PERFORMING CULTURE, PERFORMING ME: EXPLORING TEXTUAL POWER THROUGH REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

Melinda Arteaga Gonzales, B.S.

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APPROVED:

John M. Allison, J r., Major Professor
Kelly Taylor, Committee Member
John Gossett, Committee Member and Chair of the Department of Communication Studies
Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies

This thesis project explores Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of a new *mestiza* consciousness, in which the marginalized ethnic American woman transcends her Otherness, breaks down the borders between her different identities, and creates a Thirdspace. Through the rehearsal and performance process, three ethnic American women employed Robert Scholes’ model of textuality—the consumption and production of texts—as a framework to construct a new *mestiza* consciousness, and create a Thirdspace.

The project set to determine what strategies were significant rehearsal techniques for encouraging the cast members to exercise textual power and claim a new *mestiza* identity, a Thirdspace. The results reveal four overarching factors involved in assuming textual power through rehearsal and performance in the production—building trust, having appropriate skills, assuming ownership and responsibility, and overcoming performance anxiety. The discussion addresses the direct link between Thirdspace and Scholes’ notion of production of original texts.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Chapters

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY ......................................................................................................................... 1
   - Introduction to the Problem
   - Statement of the Problem
   - Definition of Ethnic Labels
   - Scope of the Study
   - Significance of the Study
   - Plan of the Study

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................................................................................. 17
   - Identity and Otherness
   - Whiteness
   - Feminist Standpoint Theory
   - Latinas and Ethnic Labels
   - Chicana as Label
   - Chicana Feminist Identity
   - The New Mestiza Consciousness and Thirdspace
   - Conclusion

3. METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................................................................................... 49
   - Creating the Process through the First Performance
   - Creating the Process through Scholes and Textual Practice
   - Evaluating the Rehearsal and Performance Process
   - Conclusion

4. RESULTS ............................................................................................................................................................... 63
   - Method of Analysis
   - Synopsis of Consumption and Production Acts
   - Results
   - Conclusion
5. DISCUSSION ................................................................. 97
   Interpretation of the Results
   Limitations
   Suggestions for Future Studies
   Conclusion

Appendices

A. THESIS PERFORMANCE SCRIPT: PACE PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL
   ............................................................................................................. 106

B. THESIS PERFORMANCE SCRIPT: SECOND PERFORMANCE ....... 113

C. REHEARSAL JOURNAL ................................................................. 134

REFERENCES .................................................................................... 224
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction to the Problem

She stands on the borders of two cultures: she is part of both but partner in neither. She is the ethnic-American woman.

In the United States, race, ethnicity, and gender are used as measures of American identity (Carbaugh, 1996). These three standards help construct a dominant social identity against a background of excluded individuals and social groups that are represented as the Other. Ethnic-American women, however, are multiply Other-ed in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Ethnic-American women experience Otherness as members of racial/ethnic groups in relation to the dominant culture; they experience Otherness as women in relation to the dominant culture; they experience Otherness as women within racial/ethnic groups. In the poem “Legal Alien,” Pat Mora (1985) illustrates the struggles many ethnic-American women face with being the Other, and with having a hyphenated identity.

--Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,
able to slip from "How's life?"
to "Me'stan volviendo loca,"
able to sit in a paneled office
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in a fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated,
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
(their eyes say, "You may speak
Spanish but you're not like me")
an American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans
a handy token
sliding back and forth
between the fringes of both worlds
by smiling
by masking the discomfort
of being pre-judged
Bi-laterally.

The images of alienation and isolation are vivid in her experiences. She cannot exist peacefully in any of her cultures, because each culture views her as inferior and different. The hyphen becomes a borderland that she inhabits; she is imprisoned in the hyphen. If she wants to bring the cultures together, she must find a way to cross the borders and redefine her identity. She must develop a new mestiza consciousness.

La mestiza is the feminine, Spanish word for a woman who can identify with at least two different cultures. In 1987, Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa began an effort to empower ethnic-American women with experiences similar to those Mora describes by using the word mestiza to describe a woman alienated from her own culture, as well as
from the hegemonic culture. Anzaldúa advocates a new mestiza consciousness as a way “to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (p. 102). The new mestiza consciousness is an attempt to lift the ethnic-American woman out of her life in the hyphen. Accordingly, la mestiza must become the new mestiza, transforming the hyphen from a border into a bridge that connects two cultures. In so doing, the new mestiza opens up in these spaces a Thirdspace between the different worlds she inhabits, wherein escape from domination and subordination is possible (Soja, 1996).

As part of the attempt to redefine their identities and open a Thirdspace, ethnic-American women are finding contexts and mediums through which to voice the experiences and frustrations of living in the hyphen. For example, Barbara Christian (1990), a Black Feminist literary critic, points out that African-American women traditionally have used mediums like cooking, quilting, and singing to assert their identities, but none of these media have been as successful as literary texts. As Christian contends, language expresses what one knows or feels and storytelling is an active form of remembering and recreating (p. 576). Through storytelling, African-American women such as Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Toni Morrison work to reclaim and redefine significant aspects of African-American women’s experience such as sexuality, spirituality, and beauty. Similarly, Asian-American women such as Marilyn (Mei Ling) Chin, Genny Lim, and Nellie Wong use texts to re-invent their hyphenated American identity. By piecing together and sorting out the meaning of their pasts, distorted and omitted by racism, their texts seek to make a claim on America as part of their resistance to domination (Kim, 1987).
Correspondingly, Latina-American writers use their texts as resistance not only to cultural hegemony, but also to patriarchy that exists in both cultures—Latino and Anglo (Fernandez, 1994). A comparably small number of Latina texts including poetry, fiction, essay, and autobiography, assert Latina presence and identity. Nevertheless, contemporary Latina textuality promotes Anzaldúa’s new mestiza vision by providing a space for Latina women to explore issues of commonalities, differences, conflicts, and strategies for redefining their identities. As Marcela Christine Lucero-Trujillo (1980) states, “All of the literature has been positive, in that it has provided an historical awareness, ‘una concientización,’ an inspiration to other Chicanas to affirm their literary talents” (p. 626).

The way Latinas use textuality to construct a space for themselves, by employing what Lisa Flores (1996) calls rhetoric of difference, is the essence of Latina literature. Latina writers, like Mora, seek to challenge and change the notions of Latina representations and cultural expectations by writing about personal experiences and by offering alternative perspectives. As they struggle to achieve their new mestiza identities and to create a space for themselves, Latina writers also create a new homeland, a place where they belong—not as Other, but as themselves. Latina writers confirm the notion of the homeland on the page (Kevane & Heredia, 2000, p. 18). As Latina writer Cristina Garcia explains, “I’m not sure I know myself except on the page” (as cited in Kevane & Heredia, 2000, p. 82).

For many marginalized ethnic-American women writers—African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Latina-Americans alike—the practice of textuality is instrumental in constructing a new mestiza identity and opening a Thirdspace. Ethnic-American
women attempt to create a Thirdspace not only for themselves, but also for all marginalized women of color by building bridges and forming communities among one another. As an African-American writer and cultural critic, hooks (1994) supports the notion of building a community across ethnicities and against the construction of ethnic-American gendered identities by the world of white WASP ideals. Women of color, she asserts, also must be more public in “naming the ways that we dare to cross those boundaries and come together” (p. 218).

This thesis project follows the tradition established by marginalized ethnic-American women writers in using textuality to construct a new mestiza consciousness and open a Thirdspace. A performance thesis is an ideal vehicle for exploring the notion of how the body and the stage can be used to transform this metaphorical space into a physical space. By adapting the texts of ethnic-American women into a script, illustrating the power of the struggle to construct their own new mestiza identities, this thesis originally attempted to translate the space that noted ethnic-American writers created for themselves from the page to the stage: to determine whether the discursive, metaphorical Thirdspace created by marginalized ethnic-American women writers could be translated into a physical performed space.

Initially, I developed a group performance for the Pace Performance Festival at Georgia Southern University in February of 2003. The cast consisted of three women: an African-American woman, an Asian-American woman, and me, a Latina woman. Through the process of developing the performance for the festival, we constructed a physical space for the chosen ethnic-American women writers featured in the script,
including Sandra Cisneros, hooks, and Wong. After the performance, an audience member asked the cast a question: Are these your stories?

The question transformed my perspective about the performance. I realized that our voices, our experiences, were not included in the process. Cisneros, hooks, and Wong opened a Thirdspace and built the bridge for themselves—not for my cast members or for me. In our performance, we were riding their hyphen and walking their bridge. The question from the audience was the tollbooth on the bridge, a reminder that we are occupying the territory of other ethnic-American women, not our own. As I paid the audience member my toll—the answer “No, these are not our stories”—I felt immediate discomfort for trespassing on these writers’ spaces.

At the end of the preliminary project, I realized that I, too, stand on the border of two cultures: I am part of both, but partner in neither. I am Melinda Gonzales, a Mexican-American woman.

The innocent question asked by the audience member at the Pace Performance Festival made me realize that I am a Latina performing other Latinas. I have been through many of the same struggles they have been through in dealing with hyphenated identity. I, too, am trying to redefine my identity and develop a new mestiza consciousness. As I read Mora’s poem again, I realized that her experiences are not exactly my own.

I am not bilingual. I can draft memos in English, but I cannot speak Spanish. I do not even understand what the phrase, "Me'stan volviendo loca," means. Although both of my parents speak Spanish, I did not learn Spanish from them. I learned Spanish in a college classroom to fulfill a foreign language requirement, but I did not retain enough
knowledge from the classes to be able to order from the menu in a Mexican restaurant.

I am light-skinned and I do not fit the stereotypical image of a dark-skinned Mexican. Therefore, both Anglos and Mexicans tend to view me as Anglo. My last name, Gonzales, is the primary marker of my Mexican heritage. Anglos may see my last name and view me as perhaps exotic, perhaps inferior, definitely different. Mexicans may look at me and think, “Your last name is Gonzales but you’re not like me.” I am bi-cultural to an extent, because I cannot slide back and forth so easily between the two cultures. Every time I am told that I do not look like a Latina or a Mexican-American, I am imprisoned in my hyphen even more.

Latina experiences are varied. For example, Mora is a bilingual, dark-skinned Mexican-American from Texas. Lucha Corpi is a bilingual, dark-skinned immigrant from Mexico. Judith Ortiz Cofer is bilingual too, but she was born in Puerto Rico and reared in New Jersey. Cofer is definitely bicultural, born of an Anglo father and a Puerto Rican mother. Cherríe Moraga is bicultural as well, born of an Anglo father and a Mexican mother, but she was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Although I share similar experiences—experiences related to skin color, language, and cultural expectations—my experiences differ in important ways. Latina experience is not singular; Latina experience is multiple and various.

Because identity is fluid and shaped through experience (Wong, 1998), I should not have to choose another’s experience over my own. Nonetheless, in choosing texts for my original performance, I had allowed Latina writers like Mora, Moraga, and Corpi to speak for Latinas. My text authorized their experience; their texts became representative of Latina experiences. I participated in the practice of ideological
normalization and exclusion (Moya, 2000). If my script represents Latina experience as a dark-skinned, bilingual experience like Mora’s, these experiences become representative of Latina experience and my own experience becomes excluded, exceptional, Other. To attempt to speak for all Latinas is to project one socially dominant construction of one Latina woman on all Latina women, to distort the meanings and lives of differently marginalized women.

Since I cannot find my experience among texts by other Latina women, I have difficulty embracing Latina identity. I become the Other among my own people. Moreover, I feel like I cannot claim to be Latina, because I am afraid of being imprisoned by cultural expectations (Mexican and American) to fill stereotypical Latina roles: dark-skinned, bilingual, great cook, aspiring housewife and mother, domestic, and domesticated. I am weary of searching for the Latina I am in the texts of others, even others like me in many ways. I do not want my identity defined for me. I crave the opportunity to define my identity for my self.

If I continued the performance on its original trajectory, I would be participating in my own marginalization. The confines of others’ texts afforded me no opportunity to explore my identity. Furthermore, my fellow cast members—an African-American woman and an Asian-American woman—were offered no chance to explore their identities either. The original project design kept the three of us imprisoned in the hyphen. Anzaldúa (1987) encourages ethnic-American women to redefine identity through exploring a new mestiza consciousness. By embracing Anzaldúa’s concept and exploring our new mestiza identities, my fellow cast members and I have the potential to create a new space—a personal space—for ourselves, transforming the
hyphen into a bridge, a Thirdspace. We must occupy our own Thirdspace, and stop paying the toll on other ethnic-American women’s bridges.

Statement of the Problem

This thesis begins with the premise that several marginalized ethnic-American women use textuality as a practice in constructing a new mestiza identity and opening a Thirdspace. Literary critic Robert Scholes (1985) would refer to the Thirdspace as site of textual power: “the power to select (and therefore to suppress), the power to shape and present certain aspects of human experience” (p. 20). Scholes argued for students to become powerful producers of texts through the creation of new, original texts. He outlined three modes of textual response that guide the path to textual power—reading, interpretation, and criticism. Marginalized ethnic American women writers unlock their textual power by reading and consuming cultural and literary texts representing the ethnic-American woman experience. According to Scholes, however, textual power does not stop there. Textual power includes the ability for Ethnic American women writers to respond, to write back, and to extend their criticism so that they can take their own textual position in relation to their identity. Opening a Thirdspace, then, involves creating new texts that are primarily acts of production.

This thesis also examines the processes of constructing and rehearsing a performance text as a means of exercising textual power and creating a Thirdspace. Several scholars in performance studies have applied Scholes’ model of textuality to the study of performance as a textual production, enabling textual power (Strine, 1992; Long, 1992). Some performance scholars have adapted Scholes’ model to the performance classroom in an effort to help students gain control of the textual process
and become active performers and audience members (Allison & Mitchell, 1994; Bowman & Kistenberg, 1992). This thesis project is another step in employing Scholes’ method for performance studies. In the first performance, I explored ethnic-American women’s experiences through various texts by ethnic-American women. I discovered, however, the cast members and I could not explore our identities solely through their texts because our personal experiences were not entirely represented. In designing the new project, I acknowledged the use of pre-existing texts by ethnic-American women and chose pieces closest to my own experiences and the experiences of my cast members as points of departure for constructing new, original texts based on our experiences. Whereas the first performance was a compilation of texts in order to translate the Thirdspace created by specific ethnic-American women authors from the page to the stage, the final performance combined their texts and our texts as ethnic-American women in order to unlock our textual power and create a Thirdspace for ourselves.

During the rehearsal process for the final performance, however, I discovered the cast members and I could not easily exercise textual practice and engage our skills in criticism. As Scholes (1985) notes, the move from interpretation to criticism requires “a differentiation of the subjectivity of the critic from that of the author, an assertion of another textual power against that of the primary text” (p. 40). He recognizes that such a move is difficult because our culture traditionally has placed a value on some literature as secular scripture, upon which criticism would be considered heresy. As a result, students are not taught the proper skills in producing criticism. Although they have the knowledge and skills necessary to consume texts, they are incapable of properly
producing new, original texts. Performance scholars acknowledge the importance of teaching these skills in the classroom and provide a valuable framework for students to learn the processes for moving from consumption to production. Their efforts, however, neglect to address the issues and/or obstacles that make the move to criticism difficult, and the necessary strategies needed to overcome these obstacles.

John M. Allison and Karen Mitchell (1994) acknowledge that criticism is ultimately shaped through one’s experience as a member of a social group or class. As a cast of marginalized ethnic-American women, we faced significant obstacles in assuming textual power partly because of our powerless position as multiply Other-ed. The rehearsals for the first performance allowed us to experience the textual power of other marginalized ethnic-American women, and encouraged us to assume our textual power in the final performance. We seemed uncomfortable, however, in ultimately assuming the authority to speak in our respective ethnic-American gendered identities and to dare to ask questions and produce criticism. This thesis project examines how we as a cast eventually learned to overcome such issues and obstacles in constructing a new performance text and in claiming our new mestiza identities. We aimed to reach what bell hooks (1994) has labeled the transformative moment of performance, “where you might step out of the fixed identity in which you were seen, and reveal other aspects of the self... as part of an overall project of more fully becoming who you are” (p. 210). The rehearsal process served as a vehicle for constructing our new mestiza identities as we set forth to answer the following question:

What strategies emerged as significant rehearsal techniques for encouraging the ethnic-American female cast members, individually and collectively, to produce original
texts (a Thirdspace), thereby assuming responsibility for representing their new mestiza identities?

Definition of Ethnic Labels

Throughout this study, ethnic labels are used that should be clarified. As this thesis project will later explore, the Latina/o community is complex and lacks a single, all-encompassing label. According to Adela de la Torre and Beatriz Pesquera (1993), although the terms Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Hispanic\(^1\) are used interchangeably throughout United States society, these labels do not have the same meanings or uses. By definition, Latina/o refers to any U.S. resident whose ancestry derives from one or more countries in Central and Latin America. Chicana/o specifically refers to any U.S. resident whose ancestry is predominantly from Mexico. Although Hispanic refers to a person in the United States, whose ancestry is predominantly from one or more Spanish-speaking countries, including people of Latin American and Mexican origin, the term emphasizes those of Spanish descent.

Many people of the Latina/o community believe that the term Hispanic associates them with Spanish colonial power and excludes their African and/or Native American ancestry. As Angel Oquendo (1998) argues, the term Latina/o should be preferred over Hispanic because the term came from the community and is a reminder of the Latina/o struggle for recognition and respect in the United States: “The adoption of the term ‘Latino’ could be regarded as part of a broader process of self-definition and self-assertion” (p. 63). Therefore, the use of Hispanic is limited in preference for the term

\(^1\)As a general rule, foreign words in an English text, as well as words referred to as key terms and labels, are italicized (e.g., mestiza). Throughout this thesis, however, foreign words used to describe race and/or ethnicities are italicized only when referred to as key terms and labels, and not when used to describe race and/or ethnicities (e.g., the terms Latina/o and Chicana/o and the Latino community or the Chicana women).
Latina/o in order to be more inclusive and descriptive of the Latina/o community. Latino is a masculine gendered Spanish word, but can be used generically to refer to both the masculine and feminine. Latina is the feminine and refers exclusively to women, unless otherwise specified or used in companionship with Latino.

Asian American refers to a person of Asian ancestry or origin who was born in or is an immigrant to the United States. The term is used in this thesis project to represent the Asian American population, including at least fourteen distinct ethnic groups such as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Asian Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese, further divided along linguistic, religious, and class lines (Torres & Ngin, 1995). When referring to cast member Tam Tran’s specific ethnic identity, however, I use Vietnamese American.

Finally, during the thesis project the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably. Black is used as a standard racial reference term and African American refers to a person of African black ancestry or origin who was born in the United States. As Tom Smith (1992) notes, African American is considered a more politically correct term used to give Blacks a “cultural identification with their heritage and ancestral homeland” (p. 507).

Scope of the Study

The cast of the performance consists of three women: Elizabeth, an African American woman; Tam, a Vietnamese American woman; and my self, a Latina American woman. The development of our friendship as ethnic-American women is the actual foundation for the project. The project’s limitations, therefore, exist around our friendship.
First, the final performance only represents the experiences of three ethnic-American female identities: Latina, Vietnamese American, and African American. As Elizabeth once observed while meeting with Tam and me at a restaurant, “All we need is a Native American and our circle would be complete.” Elizabeth’s witty comment indicates the awareness of our friendship as diverse, but limited in terms of multicultural representation. Cast members of many other ethnicities could be included and potentially could benefit from a project designed to construct new mestiza identities. However, in order to narrow the performance’s scope, the range of experiences needed to be limited in order to avoid multiplying variables in the study.

Second, the study does not attempt to explore all aspects of the self through the rehearsal and performance process. For example, to describe my self as a Latina woman is to use such social categories as ethnicity and gender as part of my social identity. Indeed, I also could describe myself based on other social categories such as class, age, occupation, and sexual orientation. The intent of this study is to explore a narrower range of identity experiences, particularly those involving gender and racial/ethnic identity, because these main factors link the cast in our Otherness. Other categories less salient to the study are not included in the discussion on identity.

Significance of the Study

The central issue of the thesis project is identity, a concept that arguably is central to everyone’s being. According to Moya (2000), identity is significant as an issue because it is how individuals experience, understand, and know the world: “who we are—that is, who we perceive ourselves or are perceived by others to be—will significantly affect our life chances” (p. 8). Although the current project focuses on
ethnic-American gendered identity in particular, the study has potential value in a broader discussion of identity as a complex and dynamic social construction, signified by power when assumed. Communication scholars should be provided with deeper insight as to how performance can be used as a method of discourse in identity studies. Jean Haskell Speer and Elizabeth C. Fine (1992) note that studying performance is “a critical way for grasping how persons choose to present themselves, how they construct their identity, and, ultimately, how they embody, reflect, and construct their culture” (p. 10). Although I am directly involved in the thesis rehearsal and performance process, the final performance is a collaborative effort among the cast members for the purposes of informing, raising consciousness, and inciting audience members to join and/or to continue the discussion.

Specifically, the project has significance for the lives of marginalized ethnic-American women. As the rapid growth of culturally diverse populations within the United States presents a challenge to notions of American identity, the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity become critical in creating and celebrating diversity. Through the rehearsal and performance process, this project examines issues salient to ethnic-American women’s identity construction and suggests a collection of strategies for claiming one’s new mestiza identity. The results of the project are not likely to produce a how-to model, because the construction of a new mestiza identity is based on individual, varying experiences across such critical intersections. What reasonably might be expected is a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between and among marginalized ethnic-American women, as well as strategies for overcoming obstacles in constructing and claiming a new mestiza identity.
Furthermore, the thesis project serves as motivation for interdisciplinary research. The study begins an important dialogue in communication, ethnic studies, cultural studies, feminism, performance, as well as other fields concerned with identity, representation, and difference. Intercultural dialogue is necessary in helping researchers “become sensitive to the ways in which our values and beliefs are inextricably related to our images of the ‘Other’” (Hasian, 1998). This dialogue, in turn, creates an expanded body of knowledge that provides better theoretical models and diverse methodologies for studying salient issues of identity and Otherness. Overall, the project contributes to an evolution in the way researchers study, understand, and envision multicultural issues and concerns.

Plan of the Study

This chapter proposes a performance project that investigates how the creation of new texts aids in constructing a new mestiza consciousness, wherein the borders between two different and opposing cultures and identities are transgressed, leading to a space in-between, a Thirdspace. The next chapter presents a review of literature that examines the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender in creating a new mestiza identity, a Thirdspace. Chapter three provides the method of the performance project, including a discussion of the use of the performance concept to construct the performance text and the rehearsal journal as a tool of analysis. The fourth chapter summarizes the findings of the analysis and answers the posed research question. The final chapter provides a discussion of the results and their implications, and an overview of the limitations of the project. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and/or projects in the areas of performance, culture, and identity.
As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister...

(Anzaldúa, 1999, pg. 102).

Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) identified the marginalized ethnic-American woman as la mestiza, an outcast who is multiply Other-ed, on the basis of her race, ethnicity, and gender. Anzaldua advocated a new mestiza consciousness, in which la mestiza transcends her Otherness, breaks down the borders between her different identities, and creates a Thirdspace. Otherness, however, is a concept that requires clarification because of its indefinite connection with identity. To clarify the relationship between the two concepts, this chapter begins by reviewing literature relevant to the concept of identity and Otherness. Then, because the study focuses on the connection between Otherness and race, ethnicity, and gender as identity factors, subsequent sections of the review examine the applicable literature in each of these areas. Finally, this chapter explores the development of Chicana feminism and Anzaldúa’s notion of a new mestiza consciousness in connection with Thirdspace.

Identity and Otherness

Within the field of communication studies, research on identity includes psychological, sociological, and anthropological approaches to conceptualize “who we are and where we are placed in time and space” (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002). One traditional way to conceptualize identity is to divide identity into individual and social
components, commonly referred to as personal and social identity. Research in social psychology provides a useful framework for distinguishing the two concepts (Dashefsky and Shapiro, 1976; Levin, J. D., 1992; Turner, 1999). An individual’s social identity includes membership and roles in such broad social categories as age, occupation, gender, ethnicity, and race. Social identity is based on the idea that social features characterize every individual. In order for an individual to categorize her self as a member in a social category, she focuses on those particular features she shares with most, if not all, category members (Marques, et al., 1998). Personal identity, on the other hand, refers to how an individual defines her self in terms of a unique combination of specific, personal traits or features that distinguish her from others.

As Jean-Claude Deschamps and Thierry Devos (1998) made clear, the two concepts are closely connected as the basis for the construction of an individual’s identity. Whereas social identity refers to a feeling of similarity to a group of others, personal identity refers to a feeling of difference in relation to those same others. They argued, “This distinction between personal identity and social identity is indeed only an example of duality between the individual and the collective or difference and similarity” (p. 3). This section expands upon the conceptualizations of personal and social identity, tracing the development of the conflict between the individual and the social in creating the notion of Otherness.

Recent works collectively emphasize identity in terms of meanings applied to self by the self and others (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Styker & Burke, 2000). According to Victoria Chen (1997), we cannot conceptualize identity merely by defining who we are, because identity is bound within the contexts of our relationships, practices, actions,
and experiences (p. 7). For Donal Carbaugh (1996), the ability of an individual to answer the question “Who am I?” depends not only on psychological factors, but also on one’s interaction through situated, communication practices and social scenes. His focus on the various social identities that operate in American scenes is based on the premise that “I know who I am, in part, by the way I symbolize in situated social scenes” (p. 30). Although some aspects of identity are gained by direct experience with our environment, most of what we know about ourselves is derived from others. Since personal identity is embodied in selfhood and socialization with other individuals, it is both individually and socially constructed (Jenkins, 1996, p. 20). Gust Yep (1998) refers to this process as the co-creation and re-creation of identity in everyday interaction and through dialogue. Thus, identity is largely studied as an inherently communicative, dynamic process and should be understood as an interaction in which messages and values are exchanged (Collier, 1988; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Hecht, 1993).

Communication scholars have examined the relationship between identity and communication from several theoretical perspectives. For example, the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) proposes that a communication analysis of identity considers how individuals frame and enact their personal identities and how these identities are relationally and communally expressed, negotiated, and denied (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). Studies conducted by Michael Hecht and his associates used the CTI to explain the establishment and maintenance of cultural identities, including racial and ethnic identities (e.g., African American, Mexican American, and Jewish American) within the United States (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984; Hecht et al., 1989; Hecht et al., 1990).
Furthermore, communication scholars have developed and/or modified various other identity theories to explore the relationship between cultural and ethnic identity and communication (Jackson, 2002; Lu, 2001).

Ronald Jackson and Thurmon Garner (1998) noted the truly confusing use of the terms race, ethnicity, and culture in communication research. They acknowledged that the distinction between the three has been blurred and contend that ethnic research is indistinguishable from racial and/or cultural research. Ethnicity is difficult to define because, “there are no essential characteristics that are common to all groups so distinguished” (p. 4). Hecht, et. al. (2003) do not approve of the term ethnicity but conceded that it is used overwhelmingly as a way to define cultural identity (p. 47). By applying communicative theories to various racial and ethnic groups, these researchers incorporated race and ethnicity into communication scholarship as salient organizing axes around which personal and social identities are developed and maintained. Communication scholarship understands racial and ethnic identities as dynamic, evolving processes and individual and social constructions within both the larger society and the specific group (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000).

Communication scholars recognize gender as another significant social identity category. Heidi Reeder (1996) defined gender as inherently communicative, and biologically and socially constructed. In her research, Reeder underscored the importance of considering gender as a category of analysis in communication research. Aki Uchida (1997) extended the connection of identity and communication to gender in her research on women’s intercultural communication. Whereas culture may be seen as a part of identity, gender may be seen as a part of culture. Uchida (1997) contended
that gender “should be conceptualized as practice, as what individuals do in social interaction and communication” (p. 43). For Uchida, gender and identity are co-created in communication.

Further, the studies of women’s communication experiences recognize the intersections between race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, based on a study of the discourse on the gendered ethnic practice of foot binding among Chinese women, Wen Shu Lee (1998) argued that race, ethnicity, and gender are important predicates of identity formation that cannot be understood apart from one another. When studying women’s interpersonal communication, researchers also must consider the connection of other identity factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and nationality. Marsha Houston (1997) examines the differences and commonalities between African American and white women speakers. In subsequent research, Houston (2002) expanded on the interconnections of race, ethnicity, and gender by using research on the interpersonal communication of African American women to illustrate the complexities and dynamics in the process of gendered ethnic identity formation. Intercultural communication scholarship, as these studies illustrate, provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between race, ethnicity, and gender as interlocking constructs in the process of identity development and maintenance.

In addition to studying how identities are constructed in connection with race, ethnicity, and gender, communication scholars examine how identities are constructed through contrast or differentiation. As indicated previously, the concept of identity often is shaped by the relationship between the self and others. A useful conception of the self/other relationship lies in contemporary social psychology’s theory of identity.
According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981), individuals are constructed socially in groups or categories to which they belong, producing a comparison between in-group and out-group relations (us versus them). Social identities are considered relative to contrasting groups or categories because different identities are organized in a hierarchy of inclusiveness (Stets & Burke, 2000). An identity gains more salience as an individual or group feels more included within that category. The argument is consistent with communicative theories of identity like Cultural Contracts Theory, which supports the assumption that identity is a self-definition that requires affirmation or validation by others (Jackson, 1999a). As Lee (1998) contended, the process of identity construction is comprised of difference: “Self becomes a significant symbol only in relation to the other” (p. 23). From this perspective, an individual comes to understand the self by identifying what the self is not.

Poststructuralism provides a framework for dismantling the relationship between self and other as binary oppositions. Poststructuralism refers to the theories of analysis most often associated with the work of Jacques Derrida (1997). Derrida denied the validity of binary oppositions—two terms placed as polar opposites of each other, such as good/evil, man/woman, and light/dark. According to Derrida, Western culture places an either/or logic to binary pairs and gives the first term a more privileged position than the second. Derrida did not want to reverse the hierarchy of terms. Instead, he used deconstruction as a method to erase the boundaries between the binary oppositions by showing how each term actually is related and dependent on the other term for its meaning. As a result, the opposition or structure that kept the two terms apart collapses and loses meaning and power.
In terms of identity, binary oppositions are structures that perpetuate practices of domination. A recurrent theme in identity research is that “not all identities are of equal importance, for society and for the individual” (Alba, 1990, p. 23). Rank-ordering and hierarchical structures construct a dominant or hegemonic group. As Reeder (1996) explained, “the dominant group is the center of reference from which all others are perceived to be different” (p. 323). Poststructuralists like Derrida, however, sought to dispel the notion of a fixed center because the meanings of words are forever elusive and incomplete.

The poststructuralist perspective on the process of meaning supports one of the main premises of this thesis project on identity, in that identity is dynamic and ever-changing. In addition, poststructuralist perspectives often guide communication scholarship that explodes binary oppositions in creating difference and Otherness. The next two sections of this review examine how scholars seek to dismantle binary structures of otherness in the construction of ethnic and gendered identity. The first section examines the relationship between ethnic/racial identity and Otherness. For the purposes of this project, the notion of Otherness most clearly contrasts with research on Whiteness as a system of power and privilege.

Whiteness

Studies on whiteness emerged as the result of a movement for multicultural scholarship, in which scholars from communication and other social science disciplines attempted to give voice to racial and ethnic groups that traditionally had been silenced in their academic fields (Fine, et al., 1997). Robert Carter (1997) asserted that examining one’s racial/ethnic identity offers a way to “understand the multiple ways in
which race is expressed as well as the various types of internal and external factors that influence its expression” (p. 207). As scholars began to challenge traditional notions of race and ethnicity, however, they noticed questions of whiteness were absent from such scholarship.

Whiteness is acknowledged as a racial identity based on biological categories and physical features like skin color (Brodkin, 1998). Whiteness also is recognized as an ethnicity based on cultural and ethnic backgrounds, such as Jewish, Irish, Italian, and so forth (Alba, 1990). The term White American has been used to describe U.S. citizens of European ancestry, predominantly categorized as Caucasian or White (Clark & O’Donnell, 1999, p. 3). Whiteness, however, typically is not regarded as a racial/ethnic position in multicultural studies, implying that studying race and ethnicity only includes non-white people.

Richard Dyer (1997) examined how a discussion of what it means to be white also leads to consideration of what it means to be not white. Although white people are marked by their visible skin color, they are not considered people of color. The label, people of color, is used in American society to describe non-white ethnic/racial groups. Dyer argued that white people have the powerful position of just being human, and representing the commonality of the human race--not just a certain race.

Research--into books, museums, the press, advertising, films, television, and software--repeatedly shows that in Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. (p. 3)
The invisibility of whiteness in critical race studies places white people in a dominant, powerful position. More importantly, invisibility grants white people protection from scrutiny as well as license to observe and define others. Peggy McIntosh (1995) claimed that white people gain power and privilege from being under-examined and unmarked. She defined white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets” (p. 76) that white people come to depend on in everyday experience, but most often remain oblivious to enjoying. She argued that white privilege should not be looked upon as favorable or desirable because “such privilege confers dominance, gives permission to control, because of one’s race or sex” (p. 83).

Thus, as Carrie Crenshaw (1997) argued, whiteness oppresses when it operates as the invisible structure of normality, and its silence allows for the notion of othering to occur. Peter McLaren (1998) agreed that whiteness reinforced the framework of us against them: “For those who are non-White, the seduction of whiteness can produce a self-definition that disconnects the subject from his or her history of oppression and struggle, exiling identity into the unmoored, chaotic realm of abject Otherness” (p. 68). Research into Whiteness, then, recognizes a hegemonic relationship between Whiteness as the dominant race and those outside of Whiteness, or people of color, as Others (Jackson, 1999b; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Perry, 2001; Phoenix, 1997; Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002). Research also confirms that systems of oppression, like racism, exist in part because of the power and privilege of whiteness (Cooper, 1998; Flores & Moon, 2002).

Chris Cuomo and Kim Hall (1999) discussed how critical scholarship on whiteness began as a way to resist the power of whiteness by examining the history of
whiteness, the systems and practices that maintain it, and how it might be possible to resist racial classifications and accompanying privilege. Although scholarship into whiteness is interdisciplinary, discourse on whiteness is used as a theoretical framework within the field of communication research as an attempt to dismantle the us versus them position and reinvent racial/ethnic identities (Fujimoto, 2002; Martin, et al., 1996; Martin & Davis, 2001; Warren, 2001).

Whiteness also is used as a theoretical framework by feminist scholars to dismantle a patriarchal power system that sustains white, male privilege and positions women as Other (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997). Audre Lorde (1995) contended that the same white privilege also creates racial differences between women. The third section examines how gender factors into both ethnicity and Otherness from the perspective of feminist standpoint theory.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Although research on gender is considered a significant area of communication research, Carole Spitzack and Kathryn Carter (1987) argued that gender research suffers from an underlying assumption that women are to be compared against the dominant male paradigm. The comparison is counter-productive in women’s research because it reinforces the notion of women as Other--the outsiders within culture. Spitzack and Carter indicated that more research should view women as communicators, rather than as a “deviant or mysterious subculture” (p. 418).

In attempting to research women’s communication, scholars first see a need to make a clear distinction between sex and gender to emphasize that gendered identity,
like racial/ethnic identity, is a social construction. For example, Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins (1995) provided a distinction with their definition.

Sex refers to one’s biological identity as male or female; gender refers to the systematic structuring of relationships between women and men in social institutions. Gender is a learned identity, but as with race, it cannot be understood at the individual level alone. (p. 67)

The intersections between gender, race, and ethnicity are critical in the social construction of identity, which explains the difficulties some feminists face in attempting to define a common identity or experience for women. Diana Meyers (2000) argued that women have no common identity, but gender and marginalization affect individual identity. She reiterated contemporary feminist analyses of the interplay between socialization and individual women’s lives. For Meyers, cultural gender, race, sexuality, class, and ethnicity are internalized, but they also are processed psychologically (p. 15). Because of the necessity of seeing womanhood and other marginalized social identities as dimensions of individual identity, many communication scholars (Allen, et al., 1999; Hallstein, 1999; Reeder, 1996) have advocated a feminist standpoint (Hartsock, 1983) on identity, a standpoint that reveals women’s daily, unique experiences. A study of these standpoints may further understanding of how social inequality exacerbates otherness and shapes our perspectives and communication with others.

As Sandra Harding (1991; 1993) explained, feminist standpoint theory had its starting point in the notion that socially situated claims on knowledge are structured by power relations within social hierarchies based on salient aspects of identity, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Dominant groups--those at the top of the
hierarchy—have the power and privilege to define others and provide a partial, biased, and even false perspective of groups lower in the hierarchy (1993, p. 54). Scholars who use standpoint theory have argued that privileging perspectives and knowledge of groups at the bottom—the marginalized groups—provide a more objective view than the perspective from the lives of the more powerful. Feminist standpoint theory, then, seeks to empower marginalized groups by allowing their experiences to be valued as agents of knowledge.

For the most part, feminist standpoint theory began as a way to raise consciousness about the patriarchal process of othering whereby men are constructed as the dominant, privileged group and women as the oppressed, marginalized group. Although feminist standpoint theorists have recognized how factors like race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality affect a women's position in society, they have described gender as the fundamental inequality in constructing women as Other (Hallstein, 2000). Theorists now recognize, however, that women cannot be understood as a monolithic group, and do not share the same standpoint. The way gender is experienced is not the same for every group. According to D. Lynn O’Brien Hallstein (2000), “as a consequence, feminist standpoint theory has shifted to theorizing standpoint rather than a feminist standpoint as a way to recognize and accommodate difference (p. 5).

Scholars in Black feminist thought (Allen, 1996; Bell, et. al., 2000; Collins, 1994, 2000; Davis, 1998;) have used standpoint theory to raise consciousness of how some social groups are more marginalized than others. For example, white women may be oppressed by their gender, but privileged by their race. Black feminist thought, then, has provided an alternative discussion to the usual emphasis on white feminist thought.
Black feminists have argued that African American women as a group have experiences that provide them with a unique angle of vision. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) provided a conceptual framework on how African American women's standpoint exists in a situation characterized by domination. Collins argued that oppression and domination begin with gender as the fundamental inequality, and race and ethnicity as additives. Each system needs the others in order to function. Therefore, race, ethnicity, and gender operate as interlocking systems of privilege, domination, and oppression.

As identity factors, race, ethnicity, and gender also function as axes along a single historically created system of domination that Collins (2000) referred to as the matrix of domination, which includes other axes like class, sexuality, religion, and age. The three axes of oppression that frame the definitional tensions in Black feminist thought, according to Collins, are race, class, and gender (Collins, 1994, p. 592). For example, African American women are Othered by three dominant groups: white men, white women, and African American men.

Developing adequate definitions of Black feminist thought involves facing this complex nexus of relationships among biological classification, the social construction of race and gender as categories of analysis, the material conditions accompanying these changing social constructions, and Black women's consciousness about these themes. (p. 581)

Collins claimed that individual expressions of consciousness make an articulated, self-defined, and collective standpoint possible, which is critical for an oppressed group that seeks to define themselves for themselves rather than allowing themselves to be defined by others.
Although Black feminist thought only introduces an African American woman’s standpoint, Collins acknowledged that the matrix of domination affects other, marginalized groups. These groups, however, encounter different dimensions of the matrix and could benefit from the Black feminist project, according to Collins, by learning to speak from their own standpoint and entering an epistemological dialogue. Chicana feminism has emerged from a similar effort to place Chicanas, another traditionally marginalized group, at the center of intellectual discourse and express a collective, self-defined Chicana feminist consciousness. As Chicana feminist, Alma Garcia (1989), argued,

Chicana, Black, and Asian American feminists were all confronted with the issue of engaging in a feminist struggle to end sexist oppression within a broader nationalist struggle to end racist oppression. All experienced male domination in their own communities as well as in the larger society. (p. 220)

The work of Chicana feminist Anzaldúa (1987), particularly her concept of a new mestiza consciousness, brought the plight of the Chicana feminists to the forefront. Consequently, the Chicana feminist movement gave other Latina women more options and opportunities to redefine and assert their identities. The next section provides a background of Chicana feminism as a movement to emphasize the diversity of Latina experiences in the United States.

The literature review thus far positions race, ethnicity, and gender as interlocking categories in constructing Otherness and recognizes that, traditionally, the white, male identity has been a source of privilege and power. Now, the focus shifts to the Other-side--Latina/Chicana women, as an example of labeled ethnic gendered identity, as
Other. This next section begins with a discussion of how ethnic labels play a distinct role in shaping the Latina ethnic gendered identity. Then, the review provides an examination of Chicana feminists—who they are and why and how they use the label, Chicana, to identify themselves.

Latinas and Ethnic Labels

To understand Latina ethnic gendered identity as Other requires a basic understanding of the historical labeling of their ethnic identity. As Laura Gomez (1995) contended, ethnic identity and ethnic labels are connected in a dialectic process through which identity shapes labels and labels shape identity. Her research on ethnic identity demonstrated that ethnic labels, like ethnic identity, are both dynamic and contextual. An examination of how ethnic labels change and how they are used in a given situation must be understood both in terms of internal (within the ethnic group) and external (outside the group, from the dominant society) pressures. According to Gomez, the historical evolution of ethnic labels used to refer to the Latina/o community in the United States illustrates the interplay between internal and external forces (p. 47).

The generic label, Hispanic, for example, has been widely used for the past three decades to refer to Latina/o ethnic identity by emphasizing their Spanish descent. The term is considered problematic, however, because of its distinct meanings for outsiders and for members of the Latina/o community. The label materialized not from the community itself, but from the dominant white, male society during the Nixon Administration in the 1970s to label Spanish-speaking people in the United States without regard for their cultural roots or identities. As Suzanne Oboler (1995) argued, many Latina/o people feel that using the label Hispanic places the large group of
Latina/o people under one umbrella and homogenizes the varied social and political experiences of more than 23 million people of different races, classes, languages, national origins, genders, and religions.

Furthermore, because the label was chosen by the dominant white, male group, Hispanics are seen as a binary opposite--as non-whites, as Others. Oboler contended that the Hispanic label established group members as non-American, as second-class, foreign Others by homogenizing popular perceptions of these populations as foreign to the way the national community of Americans is imagined. Many scholars have agreed that the term is problematic because it automatically categorizes the Latina/o community as Other (Fox, 1996; Rosoldo & Flores, 1997; Toro, 1998). As Luis Angel Toro (1998) argued, “the Hispanic classification is merely the latest legal fiction that works, intentionally or not, to prevent this community from overcoming the disadvantages imposed by racial subordination” (p. 52).

As a result, many Latina/o people reject the label Hispanic and prefer to use alternative labels as part of the broader process of self-definition and self-assertion. Latina/os may identify themselves and describe their heritage, by using either unifying terms (e.g., Latina/o, Chicana/o, La Raza [the People]), or terms of specific nationality (e.g., Mexican-American, Puerto Rican American, Cuban American). The formation of a Latina/o identity, then, involves what Chicana Feminist Elizabeth Martinez (1998) identified as the Great Terminology Question: which word best identifies the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States? (p. 1). For an ethnic group that includes people from every race and more than twenty different national origins, picking one word to encompass an identity has never been an easy task. As a result, a terminology
debate exists in the Latina/o community and Latina/os have no all-embracing term that is universally accepted. According to Martinez, however, one term may not be possible because many people of Latina/o descent prefer to call themselves different names for a variety of significant, often personal, reasons. Considering the Latina/o people’s unique history of oppression, the intensity of the terminology debate “echoes people’s struggles for non-racist--indeed, anti-racist--ways of defining themselves” (p. 3).

As Alicia Arrizon (1999) contended, people who choose to identify as Latina/o, to resist the term Hispanic, make a conscious, political determination to re-claim their identity, to compensate for what the dominant culture has failed to embody (p.19). Dolores Tanno (1997) concurred and discussed how a Latina/o can claim multiple labels--Spanish, Mexican American, Latina/o, and Chicana/o--because each name reveals a different facet of identity that allows symbolic, historical, cultural, and political connectedness (p. 31). Chicana is one such label that a Latina woman can use that suggests “a smaller community, a special kind of Mexican American awareness that does not invoke others (Cubans, Puerto Ricans, etc.)” (p. 28).

Chicana as Label

Chicana is the feminine form of the Spanish word Chicano, and has its roots in the Chicano label, used exclusively to refer to anyone born of Mexican descent in the United States. Although Chicano is used as a common synonym for a Mexican American within mainstream society, the terms are not synonymous. Chicano is used to describe a Mexican American, but not all Mexican Americans identify as Chicano.

Chicano was originally used in the 1930s as a derogatory label for poor, rural Mexican immigrants living in the United States. In the mid-1960s, however, activists
who took part in the Chicano civil rights movement, which coincided with the Black civil rights movement, re-appropriated the term as a symbol of self-determination and ethnic pride (Chavez, 2002; Cuello, 2000). Rodolfo Acuna (1996) noted that Chicano, as an ethnic label, is contentious, even among activists.

To some it includes only Mexicans born in the United States, while for others it encompasses those born on either side of the border. The arrival of large numbers of Central Americans has generated a third school, which accepts this new reality by using Chicano as a political term rather than one referring to a single nationality. (p. 9)

Thus, the Chicano movement politicized the term Chicano to signify those Mexican-Americans and other Latinos that adopted the nationalist, anti-assimilationist, working-class politics of the movement.

The Chicano movement was an all-encompassing effort to express and strengthen the Mexican Americans’ existence and demand that dominant white America acknowledge historic and persistent patterns of racial inequality in legal, political, educational, and social opportunities for Mexican Americans (Apodaca, 2003). Since Spanish is a gendered language, the term Chicano refers to males, but it is considered a generic term for women as well. Chicanas, however, did not always feel the term was inclusive. As Chicana feminist Adalijiza Sosa Riddell (1974) argued, the Chicano movement was primarily male-dominated and Chicanas experienced tension in their quest for their own political and social power within the context of their work on behalf of the larger Chicano community. Chicana feminists wanted to fight issues of both racial and gender oppression. However, for the majority of Chicano men in the movement,
gender was considered irrelevant and was, therefore, excluded from the movement. Chicanas felt the contradiction of the movement, which oppressed Chicanas in the same way that the dominant white, male system oppressed Chicanos. Sosa Riddell noted that the concerns expressed by Chicanas for their own needs within the movement were considered disloyal and an unnecessary threat to the political unity of the movement itself (p. 163). According to Elizabeth Martinez (1997), Chicana feminists wanted to reform and strengthen the movement with their criticisms, but they did not necessarily want to break away from the movement.

We will not win our liberation struggle unless the women move together with the men rather than against them. We must work to convince the men that our struggle will become stronger if women are not limited to a few, special roles. We also have the right to expect that our most enlightened men will join in the fight against sexism; it should not be our battle alone. (p. 33)

As a result, the Chicana feminist movement, which developed in the 1970s, remained an active part of the Chicanos’ struggle to overcome political and social oppression, and also supported gender issues such as welfare rights, bilingual childcare, and equal pay for equal work.

During this time of social awareness in the 1960s and 1970s, Chicanas found themselves fighting similar battles within the mainstream, white, feminist group. According to Alma Garcia (1989), two main issues made a coalition with white feminists difficult. First, Chicana feminists argued that white feminist thought often emphasized issues of gender oppression and overlooked the effects of racial oppression experienced by Chicanas and other marginalized ethnic American women. Second,
Chicana feminists disagreed with the white feminist assumption that a general women’s movement spoke for all races and classes. Chicana feminists claimed that white feminists could not speak for them because white women do not suffer from racial discrimination (p. 227). Garcia stressed that Chicana feminism represented a struggle that was both nationalist and feminist since Chicana feminists were struggling to gain equal status in the white, male-dominated national movement and also in their own Chicano, male-dominated community. As Chicana feminist, Mirta Vidal (1997) contended, “the struggle for women’s liberation is the Chicana’s struggle, and only a strong independent Chicana movement, as part of the general women’s liberation movement and part of the movement of La Raza, can ensure its success” (p. 24).

As part of the movement, Chicana feminists found contexts and mediums through which to voice their experiences and frustrations and confront racial and gender oppression. Through their collective efforts, a Chicana feminist consciousness developed, significantly displayed by their writings. The next section of the literature review discusses the importance of the Chicana feminists’ writings in contributing to the movement and developing a Chicana feminist identity.

Chicana Feminist Identity

As Chicanas we respect our men. We respect the home, the family. This is all dealing within the cultural context. Yet times are changing. You are coping with a new Chicana, a Chicana working within the college system. A Chicana who is seeing that her place need not only be in the home, with her husband and family. She is sensing her ability beyond that, yet not excluding it. She must utilize her
This excerpt from a 1973 essay by Chicana feminist Elena Garcia exemplifies the Chicana feminists’ efforts to define a Chicana feminist consciousness through their writings. As Garcia (1997) noted in the introduction of her anthology of Chicana feminists’ writings, these essays uncover the multiple sources of inequality--the interplay between race/ethnicity and gender--that Chicanas encountered in both the public and private spheres. Many Chicana feminists eventually analyzed their oppression as a collective problem and constructed a collective Chicana feminist ideology--a shared sense of Chicana sisterhood--based on their experiences as marginalized women of color (p. 70). Many essays use the collective we when discussing their experiences and their goals in the movement. Rarely does a Chicana feminist speak about her experience individually. Rather, she writes about the Chicana feminist as a collective identity, defined by Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) as, “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (p. 105).

For the Chicana feminists, collective identity is the driving force behind their movement in what Diana Fuss (1989) referred to as identity politics, “the tendency to base one’s politics on a sense of collective identity--as gay, as Jewish, as Black, as female” (p. 97). Identity politics often involves the use of essentialism, broadly defined as the idea that groups have an absolute and constitutive essence--“a basic, unvariable, and presocial nature” (Moya, 2000, p. 7). As Cindy Griffin (1996) noted, “essentialism is an argument for fixed, unchanging characteristics that determine an individual's
behaviors or actions” (p. 23). The construction of an essentialized identity is useful in uniting an oppressed group against the dominant society. According to John Anner (1996), “the premise of identity politics is that all members of the group have more in common than the members have with anyone outside the group, that they are oppressed in the same way, and therefore that they belong on the same road to justice” (p. 90).

Although most discussions of identity politics are not directly applied to Chicana feminist identity, they provide a framework for understanding how the notion of a Chicana essence is relied upon to mobilize and legitimate Chicana activism. Chicana feminist Deena Gonzalez (1998) argued that one theme underlying Chicana feminist writing is a presumption of a unified Chicana feminist voice and the marked absence of named differences among Chicanas (p. 47). For many Chicana feminists, identity is defined by ethnicity/race and gender, and carries with it a strong implication that certain qualities and experiences are unique to this particular group. For example, Chicana feminist Elizabeth Martinez (1997) wrote in her 1972 essay, "La Chicana":

From birth, her life is a predestined pattern based on passing from her parents control to that of her husband. She goes through high school acquiring a strong sense of competition with other Chicanas for the attention of the boys. This is the dominant feature of her high school years. Although she is expected to become a wife and mother, the whole subject of sexual functions and physiology is treated like a dark secret. (p. 33)
By emphasizing the collective components of their feminists’ struggles, essentialism reduces the Chicana feminist women to an essential idea of what it means to have a Chicana feminist identity.

Gonzalez (1998) also argued, however, that the same intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender that differentiate Chicanas from other women of color function--along with other factors--to differentiate Chicana women from one another. According to Gonzalez, these factors all mark them differently and Chicana feminists cannot pretend that they agree on all things or that the world treats them all the same. Gonzalez’ viewpoint reflects the resistance against essentialist arguments by many feminist scholars who believe that essentialism represents a limited, totalizing image of women (Condit, 1993). Essentialism involves defining a group of people by a small set of fixed properties, while ignoring the conditions under which such identities emerged. In the process, essentialism views one’s racial/ethnic gendered identity as stable and static and discounts any possibility of change or variation within the group. As Antonia Darder (1995) contended:

Critiques of essentialism embody the mistaken dichotomous notion that inquiry focused on subordinate life experiences automatically precludes recognition of in-group differences and cultural change, and amounts to nothing more than the act of reducing culture to a theory of reifying collectivity. (p. 5)

Diana Fuss (1989) discussed how essentialism is now increasingly used in order to explain why anti-essentialism is preferable amongst several social and cultural researchers. Anti-essentialism, in opposition to essentialism, involves the rejection of a quest for natural or biological essences, in preference for a view that essence is a
historical and social construction. The anti-essentialist, then, is defined as a constructionist. According to Fuss, “while the essentialist holds that the natural is repressed by the social, the constructionist maintains that the natural is produced by the social” (p. 3).

Anti-essentialists are engaged in interrogating the intricate and interlacing processes which work together to produce all seemingly “natural” or “given” objects. What is at stake for a constructionist are systems of representations, social and material practices, laws of discourses, and ideological effects. In short, constructionists are concerned above all with the production and organization of differences. (p. 2)

To clarify, for an essentialist, a woman is born with a certain essence that may fit under a prescribed Chicana feminist identity, which she has the choice to then claim. For an anti-essentialist, the Chicana feminist is made not born. She has the opportunity to define what specifically makes her a Chicana feminist.

Anti-essentialism, then, recognizes one’s identity within a group as dynamic and unique to the individual, but leaves the group’s identity fragmented. Under anti-essentialism, no notion of a collective identity exists. For example, Paul Gilroy (1993) explained how anti-essentialism works for black identity: “It moves towards a casual and arrogant deconstruction of blackness while ignoring the appeal of the first position’s powerful, populist affirmation of black culture” (p. 100). Gilroy rejected both essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches and suggested that blackness is neither innate nor entirely irrelevant as a racial category. Gilroy insisted that the notion of blackness must thus be constructed in an anti-anti-essentialist manner that views “racialised subjectivity
as the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from it” (p. 102). Under anti-anti-essentialism, a group’s identity is a combination of social and political categories, as well as the individual social construction of self.

The discussion of the various forms of essentialism provides a framework for understanding the shift during the 1980s in Chicana Feminist Thought towards a new consciousness that challenged a single perspective, what Alma Garcia (1997) termed post-Movement Chicana feminism. Chicana feminists crafted an anti-anti essentialist identity built on both sameness and difference. As Gonzalez (1998) noted, the Chicana feminists began to display a wide range of group ideologies and identity politics. The differences that split Chicana feminists included separatists and non-, lesbian/feminist and non-, male-identified and non-, tenured and non-, and working class and non-. Therefore, in order to survive as a movement or a cause, they had to develop a new consciousness that exhibited certain continuities with the early Chicana feminist movement, but also addressed discontinuities with the Movement.

Teresa Cordova (1999) discussed how, during the 1980s and the 1990s, a new group of Chicana feminists evolved and established a space and a voice through their writings. According to Cordova, these post-Movement Chicana women gained strength, power, and beauty by redefining their identities in opposition to the symbolic representations of the Chicano and Feminist movements that did not include them.

The very essence of Chicana writings is to establish Chicanas as subjects and to replace all previous representations with self-representations. The act of redefining the experiences of Chicanas through their own voices is an expression of resistance against all other definitions. (p. 16)
Flores (1996) agreed that Chicana feminists use their creative works as a tool in the discursive construction of a space of their own (p. 143). Flores argued that the post-Movement Chicana feminists construct an identity by utilizing a rhetoric of difference that runs counter to constraints imposed on them by those in other cultures, and within their own culture as well.

One of the most influential writers in the move toward a new Chicana feminist consciousness is Anzaldúa (1987; 1999). Anzaldúa’s notions of the borderland and new mestiza consciousness serve as anti-anti-essentialist moves toward inventing and constructing new identities. As Melissa Harrison and Margaret Montoya (1998) argued, the borderland metaphor serves as a liminal space filled with potentiality, a way out of the dichotomy between essentialism and anti-essentialism.

The New Mestiza Consciousness and Thirdspace

In Anzaldúa’s most notable work, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987; 1999), she examined the conditions of women in the Chicano culture, Chicana/os in white American society, and lesbians in the straight world. Anzaldúa refers to herself as a border woman, because she lives in the border of two cultures: “The Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)” (1999, p. 19).

Through a combination of history and personal narrative, Anzaldúa conceptualizes the figure of la mestiza, an identity characterized by borders and otherness. The term mestiza is the feminine form of the Spanish term mestizo, a mixed-raced person of Native American and Spanish blood. In 1521, the Spanish conquest of Central and South America created a new race, el mestizo, with the Chicana/os and
Mexican Americans as the offspring (1999). Anzaldúa argued, however, that the term comes from the Aztec word for torn between two ways (1999, p. 100). The mestizo must operate within two or more cultures, which often can be in direct conflict, imprisoning the mestizo in the border between the cultures. She described the border as una herida abierta, an open wound, caused by the struggle between the different cultures:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (1999, p. 25)

Mestizos are the inhabitants of the borderland, Others, struggling to transgress the borders imposed on them.

Although the term mestizo is generic for both the masculine and the feminine, Anzaldúa (1987) argued that la mestiza, the feminine of mestizo, faces different struggles as a woman. La mestiza is acutely aware of her race/ethnicity and gender as interlocking systems of oppression that define her Otherness. Anzaldúa declared, “the struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one” (p. 106). Anzaldúa made clear that the borders are oppressive for Chicanas and other women of color. Chicana feminist Maria Lugones (1992) agreed and argued that to be imprisoned in the borders is “to become a hyphenated being, a dual personality enacted from the outside, without the ability to fashion her own responses” (p. 35). The new mestiza must be a crossroads between her cultures--live without the borders and transcend all the obstacles of her social location as the Other. According to Anzaldúa (1999), a new mestiza
consciousness is a consciousness of the Borderlands, the ability to move in and out of two or more cultures, and to transform the border into a bridge.

Anzaldúa began discussing the borderland specifically as the geographic and physical location of the Texas-U. S. Southwest/ Mexico border and emphasized the Mexican origin of the U.S. Chicanas. Later, however, she claimed the notion of the Borderlands can be used metaphorically for a series of psychological, sexual, and spiritual sites that emphasize other dimensions of the Chicana identity. Sonia Saldivar-Hull (1991) described Anzaldúa’s writing as feminism on the border, or border feminism, because it “adequately takes into account our position as women under multiple oppressions” (p. 206). As Anzaldúa (1999) contended in the preface to the first edition of Borderlands, “the Borderlands are physically present whenever people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy” (p. 19). Margaret Montoya observed that the border becomes a metaphor for larger social forces: “Borders have been transformed from bilateral national boundaries to cultural and epistemic sites of contestation” (p. 641).

As Chicana feminist Maria Socorro Tabuenca-Cúrdoba. (1998) argued, the border is what brings them together and tears them apart.

It brings us together when we see it as place of transit, as an empty space, as a transitory state where we all fit together--a place we can establish a dialogue in spite of our prejudices, our discourses, our writings. It tears us apart when we want to own it; when we assume that it is “our” territory, geographically, and textually; when we do not accept the voices and expressions of the other not the
articulations from our own otherness; when we assume our master identity and not our multiple subjectivities. (p. 237)

The border metaphor, then, is used by Chicana feminists to describe a space where one culture and the other fit. Anzaldúa (1999) referred to this space as in-between, but Edward Soja (1996) referred to it as a Thirdspace, a lived space that both encompasses and is distinct from the other two sides. The Thirdspace is a “third possibility or ‘moment’ that partakes of the original pairing but it is not just a simple combination or an ‘in between’ position along some all-inclusive continuum” (p. 60). A Thirdspace consciousness, according to Soja, is known as thirding-as-Othering: “the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also...” (p. 60). Soja noted the importance of Anzaldúa’s borderland metaphor as a useful place to explore the Thirdspace.

The consciousness of the new mestiza is the Thirdspace, or what Anzaldúa (1987) referred to as a third country or border culture, the construction of which requires not only an exchange between la mestiza’s different cultures, but an opportunity to redefine her own self: “And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture--una cultura mestiza--with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (1999, p. 44). La mestiza is the icon of this Thirdspace situated at the borderlands, constructing a new consciousness through self-transformation and adaptation. She must develop a plural personality with multiple and flexible identities by taking from each culture that which is useful and beneficial in her struggle. Anzaldúa (1999) wrote that la mestiza must view the borderland as a unique site for mixture: “I am an act of kneading, of uniting and
joining that not only has produced both a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (p. 103). These new meanings are a vital part of a new mestiza consciousness and serve in redefining her identity and giving her a new sense of self. A new mestiza identity, then, cannot be given or considered innate, but has to be produced or constructed through this new consciousness.

The new mestiza consciousness, as Thirdspace, is opened up or constructed through the production of texts, specifically through writing. Flores (2001) argued that Chicanas offer their words as a strategy of resistance, as a “means of rejecting dominant discourses” (p. 26). Anzaldúa’s work, Borderlands/La Frontera (1987, 1999) provided an example by combining different genres--history, autobiography, ethnography, mythology, prose, and poetry. In addition, she wrote in English and Spanish as a way to claim space through code switching, and referred to her mixture of language as a reflection of her language, “a new language--the language of the borderlands” (p. 18).

Many Chicana feminists have used genre mixing and code switching in their own writings (Castillo, 1995; Mora, 1993). Contemporary Chicana feminist Eden Torres (2003) noted how this method has produced highly readable accounts of lived theory and practice. She stresses, however, that the life of one Chicana cannot speak for all others, “but it can be used as a lens through which to analyze and critique oppressive phenomena, behaviors, and symbols (p. 3). Soja (1996) contended that Chicana feminists “expand our understanding of the intersections of space and language, sitios y lenguas, the production of space and the production of texts by exploring in novels,
poetry, and cultural criticism the multiple meanings of la linea--the line, the border, the boundary--as lived space” (pp. 129-130).

Conclusion

Scholars have suggested that identity is a complex and dynamic construction, and the intersecting notions of race/ethnicity and gender further complicate its construction. By examining the critical intersections of race/ethnicity and gender, scholars also have suggested these intersections are significant variables by which human societies mark individuals as Others, often leading to an inequitable distribution of political power and social well-being. Studies in whiteness and feminist standpoint theory have increased our awareness and understanding of the inequities that exist within American society and the consequences those inequities have for different, Other-ed communities.

Chicana feminists serve as an example of an identity that is multiply Other-ed along the critical intersections of race/ethnicity and gender. Through studying the history of the Chicana label, and its role in constructing a Chicana feminist collective identity, this study has demonstrated that essentialized representations of Chicana experience exist based on shared histories. Further research in Chicana feminist thought, however, has indicated that the Chicana experience cannot be generalized or universally represented because Chicana experiences are complex and various. Thus, Chicana feminist consciousness began to disrupt the essentialized, homogenous representations of Chicana identity and emphasized both similarities and differences between and among Latinas. The Chicana feminist movement provided a political and cultural opportunity for Latinas nationwide to define their own identities and future.
This examination of Anzaldúa’s notion of a new mestiza consciousness also explored the concept of Thirdspace as a framework for the construction of a new mestiza identity. In the Thirdspace, la mestiza can cross the borders that imprison her as Other. She does not have to be either one culture or another, but can be both and something else—an identity that she has created for herself.

Anzaldúa stressed that this new mestiza consciousness is not given, but has to be produced or constructed by the individual on her own. For example, as a Latina woman, I cannot allow Anzaldúa’s experience as a Latina to speak for my experiences. Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminists have provided models and have given me the opportunity to define what it means for me to be a Latina woman, to define what makes me Latina. Chicana feminists have created this new consciousness through writing, and have encouraged other marginalized women to construct their new mestiza identities through the production of texts. This project investigates how such a production of texts can be achieved through the rehearsal and performance process. The next chapter provides the method for constructing a performance text that explores the cast members’ new mestiza identities.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The first chapter provided an overview of the development of the research question. The second chapter reviewed literature at the critical intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender as conditions that create Otherness, and as categories for understanding the experiences of ethnic-American women. Specifically, the literature review examines the Chicana feminists’ move to re-claim their identity with a new mestiza consciousness, a Thirdspace outside the hegemonic construction of borders between cultures. This chapter discusses and justifies the methodology used to conduct the rehearsals and to create a production process that enables the cast members to discover and perform new mestiza identities.

Creating the Process through the First Performance

As a Latina woman, I was immediately struck, from an artistic perspective, by a poem called “Failure of an Invention” by Safiya Henderson-Holmes (1994), an African-American woman.

i am not any of the faces
you have put on me America
every mask has slipped
i am not any of the names
or sounds you have called me
the tones have nearly
made me deaf
this dark skin, both of us
i can smell the cancer.
this dark hair, these thick lips
both of us have tried to narrow
begging entrance through
the needle of your eye
some of me broken
in the squeeze
and even as I carry
a bone of yours in my back
your soul America
no matter what we’ve tried
i’ve never been able to bear. (p.60)

In this poem, Henderson-Holmes attempted to re-envision her American identity as an African-American woman by combating the power of the names and labels imposed on her. In speaking about the struggle against external pressures, she also speaks about the struggle against the complicated demands of members of her own ethnicity. For example, the practice of bleaching skin to look lighter comes from both external and internal pressures to fit within the dominant, white skin standard for attractiveness and competence. As an emerging scholar, my interests were peaked by the theoretical implications of the text. Her complex experience as an African American woman—living in the hyphen—is reminiscent of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s
(1987) discussion of a new mestiza consciousness, a transgression of borders that opens up a Thirdspace.

As I discussed in the first chapter, my interests in the literature of marginalized ethnic-American women instigated an initial performance project that addressed the complexities of ethnic-American gendered identity and sought to create a Thirdspace on stage by compiling and staging the published texts of ethnic-American women. As the director of the performance project, I constructed the script based on the notion of intertextuality. John Fiske (1987) explains that intertextuality “proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it” (p. 108). These textual knowledges include allusions to both public and private texts, and pre-orient the audience to read the new texts in reference to those already in existence.

For example, in reading Henderson-Holmes’ poem, “Failure of an Invention,” I studied the text’s intertextual relations in order to produce meaning. To read intertextually, however, I did not need to have knowledge of specific references the poem makes about African-American cultural identity. Henderson-Holmes mentions how dark skin is bleached and thick hair is narrowed, practices that are not necessarily part of my experience as a Latina woman. The experiences named by Henderson-Holmes, however, resonate with similar experiences in my lived experience as an ethnic-American woman growing up on the borders of the dominant American culture. As Fiske (1987) explains, “intertextuality exists rather in the space between texts” (p. 108).
My understanding of the poem is grounded in its allusion to Otherness and its connection to an entire body of texts that present discussions of what it means to be an ethnic-American woman—the Other—in contemporary American society. The poem also is reminiscent of my personal experience as a Latina woman, living in the hyphen. Because the poem addresses significant issues that marginalized ethnic-American women often share in their own experiences, the poem served as a base text in the initial performance—a point of departure as I collected related texts by other marginalized ethnic-American women. I chose texts by writers such as Angela de Hoyos, bell hooks, and Nellie Wong, because of their specific references to issues that Henderson-Holmes addresses in her poem, such as labels and names, and issues of displacement in comparison to the dominant, white paradigm.

I also chose texts that I presumed would resemble closely the experiences of the cast members—Elizabeth, an African American woman, Tam, a Vietnamese American woman, and me, a Latina American woman. The three of us had developed a friendship in the two months prior to the beginning of the performance project in January 2003. I wanted the performance text to capture the essence of our friendship—our ability to speak openly and honestly regarding our experiences as marginalized ethnic-American women. Part of the basis of our friendship was our ongoing participation in a multi-cultural form of what Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson (1992) call spinstorying, or women storytelling—the specific practices of women telling stories. Langellier and Peterson claimed, “spinstorying empirically illustrates performance strategies that challenge normative assumptions about the stories we tell, the way we tell stories, and what constitutes an adequate description of gender politics in personal narrative
research” (p. 158). By using spinstorying, we were attempting to keep the various texts of ethnic-American women in a conversational context, to begin a discussion of the representation of ethnic-American women’s identities.

In addition, our initial performance text adhered to what Karen Mitchell (1993) defined as a seamless intertext: a text “composed for public performance purposes from a number of sources which previously existed outside the script in some form: music, film, mass media, cultural discourse, found discourse, fiction, non-fiction, and so forth” (p. 45). These sources are pieced together seamlessly to follow a consistent storyline in which “the parts cannot be discerned without close analysis” (p. 45). Our performance featured a variety of texts merged around the poem, “Failure of an Invention,” into one, cohesive text in order to establish a unifying space and voice for the represented ethnic-American women of the texts. We each represented our own ethnicities within the performance text. For example, as a Latina, I performed Angela de Hoyos’ (1994) poem, “Hermano,” whenever it appeared in the script. However, each time the text of the poem, “Failure of an Invention,” appeared in the script, we performed it together to suggest that this text applied to all of the represented experiences. Therefore, our performance strategies helped to maintain a horizontal relationship within the group in order to create closeness, inclusiveness, and equality.

This initial performance produced a new text, a performance text that relied solely on the compilation of pre-existing texts by ethnic American women. The performance text illustrated the Thirdspace these women had created for themselves, not for my cast members or me. We were interlopers in their space, powerless and incapable of claiming that space as our own. At the completion of the first performance,
I felt the need to produce another performance text, one based on the cast’s personal experiences as ethnic-American women. I wanted us to play an active part in the textual process, so that we could construct our own mestiza identities, our own Thirdspace. The final, thesis performance text experiments with the concept of intertextuality and textual power as ways for the three female performers in the project to assert power and to gain control of the textual process. The second performance project used Robert Scholes’ (1985; 1989; 1990) semiotic model of textuality to provide a framework for the intertextual process involved in constructing the final performance script.

Creating the Process through Scholes and Textual Practice

Concerned with the privileging of certain literary works as part of a sacred canon in English departments, Scholes (1985; 1989; 1992) argued the need to rebuild English curricula to accommodate for the expansion of textuality: textual knowledge and textual skills. According to Scholes, any discrete entity that someone can and does interpret as meaningful is a text. This distinction includes, but is not limited to, traditional literary texts, such as poems, narratives, letters, and plays. In Protocols of Reading (1989), he explored a variety of texts that we must begin to examine, although we may still examine literary texts as “symptoms of the larger super-text that is culture” (p. 31). We may Scholes suggested, even begin to examine ourselves as texts. Scholes noted that “when we become aware of ourselves, we are already thoroughly developed as textual creatures. What we are and what we may become are already shaped by powerful cultural texts” (p. 27).
According to Scholes’ model, the best way to study textual practice—understanding the functioning of textual powers and pleasures—is through the actual consumption and production of texts, the equivalent of reading and writing, respectively, as complementary activities that produce meaning. Scholes (1985) proposed three ways to approach a text: reading (text within text), interpretation (text upon text), and criticism (text against text). Reading involves mastering the proper generic and cultural codings to make sense of the text. Interpreting is abstracting and thematizing the codes to make sense of what is implied in the text. Criticism is critiquing the use of literary modes and norms in a text from a certain point of view, such as race, class, or gender. Working through all three stages is necessary in the process of acquiring textual power. According to Scholes (1985), “we move from a submission to textual authority in reading, through a sharing of textual power in interpretation, toward an assertion of power through opposition in criticism” (p. 39). Teachers of literary texts, according to Scholes, must find ways to encourage students to participate in all three modes of textualization and to teach students the skills necessary for producing their own texts. The English classroom, then, becomes a site of textual power: “the power to select (and therefore to suppress), the power to shape and present certain aspects of human experience” (p. 20).

Although Scholes developed his model for use in the English classroom, scholars in performance studies have adopted the principles of textual power for the performance classroom. Beverly Whitaker Long (1991) challenged the framework for reading and performing texts that traditionally has guided the pedagogy and practice of performance studies. She briefly reviewed how four performance categories, reporting, evoking,
enacting, and arguing, have been privileged in evaluating performances. She emphasized the fourth category, arguing, by demonstrating how Scholes’ categories of reading, interpretation, and criticism of texts can be used as a method of producing new texts for performance. She then developed the notion of performance as argument or as critique, in which students produce their own texts that talk back to some situational, stylistic, or thematic aspect of a particular literary or cultural text. Whether arguing on behalf of or against texts, the production of the new text can be seen as an act of resistance either to the specific literary text or some larger cultural text.

Michael S. Bowman and Cindy J. Kistenberg (1992) concurred with Long’s argument for the use of arguing as a performance category. They adapted performance to Scholes’ semiotic model for the performance studies classroom, enabling students to recognize the power that performance texts have over them and to develop a measure of control over textual processes for themselves. Performance, they argued, makes the textual practice promoted by Scholes “overtly public and social rather than private or individualistic” (p. 297).

Because performance brings textual practice into a public forum, John M. Allison and Karen Mitchell (1994) emphasized that the reader/audience member is as much a part of performance/reading as the author or performer. They sought to close the theoretical gap between Scholes’ model for the English classroom and Bowman and Kistenberg’s model for the performance classroom by providing a model by which students can engage in the intertextual practice of textualizing both literary and performance texts. Performers are engaged in the intermingling of consumption of literary texts and production of performance texts. Audience members are engaged in
the intermingling process of consumption of performance texts and production of performance criticism. Allison and Mitchell reinforced Long’s (1991) notion of performing criticism by adapting the critical performance project, that argues on behalf of or against a certain text.

Performance scholars also have raised questions about how Scholes’ model affects research in the discipline by addressing the role of critical methodology in how reading and responding to performance texts (Pollock, 1992; Strine, 1992; Long, 1992). In response, Scholes (1992) agreed that textual practice is important in teaching about performance and response. By textualizing the performances of others, we can generate more interest in these performance texts, which possibly can lead people to experience these texts for themselves. Scholes, however, reaffirms his belief that a major responsibility still belongs to the teachers of textuality—in English or performance classrooms:

This means we should help them find and criticize the power behind the texts that already please them—and to find the pleasure in texts they may begin by regarding merely as oppressive instances of power. It also means helping them learn how to create texts that will be powerful because they, too, know how to please—and how to think through the texts they create. (p. 78)

This thesis project responds to the challenge set forth by Scholes in this passage by constructing a new performance text that involves all cast members in the intertextual process. They learn to find pleasure in as well as to criticize the power behind pre-existing texts by ethnic-American women and to create their own powerful texts. Scholes (1990) discussed the principle of intertextuality as crucial to textual
theory and practice. The process of intertextuality involves making “new texts out of our own pretexts as well as those of others” (p. 105). As the director and a performer in the initial performance, I excluded the rest of my cast, Tam and Elizabeth, from the intertextual process of constructing the performance text. I produced a performance text based on my consumption, my reading and interpretation of pre-existing texts.

My role as the director of the re-envisioned performance project was to engage the other two performers in the intertextual processes of consumption and production, to help them attain textual power from the process, and to produce their own, powerful texts. Together as a cast, however, we worked to push consumption and production further than in the first performance, to produce a new performance script based, in part, on our own experiences. The rehearsal process was used as a vehicle for exploring our new mestiza identities through the intertextual processes of consumption and production. During the rehearsal process, we constructed a script using literary texts, some from the original performance and some new texts, as departure points. Whereas in the first performance, I chose representative texts for the cast, in the new performance they chose their own texts. The cast members were instructed to choose texts that closely resembled or represented their experiences. These texts would provide structure for the production of personal experience narratives, which we would use to co-construct and co-produce the final performance text.

The new performance text was consistent with the type of critical performance, described by Long (1991) and Allison and Mitchell (1994) as a new text that speaks on behalf of or against an aspect of a pre-existing literary or cultural text. Creating the new text required us to quote, rewrite, parody, and reconfigure the collected pre-existing
texts (Allison & Mitchell, 1994). The new performance text, then, involved a provocative, seamless intertextual collection of narratives, essays, poetry, jokes, and other representations of ethnic American women’s experiences. Most importantly, we included our own personal experience narratives to foreground the complexities of our experiences as ethnic American women. In co-producing a new performance text, we not only constructed a new text, we each created a new mestiza consciousness, our own Thirdspace. This move to create a Thirdspace, in turn, allowed us an opportunity to redefine and assert our identities.

Evaluating the Rehearsal and Performance Process

The rehearsal process, including both informal and formal meetings, served as a site of field research in evaluating our accomplishments in the project— if and how we were able to engage in textual practice to produce new texts and claim our new mestiza identities. As the director of the project, I maintained an extensive rehearsal journal during the rehearsal process to chart our progress in completing the new performance text (Appendix C). The journal consists of 89 typed, double-spaced pages that document the rehearsal process; the journal begins in October 2002 and concludes in April 2003. In addition to traditional components (i.e., objectives and goals for each rehearsal, evaluation of cast’s progress, plan for next meeting, etc.) the rehearsal journal includes my own reflections on the process as I attempted to engage Tam, Elizabeth, and myself in exploring our new mestiza identities and producing new texts. As D. Jean Clandin and F. Michael Connelly (1998) contend, the researcher’s own narrative of experience is one of the starting points for social science inquiry in that, as researchers, “we try to gain experience of our experience through constructing
narratives of that experience” (p. 161). Personal experience methods, such as journals, construct field texts: “texts created by participants and researchers to represent aspects of field experience” (p. 162). The rehearsal journal, then, is an important representation of the thesis project narrative and serves as a field text to answer the research question:

What strategies emerged as significant rehearsal techniques for encouraging the ethnic-American female cast members, individually and collectively, to produce original texts (a Thirdspace), thereby assuming responsibility for representing their new mestiza identities?

With a clearly focused research question, I analyzed the rehearsal journal, as fieldnotes, in a process of focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to identify specific acts of consumption and production in constructing the new performance text. Scholes’ (1985) discussion of consumption and production provided an outline for distinguishing between the two acts. At a fundamental level, consumption occurs whenever anyone reads and interprets a text, of any kind, as possessing or bearing meaning. For example, a cast member demonstrates basic consumption when she reads a text like “Failure of an Invention,” and is able to say from clues given in the text, “It’s about an African American woman.” She demonstrates a deeper level of consumption when she identifies some generalized themes and values, and says, “It’s about alienation and frustration or prejudice and racism.” As Scholes explains, however, consumption is “a matter of making connections between a particular verbal text and a larger cultural text” (p. 32). Such connections are apparent, for example, when, after situating the poem in relation to other texts, a cast member says, “bell hooks discusses a similar situation in her essay,” or “My mom told me a similar story.” Moreover, she
situates the poem in relation to culture, society, and the world, when she observes, “It’s no wonder African American women want to fit in by looking more white. White women are represented much more than African American women are in the media.”

Production, then, is a matter of responding to that particular reading and interpretation of the text, its connected verbal texts, and/or larger cultural texts, as, for example, when she begins to question, “Why aren’t African American women represented more in the media?” Similarly, a cast member is engaged in production when, she argues against the poem, which purports to speak for all African American women, yet excludes her experience. Production occurs whenever anyone generates or constructs a new text based on this response. When an individual talks about her own experience, or writes a new poem or story, she is engaged in production. Scholes makes clear that consumption and production are intermingled acts. Production only can occur properly after the consumption of previous texts, which guide and sustain the construction of the new text.

I used Scholes’ definitions of consumption and production as pre-established categories to analyze the fieldnotes. First, I performed a preliminary exploratory reading of the entire journal to identify the processes of consumption and production. Specifically, I searched for the moments when each cast member moved from consumption to production, because only at these moments could a cast member represent her new mestiza identity. From those points, I re-examined the rehearsal journal to see what tactics or strategies were used to engage the cast in the acts of production. I labeled the tactics/strategies with codes and listed multiple instances of these codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Next, I reduced overlap and redundancy of
codes by making comparisons between cast members’ progress, identifying strategies that were comparable to or differ from one another, and noting the conditions under which these variations occurred. Then, I connected and evaluated the strategies based on their relative effectiveness in engaging the cast members in the intertextual process. Ultimately, the evaluation focused on the strategies that were effective in the rehearsal process in order to support a discussion of what strategies could be used to reproduce the performance process with another group of marginalized ethnic-American women.

Conclusion

This chapter described the method by which the performance project was conducted. The next chapter presents the results of the analysis of the rehearsal journal. The final chapter presents a discussion of the strategies, describes the limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the processes of constructing and rehearsing a new performance text as a means of exercising textual power and claiming a new mestiza identity, a Thirdspace. Chapter Three described the method by which the performance project was conducted. The project included the use of three women: Elizabeth, an African American woman; Tam, an Asian American woman, and me, a Latina woman. The rehearsal and performance process spanned 7 months, beginning the day the three cast members met informally in October of 2002, extending through the original performance at the Pace Performance Festival at Georgia Southern University in February 2003, and concluding with the final performance in April 2003. Throughout the process, I maintained a journal to document the rehearsal process; the journal consists of 89 typed, double-spaced pages of information that represents the thesis project narrative. The rehearsal journal (Appendix C) served as a field text to answer the research question. This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the rehearsal journal, including the strategies that emerged as significant rehearsal techniques for helping the cast produce original texts.

Method of Analysis

In order to answer the research question, I used focused coding to analyze the rehearsal journal, identifying specific acts of consumption and production for each cast member. Next, I re-examined the journal to identify strategies used by the faculty advisors and by me to engage each member in the move from consumption to production. I labeled the strategies with codes based on emergent patterns or themes.
In a final examination of the journal, I identified fundamental similarities and differences between each member’s moves from consumption to production. By collapsing similar strategies and retaining distinct strategies, I produced a set of thirteen strategies. In the sections that follow, I provide (1) a synopsis of each cast member's move from consumption to production during the rehearsal and performance process, (2) an overview of results of the analysis, and (3) a discussion of the thirteen strategies that emerged as significant rehearsal techniques.

Synopsis of Consumption and Production Acts

Melinda Gonzales

I am a Latina American woman in my mid-20s, who acquired prior knowledge of the consumption and production process as a teaching assistant for the undergraduate classes Performance of Literature and Storytelling in the Department of Communication Studies. As a graduate student in Communication Studies, I had the opportunity to acquire more skills and apply them in class assignments for graduate classes such as Performance Criticism and Intertextuality and Performance. Given my previous experience and my role as the director of the project, I engaged in more sophisticated acts of consumption and production at the start of the rehearsal process than the other two cast members. For example, I engaged in the acts of consumption and production through my construction of the first performance script for the Pace Performance Festival. As noted in the journal on the first day of rehearsal, January 28, 2003, I wrote the script in seven days, including five days to locate various texts by ethnic American women and two days to adapt the texts into a performance based on the common themes of resistance and the pain of assimilation for people of color. Although I wrote
the script primarily for my multi-ethnic cast, I included three white people—Dr. Kelly Taylor, Jace Sanders, and Christine Snowden—to perform those sections that represented a white perspective.

As the project's creator and director, I engaged in additional acts of consumption and production required of me in my role as the director. For example, I was required to develop a production concept based on my interpretation of the script, as well as a staging plan to convey my interpretation to an audience. I shared my basic production concept, based on my interpretation of the poem, “Failure of an Invention” with the cast on the first day of rehearsals. I noted in the journal:

... the only production concept I have is to use masks and, perhaps, make some tableaux of typical American scenes in the beginning. My idea is for the white people to form tableaux of typical American life, and for the three of us--Tam, Elizabeth, and me--to come in and fail to fit into the tableaux, prompting the line: I am not any of the faces you have put on me America.

I eventually engaged in further acts of consumption and production to help me develop additional ideas for the production concept--on my own and with the cast. For example, I developed an idea for the beginning of the show that involved the use of beauty magazines with their dominant images of white, beautiful women. Also, I made the decision to cut back the roles of the White cast members. As a result, the White cast members had few lines in the script and were removed from the stage. I also scheduled rehearsals without their attendance. Furthermore, I attempted to make the script more personal. For example, I had originally included an excerpt from a Cherrie Moraga

65
piece, in which she uses the term Chicana to identify herself. At that time, I did not feel comfortable identifying myself as a Chicana, so I changed the term to Hispanic.

By the time of the first performance in Georgia, I had developed a full production concept with the help of Elizabeth, Tam, and other people involved in the performance, including the White cast members and advising professors. I was actively engaging in acts of consumption and production—developing more ideas on my own. For example, I developed an idea to use masks made from beauty magazine clippings. I made the masks during a workshop at the festival, and we incorporated the idea into the performance.

When I began the rehearsal process for the second performance, I was more motivated than Elizabeth and Tam to make the move from consumption to production. The process, however, was not necessarily easier for me to make. In fact, I demonstrated just as many struggles to grasp the concept of production as did Elizabeth and Tam. The biggest obstacle occurred when Dr. Juandalynn Taylor and Dr. Allison informed me that the script had to be revised a week before the final performance because the script did not appropriately display the ultimate move into production—the construction of our new mestiza identities. Even though I believed we had achieved this move by including our personal stories and experiences, we had not yet created the Thirdspace, where we assumed ownership of our identities. Dr. Taylor gave advice on how to revise the script, including her interpretation of the Chukwuelue text, and how to extend the ideas included in that text to our performance text. Although I found Dr. Taylor’s suggestions helpful later, I did not grasp the concept of the
Thirdspace at that time, and I was confused and frustrated about how to revise the script.

Sensing my confusion, Dr. Taylor showed me a video taped performance of a poem by Vanessa Hidary on the HBO series, Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry, as an example. Watching the video clip marked the beginning of my ultimate move into production, the creation of the Thirdspace. I explained in the journal:

Vanessa’s performance inspired me to talk about my own experience with comments like “You do not look Hispanic to me.” When I say nothing, I am not only disappointing myself but other Hispanics as well. The introduction will be about the process of reading different Latina literature and not finding my story there. I spend the rest of the night revising my parts of the script.

With only a week until the final performance, I spent the next few days and nights with Elizabeth and Tam re-writing the end of the script based on Dr. Taylor’s suggestions. By this point in the rehearsal process, I behaved more as producer than as director role—I took care of all the technical and administrative aspects of the production. In rehearsal, I considered myself a cast member. I achieved the ultimate move from consumption to production, therefore, around the same time as Elizabeth and Tam while we revised the script’s ending together.

Elizabeth Okigbo

Elizabeth, an African American woman in her early 20s, is a senior undergraduate student in the Department of Communication Studies. Elizabeth acquired prior knowledge of the consumption and production processes from undergraduate performance classes. She demonstrated basic skills in the consumption
of public texts as a student in my recitation of a Performance of Literature class and later during the Petit Jean Performance Festival auditions. I also had the opportunity to work with her two years before on a local production of The Vagina Monologues. She performed a monologue entitled, “The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could,” a personal narrative of a disadvantaged African-American woman from the South. Her performance, which demonstrated her ability to adopt the role of another African American woman, required skills in reading and interpretation in order to make informed performance decisions. In order to perform this unidentified woman’s story, Elizabeth needed a basic understanding of the codes in the text--age, physical appearance, economic status--and the skills to fill in any gaps in knowledge to demonstrate the woman’s motivations and goals.

Her skills in performing acts of consumption were further honed in the Performance of Literature class, which required her to consume and perform texts from everyday life and literary texts. She had no opportunity, however, to produce and perform her own texts. During the same semester as the thesis project, Elizabeth had the opportunity to practice skills in production in Dr. Allison’s undergraduate Intertextuality and Performance class.

Elizabeth demonstrated her facility at acts of consumption during the rehearsal process. For example, upon first reading the script, she read the pieces in her part of the script as texts by and about African American women. While the White people were asking about their parts on the first day of rehearsal, Elizabeth did not seem to want help from me and often rejected my attempts to help her, as I noted during one rehearsal:
I cannot tell Elizabeth how to perform her pieces because she will say to me, “And how do you know how it feels to be a Black woman?” She took ownership of her parts of the script, and displayed comfort in performing them appropriately.

Elizabeth also displayed her ability to engage in a higher level of consumption—acts of interpretation. I was not privy to her interpretation process, however, because we never spent the time to discuss the pieces in detail, as I might have done in a classroom setting. Because of her previous experience and time constraints with the rehearsal schedule, I assumed she would be able to interpret the texts on her own time. She showed clear signs of her interpretation skills by her ability to speak about some of the texts. For example, a question was raised during one of the rehearsals on the concept of good hair, an idea mentioned in a bell hooks’ text:

Jace asks if Elizabeth has good hair, and Elizabeth tells us that she does not and she tries to explain why not. Many of us do not understand why a concept such as good hair exists. Elizabeth tries to explain that it is really just a Black thing. White people can say they do not have good hair, but that is not what bell hooks is talking about in her piece.

In this instance, Elizabeth imparted personal knowledge about the text on good hair, thereby demonstrating her ability to define the concept of good hair and to recognize herself in relation to the concept.

Although Elizabeth demonstrated an ability to engage in consumption, she lacked commitment to the project. Throughout the journal, I noted her unwillingness to memorize the first performance script in a timely manner. In addition, she did not take
rehearsals seriously; she failed to use rehearsal time and space effectively to rehearse her pieces.

Elizabeth was capable of making the move to production, and eventually began producing original texts. She displayed her ability to talk about her own experience, even before rehearsals began. For example, at the Petit Jean Performance Festival she participated in discussions started by Tam and I about our heritage. Elizabeth talked openly about her heritage and the problems associated with her last name. She disclosed additional information about her experiences as an African American woman during the rehearsal process, including a discussion about being called an oreo. Her participation in these discussions also demonstrated her ability to engage in acts of intertextuality by relating aspects of lived experiences to parallel aspects of our experiences.

In addition, she produced a critical performance for Dr. Allison’s class, an assignment similar to the concept guiding our second performance. To complete this assignment, Elizabeth found texts by African American women that she used to produce a new text based on her own experiences. After reading her script, I knew she would understand the concept of the second performance.

Her introduction to the performance says the following: In my performance, I will be arguing against the concept of beauty by African-American standards. This idea of beauty is fair skin or a light brown coloring and straight hair. This concept of beauty has been so ingrained into Southern black women’s mind that this is the only thing that is beautiful. I have used an essay by bell hooks and a story by Nneka Chukwuelue.
I am not familiar with Chukwuelue’s work, so I call Elizabeth to ask her about it. I am confused because at one point her script says: “My mother is American and my father is Nigerian.” I do not know whether those are Chukwuelue’s words or Elizabeth’s. Elizabeth tells me that it is Chukwuelue’s story, which amazingly parallels her own -- except for the fact that Chukwuelue has darker skin than Elizabeth. Because of her lighter skin, Elizabeth did not necessarily face the same types of hardships that Chukwuelue discusses.

Elizabeth, then, began to engage in acts of production before Tam, but her progress was slow and reluctant. After completing the assignment for Dr. Allison’s class, she did not produce additional original texts for our second performance, until late in the rehearsal process.

Consequently, I decided to interview her to include more of her experiences in the script. After using the new interview material to construct the script, I started to receive feedback from her:

Elizabeth expressed her dissatisfaction with the racial joke section. I put in some “Yo Mama is so Black” jokes that I got from the Internet. Apparently, from Elizabeth’s perspective the jokes were not funny. She called a friend in the middle of rehearsal to ask for more jokes, and we add them into the script. After this rehearsal moment, she engaged in additional acts of production, and she started to work on her own texts on her own time. She seemed to understand the goals of the performance project, but still lacked commitment.
On the day we were told that the script had to change to include the Thirdspace, Elizabeth displayed a breakthrough moment. She remained optimistic about the change, and the next day she already had revised her script:

I see Elizabeth at the gym on Saturday morning. As we are walking to our cars after our workout, she tells me that she has been thinking about what Juandalynn was telling us on Friday. She told me that she went home and did some work on the ending of the script. I am pleasantly surprised that Elizabeth has done this for me on a Friday night. I did not even ask her to work on the script for me; she took the initiative. Finally, I am getting through to Elizabeth – she is beginning to think of the performance as our project and not just mine.

With her revisions, she made an attempt to construct a Thirdspace before Tam or I. When I showed them the video clip of Vanessa Hidary’s performance, Elizabeth understood how her parts needed to be revised, and her commitment to the project increased. For example, she made more suggestions and devoted more time to rehearsal. As I noted in the rehearsal journal, she started to express a genuine desire for the success of the performance, and I surmised from her behavior that she saw the performance as a representation of her self.

Tam Tran

Tam, a Vietnamese American woman in her early 20s, is a senior undergraduate student in the Department of Communication Studies. Tam acquired prior knowledge of production and consumption processes from undergraduate performance classes, including the sophomore level class, Performance of Literature, and the upper-division classes, Storytelling and Intertextuality and Performance. She was my student in the
Storytelling class, which provided me a limited number of opportunities to evaluate her performance abilities. My only other opportunity to witness her skills prior to the start of the thesis project occurred during the Petit Jean Performance Festival auditions, at which she performed an excerpt from the novel, The Joy Luck Club. Her performance of this particular piece about Asian American women displayed her ability to engage in consumption, as she clearly understood the generic and cultural codes of the text. Tam, however, displayed clear signs of performance apprehension; she forgot some lines and she did not finish the performance. This failure seemed to haunt her throughout our performance process; it limited her ability to own her performance choices and affected her self-confidence.

Despite this failure, she had success in her performance classes, and she was capable of engaging in basic acts of consumption. For the first performance’s script, Tam read the texts that comprised her part of the script as texts by and about Asian American women with varying ethnicities—Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. Since she did not ask questions about how to perform her parts, I assumed she was competent in the skills necessary to consume the text.

During rehearsals for the first performance, the only instances that displayed Tam’s ability to read and interpret the performance text occurred when she was active in providing suggestions and applying her knowledge of performance to stage the script. I noted this ability during one of the rehearsals:

Jace, Elizabeth, and Tam seemed to be having fun applying performance knowledge from their classes to the performance. For example, Tam said, “Hey we learned in class today how we shouldn’t stand like this...”
Otherwise, I was not privy to her interpretation process. She did not display many acts of interpretation. In fact, she did not discuss her parts at all. One reason for her silence was that Tam concentrated more on memorizing her lines than understanding their meanings. I observed this behavior during one rehearsal:

Tam claimed it was more important for her to remember a line before she added any emotion. As a director, I advised the opposite -- you should only remember the lines through the attitudes and feelings of the character. I like the Stanislavski method of performing, which basically means, no acting, just character embodiment. Acting is fake--if you have to think of the line, then you are faking it. I tried to explain this concept to Tam, but she continued to concentrate on memorization first. I did not push the matter, though, because she believes this method.

Apparently, Tam was made little effort to understand the feelings or attitudes of her characters. In addition, she did not display as much confidence as Elizabeth in performing her pieces. Tam’s move to production, then, was more slow and difficult. In fact, Tam dreaded the move to production because she saw the move as additional work. Therefore, she had a difficult time engaging in the process. For example, she avoided meeting with me, she developed a pattern of canceling rehearsal, and she discussed quitting with Elizabeth.

Tam was capable of making the move to production. Like Elizabeth, she displayed her ability to talk about her own experience openly and honestly at the Petit Jean Performance Festival before rehearsals began. She shared stories about her heritage, her family, and her name.
Tam discusses how people get her name wrong all the time. I laugh because I am confused about how to pronounce her name as well. Dr. Byers had told me that Tam told her that her name is really pronounced “Tom.” Tam said that Dr. Byers misunderstood the conversation. Her name really is pronounced Tam - like it sounds. She does not understand why people try to make it more difficult than it has to be.

Tam frequently talked about her identity and other issues that would be appropriate for the second performance script, but she resisted putting her stories down on paper. For example, she did not want to write about her experience as an Asian American woman when given the opportunity in an assignment for Dr. Allison’s class. Tam likes the idea, but she claims that she already has done too many Asian performances in the class. She often performs stories about her Vietnamese family. “I don’t want to be known as that Asian girl,” she tells me. While I understand her point, I am disappointed in her decision because I think using her heritage would have helped.

Because she would not start producing original texts on her own, I decided to interview her so that I could add her experiences to the performance script. After constructing the script, I finally received some feedback from her:

Just when I think all hope is lost, Tam says to me, “Well, you got my part all wrong.” She explains to me that I misquoted her in one part of the script. Even though I tell her that I got that part directly from her interview – word for word -- she tells me that I misinterpreted her words. I explain that is why I need her to write this in her own words. She is silent, while she looks over the script again.
She looks up and says, “Okay, let’s talk about this.” We go to lunch, and discuss the script. Together we are able to revise other parts.

After this moment in rehearsal, Tam worked on her parts of the script, but only those sections that I already had written for her. Unlike Elizabeth, she did not provide additional texts.

After I showed the video clip of Vanessa Hidary’s performance, Tam understood the goal of the project, and made a more concerted attempt to work on the performance. Her ultimate move to production was achieved later that night after rehearsal:

At 1 a.m., I am still working on my revisions. I receive a call from Tam. Since it is 1 a.m., I am expecting the worst. Instead, Tam asks me a question about the script. “Listen to me,” she tells me. “It’s 1 a.m., I have a paper due tomorrow, and I am working on your stuff. You got me thinking about this at home now...” I am tired and cranky, so Tam’s tone of voice sounds sneering to me. I tell her, “Oh, cry me a river, Tam. We all have work to do.” We continued to exchange rude comments with one another for a few minutes. Then, Tam says, “Whatever, Mel. Can I talk to you now?” I stop to listen to her. Tam wants to change a part where she is discussing her light skin. Originally, in the script, she is just rambling about her skin color and her nose. Instead, she wants to discuss how too many people—the white girls, the Asian girls, her family—all expect her to cater to their expectations. “It’s like I was a rubber band being stretched from both sides,” Tam says. “Can I say that in the show?”
This moment was significant for two reasons. First, Tam displayed her ability to produce an original text based on her experience. Second, she expressed a genuine interest in the performance and wanted to assume responsibility for representing herself.

After this moment, Tam began to engage in additional acts of production. More importantly, she assumed ownership of the performance—an important step in producing additional original texts and assuming her new mestiza identity. The following moment in rehearsal best exemplified her progress:

When we finished our celebration, Tam sat down and looked at the script. “This is good,” she said. Her tone of voice sounded sarcastic to me so I gave her a sardonic remark, “Shut-up.” I got up from my seat, and she grabbed my arm. “No, Mel,” she said seriously. “This is a really good thing we’re doing here.” I smiled at her; I realized she had finally used the word “we.” I was so happy that I hugged her. “It’s our performance,” I told her. “I know,” she said.

Before this moment, Tam questioned the need for the second performance, and resisted involvement in the project. By giving a positive evaluation of the project, then, she demonstrated her understanding of the second performance’s purpose and her approval of the project. Also, this moment marked the first time that Tam used the term we when discussing the project, and assumed ownership of the performance.

Results

The research question sought to identify significant rehearsal techniques to encourage the cast to move from consumption to production. After examining each cast member’s progress from consumption to production, I identified thirteen broad
categories of behavior and outcomes that constituted effective rehearsal strategies. The thirteen categories grouped into four overarching patterns or themes in our move from consumption to production:

1. Trust Building/ Bonding
2. Building skills in the intertextual process
3. Assuming performance ownership and responsibility

With the exception of the third theme, each theme emerged in every cast member’s move to production. Theme three emerged as an issue in motivating Elizabeth and Tam to produce original texts, but it did not emerge as an issue for me. In the following sections, I provide a brief description of each theme followed by an explanation of the strategies characteristic of the themes.

Trust Building/ Bonding

The first theme addresses the importance of forging a bond and building trust within the group. For the most part, I had to establish trustworthiness to Elizabeth and Tam as a friend rather than a teaching assistant. Also, I had to learn to trust them as my friends. I discovered three salient categories of strategies to create a bond and to build trust: establishing personal relationships, creating exclusive friendship rituals, and creating safe environments to discuss issues openly and honestly.

Establishing personal relationships. The first technique includes those actions used to establish personal relationships built on mutual respect, caring, and concern. Establishing personal relationships at the beginning of the rehearsal process was important for two reasons: to establish the tone for the rehearsal process and to create
group cohesion. I already had established personal relationships with Elizabeth and Tam as their teaching assistant, but I needed to create a closer relationship with them as a friend. My strategy was to practice self-disclosure in order to establish a bond with them based on our mutual interests and similar backgrounds and experiences. I had an opportunity to form this bond before the rehearsal process. At the Petit Jean Performance Festival, for example, we lived in close quarters with ten people for four days. As the only ethnic minorities in the group, we formed a natural bond as we started to share our experiences with each other. Self-disclosure, then, proved to an effective strategy for all three of us.

Since a bond was established prior to the beginning of rehearsals, I did not spend much time implementing trust building techniques during rehearsals. The rehearsal process, however, provided us additional time with each other to enhance our friendly, almost sisterly, bond. Consequently, I used an unusual warm-up technique for rehearsals—conversations. As I explain in the rehearsal journal:

Casual conversation has become our normal method for warming up for rehearsal. The conversations generally last from fifteen to twenty minutes. I encourage conversation, because it helps us relax and feel comfortable. Although our friendship was helpful in creating trust and inspiring more acts of self-disclosure, our friendship might also have hindered our progress. Often, we got too comfortable with each other, as I noted during one rehearsal:

Because we are friends, Tam and Elizabeth take liberties with me during rehearsals. For example, Tam played on the computer and Elizabeth wrote on the chalkboard. They both kept their cell phones on during rehearsal and felt free
to break during rehearsal time to take a call. At times I told them to stop and be serious, but I did not try to enforce my power on them in any way. I did not set a good example either, because I answered my cell phone as well. Most of the time, however, we knew when to be serious.

Some rehearsals were not very productive because we chose to use the time to socialize. The excerpt above, however, suggests that we attempted to keep the socializing activities to a minimum and tried to be productive during most rehearsals. Our close friendship, then, did not serve as a major obstacle.

Creating exclusive friendship ritual. The second strategy in building trust and creating a bond was the creation of exclusive friendship rituals. For example, as Elizabeth and Tam became friends with me, we participated in stereotype banter—talk in which we teased each other about the stereotypes attached to our respective ethnic identities. The banter began at the Petit Jean Performance Festival:

In a matter of days, the three of us have formed a close bond. We already have developed a little banter routine among the three of us. For instance Tam will say something rude to Elizabeth and Elizabeth will reply, “Hey, go eat your eggrolls.”

Tam will reply, “Hey go eat some fried chicken!”

And then they would say to me, “Hey go eat some enchiladas.”

To Tam: Oh, yeah well, why don’t you go and do some nails???

To Elizabeth: Why don’t you go and play some basketball???

To Me: Why don’t you go and clean some hotel???
Those remarks are comfortable and fun to us—no one is offended. In fact, I find myself liking the banter. I feel a sense of connection between the three of us. Thereafter, our nicknames for each other became Eggroll, Fried Chicken, and Enchilada. The nicknames were used throughout the rehearsal process and became part of the title for the second performance. My notes in the rehearsal journal suggested that the stereotypical nickname banter worked as an effective strategy to establish a bond between the three of us. Elizabeth and Tam’s heavy engagement in the nickname banter suggested that they found our nicknames to be effective bonding tools as well. Their appreciation of the nicknames is best illustrated by the following moment in rehearsal:

I ask Tam, “Do you think it’s wrong that we call each other Enchilada and Eggroll and stuff?”

Tam snorts, “No. That’s just what we call each other. It’s not like we call anyone else that. I don’t call any other enchiladas that name.”

Elizabeth adds in, “Don’t worry about it Enchilada.”

Elizabeth and Tam were aware that the nickname banter was a friendship ritual between the three of us only and were comfortable participating in the banter.

Creating a safe environment. The third strategy in establishing a bond and creating trust involved cast members working together to create and sustain an environment in which everyone felt safe, supported, and encouraged to express her views and concerns openly and honestly. One strategy I used to limit attendance at rehearsals to the ethnic America members of the cast. We seemed more comfortable when we were alone together. Early in the process, we reached a decision to remove
the white cast members from rehearsals. As I noted repeatedly throughout the first half of the rehearsal process, we worked best without the presence of the white people. Indeed, we worked best without the presence other people in general. With Elizabeth, I did not need additional strategies to create a safe environment; she seemed comfortable talking about herself in most settings. With Tam, on the other hand, a safe and comfortable environment was essential to encourage the process of self-disclosure. When I interviewed her, for example, she seemed uncomfortable with the presence of the tape recorder. I noted in the journal:

I think the tape-recorder made her worry that I would start analyzing her. At one point during the interview, for example, she talked about her strict father.

Suddenly, she stopped and said to me, “It’s like you’re a therapist with that recorder thing...”

Tam felt that the tape recorder was intrusive on our conversation, and that the taped conversation would open space for judgment. My strategy to create a safe environment for her was to emphasize our friendship and to keep the interview conversational, using informal language and grammar.

Skills Building

Although all three of us demonstrated our ability to engage in acts of consumption and production, we were reluctant to engage in primarily acts of production. Elizabeth and I were able to produce new, original texts. While our new texts focused mainly on production, they were at the same time acts of consumption as well. Although we had moved along the continuum from engaging in primarily acts of consumption to acts of both consumption and production, we were unable to move past
these points. Both of us faced some difficulty in extending our texts to primarily acts of production that open a Thirdspace. Tam was able to engage in acts of consumption and production, but she did not produce new, original texts. She was unable to produce criticism, and extend her criticism to primarily acts of production. The categories of strategies under this theme deal directly with developing the consumption and production skills of each cast member in order for each of us to extend our movement into production. I obtained three salient categories of strategies in this area: written and verbal instructions, visual representations, and collaborative learning.

Written and Verbal Instructions. Initially, I did not provide many instructions to Elizabeth and Tam because of their prior knowledge of the consumption and production processes. In addition, both of them were completing a similar assignment to the thesis project in Dr. Allison’s class. Elizabeth did not appear to need many instructions because she did not ask many questions, and she already produced her own texts based on Dr. Allison’s assignment. Tam, on the other hand, seemed to need instructions from me. As I noted in the rehearsal journal:

She does not seem to understand the basic premise of the performance. Unlike Elizabeth, she did not develop a critical performance on the topic of Asian-American standards of beauty or identity. I feel the need to explain to her the process of building a good argument against certain texts.

In order to help Tam engage in acts of consumption and production, I used specific strategies. For example, I found texts that described Asian-American female experiences, and showed them to encourage the process of consumption and to create a foundation for producing her own texts. When she did not immediately understand, I
went through the process with her—we read some of the texts together, and I asked her to compare and contrasts these texts with her own experiences. Then, I gave her more instructions and I asked her to perform these tasks at home.

These strategies were ineffective at first because she did not complete any of the tasks I requested. Tam understood the instructions, but her lack of compliance and her complaints indicated that she viewed the project as too much work. Throughout the rest of the rehearsal process, I continued to give her instructions. For example, towards the end of the rehearsal process, as we were making re-writing the script's ending, I used strategies specifically geared to her. My strategies are best illustrated by the following excerpt from the journal:

Tam was beginning to understand a little more, but I still felt the need to direct her in making changes. I told her, for example, “Here’s where you’re going to tell me how proud you are to be a Vietnamese woman…” or “I want you to tell me at this point in the script, in your own words, how it felt when you …” I felt like I was writing her parts for her. All she had to do was fill in the blanks. Being Asian means _____ and ______.

These strategies seemed to help Tam understand how to complete the revisions of the script's ending. She completed the revisions at home, and she started to produce her own, original texts beyond my instructions.

As the director, I needed instructions as well. Repeatedly throughout the rehearsal process, I relied on Dr. Allison’s instructions to help start the thesis project, and construct certain parts of the script. His instructions, however, often seemed like advice for me to consider as I constructed the performance script. Apparently from my
struggles during the rehearsal process, I could have used more instructions, but I did not ask for them. When Dr. J. Taylor told me that the script’s ending had to be revised, I needed explicit instructions from her to make the revisions. Her strategy was to provide additional information about Thirdspace, verbal instructions on how the script should end, and an example of how to revise the script. Her strategy was helpful, but not completely effective in helping me understand the necessary revisions. I remained confused about the concept of the Thirdspace and how to include this concept in my script. I required additional strategies to help me engage primarily in acts of production and open a Thirdspace.

Visual Representations. This category of strategies was perhaps the most effective for all three cast members, since the three of us needed visual representations in order to understand how to construct the Thirdspace in our script. Dr. Taylor provided a visual representation of a text that constructed a Thirdspace: a video clip of Vanessa Hidary’s performance from HBO’s Def Jam Poetry. After watching the clip, I developed a better understanding of how to construct the Thirdspace in the script. I explained my reaction in the journal:

The performance gives me chills as I watch. Juandalynn tells me that the performance is exactly what she is looking for in my own. Suddenly, I understand exactly what she means.

The video clip, then, served as an effective strategy to help me understand the Thirdspace and to motivate me to start constructing Thirdspace in my own work. I knew, for example, how to begin the performance, a decision that proved troublesome throughout the process.
Then, as a strategy to help Elizabeth and Tam understand, I showed them the video clip as a visual representation as well. I explained their reactions in the journal:

After I showed them the performance, I turned around to check Tam’s and Elizabeth’s reactions. They both smiled at me and told me how they loved her. “She makes me want to cry,” Tam told me, and I knew that she sincerely meant what she said. I was extremely glad that she was moved by the performance.

I explained to them that I want our performance to be the same way. We should all want our performance to make people cry. They seemed to understand and we started working on the script together.

This strategy, then, helped all three of us visualize the concept of Thirdspace, and gave us encouragement to start representing our selves in the same way.

Collaborative Learning. Throughout the rehearsal process, I expressed my reluctance to be the decision-maker and my intent to develop the production as a group effort. I attempted to use collaborative learning strategies to encourage active participation from each cast member in the skill building process. In other words, we needed to help each other learn. These strategies included a set of approaches to involve each cast member in constructing the final performance script.

For the production concept of the first performance, for example, I did not want to develop ideas on my own. I attempted to involve the cast by starting open discussions about the script and encouraging feedback and advice. At first, the cast was not responsive, but eventually they started to provide input. As individuals shared ideas with the group, others began to participate. At times, collaborative learning worked too
well and inhibited our progress. I noted an instance of how collaboration slowed our progress in the rehearsal journal:

We spent 45 minutes running through one page of the script. We spent another 20 minutes with the “I hate Meskins” part, because everyone had opinions on how this section should be performed. I had such a headache that I had to ask the cast to move on from this part, and we got through another page before I decided to call it a night.

For the most part, collaborative learning strategies were effective in building our skills in consumption and production. In particular, we seemed to need these strategies during the second rehearsal process when we were trying to produce our own texts. I note often in the journal how Elizabeth or Tam helped me learn more about the production process. For example, during one rehearsal, Elizabeth and I were sharing our stories, and I note the following:

I think Elizabeth understands more about the goal of performance, or maybe she helps me understand it more. I certainly realized additional things about my own experiences while talking to her.

These strategies proved effective for Elizabeth and Tam as well, since they were able to actively participate in the collaborative process and start producing their own texts.

Performance Ownership and Responsibility

Categories of strategies under this theme address the cast members’ attitudes and beliefs during the rehearsal and performance process. Although the performances ultimately were part of my thesis project, I wanted the performance to be a group effort. Elizabeth and Tam were willing to help me on the project, but they were motivated to
participate in order to help me complete the project. They did not appreciate the
importance the project could have for their lives. Elizabeth did not seem committed to
the project, but she initially put forth more effort than Tam to finish the second
performance project. Elizabeth seemed to regard the project as an obligation to me—a
promise she made and intended to keep. Tam, on the other hand, regarded the project
as a punishment for making a promise to me. Her attitude is illustrated in the following
entry:

I feel bad because I know that I am taking up a lot of their precious time. I
practically have to bribe them to stay in the performance. Tam laughs, although I
know she is stressed. “I’m doing this for you, Mel,” she tells me. I feel extremely
guilty.

“Do it for yourself,” I tell her. “This is a chance to tell your story.”

She laughs and says, “Whatever. It’s your performance”

“Tam, it’s our performance,” I remind her, but she laughs again. She replies,

“Boo,” which means that she does not like what I have just said to her.

One night during the second half of the rehearsal process, Tam revealed that she
and Elizabeth had been talking about quitting the performance. After this critical
moment, I realized that I needed strategies to motivate them to stay, and to be actively
involved in the process. Elizabeth did not require as much motivation, perhaps, because
she enjoyed the process more. As a student in one of my classes, she had
demonstrated that she was an excellent student and was willing to put forth effort. Tam,
on the other hand, required more motivational strategies because she did not appear to
enjoy the rehearsal and performance process as much. Having performance classes at
the same time as the thesis project most likely put her on performance overload. I obtained five salient strategies in this area: setting goals and objectives, homework, making accommodations, emphasizing the personal, and sharing the credit.

Setting goals and objectives. In attempting to motivate the cast to assume ownership and responsibility, I discovered the importance of setting goals and objectives for the cast. When I started the thesis project, I seemed to set one implicit goal for the cast: to help me finish my thesis project and graduate. This strategy proved ineffective and worked against me as I attempted to engage Elizabeth and Tam’s commitment to the project. The goal stressed the project as a favor to me, and overlooked the potential benefit to help them discover aspects of their own identities. Later, I found it difficult to set any explicit goals for the project, as I noted in a discussion of one rehearsal:

As the director, I am limited in my ability to set goals and objectives for the cast. Tam and Elizabeth come to rehearsal with their own agendas and goals; for example, we need to finish by 11 p.m. because one of them has to call her boyfriend or work on a paper.

Since I did not set shared goals and objectives with the cast at the beginning of the project, I did not use this strategy effectively.

Homework. In using this strategy, I began with the assumption that Tam and Elizabeth had enough experience in the consumption and production process to be able to produce original texts on their own time. In preparation for the first performance, I found texts by ethnic American women for them. In evaluating that action, I concluded that this action might have taken away some of their power. My revised strategy
involved assigning them homework to find their own texts, and start developing their own stories. I explained my strategy in the rehearsal journal:

Since they have previous experience in creating performances based in personal experience, Tam and Elizabeth can develop their own stories. I will try to guide them as much as possible but I want it to be their work. Hopefully, this strategy will encourage them to take ownership of the production.

This strategy proved to be somewhat effective for Elizabeth, since she responded by bringing additional texts to the project. She did not remain active in the production process, however, and I was forced to bring in additional texts for her. For Tam, this strategy proved ineffective. Tam did not bring in any additional texts, nor did she start producing her own texts. Perhaps, she thought of the task as homework—school work for her to complete—and she seemed overwhelmed with school work already. She did not want responsibility for any additional work.

Making accommodations. Because I sensed that Tam and Elizabeth were vacillating in their commitment, and were considering quitting, I decided that I needed strategies to help them remain involved in the process, and not see the project as just another school assignment. For example, I continually adapted the rehearsal plan to accommodate their needs and schedules. As I explained in the journal, I deliberately set low goals so they would attend rehearsals and would participate.

Eventually, I started to complete tasks for them. For example, both were reluctant to write their stories because the task seemed too time-consuming. As a strategy, I decided to interview each of them to acquire stories to include in the script. This particular strategy was effective in engaging their attention and interest. When they saw
their stories included in the script—word-for-word as I had transcribed them—they began to take more ownership in the process. They started re-writing the script to describe their personal experience more precisely.

Sharing the credit. One of the struggles I faced was handling the your performance/our performance dialogue throughout the rehearsal process. While both seemed to regard the performance as mine, Tam, in particular, repeatedly expressed this thought with the phrase, “It’s your performance, Mel.” She was determined to hand over all power and responsibility to me. My strategy to combat this phrase was to share credit, and to express my belief that this project was our performance. Whenever I spoke about the project, I tried to emphasize it as a group effort. For example, at the end of the first performance at the Pace Performance Festival, the three of us discussed the performance with the audience. Although most audience members directed their questions to me, I often re-directed their questions to include Tam and Elizabeth. As I expressed in the journal, I did not want to steal the show.

I struggled to implement these strategies by repeatedly emphasizing joint partnership of the performance. Eventually, the strategies proved effective as Tam and Elizabeth claimed ownership in the performance and admitted that the project was ours.

Emphasizing the personal. In the first performance, Tam and Elizabeth represented other ethnic American women by performing other women’s texts; in the second performance they represented themselves. I needed to use specific strategies to emphasize how personal this performance would be for them. One effective strategy was to give them authority over individual appearance in the second performance—I allowed them to choose their own outfits for the second performance. Both Elizabeth
and Tam were excited to assume this authority and they chose their outfits carefully. During rehearsals, we often talked about what we were going to wear and how we are going to fix our hair. In fact, Tam assumed some power in giving me directions on what to wear.

“Wear something pretty,” Tam tells me. “You always wear frumpy clothes.” I am seriously offended by this statement, because I think I have a keen fashion sense. However, they always are critical of what I wear. I tell Tam that I was just thinking of wearing a pair of my baggy jeans, because I know that this choice will upset her. Tam looks at me and says, “Mel, don’t do that.” I tell her that I am just kidding. She laughs and continues to give me directions. “Wear some slacks – the kind that show off your ass,” she tells me. “And some kind of cute, TIGHT top. No T-shirt. Wash your hair, too. You’re going to wear it down.”

These strategies, then, proved effective in encouraging them to assume power and responsibility for the performance and to start representing their individual identities.

Overcoming Performance Anxiety

One challenge of the performance process was developing the performance script. Another challenge was the performance itself. I noted in the rehearsal journal that we spent too much time worrying about what we were performing, and too little time on how we were performing. Since the performance revealed a lot of personal information, we were nervous about revealing so much of our selves to the audience. We were comfortable performing in front of each other, but were apprehensive about revealing ourselves to an external audience. We were anxious about doing justice to the script and to our selves. Also, we worried about whether the performance would be a
success. One moment before the final performance best exemplifies our performance anxiety:

When we finish our final rehearsal, we go back upstairs to my office. One of us mentions that we will be performing in less than an hour, and all of us start freaking out. Tam starts saying, “What if I forget my lines?” Elizabeth starts telling Tam to shut-up because she is making her nervous. Both of them start arguing. I start worrying about my introduction. Tam looks like she is going to cry. I tell them that I cannot deal with this right now. I have work to do.

This fourth general theme in the move from consumption to production deals with how anxiety often prevented our move into production. The strategies included as part of this theme deal with how we overcame our anxiety about the performance. I detected two categories of strategies in this area: practice and support and solidarity.

Practice. The natural strategy in overcoming performance anxiety was to be prepared through rehearsal and practice. In spite of our knowledge of this common sense strategy, we often experienced difficulty performing in front of others. I noted in the rehearsal journal:

I do not usually invite other people to come watch us during rehearsal, because we are constantly working on constructing the performance together. I am afraid the presence of other people will affect our connection. At this point, we have no choice; we have to get used to people watching us.

In the final stages of the rehearsal process, my strategy to help us overcome this difficulty was to invite people to rehearsals so that we could become accustomed to their reactions. Their reactions only strengthened some of our performances, because
they identified what to emphasize and what to change. In addition, this strategy helped us overcome the fear of performing in front of authoritative figures such as Dr. Allison, Dr. Kelly Taylor, and Dr. Juandalynn Taylor. As our instructors, they often gave us guidance; we seemed to need their approval. In particular, Tam needed to overcome her performance anxiety from her performance at the Petit Jean Performance Festival auditions. When we rehearsed with Dr. Allison one night, she found an opportunity to deal with the embarrassing situation, and laugh about it.

Support and solidarity. In overcoming our performance anxiety, we seemed to rely on each other for support and solidarity. On the day of the performance, all three of us were nervous about the performance. Our strategy was to comfort each other as much as possible. On that day, we spent a lot of time together preparing for the performance and rehearsing our lines. This strategy seemed to be effective in relieving stress; we seemed to know we could depend on each other for support if anything should go wrong during the performance. Indeed, the performance did not run perfectly, and we experienced some slips in performing our parts, but we helped each other out. In the journal, I noted how well we worked as a team:

We try to help each other out as much as possible because we all seem to want a good performance. We could not practice this in rehearsal. On the contrary, such teamwork skills only can be acquired in the actual performance. I learn more in the forty minutes of our performance than I ever did in rehearsal. Although practice was an effective strategy to help us prepare for the final performance, we relied more on support and solidarity as a strategy to help us finish the performance successfully.
Conclusion

This chapter provided an analysis of the rehearsal journal and a summary of each cast member’s move from consumption to production. This chapter also provided an overview of the results and a discussion of the strategies that emerged as significant rehearsal techniques. The results reveal four overarching factors involved in assuming textual power through rehearsal and performance in the production process—building trust, having appropriate skills, assuming ownership and responsibility, and overcoming performance anxiety. Thirteen strategies were used to manage these four factors during the rehearsal process.

The first factor—building trust—required only three strategies, since a bond was established prior to the beginning of rehearsals and few strategies were needed to enhance our friendship. Building trust, then, was not an obstacle in our move into production. The second factor—having appropriate consumption and production skills—required only three strategies, since we each had prior knowledge of the consumption and production process from performance classes. We seemed to lack, however, the proper skills required to engage primarily in acts of production, and we each needed specific strategies to help us overcome this obstacle. The most commonly used strategy proved to be collaborative learning, suggesting the importance of collaboration during the consumption and production processes.

The third factor—performance ownership and responsibility—served as an obstacle in Tam and Elizabeth’s move into production and required the most strategies to overcome. Of the five strategies that emerged, the most effective was to share the credit and emphasize joint ownership of the performance. Although I struggled to
implement this strategy, I was eventually able to motivate Tam and Elizabeth to claim ownership of the project. The fourth factor—overcoming performance anxiety—required the fewest strategies, but these two strategies were important to help us overcome performance anxiety as a major obstacle in our move into production. Practice proved to be an effective strategy, suggesting the importance of scheduling a proper amount of rehearsals before the final performance. Despite our amount of practice, however, the most effective strategy we used was to establish support and solidarity, to work as a team to comfort each other and finish the final performance successfully.

The final chapter will draw conclusions from the data presented in this chapter and offer suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

In this thesis project, I sought to determine effective rehearsal techniques to encourage the ethnic-American female cast members, individually and collectively, to produce original texts and to assume responsibility for constituting their new mestiza identities, a Thirdspace. The preceding chapter presented the results of the study, including an overview of the four themes and thirteen categories of strategies. The current chapter presents a discussion of the strategies, describes the limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Results

The analysis of the rehearsal journal suggests that textuality—the practice of consumption and production of texts—can be a useful method in the construction of new mestiza consciousness, and an opening of a Thirdspace. Each of the three cast members used the rehearsal process effectively as a vehicle to exercise textual practice and construct new mestiza identities.

Our progress through the rehearsal process supports Robert Scholes’ (1985) argument that consumption and production are not separate categories, but are mutually supportive activities—each is necessary to the other. Production only can occur properly after the consumption of previous texts that guide and sustain the construction of the new text. The first and second performances were not separate acts, wherein we engaged in acts of consumption in the first performance and acts of production in the second performance.
With each performance, we were engaged in acts of consumption and production. For example, I engaged in acts of consumption and production through my construction of the first performance script for the Pace Performance Festival. The performance text, however, relied solely on the consumption of pre-existing public texts by ethnic American women. As we began the rehearsal process, then, we were engaged in primarily acts of consumption by performing the texts in the first performance script. For example, I was able to demonstrate how Pat Mora defines being a Latina based on her experiences. In the process of performing the first performance script, we began to discuss our experiences as ethnic American women related to the pre-existing public texts in the script. We were engaged in acts of production that focused primarily on the consumption of preexisting texts. For example, I was able to describe how I have had similar experiences to Pat Mora.

As we began the rehearsal process for the second performance, we engaged in acts of production that focused primarily on the production of new texts based on our own experiences. To produce these new texts, however, we still engaged in acts of consumption of the preexisting public texts. For example, I was able to produce new texts that defined my Latina identity, only in comparison to how other Latinas defined their identities in their texts. If Pat Mora defined being a Latina as bilingual and bicultural, then I should be bilingual and bicultural as well. I am not bilingual, however, so I must not have a pure Latina identity. I could not allow the performance to end at this point because we could not claim a new mestiza identity and open a Thirdspace. We needed to push the production process further so that we could redefine our identities.
By the end of the rehearsal process, we engaged in primarily acts of production by producing new texts that were not inspired by these preexisting public texts, but created on our own. We were able to take our own textual position and define being an ethnic American woman based on our experiences. For example, I was able to say that it does not matter how Pat Mora and other Latinas define their identity; this is what makes me a Latina.

Consumption and production are both processes, then, that extended over time through successive attempts at making meaning of pre-existing public texts and original, new texts. Through the rehearsal and performance process, we demonstrated that consumption and production exist at opposite ends of a single continuum. Our progress through the rehearsal and performance process was essentially a move down the continuum from performances that are primarily acts of consumption to performances that are primarily acts of production. In the case of this thesis project, the process proved to be a more valuable subject than its product—the final performance.

Our progress also suggests that developing textual power can be a collaborative effort. We relied on each other heavily throughout the process for guidance and support to make meaning from texts and produce new texts. In our case, collaboration was a natural approach because we already had established trusting personal relationships with each other. Bonding, then, proved to be a necessity to unify the group and create an environment for negotiation. As the director of the project I did not want an authoritative role over Elizabeth and Tam, yet I had to drive the project forward. John Lutterbie (1993) best describes this dilemma in his article on co-directing:
I knew the more I dominated rehearsals, the more imposing would be my definitions, while distancing myself would betray the trust the rehearsal process requires, and, if anything, position me as more of a voyeur. (p. 264)

As I was worked through the process with Tam and Elizabeth as a cast member, I realized that I could not keep an authoritative role over Elizabeth and Tam because I needed their help just as much as they needed mine. Indeed, we most likely would not have accelerated through the process successfully without collaboration.

Despite our collaborative efforts, we did not read, interpret, and criticize the pre-existing public texts in the same manner. Our individual progress, then, suggests that individuals have different approaches for engaging in the consumption and production processes. Indeed, Tam’s progress reveals that some individuals may find it difficult to engage in the process because they are oblivious to the need for a text to be interpreted and explored from a critical perspective. Scholes argued that although students are taught the skills necessary to consume texts in appropriate ways, they are not taught the proper skills to produce criticism, or to produce new texts. Tam had the knowledge and skills necessary to consume and produce texts, but she seemed unwilling to produce criticism of the pre-existing public texts. Tam might have placed too much value on these texts, because they are considered part of the canon of Asian American women’s literature.

Tam’s resistance illustrated Scholes’ (1985) contention that the move from consumption to production is difficult because many students are content to consume the texts of others. Tam was pleased with the first performance, in which we engaged primarily in acts of consumption by performing other women’s stories. She expressed
no need to engage in acts of production—to question pre-existing public texts and to add her voice and experiences. She resisted the process of claiming a new mestiza identity.

The results of the project suggest that certain factors hinder the efficient move from consumption to production. Through this project, I concluded that four overarching factors were involved in encouraging cast members to produce original texts and assume responsibility for representing their new mestiza identities—building trust, having appropriate skills, assuming ownership and responsibility, and overcoming performance anxiety.

Clearly, the most important factor is the third one—the need to take ownership and responsibility in the performance—since it required the most strategies to achieve. These strategies demonstrate the importance of starting the consumption and production process on the right note. As the director of the thesis project, I started the project with clear objectives and goals, including: (1) to complete a thesis project in order to graduate and (2) to explore my Latina identity based on previous frustrations on finding a Latina experience to represent my own. Therefore, I had more motivation to complete the project than the other cast members. I involved Elizabeth and Tam in the process because I assumed, from past conversations, that both of them would welcome the opportunity to explore their marginalized status and to construct their new mestiza identities.

Elizabeth and Tam agreed to be in the performance because they wanted to help me with my thesis project. However, I did not begin the process by setting any goals and objectives with them, or by explaining the potential personal benefits of the
project. I did not ask whether they wanted to go through the process. The strategies that I employed to encourage Elizabeth and Tam to take ownership and responsibility, then, were retroactive and most likely would not have been needed had I garnered their complete cooperation and established goals and objectives from the outset.

I do not find it shocking, then, that Elizabeth and Tam resisted engagement in the consumption and production process, and resisted taking ownership in the performance. From the beginning, they considered the project my responsibility. Their resistance to fully commit to the rehearsal and performance process, then, suggests that a person cannot be forced into the practice of textuality and to claim a new mestiza identity. She must have the drive and desire to use the consumption and production process in order to assume textual power, start producing her own texts, and construct a new mestiza consciousness.

Limitations

One weakness of this thesis project was the method used for data collection. As the director of the project, I kept a rehearsal journal to document the rehearsal and performance process, but I also participated as a subject in the study. I immediately experienced problems associated with playing both roles. One problem I encountered was earning trust and respect from the cast as an authoritative figure while trying to earn trust and respect as a peer at the same time. I was trying to direct the cast, as I was trying to learn with the cast. The production might have run smoother, perhaps, if I had played one role. Another problem I encountered in playing both roles was a lack of objectivity in reporting results. As the cast and I were going through the process
together, I observed the process rather subjectively. The results, therefore, are based on my personal assessment of each cast member, including me.

In addition, this project presented a limited sample of ethnic American women—one African American, one Vietnamese American, and one Latina American. The selection and criticism of pre-existing public texts were based on our own preferences and individual histories. Therefore, these public texts should not be taken as the only representative base texts for our respective ethnicities. A project including a broader sample of ethnic American women would, perhaps, produce a different production concept. Furthermore, the strategies employed might differ depending on the nature of the group and the cast members’ relationships with each other. By investigating these issues, scholars can better understand how Scholes’ method of textuality can aid in the construction of a new mestiza consciousness, and in the construction of Thirdspace.

Suggestions for Future Studies

This thesis project contributes to discussions on identity by emphasizing connections between several areas concerning identity, including communication and identity, Otherness and identity, Chicana feminism and identity politics, and the notions of new mestiza consciousness and Thirdspace. Additional research in these areas should be conducted to strengthen connections and further the discussion on the complexity of ethnic American gendered identities.

The results of this study point to the need for additional research in several areas concerning identity, performance, and culture. First, the rehearsal process served as a vehicle for constructing our new mestiza identities. Additional research should be conducted on how performance methods can be a resource for understanding the
processes of identity development and maintenance. More studies also should be conducted on how performance methods can be used in creating space for consciousness-raising efforts such as those efforts established by the Chicana Feminists.

This study should increase confidence in the utility of Scholes’ model of textuality in the study of performance as a textual production. More research should examine the use of Scholes’ model as a method in textual production for performance.

This study also established a relationship between Scholes’ notion of textual power and the notion of Thirdspace. Future research should further investigate the link between Thirdspace and textual power if we are to have confidence that a reliable relationship exists.

Conclusion

In this study, I have demonstrated how the practice of textuality—the consumption and production of texts—is a useful method in the rehearsal and performance process for marginalized ethnic American women to redefine their identities, create a new mestiza consciousness, and open a Thirdspace. I hope this project can serve as a source of inspiration to any marginalized ethnic American woman who has felt imprisoned in the hyphen, and wants to unlock her textual power and transform the hyphen into a bridge, a Thirdspace. Indeed, the project was a source of inspiration for the three of us.

I cannot speak for Elizabeth and Tam, but the project helped me work through such problems as authenticity of experience, and led to a more critical understanding of
my own experience as a Latina American woman. More importantly, the project enabled me to embrace my Latina identity.

I can say now that being Latina is being me. I look in the mirror everyday and I know that I am Latina. My parents, my culture, and everything I experience daily in my life define my Latina identity.

I am fair-skinned.

Yes, we do exist.

I can’t speak Spanish, but I can dance the cumbia. I still know what it means to be Latina. However I act, whatever I wear—I am a Latina. From now on, when I am asked, What are you? I have an answer: I am a human being, a woman, a fair-skinned Latina, a proud Chicana feminist, a new mestiza.
APPENDIX A

THESIS PERFORMANCE SCRIPT: PACE PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL
I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

[from When I Was Growing Up by Nellie Wong]

I know now that once I longed to be white. How? You ask. Let me tell you the ways. When I was growing up...

[from Growing Up White In America by Bonnie Kae Grover]

Growing up white in America.
How do you do that?
I mean, lots of folks grow up Italian in America, lots more grow up capitalist in America, and legions of us have grown up middle class, working class, poor, or even rich in America. But white?

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

[Wong, cont'd]

When I was growing up, I read magazines and saw movies, blonde movie stars, white skin, sensuous lips and to be elevated, to become a woman, a desirable woman, I began to wear imaginary pale skin
When I was growing up I hungered for American food, American styles coded: WHITE and even to me, a child born of Chinese parents, being Chinese was feeling foreign, was limiting, was un-American.

I am not any of the faces
Every mask has slipped
You have made for me America

[Grover, cont'd]
White is transparent. That's the point of being the dominant race. Sure, the whiteness is there, but you never have to think of it. Sometimes when folks make a point of thinking of it, some (not all) of them run the risk of being either sappy in the eyes of other whites, or of being dangerous to nonwhites.
I was born too late in a land that no longer belongs to me (so it says here in this Texas History).

I am not any of the names
Or sounds you have called me

(This land belongs) to a pilgrim arrived here only yesterday whose racist tongue says to me:
I hate Meskins
You’re a Meskin.
Why don’t you go back to where you came from?

I am not any of the names
Or sounds you have called me
The tones have nearly

Made me deaf

Yes, amigo... ! Why don’t I? Why don’t I resurrect the Pinta, the Nina, and the Santa Maria and you can scare up your little “Flor de Mayo” so we can sail back to where we came from: the motherland womb.

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

I was born too late or perhaps I was born too soon: it is not yet my time; it is not yet my home.

This dark skin,

When I was growing up, my sisters with fair skin got praised for their beauty, and in the dark I fell further, crushed between high walls
This dark skin,

[from The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros]

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with skinny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

[Cisneros, cont'd]

But we aren't afraid. We know the people around here. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight.
Yeah, that is how it goes and goes...

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

[Wong, cont'd]

When I was growing up, I felt dirty. I thought God made white people clean and no matter how much I bathed, I could not change, I could not shed my skin in the gray water...

This dark skin,

[Wong, cont'd]

When I was growing up, people told me I was dark and I believed my own darkness in the mirror, in my soul, my own narrow vision.

This dark skin, both of us

Have tried to bleach
I can smell the cancer.
[from La Güera by Cherrie Moraga]
No one ever told me this that light is right, but I knew that being light was something valued in my family (who were all Chicano). In fact, everything about my upbringing attempted to bleach me of what color I did have.

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

This thick hair, these thick lips

[from Black Is a Woman’s Color by bell hooks]

Good hair- that’s the expression. We all know it, begin to hear it when we are small children. When we are sitting between the legs of mothers and sisters getting our hair combed. Good hair is hair that is not kinky, hair that does not feel like balls of steel wool, hair that does not take hours to comb, hair that does not need tons of grease to untangle, hair that is long. Real good hair is straight hair, hair like white folks’ hair. Yet no one says so. No one says your hair is so nice, so beautiful because it is like white folk’s hair. We pretend that the standards we measure our beauty by are our own invention- that it is questions of time and money that lead us to make distinctions between good hair and bad hair.

This thick hair, these thick lips
Both have tried to narrow

[Wong, cont’d]

When I was growing up and went to high school, I discovered the rich white girls, a few yellow girls, their imported cotton dresses, their cashmere sweaters, their curly hair...

This thick hair, these thick lips
Both have tried to narrow

[Wong, cont’d]

And I thought that I too should have what these lucky girls had...

Both have tried to narrow
Begging entrance through
The needle of your eye
I have good hair that does not need pressing. Without the hot comb I remain a child, one of the uninitiated. I plead, I beg, I cry for my turn. They tell me once you start you will be sorry. You will wish you had never straightened your hair. They do not understand that it is not the straightening I seek, but the chance to belong, to be one in this world of women.

Begging entrance through
The needle of your eye

It is finally my turn. I am happy. Happy even though my thin hair straightened looks like black thread, has no body, strands in the air like ends of barbed wire; happy even though the sweet smell of unpressed hair is gone forever. Secretly, I had hoped that the hot comb would transform me, turn the thin good hair into thick nappy hair, the kind of hair I like and long for, the kind you can do anything with, wear in all kinds of styles. I am bitterly disappointed in the new look.

Begging entrance through
The needle of your eye

White is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality

Because it is everything
White is no color because it is all colors.
This property of whiteness to be everything and nothing is the source of its representational power...

I know from birth that I am lucky, lucky to have hair at all for I was bald for two years, then lucky finally to have thin almost straight hair, hair that does not need to be hot combed.

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

[Grover, cont’d]

No, I’m not ashamed of being white. But I sure am ashamed of what being white can mean to some folks who are proud of being white. And I’m ashamed of what it can mean to be white when that whiteness can so easily be used to hurt people who aren’t white. I definitely am ashamed of that part of whiteness. Because in America, whiteness means being dominant, and it stands to reason that if somebody’s dominant, somebody else is down.

I am not any of the faces
You have made for me America

[from Chicana y Chicana by Dorothy Leland]

I’m not the sort of Hispanic who makes Anglos uncomfortable: I have neither the stereotypical name nor look. Lately I’ve adopted a somewhat different strategy: now I check both the “white” and “Hispanic” boxes, even though you are supposed to declare yourself as only one. It is a little protest against the logic of racism that says you must be either one or the other- which recognizes only blood that is pure.

And even as I carry
A bone of yours in my back

[Wong, cont’d]

When I was growing up, people would ask if I were Filipino, Polynesian, Portuguese. They named all colors except white, the shell of my soul, but not my dark, rough skin.

And even as I carry
A bone of yours in my back

Your soul America
No matter what we’ve tried

[Wong, cont’d]

I know now that I once longed to be white. How many more ways? You ask. Haven’t I told you enough?

No matter what we’ve tried
Your soul America
I’ve never been able to bear.
APPENDIX B

THESIS PERFORMANCE SCRIPT: SECOND PERFORMANCE
[Melinda enters with a box of papers, representing research. She is running late and in a hurry so she does not seem to notice when her papers are falling down around her, making a mess on the floor. She sets the box down on a table and starts to get out the papers in the box and lay them in neat piles on the table. This takes quite a while for her to organize, but she makes sure she has everything in place before she takes a deep breath, walks up front and begins to speak to the audience]

[MELINDA]

Earlier this year I did a performance of a poem called “Failure of an Invention” by Safiya Henderson-Holmes, an African American woman.

And it began...

I am not any of the faces
you have put on me America
Every mask has slipped

Well, that performance got me thinking of my own identity as a Hispanic woman. For that performance I had to scour through tons of literature about and by women of color. I began searching for stories from all kinds of female ethnic writers, including Latinas, in the hope that I could somehow find stories from women who share my experiences. And I discovered that there is actually a lot of literature out there on this from essays, poetry, books, research articles, and so on. I mean the stuff on Hispanics alone is tremendous. Here let me show you.

[she walks to the back of the table and begins to show the piles]

This pile discusses how Hispanic identity is biological. This one here discusses how it is socially constructed. Well, this pile is all the research I have thus far about the different labels for Hispanics— you know we have so many. Here’s articles that argue for and those against the use of the term “Hispanic”

Here’s the articles for and those against use of term “Latino or Latina”

Chicana
La Raza

Those who want to be called by their specific nationality- Mexican-American, Puerto-Rican, Cuban, etc.

Here’s articles for the use of no name at all

[she examines one pile for a second and picks up a paper from it]

Gloria Anzaldua uses the term mestiza- which refers to a woman whose identity is a product of at least two cultures--she wrote this beautiful poem:

Because I, a mestiza,
Continually walk out of one’s culture
And into another,
Because I am in all cultures at the same time,
Alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo con... contra...
contradict... contra- dict-ar (laugh)

Well, I can’t really speak Spanish all that well- but the rest says my head buzzes with the contradictory, I am disoriented by all the voices that talk to me simultaneously
I think I can relate to that... there should be a lot here that I can relate to. I mean they are discussing the Hispanic identity...

[she begins sifting through more piles and reading them]
No, because I’m not an immigrant
[tosses that pile to the floor]

No, because I’m not dark-skinned
[tosses that pile to the floor]

No, because I’m not bi-lingual
[tosses that pile to the floor, and then in desperation begins to rummage through all the piles of research- searching hopelessly- and creating a huge mess on the table- but she finds nothing. She sighs and sits down in defeat.]

Are you concerned?
I’m concerned- three years in grad school, and I’m suppose to be finishing my thesis, and I can show you all this research but I can’t show you one theory or one single article that explains it all. Like looking for a needle through a haystack. I mean there are just so many issues I want to explore and discuss when it comes to Hispanic identity. How do I discuss marginalization without discussing assimilation or the notion of passing, immigration, discrimination, skin color, eye color, language, etc.
What about the issues I’ve had to deal with personally as a Hispanic? I can show you literature by several different Latina women—For example—Pat Mora talks about being bilingual and dark-skinned—but I am neither. Cherrie Moraga discusses her experience growing up in a family with a brown skinned mother and an Anglo father—but my mother was light skinned and my father was dark skinned, so that wasn’t my experience… There are more like Sandra Cisneros, and Ana Castillo—they all have stories about their experiences but none of them are exactly like my own…

Where’s the story of a Hispanic girl who can’t speak fluent Spanish. Her parents were afraid to teach her Spanish when she was growing up because they didn’t want her to go through the same struggle they went through trying to speak both languages. And now her mom cries sometimes because she feels like her children have lost a vital part of our heritage.

Or

How about the story of a Hispanic girl who gets told most of her life:

Oh, you’re Hispanic?
I didn’t know you were Hispanic? You don’t look Hispanic to me?
You don’t seem like a Hispanic person to me.

And let’s not forget all the:

Oh, but I know you, Melinda, so I don’t think of you as Hispanic.

Because if I had a dime for every time someone told me this.

And ALWAYS I’m supposed to take this as a compliment because I don’t look like my people

And do you know what I say to someone when they tell me this?

I tell that person…
I say…

Nothing.

I say nothing and my silence combined with a smile translates to “Thank you.”

And in the background I see all my Latina sisters standing there, witnessing this silence as it happens
And half of them are shaking their head in sadness because I made it seem like I was ashamed of them, because I lost yet another opportunity to give them a voice--to do as Gloria Anzaldúa says in her articles--to take back or uncover our true faces, our dignity, and self-respect.

And the other half is applauding me because to them it was a compliment, and they will take it with them as they go home and bleach their hair blonde and buy blue eye contacts and hide from the sun because they don’t want to get any darker. See, they’ve been taught all their lives that light is right.

No, I never had to read about that in a book or an article, because I got to live it.

That is one of my experiences as a Hispanic woman, and the fact that I can’t find enough literature on this makes me feel… makes me feel… alone…

(silence)

[MELINDA] [TAM gets up from set in audience and joins in]
[from Failure of an Invention by Safiya Henderson-Holmes]

I am not any of the faces
You have put on me America

[TAM]
[from When I Was Growing Up by Nellie Wong]

I know now that once I longed to be white.

[WHITE]
How?

[TAM]
You ask.

Let me tell you the ways.
When I was growing up...

[WHITE]
[from Growing Up White in America by Bonnie Kae Grover]

Growing up white in America.
How do you do that?
I mean, lots of folks grow up Italian in America, lots more grow up capitalist in America, and legions of us grow up middle class, working class, poor, or even rich in America. But-
[TAM]
No, When I was growing up, I read magazines and saw movies, blonde movie stars, white skin, sensuous lips and to be elevated, to become a woman, a desirable woman, I began to wear imaginary pale skin.

[MEL start round, followed by TAM, and ELIZABETH joins in]
I am not any of the faces
You have put on me America.

[ELIZABETH]
[from What It's Like to Be a Black Girl (For Those of You Who Aren't) by Patricia Smith] What it's like to be black (for those of you who aren't)... first of all, it's being nine years old and feeling like you're not finished, like your edges are wild, like there's something, everything, wrong.

[TAM]
When I was growing up, people told me I was dark

[ELIZABETH]
it's like dropping food coloring in your eyes to make them blue and suffering their burn in silence

[TAM]
And I believed my own darkness in the mirror

[ELIZABETH]
Its popping a bleached white mop head over the kinks of you hair and

[TAM]
In my soul

[ELIZABETH]
Primping in front of mirrors

[TAM]
My own narrow vision

[ELIZABETH]
That deny your reflection.
[MEL starts, TAM, and then ELIZABETH]

I am not any of the faces
You have put on me America
Every mask has slipped

[TAM]
My name is Tam Tran
[TOGETHER]

I am not any of the names

[TAM]
No, my name is not Pam, Tom, Tim or even Tran...

[ELIZABETH]
My name is Elizabeth Okigbo
[TOGETHER]

I am not any of the names

[ELIZABETH]
That’s Okigbo (pronounce it out)- not ___ or ______.

[TAM]
My name is as exactly as it looks: T- A- M

[ELIZABETH]
The G is silent

[TAM]
It’s easy to say- TAM- and most people will get it right the first time- only when they see my face and realize that I’m Asian, then they assume it must have some different type of pronunciation.

[ELIZABETH]
Some people -if they see my last name - because it is Okigbo- I get this a lot before they even see me they assume that I’m Japanese. Never does it cross their mind to say- are you half-African or Nigerian or even black.

[TOGETHER]
"I am not any of the names"

[**MEL**]
My name is Melinda Gonzales- with an s at the end.

[Both- **TAM** and **ELI**]
Gonzales?

[**TAM**]
So, I've been meaning to ask you...

[**BOTH**]
What are you?

[**MEL**]
Ah, my favorite question. When I was growing up... I always got asked "What are you?"

[**ELI**]
Well, ain't I a woman?

[**TAM**]
I always got asked

[**BOTH- ELI & MEL**]
"Where are you from?"

[**TAM**]
I was born in New Orleans.

[**MEL**]
No, but where are you really from?

[**TAM**]
That used to make me so angry... One day this guy asked me, and I guess he caught me on the wrong day because I just snapped. "I'm from New Orleans. I was born in New Orleans! What? You want to know where my parents are from??"

[**MEL**]
Well, I snapped "I'm a human being!"

[**ELI**]
So I'm like J apanese? I was like yeah that's it--I’m J apanese. (laughs)

[**TAM**]
well I can see how they could get J apanese
[ELI] 
but uh I think its funny that people are always assuming black people have to be mixed up with something in order to be or look a certain way. Why can’t we be just black or to be politically correct African- American.

[MEL] 
I’m not the sort of Hispanic who makes Anglos uncomfortable: I don’t have the stereotypical look. I grew up in San Antonio- a predominantly Hispanic city. However, when I was in first grade I didn’t even know I was Hispanic--I didn’t even know what a Hispanic was. I didn’t know about ethnic labels. I thought we were all the same.

[ELIZABETH] 
Well in elementary school I was in Austin. Austin’s been- even now- predominantly white and so I didn’t see anything wrong with hanging out with all white people. There were never a lot of black people at my school. I was always the only black kid in my class. It never bothered me because I didn’t see any difference. It wasn’t until junior high when Black people started to question what made me Black that I also began to question my own Blackness. What did make me Black?

[TAM] 
Where I grew up, in Palacios, an hour away from Houston, the population was 50 % Hispanic and then divided between the whites, Asians and Blacks. That’s how our community was. It’s almost like – you always want to hang out with either Hispanics or Whites. Well in other schools, you probably want to be just white. But at our school being Hispanic wasn’t too bad either. They, at least, could speak English and looked more like an American. I guess white people were more willing to hang out with Hispanics than Asians or Blacks.

[MEL] 
One day in first grade, we’re standing in line for something and this girl Judy goes around and asks everyone one by one “Are you Mexican? Are you Mexican?”

I noticed that everyone was saying yes. I didn’t even know what a Mexican was, but I knew that everyone seemed to be one so it seemed like something I should be as well. I mean I didn’t want to be left out or anything. But when Judy comes to me, I hesitate. I don’t know what answer to give her. Judy doesn’t give me a chance to answer. She takes one quick look at me and says “Of course not.”

And then asks the next person. Well, that made me feel completely ostracized that I went home and asked my dad if I was a Mexican.

“Well, of course you are,” he said to me. I remember feeling excited and immediately planned the encounter I was going to have the next day when I got to tell Judy that I was indeed a Mexican!
But then I still didn’t know what a Mexican was, or what made me a Mexican… so then I ask my dad and he says, “It’s where we’re from.”
I ask, “So we’re from Mexico?”
And he says “No, we’re not from Mexico…”
And I could tell he was having difficulty in explaining that it was my heritage because I was seven – what did I know about heritage? Up until then, remember, I thought we were all the same.
I remember being confused and asking my dad if being a Mexican was a good thing. He said of coarse it is because it’s who I am. Then he pauses for a while and I always remember this moment because he looks at me and says seriously “You should never be ashamed of who you are. And you should never let anyone make you feel bad for being Mexican.” The tone of his voice was so strange, I remember, that I asked him rather innocently, “But why would I be ashamed?” Of coarse, how could he explain all this to a seven year old?

[ELI]
That also happened to me. I was in kindergarten and a little girl came up to me and told me I was a nigger. I went home and asked my mom what a nigger was, and she was shocked. She and my step-dad had done their best to shield us from the realities of the world. My poor mother had a difficult time trying to explain to me the negative connotations of the word, while also explaining my ethnicity. Being five years old I was only confused. None of what she said defined me. I was a little girl who never saw color – only people. My skin color was brown not black. What did she mean? My friends were peach not white.

[TAM]
[from Children Are Color-blind by Genny Lim]

I never painted myself yellow
the way I colored the sun when I was five...

[MEL]
I never painted myself brown. My skin is light and I’m a woman of color?

[MEL, TAM, ELIZABETH - Round]

I am not any of the faces
You have put on me America

[MEL]
[from Hermano by Angela de Hoyos]

I was born too late in a land that no longer belongs to me (so it says here in this Texas History).
[TOGETHER]
I am not any of the names

[MEL]
Or sounds

[TOGETHER]
you have called me

[MEL]
[Hermano, cont’d]
(This land belongs) to a pilgrim arrived here only yesterday whose racist tongue

says to me:

[TAM]
[Hermano, cont’d]

I hate Meskins
You’re a Meskin.
Why don’t you go back to where you came from?

[MEL]
I am not any of the names
Or sounds you have called me
The tones have nearly
Made me deaf

[MEL]
[Hermano, cont’d]

Yes, amigo...!
Why don’t I? Why don’t I resurrect the Pinta, the Nina, and the Santa Maria and
you can scare up your little “Flor de Mayo” so we can all sail back to where we
came from: the motherland womb.

[MEL]
I am not any of the names
Or sounds you have called me

[ELIZABETH]
[from The Chocolate Trial by Nneka Chukwuelue]

On many occasions I have been called “smut”, “black”, “charcoal” and
have heard every yo mama so black joke I could recite them in my sleep.
[MEL]
Like what?

[ELIZABETH]
Yo momma’s so black that she got to smile at night so people can see her.

Yo momma's so black that she went to night school and they marked her absent!

Yo momma’s so black I shot three bullets at her and they came back asking for a flashlight!

Well, when I was growing up we heard jokes about Mexicans as well...

[MEL]
Like?

[TAM]
What did the Mexican say when he lost his homework? "Come back, essay!"

Why were there only 600 Mexicans at the Alamo? They only had two cars!

[MEL]
When I was growing up, the kids used to love to tell this joke about Asians...
My mother is Chinese; my father is Japanese; and look what they did to me....

Ha Ha (Lots of improv)

[Stop laughing slowly and TOGETHER]
I am not any of the faces

[TAM]
[from When I Was Growing Up]

When I was growing up I hungered for American food, American styles coded: WHITE and even to me, a child born of Chinese parents, being Chinese was feeling foreign, was limiting, was un-American.

[from TAM]
Actually, I’m a child born of Vietnamese parents. I never really wanted to be white. Well, not when I was growing up, but when I started my high school years-the years when everything mattered--Well, that’s when I realized that I wanted to belong. I was happy with my Asian friends, but I just felt like I didn’t have other opportunities that the white girls had.

[MEL-- reading to TAM from When I Was Growing Up]
When I was growing up and went to high school I discovered the rich white girls, a few yellow girls, their imported cotton dresses, their cashmere sweaters, their curly hair and I thought that I too should have what these lucky girls had...

[TAM]
I remembered when I hung out with white girls, my grades were better and I was voted into Student Council, designated as an officer of National Honor Society, and made it on the dance team. Before then, teachers and most of my classmates hardly knew my name. I feel that it all happened because I was part of the white crowd. I felt like I belonged, that I was somebody.

[MEL]
I am not any of the names

[TAM]
However, there are some that are rude and obnoxious... They would call me names like slanted eyes (even when my eyes aren’t) and others would call me Gook- oh Gooks are slang for Vietnamese - kinda like saying you’re a wetback (laughs)

I am not any of the names
Or sounds you have called me

[MEL]
Actually, I never got called a wetback or any other name really.

[TAM]
Why not?

[MEL]
I was never dark enough

[TOGETHER]
This dark skin,

[MEL]
I used to get asked all the time “What are you?” And most of the time it would bother me because it was people of my own ethnicity asking me that. And I used to ask, “well, don’t you know? I’m just like you.” or was I? If they had to ask me, did that mean I didn’t look like one of them? That I wasn’t one of them?

[MEL]
This dark skin?

[ELI]
[from The Chocolate Trial]
Imagine being put on trial in court and told you were guilty of a crime you had committed before you even came from your mother’s womb. Add a twist to the vision and imagine the people who were prosecuting you were your boyfriend/girlfriend, family, friends, and associates. I felt that way for a long time, I am a dark-skinned black girl who has been told only by people of her own race that a girl of my skin color is a terrible and ugly thing.

[MEL to ELIZABETH]
This dark skin?

[ELI]
[from Chocolate Trial]

My mother is American and my father Nigerian. Both of my parents are dark-brown people, and so is the rest of my family. I grew up always being told how beautiful I am.

[TAM]
I don't know my mom always said I had pretty eyes. Maybe because they were round and not so slanted...

[ELI]
[from Chocolate Trial]

I never suspected that being a dark-skinned black person was considered something negative until I was in sixth grade at Chapel Hill Elementary, an all-black school. When another student who had light brown skin first told me to "shut my black ass up" I remember being confused and hurt, thinking, "Aren't you black too?"

[TAM]
This dark skin

[Mel]
Well I think her whole thing is that she’s a dark skinned girl

[ELI]
It’s so true and I see this all the time. Put a dark skin black girl next to a light skin black girl – and put them like 50 feet away from a guy, the guy immediately says “Oh, that bright girl is so fine!” when I say bright I mean light skin, and that’s just a term that black people use for light skin.

[Mel]
We say “guera”- it means white skinned girl. I got called guera all the time. When my family called me guera, it was a term of endearment- like being called pumpkin or sweetie. When people at school would call me guera- well, that was a different thing.

[ELI]
So they’ll say oh that bright girl is so fine. Even when they get closer, its obvious that the dark skin girl is prettier but they assume that dark has to mean ugly or not that attractive, so I think Chuk’s whole thing is that she is a beautiful dark skinned black girl and it doesn’t bother her that’s she is dark skinned, but apparently other people keep throwing it in her face as to say “okay so well you’re dark skin so therefore you being beautiful has to be so extraordinary.” What I don’t understand is why color is so important? A person’s color is not who they are. My skin tone is a part of me yes but it does not define who I am.

[MEL to TAM]
[reading from Wong’s piece]

When you were growing up, people told you that you were dark

[TAM]
White People thought I was dark

[MEL]
[reading from Wong’s piece]
and you believed my your own darkness in the mirror, in your soul, your own narrow vision.

[TAM]
This dark skin? (sarcastic)
[Tam]
But other Asians thought I was light skinned
[ELI]

Dark skin people are always trying to tell me how lucky I am because I am bright. Like I have some kind of advantage. I want to scream at them and say, “look I am brown, that makes me black like you. That is what people see, black!” I am not bright neither do I want to be. My skin color is brown, you can call me honey, caramel, or even butterscotch, but don’t you dare call me bright!

[MEL]

I guess I did have a problem when the Hispanic kids at school would call me la guera, because they meant it as an insult. They would say, “Mira, la guera!” and laugh at me - like I didn’t understand what they were saying.

Most of the time, Hispanic people would see my light skin and think I was white or that I was trying to be White, and I’m like “no I’m not!” I am Hispanic! How can I try to be White? I was born with this skin color! Don’t call me guera!

[ELI]

Don’t identify me with being bright because there’s so many stereotypes with being bright even though bright is suppose to be beautiful within the black culture there is still a stigma that goes along with being bright or yellow. Yellow now that is a word that is hard to explain if you are not black. Let me do my best. When I say yellow imagine a banana color. Make it two shades lighter and you got the color of a yellow black person. I guess that is the best way I can describe the word “yellow.” I prefer to be brown and I know I am a light shade of brown but I am still brown. What’s really funny is that my dad is Nigerian and he is dark skinned and my mother is American but she is
fair skinned. My father assumed that I would come out as light as my mom, but I am thinking hello, you mix dark with light and you get an in between shade. Truth be told he just wanted a really light skinned little girl and what I want to know is why do black people always assume that light skin equals beautiful? That is why black people got so many issues when it comes to skin color. I just want everyone to know that I may be light skin but I am still black and believe me I don’t get any special privileges.

[MEL to ELIZABETH]

“Well, you’re light skinned, you don’t know how it feels to be Black”

[ELIZABETH]

“Well, you’re light skinned, you don’t know how it feels to be Mexican.”

[Both- Eli, MEL to TAM]

Why are your eyes not slanted?

[ELI]

STOP! Stop putting me in subcategories trying to make me a color I am not because it is convenient for you. My ethnicity is black, but my skin color is brown. Not bright, not yellow, but brown. So please don’t put me in a category with all those light skinned people and think oh she is close to being bright so she is stuck up and too beautiful, and she must get extra privileges.

[TAM]

They ask me, “Why don’t you look like other Asians?” And I’m like, I don’t know- my mom and dad are both Asian so I don’t know why... maybe I drank too much wine... or
elephants milk… my mom would always say that if you’re a healthy child, you must have drank elephant’s milk… (laughs)

[MEL]

That’s funny because my cousins used to ask my mom how we came out so white, and my mom would tell them that we just drank lots and lots of milk, and it made our skin white.

This thick hair

these thick lips

[ELI]
[from Black Is a Woman’s Color by bell hooks]

Good hair- that’s the expression. We all know it, begin to hear it when we are small children. When we are sitting between the legs of mothers and sisters getting our hair combed. Good hair is hair that is not kinky, hair that does not feel like balls of steel wool, hair that does not take hours to comb, hair that does not need tons of grease to untangle, hair that is long. Real good hair is straight hair, hair like white folks’ hair. Yet no one says so. No one says your hair is so nice, so beautiful because it is like white folk’s hair. We pretend that the standards we measure our beauty by are our own invention- that it is questions of time and money that lead us to make distinctions between good hair and bad hair.

This thick hair, these thick lips

Both have tried to narrow

I have good hair that does not need pressing. Without the hot comb I remain a child, one of the uninitiated. I plead, I beg, I cry for my turn. They tell me once you start you will be sorry. You will wish you had never straightened your hair. They do not understand that it is not the straightening I seek, but the chance to belong, to be one in this world of women.

[TAM]
I always liked my hair color. Although, there was a time in my life when, I did try to bleach it. In high school, I had it brown. I didn’t have it black, because everyone was
doing it—Asians, Hispanics, the White folks. I hung out with the white folks. We’d sit out in the sun- spray in some sun in...

[MEL]
I was 17 when I first bleached my hair. My mother asked me “are you trying to be White?” I thought, what? How can she say that? My mother dyed her hair all the time. Growing up I thought she was a natural blonde, and she has lighter skin than me with hazel eyes, so I thought she of all people should know better than to ask that question.

[TAM]
My parents made me feel bad, but all my Asian friends thought it was cool. My father especially hated the fact that I dyed my hair. He was so traditional. I couldn’t speak English when I was in his presence, I was forced to go to church that was performed in Vietnamese, and above all, he hated the fact that I dyed my hair. He is the traditional anal Vietnamese man who hates colored hair.

Begging entrance through
The needle of your eye

[ELI]
I’m thinking no one’s happy with whatever hair they have.

[MEL]
Do you have good hair?

[ELI]
No! because, well, to me, I think my hair is wonderful, but (laughs) or to a black person if you said “does elizabeth have good hair?” they’d be like “uh, no.” but um, it also goes back to my genes. And hello my dad is from Africa. Not many- especially from Nigeria- not many Nigerians have the typically good hair. They have you know kinky hair or tight curls. I went through a whole stage where I said tight curls. Do not call my hair nappy, they’re just tight curls that don’t relax. So um... I know everytime I got to the beauty shop and I have to get a relaxer I think of all the pain and trauma I have to go through, but I could not imagine not having my hair straight. Or keeping it like tight curls or in the little fro, and picking it out I get to the point where I don’t even want to comb my hair when its time to go to the beauty shop because it hurts so bad.

Some of me broken
In the squeeze

[TAM]
I don’t think I was broken, well, maybe squeezed a little. I was always proud of my color. I wasn’t too white or too yellow. But white girls and Asian girls thought I wasn’t white enough or yellow enough. To me, I was just right. Yet I still feel like this rubber
band being stretched from both ends. Luckily, I didn’t break and fall apart. Instead, it just made me question myself- made me question who I am.

[MEL]
I guess I felt the same way sometimes- like a rubberband being stretched from both sides- because no matter what I did I could not seem to please everyone. If I let my black roots show on my hair then I was being too Mexican, but if I dye my hair lighter then I’m trying to be White- its that whole damn if I do; damned if I don’t mentality

And there’s only so many things I can do; so many things I can change... like my skin color

I was born with this color of skin. In fact, my mother used to tell me that when I was born, the nurses at the hospital seemed so amazed that I was light-skinned. I mean my mom is pretty pale, but my dad is pretty dark, and I guess they were amazed that I came out so pale myself. “Why she’s as white as the walls,” they told my mom. And my mom would get offended and say, So what? ...
So what?
So what?
So my last name is Gonzales and I can’t speak Spanish and I’m light skinned- it’s just the way I am right? It doesn’t make me any less Hispanic, right?
So why am I standing here questioning myself?

Because someone once told me they don’t think of me as Hispanic?

No matter what we’ve tried

Your soul America

[MEL]
Maybe I am on trial and this is the court and I stand here today to admit that I am guilty.... Guilty of eating enchiladas con frijoles y arroz y tamales ... mmm tamales- while watching The Simpsons or Friends, while listening to hip hop or techno

[TAM]
I know now that I don’t want to be white. But I don’t want to be whatever it is you think being Asian is or whatever my parents think being Asian is. I only want to be me...

[ELI]
Me, means you can’t put me in some little black box and make me conform to what you think black is.

[TAM]
Me means getting on AsianAvenue.com and eating greasy burgers, while dancing to J. Lo’s “Jenny from the Block” and playing taboo.
[ELI]
Me, means eating fried chicken and mustard greens while being secretly in love with Justin Timberlake and listening to Avril Levigne and rockin in my Asian Student Association shirt.

[TAM]
Me, means being bad at math, but good at singing Karaoke with lots of friends while chilling w/ people from all walks of life.

[MEL]
Me, means dancing the cumbia with my daddy, and wearing funky T-shirts and dying my hair crazy shades of red

[Eli]
So what does this mean? It means don't define my ethnicity by my skin color. It means that no matter how light or dark I get or how often I straighten my hair, I look in the mirror everyday and know that I am black. My parents, my culture, and everything I experience daily in my life defines my blackness. However I act, whatever I wear, I am an African American.

[MEL]
I am a Latina

[TAM]
I am an Asian American.

[MEL]
What you see is what you get, and if you don’t see ME...

[TOGETHER]
Then you just don’t get it!
APPENDIX C

REHEARSAL JOURNAL
The issue is this: If we imagine that the feminist director is invested in changing representations of women, whether by directing feminist drama, by subverting a male dramatic narrative, or by helping to construct a new piece, must not this same director also be rethinking the way she casts and rehearses? In other words, how can the product be subversive if the process stays the same? Isn’t the directing process itself part of how meaning gets created or suppressed? (Donkin & Clement, 1993, p. 233)

My thesis production is about changing representations of female ethnic identity, and, as I began the rehearsal process, I confronted these issues that Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement raise in their book. Andrea Hairston (1993) notes that rehearsal is the very essence of theater. She describes it as a “liminal work space where we practice the skill of transcending ourselves, where hard work is magic. In good rehearsals we find the discipline and control to let go of ourselves and become someone, something else” (p. 242). In the rehearsals for my production, however, we were aiming to achieve just the opposite: we were trying to be our selves and develop our mestiza identities for the performance. As a result, I started to question whether the rehearsal process would allow me to achieve our goal.

The rehearsal process became a collaborative effort among the three cast members to construct the performance text— even up until the day of the performance. Therefore, I had to rethink the process of directing and rehearsing a non-traditional production. My main role in the rehearsal process was to compile and shape the script. All three of us played the roles of scriptwriter, director, designer, and performer as we developed our individual and group performances. Although I set aside time for us to meet and rehearse the developing script that included blocking and running lines, we often met informally through conversations on the phone, at school, at the gym, or at the bars; all of these interactions became part of the process and the performance. I could
not, as the director of record for the performance, shape the rehearsal process in the conventional, recommended way, since so much of the rehearsal process happened outside actual rehearsal time. The actual rehearsals required fewer warm-ups and exercises, and more discussion and talking through our experiences.

We developed the performance text in order to create a space for our selves, and I believe the rehearsal journal should reflect all those efforts. As a result, this journal does not follow the recommended outline for the rehearsal journal of the production-centered thesis. As recommended, I include an entry for each cast meeting describing my objectives for the rehearsal and an evaluation of our progress. In addition, I have documented each informal cast meeting, conversation, moment, or comment that constituted the rehearsal process for this unique production. The production developed in various stages over time, even before formal rehearsals began—from the moment I became friends with Tam and Elizabeth to the first performance in Georgia to the final performance for my thesis. Therefore, the journal exceeds the requirements of the rehearsal journal for the production-centered thesis.

October 2002: Auditions for the Petit Jean Performance Festival

Graduate students are not required to audition in order to participate in the festival, but most of us attend the auditions to be part of the decision making process. In the three years I have been participating in the Festival, however, the auditions seem more like a formality to distinguish those undergraduate students truly interested in performing and volunteering their time for five days. Usually, the decision making process is simple because only a handful of students show up to the auditions and we
approve almost every one if we have the space and budget. The undergraduates do not know this, so we have fun witnessing their nervousness. Today, only four undergraduates show up for the auditions. As one of the teaching assistants of undergraduate performance classes I am familiar with two of them – Elizabeth Okigbo and Tam Tran – since they are currently in my classes. Elizabeth is an African-American woman in her early 20s with short, straight, thick black hair. Tam is an Asian-American woman in her early 20s with long, straight, thin, shiny black hair.

I do not remember Elizabeth’s performance at the auditions, but I know she possesses much talent. She is a student in my section of the Performance of Literature class, so I have had opportunities to evaluate and enjoy her performances before the auditions. Coincidentally, a couple of years ago we were part of the same cast in a production of The Vagina Monologues. Although we never had the opportunity to become friends, we remembered each other from the show. I remembered that Elizabeth did an incredible performance of a monologue entitled, “The Little Coochie Snorcher That Could,” a personal narrative of a disadvantaged African-American woman from the South.

Tam, on the other hand, is a student in the Storytelling class, and I have not had the opportunity to evaluate any of her performances. She performs an excerpt from the novel, The Joy Luck Club, with a clear understanding of the text because she uses accents, gestures, and expressions that seem appropriate for the Chinese characters. Midway through her performance, however, she forgets a line and starts again from the beginning. Moments later, she forgets her lines and struggles through her performance until she feels so embarrassed that she stops, apologizes to the audience, and walks
out of the room. After the last audition, I go into the hallway to talk to her. She states that she is embarrassed by the situation, and I assured her that she need not be worried. We do not really know each other well, but I hug her and give her this advice: always finish a performance.

Both Elizabeth and Tam are approved to go on the trip for the Festival. They both seem excited.

November 1, 2002

At the beginning of the trip, my relationship with Tam and Elizabeth remains formal. I do not socialize much with Tam and Elizabeth because I still did not know them very well—outside of class work. They seem to be close friends, because they tend to stick together. Some of the graduate students on the trip start referring to them as “the twins.”

At one point today, when I walk into the kitchen of the main cabin to help prepare dinner, I hear Elizabeth, Tam, and Jace Sanders (another undergraduate student) having an amusing discussion about tonight’s dinner: chili. Elizabeth openly declares her disdain for the meal. “I was hoping for something good,” she jokingly says. Jace tells us he has a craving for fried chicken, and he says to Elizabeth with a smile, “Would you like some fried chicken, too?” Elizabeth turns around, puts her hands on her hips, and says loudly, “What you tryin’ to say? Why you be all assuming I be wanting Fried Chicken? Oh, oh... is it because I’m Black??”

We all laugh, because she seems to be joking. I never think to question for a second whether she is serious. For a few seconds, Jace seems scared that he has offended Elizabeth in some way. “Uh... uh... of course not...,” he stammers. Then,
Elizabeth starts laughing, and we all know it is a joke. I start to feel more comfortable joking around with Elizabeth in an informal manner. Elizabeth asks me if I can cook. I tell her that I hate to cook. Elizabeth stops what she’s doing, “Isn’t your last name Gonzales?” she asks me.

I say, “Yeah, so?”

“Well, you aren’t really living up to your name then are you? You should love cooking.”

I do not really have a good come-back for that remark, so I laugh and tell her to shut up. I start calling her Fried Chicken. She laughs and starts calling out names for me: Taco, Burrito, Enchilada, etc. Tam started to laugh, so Elizabeth calls her Fried Rice, Eggroll, etc.

Later that night, I sit with Tam and Elizabeth and we start talking about our own ethnicities. Tam tells me that she is actually Vietnamese. We joke about how we cannot tell the difference. Tam asks me, “So what are you?”

I usually am annoyed by this question, but I do not feel as defensive with Tam. Tam tells me that she never would have guessed that I was Hispanic, because I do not look like one. I ask, “What is a Hispanic person supposed to look like?”

“Well, you know... you’re not dark, and you look pretty with red hair,” she replies and she laughs afterward, so I sense that she is joking with me. I am not offended by this comment. Tam is cute and bubbly, so I find it hard to take offense at anything she says; I feel comfortable with her, like she is my sister. I tell her that she reminds me of my younger sister. When my sister was younger she looked more Asian than Hispanic. To this day, people often assume she is at least half-Asian. Tam tells me that she thinks this is strange. She, too, has a younger sister that looks more Hispanic than Asian.
People assume she is at least half-Hispanic. Elizabeth tells us that her dad is Nigerian, and she talks about her family. No one can pronounce her last name, and everyone assumes that the name is Japanese. We all laugh, because we have wondered ourselves how to pronounce it, or if it is Japanese? Tam discusses how people get her name wrong all the time. I laugh because I am confused about how to pronounce her name as well. Dr. Byers had told me that Tam told her that her name is really pronounced “Tom.” Tam said that Dr. Byers misunderstood the conversation. Her name really is pronounced Tam – like it sounds. She does not understand why people try to make it more difficult than it has to be.

Sunday, November 3

In a matter of days, the three of us have formed a close bond. We already have developed a little banter routine among the three of us. For instance Tam will say something rude to Elizabeth and Elizabeth will reply, “Hey, go eat your eggrolls.” Tam will reply, “Hey go eat some fried chicken!”

And then they would say to me, “Hey go eat some enchiladas.”

To Tam: Oh, yeah well, why don’t you go and do some nails???

To Elizabeth: Why don’t you go and play some basketball???

To Me: Why don’t you go and clean some hotel???

Those remarks are comfortable and fun to us—no one is offended. In fact, I find myself liking the banter. I feel a sense of connection between the three of us.
Tuesday, January 28

At this point, Tam, Elizabeth, and I are like three peas in a pod. We have official nicknames for each other: Eggroll, Fried Chicken, and Enchilada. We do not see each other during the Christmas break, but we continue to keep in touch. Once the spring school semester starts, however, we begin to spend more time together.

I have been given an opportunity by Dr. Kelly Taylor (hereafter referred to as Kelly in the rehearsal journal) to develop a group performance for the Pace Performance Festival at Georgia Southern University in three weeks. Originally, Kelly was going to take one of her own performances to the Festival, so she informs me that I can use her cast as part of my own. The cast of five people who have already agreed to go on the trip includes Tam, Elizabeth, and me. The two other people are Jace Sanders, a young undergraduate student in performance classes, and Christine Snowden, a graduate teaching assistant for the Performance of Literature class and a close friend of mine. Although Christine is of Greek ethnic heritage with dark, curly hair and olive skin, she is considered one of the white people. Her last name and her appearance do not mark her as an ethnic minority.

I have constructed a performance with Tam, Elizabeth, and myself based on Safiya Henderson-Holmes poem, “Failure of an Invention.” We perform a selected, representative body of literature by ethnic women. The performance also includes white people who read the pieces of the script that represent a white perspective. Therefore, I use the term “White People” freely when discussing their parts. Casting the white people is simple, because I want to use everyone who is going to the Festival with us: Dr. Kelly Taylor, Christine, and Jace. I wrote the four-page script in one week, including
five days to research for various multicultural texts and two days to adapt the texts into a critical performance. As I am writing the script I am not thinking like a director. I make no notes about lighting, set design, sounds, movements, emotions, attitudes, etc. The script thus far is just a bunch intertextual passages put together around the common themes of resistance and the pain of assimilation for people of color. As I begin rehearsals, I do not have a concrete production concept. In fact, the only production concept I have is to use masks and, perhaps, make some tableaux of typical American scenes in the beginning. My idea is for the white people to form tableaux of typical American life, and for the three of us—Tam, Elizabeth, and me—to come in and fail to fit into the tableaux, prompting the line: I am not any of the faces you have put on me America. I am not sure if the idea will work with the cast, but staging is the least of my worries. Right now, I am more nervous about the cast accepting the script.

Primary Objective:

As this was our first cast meeting, my primary purpose is to read through the script.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:

Moments before rehearsal began I assigned everyone parts and made copies of the script. This will be their first opportunity to read through the script fully. As I have not figured out many of the details of the performance, I am just hoping to get everyone acquainted with the script. I also hope to attain some more ideas about how to craft the performance.
Evaluation of the director's progress:

The first thing I did to begin the rehearsal was set a rehearsal schedule for the cast. The performance is just three weeks away, so time is a crucial factor. I handed out copies of a calendar for February, so they would have the dates beforehand, and we collectively agree to have rehearsal every weekday night after 9 pm.

Evaluation of the cast's progress:

We already know each other well, so we do not need to go through formal introductions. We may all know each other too well, in fact, because we treat the rehearsal as a type of social gathering. We spend a lot of time making casual conversation before we actually begin the rehearsal. We met in the TA office in Terrill Hall and sat around a table to read the script aloud together. The cold reading of the script was a good way for everyone to hear the text in its simplest form, as I directed everyone to just read and not to attempt to act.

When I assigned parts for every one, I wrote down on the scripts our nicknames to designate Elizabeth as Fried Chicken, Tam as Eggroll, and me as Enchilada. The rest of the cast seemed a little astonished by the nicknames on the script. I was surprised by the response because I have become so comfortable with using these nicknames. A discussion started around our use of those names for each other, and I had to explain that we are friends and that is how we chose to refer to one another. To make them feel more comfortable with the idea, I suggested that we give them nicknames as well. We discussed how white people did not have any fun food names—
unless we included hamburgers or fries. We decided Kelly will be called Nutra Sweet, 
Jace will be Cucumber, and Christine will be Gyro.

After the read-through, I planned to question the cast about the script in 
order to help us conceptualize the performance. The performance script conveys 
many difficult issues involving race. I hoped we would be discussing our ideas 
and feelings, as well as images from the script. Since our cast consists of 
performance students and a performance professor, we all have prior knowledge 
of basic performance concepts and theories. Therefore, I expected some good 
insight from all of us.

After the first read-through, I discussed my one production concept with 
the cast. As the director, I had no other idea on how to open the performance, so 
I asked the cast for suggestions. Their collective response was, “Yeah, sounds 
good.” I did not feel like the group was in the mood to discuss the production. It is 
late at night after a long day for all of us, so everyone seems to be very tired.

I feel like I am failing already as a director because I should be making 
more decisions or already have a more polished production concept to give to 
the group. However, I did not want to be the only person making the decisions. I 
really wanted it to be a group effort.

I suggested that the poem be read in its entirety in the beginning, so the 
audience would understand that the rest of the performance is a breakdown of 
the poem. Their response was, “Yeah, sounds good.”

After the read-through, the white people started asking questions on how 
their parts should be performed – what is their attitude, motivation, etc.? At first I
had Kelly reading through all the white parts just to hear how it would sound. She felt that her part was too long, and she gave some suggestions on changing a passage. She also suggested that maybe white people did not need to be included in the script, and Christine and Jace agreed. I did not want to cut the white perspective entirely, so Kelly suggested that maybe her part could be a voice-over to the performance. I did not like this idea either, because I envisioned all of us on stage. Rather than cut her part, we decided to divide the “white” part, and give Christine and Jace lines as well.

At this point I am referring to the White people as “Whities.” I am not sure if I am offending Kelly and Jace, because they laugh about it. I might be offending Christine, because she is my friend. As one of the white people, she has to perform the role of an ignorant Whitie. She says the following lines to me:

I hate Meskins.
You’re a Meskin
Why don’t you go back to where you came from?

I sense that she is having trouble saying this to me, and I do not think I help by calling her a Whitie. As a result, I do not call her a Whitie, but I still refer to Jace and Kelly as Whities. I do not use the term so much when Christine is around.

The cast was helpful in giving suggestions for the performance. We also discussed the “I am not any of the faces...” repetition in the script that develops a chorus feeling for the performance. At first, I had Elizabeth, Tam, and I read the parts in unison together, but we agreed that we needed to make a different choice because it did not sound good. We exchanged ideas, including a “row,
row, row your boat” type of repetition, a round. We tried it several different ways, and we decided to use the round method.

Plan for next meeting:

I need to revise the script slightly by designating parts and speaking order for the round. I also need to re-think what to do in the beginning with the poem.

Wednesday, January 29 (9-10 p.m.)

I show the script to Dr. Juandalynn Taylor (hereafter referred to as Juandalynn in the rehearsal journal), and she says that the script seems to be powerful with just the three of us. In other words, she does not think we need the white voices in the performance at all. I still envision a performance with interaction on stage between the Whities and us - even though I do not have many ideas on how this interaction should be staged. She offers numerous comments regarding how the piece is about white standards of beauty. She suggests we play with the idea of mirrors. The white people could be trying to show us an image of ourselves in the mirror. When we look in the mirror we see white people. Finally, in the end, we start seeing our own images in the mirror. I still envision interaction on stage between the Whities and us.

Primary Objective:

As we are still becoming acquainted with the script, I chose to continue with a read-through of the script.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:

I have designated parts for the chorus, and I plan on using a mix of unison, round, and repetition to read through the chorus part. I mainly want to
hear how the choral parts sound when read aloud and to determine whether this voice will be effective for the performance.

I hope we can begin blocking scenes for the performance, and maybe practice with the idea of tableaux in the beginning.

Evaluation of the cast’s progress:

We read through the script, and made a few changes to the choral parts. Also, we added in all three of the white people during the “I hate Meskins” part. Together, we seem to be coming together well as a cast. We mainly spend our time talking to one another, so it is difficult for us to be serious and focus on the rehearsal.

I feel like we are all learning something new about each other. For example, Jace asks if Elizabeth has good hair, and Elizabeth tells us that she does not and she tries to explain why not. Many of us do not understand why a concept such as good hair exists. Elizabeth tries to explain that it is really just a Black thing. White people can say they do not have good hair, but that is not what bell hooks is talking about in her piece.

Someone also asks what we mean when we perform the line, “I can smell the cancer,” when referring to bleaching skin. Someone actually asked why people would bleach their skin. Elizabeth and I looked at each other, because we did not know how to respond. The answer would be too deep and too complicated to get into in the short span of a rehearsal. The performance, itself, should be able to answer that question.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

Kelly is helpful with suggestions for the performance, and I am grateful for her expertise since I am not contributing as much as I should.
At one point, Kelly commented on the “good hair” piece by bell hooks; she said that it was confusing. She suggested that we cut some lines from it. While Elizabeth was reading the passage, it seemed to drag, but I think it seemed that way because she read it without emotion. I had worried that maybe the piece was too long for her to memorize, but I did not want it cut at all.

We are not on schedule because I did not have a chance to work on blocking with the group. Because we meet late at night, I felt like the group was cranky and tired by the time rehearsal began. I also felt I was wasting the White people’s time since their part is small. I suggested that I meet with just Elizabeth and Tam the next day, so we could work on our part alone. I felt like we would accomplish more on our own. The white people agreed.

Plan for next meeting:

I will work with Tam and Elizabeth, and hopefully we can develop some blocking together.

Thursday, January 30 (5pm)

Primary Objective:

I need to start blocking the piece, but the only ideas I have so far are the use of different arrangements of the performers, such as planes and levels during the choral part to emphasize certain relationships.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:
I feel like Elizabeth, Tam, and I work best without the presence of the Whities, so I want to read through the script some more until we have a steady rhythm flowing through the performance.

Evaluation of the cast’s progress:

Since the three of us are friends, we had no problems interacting with each other on a positive level. The only problem was that we interacted too well, and it took us longer to get down to serious during the rehearsal. I felt like our conversations with each other, however, were part of a warm-up. We talked to ease our nerves and to get comfortable with each other, and then we got serious. I ask Tam, “Do you think it’s wrong that we call each other Enchilada and Eggroll and stuff?”

Tam snorts, “No. That’s just what we call each other. It’s not like we call anyone else that. I don’t call any other enchiladas that name.”

Elizabeth adds in, “Don’t worry about it Enchilada.”

We read through the script several different times until we had a steady rhythm down. The script, however, was very choppy, and Elizabeth and Tam had trouble knowing exactly when to begin speaking. We tried to go over the script in its entirety. As an incentive to memorize the script, we decided that if anyone missed her cue, we had to start from the beginning. We had to restart the read-through several times, but we had fun with it. Elizabeth started throwing Cheetos at us when we missed our cues. By this time, we were having fun with each other and we decided to work on the blocking. We played with the idea of using planes as composition. When we all lined up for the planes, however, we thought...
it looked cheesy – like we were cheerleaders. Since a significant section of the choral part involves the constant repetition of the phrase, “I am not any of the faces,” we often find it necessary to have fun with the phrase before it becomes monotonous. Therefore, we started a little “I am not” routine—a dance routine that mainly involves us jumping around aimlessly, using our jazz hands and saying, “I am not!” We danced and jumped around for about fifteen minutes, laughing and giggling with each other. When we became focused on having fun, I knew rehearsal was over.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

Although we did not actually accomplish any blocking for the script, I felt like rehearsal was successful because we were able to work together effectively. We have created a strong bond, I consider myself lucky that they are so willing to work with me. I am nervous as a director because I worry about how the performance will be received. Also, I feel like I have been given too much power, and I do not want it. I do not want to have to decide everything.

Because Tam and Elizabeth are students in performance studies classes, they are quite used to constructing and rehearsing a performance in a limited amount of time. Therefore, I am not worried about memorization. I ask them to familiarize themselves with the script on their own time, since I have the impression that the only time they spend on the script is during rehearsal. However, I understand that they have other work to complete on top of the performance, so I am not disappointed.
Plan for next meeting:

We will meet with the White people once again and develop blocking. The performance is less than two weeks away.

Monday, February 3 (9-11p.m.)

Primary Objective:

Since we leave to perform in Georgia next week, I need to spend rehearsal time blocking the whole script.

Because of time limits, I decide against using masks and tableaux in the beginning. My only idea for the beginning is to use beauty magazines like Vogue and Cosmopolitan with their dominant images of white, beautiful women. The Whities will be looking through the magazines, and I will come in and try to find an image more like my self, prompting the line, “I am not any of the faces.” I want Tam and Elizabeth entering from the audience, as if they are joining me. When Tam, Elizabeth, and I say, “Every mask has slipped,” we drop the magazines. The performance should have a lot of interaction with the audience—as in, no fourth wall. Since we are performing in Georgia, we do not have an idea about the design of the performance space. I am not too concerned with completing the staging, because we seem to have a very conversational-type of performance, one that is not bound by blocking. Still, I feel the need to structure the performance in some way as far as movement is concerned. I am not sure exactly how to accomplish that goal, yet.

Evaluation of the cast's progress:

Usually our problem is a lack of energy, but today, we seemed to have too much. At first we met in the TA area to read through the script. Then, I started
discussing my new production concept. We went up to Terrill Hall 316 to use the classroom for blocking. As soon as we entered the classroom, however, we became too relaxed and comfortable. I found it difficult to begin rehearsal. While I was running around trying to set up the room for the performance, the cast started doing other things—Elizabeth and Tam were drawing on the board and checking their e-mail on the computer; Christine was talking on the cell phone, Kelly was looking through the magazines and making comments. I positioned the Whities around the table for the opening sequence and directed them to start looking through the magazines; they actually begin reading the magazines. At this point the magazines seemed to be a bad idea, because they were distracting the cast. I found it difficult to gain their attention. I began raising my voice, but no one noticed my frustration. Finally, we started running through the script and working out some more movement. I want the blocking to evolve out of rhythmic patterns and feelings as we read. The script is “staged” more than I would have liked it to be, but we are using more planes and levels as I had planned. We spent 45 minutes running through one page of the script. We spent another 20 minutes with the “I hate Meskins” part, because everyone had opinions on how this section should be performed. I had such a headache that I had to ask the cast to move on from this part, and we got through another page before I decided to call it a night.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

I feel like I am not interacting very well with the cast, because tonight’s rehearsal was a complete mess. As a director I should have given the cast more
direction, but I am beginning to feel that the task is impossible with this group. We know each other too well, and I find it extremely difficult to take control. Maybe I made a mistake thinking we could develop the staging collaboratively, because it takes up more time. We are behind schedule.

Plan for next meeting:

Survive each other.

Tuesday, February 4 (9-11p.m.)

Warm-Up:

Tam and Elizabeth decide to come earlier at 8:30 to run-through the script before the Whities come.

I am relieved because coming early was their suggestion. It shows that they are taking the performance a little more seriously and are willing to give more effort. As a way to physically and mentally prepare us for our rehearsal, we use conversation as an activity. Elizabeth and Tam are chatty as usual, but I do not contribute much to conversation because I feel tense tonight. I am the one in need of a mental warm-up of some kind.

Once we sit down, I beg Tam and Elizabeth to please behave during rehearsals tonight. I ask them to please, please pay attention to me during rehearsal. They do not understand, so I try to explain what I am asking. At this point, I am placing too much pressure on myself to complete this performance. I feel very uncomfortable as a director because I do not want to be the one in charge. They love me, so they will try to cooperate.

Primary Objective:
My primary objective for the rehearsal is to finish blocking the script, and run-through the blocking from yesterday’s rehearsal. Before the Whities come, the three of us start with a read-through of the performance, since Tam and Elizabeth are still memorizing their parts. Tam and Elizabeth read the White parts for the Whities.

Tam stops, “Hey so why do we even need them?”

I ask, “What do you mean?”

Tam replies, “Well, do they even have to be here?”

Elizabeth agrees. We talk some more about it. Tam and Elizabeth suggest just cutting their part completely. Since several other people have questioned the Whities’ parts as well, I finally consider cutting them out. Their parts are small and sporadic through out the script. They speak more in the first minute with a few lines, and have no lines until the very end of the performance. Nonetheless, I would need to re-write the script without their parts, and I do not have enough time. We decide, however, that they do not need to be on stage with us. I am completely relieved about this decision, and I am excited about the performance. I call Kelly at her house and tell her not to come to rehearsal tonight. We see Christine at school and tell her she can go home. We do not know how to reach Jace, but we plan on telling him when he comes.

Goals and Objectives:

My goals changed after we removed the Whities from the stage. The new goal is to revise the script so that the Whities do not have to be on stage with us. As a group, Tam, Elizabeth, and I decide to stay that night and revise the script.
Evaluation of the cast’s progress:

Rehearsal ran smoothly tonight with just the three of us, because we were able to re-block most of the script on our own. The Whities are not completely released from the cast because they still have their lines in the script. We decided that the Whities will remain in the audience throughout the entire performance, however, and read their parts from there. We still have more work to do towards the end of the performance, but we expressed greater confidence after tonight’s rehearsal. Tam and Elizabeth appeared to be more comfortable with the performance.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

I am finding it difficult to play the two roles of director and performer for the performance. I did not think about the difficulty of playing a dual role before I took on the project. I had that “If you want it done right, just do it yourself” mentality when I started. I realize that I probably am having difficulty blocking the show because I do not know how it looks from the audience’s point of view. When Jace showed up for rehearsal, I asked him to stay and help us by watching us. His opinions helped as we worked our way through the script. Jace, Elizabeth, and Tam seemed to be having fun applying performance knowledge from their classes to the performance. For example, Tam said, “Hey we learned in class today how we shouldn’t stand like this...” I felt like we all learned from this experience. At one point in the night, I realized the four of us were collaborating on the blocking.
After the rehearsal, Tam came up to me, “Hey, this is a good performance. You did good, Enchilada.”

And I said to her. “Hey, I just wrote the script.”

Plan for next meeting:

We need to run-through the script more. We still need to block the ending.

Wednesday, February 5 (9-11 p.m.)

At noon I meet with Dr. Jay Allison (hereafter referred to as Jay in the rehearsal journal) and show him the script. He suggests ideas for the performance. He suggests, for example, that I play with the notion of space. He agrees with Juandalynn that the white people should not be included in the script. He recognizes, however, my desire to keep their parts in the script and suggests ways to keep them in the performance. They may try to speak, but we hush them up every time. He suggests that I begin by giving an introduction in which I explain the performance and then I stop mid-way and say that I need more space. Then, I start pushing people away from the stage as I try to create a performance space of my own design. Ideally, we will have a performance space with movable chairs so I can clear a space in front. However, I do not know what the space will be like, so I have to e-mail Amy Burt, the director of the festival.

I send her the following e-mail:

Amy,

This is Melinda Gonzales from the University of North Texas. I am the graduate student directing the show we will be performing at the festival. As we are preparing for the show, I have a question regarding the performance space that I
hope you can answer. Exactly what is the performance space like? Kelly mentioned that you told her it was an auditorium. Does that mean a raised stage with immobile seats? I am just curious on how we can use the space.

Thanks for your time. Melinda

I will not wait for her response before we start planning the blocking. We are going to plan the blocking as if we will have mobile seats.

Primary Objective:

I plan on working with Jay’s ideas, so I am not so worried about the blocking. We need to run-through the script until I feel like we are comfortable with it.

Evaluation of the cast’s and director’s progress:

At this point, I find it hard to make a distinction between the cast and the director. When I discuss the cast, I am including myself.

Because we are friends, Tam and Elizabeth take liberties with me during rehearsals. For example, Tam played on the computer and Elizabeth wrote on the chalkboard. They both kept their cell phones on during rehearsal and felt free to break during rehearsal time to take a call. At times I told them to stop and be serious, but I did not try to enforce my power on them in any way. I did not set a good example either, because I answered my cell phone as well. Most of the time, however, we knew when to be serious.

Because Tam and Elizabeth have a basic understanding of performance, I do not feel the need to direct them much. Sometimes they ask me a question about how I want something done. I generally reply, “Do what feels right.”
usually balks, “But it’s your performance, Mel. I don’t want to mess it up.” I reply, “It’s our performance.” Tam expresses the need for more direction than Elizabeth does, so I might need to direct her more. For example, today I told her that she needs to sound more frustrated at the end.

Kelly stands up and says, “White is not anything really…”

Tam comes up to her and says, “Because it is everything…”

I told Tam to think of this line with the following types of frustrated thoughts: “They are not listening to me. Why don’t they understand finally? It’s not about them—it’s about us.” She seemed to understand, but she continued to perform it blandly—without emotion.

I was not overly concerned with how they were performing at this point, although I could see that they concentrated more on memorization than on delivery. Tam claimed it was more important for her to remember a line before she added any emotion. As a director, I advised the opposite—you should only remember the lines through the attitudes and feelings of the character. I like the Stanislavski method of performing, which basically means, no acting, just character embodiment. Acting is fake—if you have to think of the line, then you are faking it. I tried to explain this concept to Tam, but she continued to concentrate on memorization first. I did not push the matter, though, because she believes this method.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, is familiar with this method because she was in my Performance of Literature class. Outside the classroom, however, I cannot direct Elizabeth very much. I cannot tell Elizabeth how to perform her pieces
because she will say to me, “And how do you know how it feels to be a Black woman?” I feel comfortable as her friend to reply, “I’m just saying—you’re making your people look bad.” And we laugh.

Anyone else watching us might think we are a dysfunctional cast, but we get our work done. Tam and Elizabeth still do not have the script memorized, and I have most of it memorized. We are all still using the script, but I am not worried. We ran through the script several times to make sure we knew our cues. We hope the room will have movable chairs, so we have been practicing moving around the chairs during the performance.

We began a discussion of how we should end the performance. Elizabeth suggested we start dancing. We started joking about performing our ethnic dances at the end: Elizabeth will dance hip-hop or step; Tam will walk around bowing to everyone; I will start dancing the cumbia. We actually started dancing until we broke down in laughter. Later, we got serious and we worked out a more serious ending, in which we all three come together and sit down.

Finally, we are on schedule. As the director, I told the girls that we did not need rehearsal the next day; I also told them that they had to have their script memorized by the next rehearsal. They promised me to do their best.

Plan for next meeting:

We have three rehearsals before the performance next week, so we must practice as much as possible.

Monday, February 10 (9-11p.m.)
Elizabeth and I attend the same aerobics class at 9 a.m. on Mondays. This morning during class, Elizabeth tells me, “Hey I didn’t get a chance to memorize my piece.” Our performance is on Saturday.

Later in the day, I receive a response from Amy Burt:

Yup—raised stage with immobile seats.

This information will change our planned staging for the performance.

Primary Objective:

My objectives changed when I talked to Elizabeth this morning. Originally, I wanted to work with the Whities today and run-through the script, but I told the Whities not to come so the three of us could work together. The fact that we will perform in an auditorium indicates to me that most of the movement during the performance will be improvisational.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:

We are going to go through an intensive memorization run-through tonight.

Warm-Up:

Tonight, we used conversation and dancing as a warm-up. During Petit Jean, we learned that all three of us participated on dance teams at our high schools. Over the course of rehearsals, the three of us developed little dance routines with each other. For example, we developed an “I am not...” dance routine for fun. I perceive our routine as a positive step in the right direction for the performance. We have been practicing and hearing that phrase so much, that it helps to have fun with it before it gets monotonous. Whenever we get bored,
one of us would yell, “Do the ethnic dance! We then would all stop to do our ethnic dances.

After the routine, Elizabeth starts a conversation about skin color. She often was called an oreo—black on the outside and white on the inside. While listening to Elizabeth, Tam admitted that she was called a banana—yellow on the outside and white on the inside. I had heard the term “oreo” before, but I had not heard the term “banana.” I remembered the conversation because I started thinking of my own childhood. I wondered if “White wannabe” Hispanics had names like oreo or banana. If we did, I probably would have heard it.

Evaluation of our progress:

At first, we did a run-through of the script, and tried to work through blocking. Then, we sat around in a circle and just did a vocal run-through of the performance without scripts. It is tough, and we spent an hour before we finally got through it completely.

I am uncomfortable with a part of the script adapted from Chicana feminist Cherríe Moraga’s (1983) essay “La Güera,” in which she uses the term Chicano to identify her self. I do not identify as a Chicano, and do not want to use the term in the performance. I change the term to Hispanic, and tell Tam and Elizabeth to note the change in their scripts. Then, I ask Tam and Elizabeth if they would like to make any changes of their own regarding their parts. For instance, the part of the script using Nellie Wong’s (1994) poem “When I Was Growing Up” has Tam reading the following lines:
When I was growing up I hungered for American food, American styles coded: WHITE and even to me, a child born of Chinese parents, being Chinese was feeling foreign, was limiting, was un-American.

Tam is Vietnamese, not Chinese. I remembered that she once commented on how people tend to assume all Asian American cultures are the same. I did not want the performance to represent an essentialist view of Asian American identity.

Tam never indicated any grievances with the script, including the use of the term Chinese. However, I did not want her to have to identify as a Chinese woman - if she did not want to do so, and I encouraged her to change that part to Vietnamese. She thought about it for a few seconds, and said, “Nah, it's okay. Chinese is better. It'll be easier this way.”

I am not sure what she exactly meant by this comment that “it” would be easier. Either she was implying that the memorization would be easier since she was already used to saying Chinese, or that the audience would better understand the Chinese reference than Vietnamese. In any case, the term remained the same in the script.

Elizabeth did not want to change anything in the script as well.

Plan for next meeting:

We need to run-through the entire performance with the Whities.

Tuesday, February 11 (9-11 p.m.)

Primary Purpose:

Tonight’s rehearsal will be the first rehearsal with the Whities, since we revised the performance.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:
I hope that the entire group will be able to form a bond as a cast. Elizabeth, Tam, and I already have formed a bond, but I never intended for it to create an us vs. them mentality.

Evaluation of the cast's progress:

Tonight we spent time running through the script until all of us had a good understanding of the performance. Kelly, Jace, and Christine were familiar with the production concept before rehearsal, so they understood their position pretty well. I cut the Whities part in half towards the end, so that Elizabeth cuts them off when they speak. Jace says the last line, “Because in America, being White means being dominant...” and Elizabeth stops him and sits him down. Jace read the line more antagonistically than I had anticipated. I meant for him to sound apologetic, but I think the interaction between Elizabeth and Jace works well for the performance. We played with the ending, because Kelly brought up the fact that we should be stronger at the end. If we simply sit down again, we look like we are giving up. She suggests that we should stand up in the center of the space we created and own it. The ending, then, is the three of us coming to the center of the stage and standing together. We are still using our script a little, but I am not worried.

As a director, I remind myself how little directing I actually do. I am proud of the self-directing Tam and Elizabeth do on their own. For example, I noticed tonight that they had little hand gestures they perform behind me sometimes to emphasize certain things I say. As the Whities were watching us from the audience tonight, I noticed them smiling during this part:
Our knees go shakity shake and our windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight.

On their own, they have developed a gesture routine in the back of me as I say these lines to emphasize the ridiculous of the situation. On my own, I would not have thought of this idea—mostly because I am both a director and a performer in the performance. Often, I cannot see the staging of the performance, so I do not know how we look to the audience. As I am standing up front delivering my lines, I often forget that Tam and Elizabeth are behind me. I have to trust Elizabeth and Tam that they know what to do, and I am pleased that they are taking initiative.

Plan for next meeting:

Tomorrow will be our final dress rehearsal before we leave for Georgia, we will need to run-through the entire performance.

Wednesday, February 12 (9-11 p.m.)

Primary Purpose:

We will have a final dress rehearsal before we leave for Georgia tomorrow.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:

Because we meet late at night, my only objective is to keep the cast energetic enough to have a successful rehearsal.

Evaluation of the cast's progress:
As a director who is attempting to get my cast to take ownership of the production, I avoid exerting authority. I consequently find it hard to conduct rehearsals. Everyone shows up in his or her own time and none are prepared to begin rehearsal. Although I know I should begin with a warm-up to prepare them, I fear that they will think the exercise lame. This evening the only thing I can do to gain their attention is to provide an incentive: “The sooner we run through this and get it right, the sooner we can leave.” That seems to be all the motivation we need.

We ran through the performance several times for continuity, tempo, and pacing until we all felt comfortable with the performance. We have our lines almost completely memorized, but sometimes we miss cues and need prompting. I have lived with the script so long and I have heard the performance so many times that I am familiar with everyone’s parts. The Whities sometimes miss their cues, because they are not as involved in the performance since they sit in the audience throughout the production. I am confident they will listen more during the performance. I continue to worry about Tam, because she misses her cues more often than Elizabeth or me. We have smoother transitions between the chorus lines, but I often have to cue Tam to begin speaking. Until this point in rehearsal, I have not been performing my introduction, in part because I do not have it memorized. I use time constraints as a reason for not performing the introduction during rehearsal. The final piece of direction that I gave to Elizabeth and Tam at the final rehearsal is this: Talk to the audience as much as possible. Engage their attention. Keep it conversational.
Unfortunately, such direction is difficult to implement without an audience. Right now we speak to empty chairs and the White people. I observed Tam and Elizabeth trying to speak to the empty chairs, but mostly they speak directly to the White people. I reminded them that during the performance, they must speak to everyone. They told me, almost annoyed, “I know, Melinda.” I am actually more worried about whether they will create enough immediacy with the audience than whether they will have the script memorized.

Plan for next meeting:

When we get to Georgia I need to see the performance space. The precise configuration of the space will dictate how much we will need to re-stage the performance.

Friday, February 14

When we arrive at the university, I immediately walk into the auditorium to see the performance space. The auditorium is small and quaint – perfect for our conversational type of performance. As Amy indicated in her e-mail, the space has a raised stage in the front, with immobile seats in the center, and aisles on each side. I realize that we are going to have to change most of our staging, because we had been practicing with a different space in mind.

The keynote speaker for the festival, Gary Belfonte, discusses the notion of creating a space for your performance, and I smile happily to myself. The presentation provides a perfect connection to our performance, since I begin the performance by trying to create a space for myself in the beginning. No one should be confused when I
push the audience back. I begin re-writing my introduction to include this idea more overtly. I think of adding a line into the introduction as I am pushing them back, “Gary talked about creating space, and that is what I’m going to do. “

Kelly is conducting a workshop on the use of masks in performance. Part of the workshop is to create masks out of magazine clippings. I realize that I can make masks for the three of us to use in the performance. I spend time during the workshop looking through magazines for white female faces. I glue my clippings onto masks to cover our faces. I decide we can use them in the performance, and take them off when we say, “Every mask has slipped.” I am pleased that I have found a way to reincorporate one of my early concepts for the production.

Primary Objective:

We have an opportunity to rehearse in the space before dinner, but only for an hour. We will have a technical rehearsal as we adjust the lighting for the performance in the auditorium. We will also have to re-block the performance in the new space.

Objectives and Goals:

I need to fully rehearse my introduction with the cast, as I have not done so before tonight. Tonight is our only rehearsal in the auditorium so we need to run-through the show with as few stops as possible.

Evaluation of the Cast:

I worked through my introduction with Elizabeth and Tam. As part of my introduction, I must be on stage and look through some fashion magazines. As I was rehearsing this scene, I realized I was performing too dramatically when
Elizabeth and Tam started laughing. I knew I could not work through this problem on my own. We decided that I would begin on the stage and move down into the audience. I would push the audience three rows back, and we would use the three rows as a part of our space. We worked out details, like where Tam, Elizabeth, and the Whities would be seated in the audience, when and how Tam would turn on the lights as she came down to the stage area.

The rehearsal did not go smoothly. Tam, Elizabeth, and I had some arguments while we were running through the performance. Mostly, though, I argued with Elizabeth, and Tam was stuck in the crossfire. I find it extremely difficult to direct Elizabeth in any productive manner. I told her during the rehearsal that she should remember to move more and to move towards the audience. Both of them were very rigid in their movements. I told them that the performance needed to be conversational and that conversational tone needs to be underscored by moving about freely.

“Don’t just stand there,” I told them. “Remember to move.”

Tam made a face and said, “Okay, okay... I’ll try to remember. Don’t make me nervous, Mel.”

Elizabeth gave me an angry look and said, “I know, Enchilada. This is just rehearsal.”

“So rehearse your moves,” I told her.

She gave me what we term “the hand,” which meant to stop talking because she was not listening anymore.
I felt frustrated with Elizabeth because she would not listen to me, but I pushed it aside and moved on with the rehearsal. I had to trust that Elizabeth would know what to do during the performance. Although we argued during the rehearsal, we let it go immediately afterwards. As soon as we walked out of the auditorium, we joked around and talked as usual. I was relieved because I did not want any tension between us as we prepared for the performance.

Plan for next meeting:

Since the majority of our rehearsal time in the auditorium was used to re-block the show, we did not have much time to run-through the show without stops. I believe that we need another rehearsal in the space tomorrow before we perform. We are not going to rehearse again tonight, but we all agreed to wake up early tomorrow morning to practice before the festival begins.

Saturday, February 15—Performance Day

Since our performance is at 9 a.m. this morning, I wake the girls at 6 a.m. so we can be ready to leave by 7:45 and practice at 8 a.m. I try to plan the morning’s schedule carefully, but I know the girls will not wake up until 7 a.m. The only requirement I have for them is to be ready by 7:45, because we need to practice before the festival starts at 9 a.m. We are going to be the second school to perform, but we have to be ready by 9 a.m. so we can watch the first performance. We give ourselves enough time in the morning to fix each other’s hair. Tam straightens my hair with her straightening iron, because she wants me to look good. Apparently, I do not know how to make myself look good. In any case, we all look beautiful, and that excites us.
I had hoped that we could rehearse in the auditorium, so we could practice our blocking. Unfortunately, when we arrive at the campus, we cannot practice in the auditorium. Instead, we have to practice in an empty classroom. Everything seems to be flowing well, and I am not concerned about our performance.

When the festival starts, we watch a performance by another university. They perform on the nature of American identity—another perfect tie-in to our performance.

As I sit in the audience watching the first performance, I start to become nervous about the performance. Once the first performance ends, I know that we will have to begin our performance. I look over and see Elizabeth watching the performance with a calm look on her face, as if she is not concerned that we are to perform next. I look over and see Tam seated next to me. She has her eyes closed and is mouthing something—her lines, maybe? Actually, I am relieved that she is nervous as well; her nervousness validates my own in some way. I grab Tam's hand and squeeze it. “Tam, I'm nervous,” I tell her.

“Shut up, Mel. You're making me nervous,” she tells me. We share a silly moment as we start squeezing each other's hands, and then we start laughing. As a result of our shared silliness, we both seem to be more calm and relaxed.

The performance goes well, considering how nervous Tam and I seemed only moments earlier. Elizabeth skips some parts during her good hair piece. Tam and I look at each other for a second in panic. I am afraid that Tam will freak out. She appears to remain calm, however, and she follows my cue to move on. Together, we play it off beautifully. Tam has a little numbered pattern (1-2-3-2-1-3-2-1-2) to help her remember
the transitions and has written it on her hand. Apparently, her system helped her remember. When Elizabeth misses a part, Tam knows where to continue.

   After the performance, Amy Burt asks us to stay on stage while the audience asks us questions. The audience’s questions and comments indicate that they appreciate the performance. We get a lot of questions about how we developed the performance. I make sure Elizabeth and Tam answer questions as well. I do not want to steal the show. People suggest that we should push them back further and further during the performance. I express my concern that this choice might have disrupted the performance flow. Others suggest that we should keep the minorities in front, and push the Whities to the back.

   An African-American woman in the audience makes a comment on how she considered the performance to be very honest. The questions and comments that follow concerning the honesty and authenticity of the performance are positive in validating our performance choices until I hear a person ask if these are our pieces. I never considered that they would think we wrote these pieces. I explain to the audience about my choice of texts to use in the performance: I chose texts that best represented our own experiences. As I speak, however, I realize that these texts do not resemble my own experiences, and I begin to feel ashamed. I become distracted from this feeling when a young lady in the audience begins a discussion about the good hair piece.

   We feel a real sense of accomplishment as we finished the question and answer period. Later, as we sit in the audience, Tam and Elizabeth say, “Thank God, that’s over.” I ask them, “Wait, you’re going to be in my thesis production, right?”

   Tam looks at me and says, “Mel, I already told you I would.”
I ask Elizabeth and she replies “Yeah.”

I feel relieved.

Monday, February 17

I need to write an abstract for the performance so that I can submit it for consideration as a program in the department's inaugural student research conference. I meet with Jay to work on an abstract. I discuss the option of constructing a performance thesis based on this initial effort. Jay expresses an interest in the project and tells me that my ideas are worth exploring. I discuss my frustration over the limited amount of texts on Latina experiences that resemble my own. He tells me that I definitely have an option of incorporating the first performance into a thesis project that will now include our own experiences.

The plan is to use Robert Scholes’ notion of consumption and production of texts to build our own stories. I plan on using the initial performance as a first part of a larger script. The second part of the script will consist of our own stories—Elizabeth’s, Tam’s, and mine.

Wednesday, February 19

We perform the piece again at a PIGS meeting. We do not rehearse the piece beforehand. Instead, we meet for about an hour before we perform to review the performance. During the performance, everything goes well. Afterwards, we have time for discussion of the performance with the audience. People from the audience, again, ask if these are our stories, and we tell them how different our stories are from the ones we present in the performance.
During the discussion, my friend, Alma, asks me if the performance has helped me find my Hispanic identity. She asks, “Do you feel like you can define what it means to be a Hispanic woman?”

The question is appropriate, even logical, to ask after our performance. I wish I could answer.

Wednesday, March 26

The performance is put on the back burner for a while, since all of us are busy with schoolwork. In conversation, we refer to the thesis performance, but we never really discuss it. I realize today, however, that I need to finish the thesis performance before the end of the semester since Elizabeth and Tam are graduating and moving away. After consulting with Tam and Elizabeth, I set the performance dates for the thesis performance—April 25 and 26 at 8 p.m. We have one month to construct and rehearse a new performance text.

Tam looks at me in anguish, “Mel, how are we going to do this?”

I tell her it will be a piece of cake, because all we have to do is put in our own stories. That shouldn’t be hard, right?

Tam asks me, “Do we have to have rehearsal?”

I feel bad because I know that I am taking up a lot of their precious time. I practically have to bribe them to stay in the performance. Tam laughs, although I know she is stressed. “I’m doing this for you, Mel,” she tells me. I feel extremely guilty.

“He it for yourself,” I tell her. “This is a chance to tell your story.”

She laughs and says, “Whatever. It’s your performance”
“Tam, it’s our performance,” I remind her, but she laughs again. She replies, “Boo,” which means that she does not like what I have just said to her.

Evaluation of our progress:

At this point in our process, Tam and Elizabeth’s only goal for performing the show is to help me. This performance, however, from my perspective, is not simply about me—the performance is about all of us finding and expressing our unique ethnic identities. I do not know how to improve their understanding of the project, but I think I am lucky that they are willing to help me. I hope as the process continues that they will gain a greater understanding of the goal of the project and will be able to call it “our” performance.

Evaluation of my progress:

I do not really have a concrete schedule planned out yet. Part of developing a rehearsal schedule involves assessing Tam’s and Elizabeth’s performance abilities. We already have worked together on the first performance, so I know that they have the ability to perform gracefully under pressure. Additionally, they are advanced performance students, so they have experience in constructing performances grounded in personal experiences. As I proceed, I have to set goals that I think Tam and Elizabeth can meet with their schedules. I have promised them that they will not have to do a great deal of extra work for the next performance.

Ideally, we would spend the next four weeks rehearsing every night. I do not see the need for this type of schedule, however, since we already have done much of the work in completing the first performance for the festival. We do not
have a completed script yet, so we should use the majority of our time constructing the new part of the performance. Since they have previous experience in creating performances based in personal experience, Tam and Elizabeth can develop their own stories. I will try to guide them as much as possible but I want it to be their work. Hopefully, this strategy will encourage them to take ownership of the production.

We will reserve the last two weeks for actual rehearsal time, as Tam and Elizabeth are extremely busy with the coursework. I will continue reading additional texts to add into the performance. I also will write down my own stories to use in the script.

**Friday, March 28**

Kelly informs me that we have a room (Terrill Hall 120) scheduled for the performance. Tam and Elizabeth have to construct a critical performance for Jay’s undergraduate Intertextuality and Performance class. Elizabeth decides to construct a performance around the bell hooks story about good hair. I question Elizabeth about her argument against bell hooks. She tells me that she did not like the message bell hooks was saying about “good hair.” At the end of the piece, bell hooks claims that her nappy hair is good enough, as if hooks is promoting nappy hair. I do not necessarily understand Elizabeth’s argument, but I encouraged her to use bell hooks for her performance. Since the concept is the same for the upcoming thesis performance, I hope we can incorporate some of her performance to help construct our script. I encourage Tam to do the same, since she seems to be struggling to find a text for her performance. Tam likes the idea, but she claims that she already has done too many
Asian performances in the class. She often performs stories about her Vietnamese family. “I don’t want to be known as that Asian girl,” she tells me. While I understand her point, I am disappointed in her decision because I think using her heritage would have helped.

Tuesday, April 1

Goals and Objectives:

My objective for this week is to attain Elizabeth’s and Tam’s full commitment to the performance. Although they made a verbal commitment to complete the thesis performance for me, they have yet to demonstrate any desire or effort to actually construct the performance with me. I have found it extremely difficult to set dates for rehearsal. Right now, I have been extremely casual about scheduling a rehearsal plan. As the director, I feel the need to be accommodating towards Tam and Elizabeth. The best way to meet their needs right now is to not have meetings or rehearsals.

Evaluation of my progress:

I am not doing an effective job as the “official” director of the performance. I feel my only duty at this point is to find a way to jump-start the production. I cannot complete the project without Tam and Elizabeth’s active participation. I try to set meetings with Tam and Elizabeth, but they are both busy working on projects for their classes. When I try to schedule meetings, they generally respond with “maybe,” or “We’ll see.”
Today I plead with Tam to meet me at 9 p.m., and she agrees. She tells me to call her at 8:45 p.m. to remind her. Meanwhile, I meet Elizabeth at the gym and we work out together. As requested, she brought her script for the Intertextuality and Performance class to the gym so I could read it and try to work it into our script. I tell her about the meeting with Tam and she agrees to come after our workout. At around 8:30 p.m., I am driving home from the gym when Tam calls me.

“Mel, you weren’t serious about meeting were you?” she asks me.

“Uh... yeah... I was,” I tell her.

“But I already told some people I would go bowling with them...”

At this point, I am frustrated with Tam, but I do not tell her. As both director and friend to these girls, I feel that I cannot resort to a position of authority without damaging what I hope to accomplish. Right now they have the upper hand because from their perspective, they are doing this great favor for me. Although I let Tam off the hook, I insist she meet me on Thursday morning at 10 a.m.

I call Elizabeth and tell her that the meeting is canceled because of Tam. I spend that night reading the script for Elizabeth’s performance for Jay’s class, and notice she has included another text by Nneka Chukwuelue. Her introduction to the performance says the following:

In my performance, I will be arguing against the concept of beauty by African-American standards. This idea of beauty is fair skin or a light brown coloring and straight hair. This concept of beauty has been so ingrained into Southern black women’s mind that this is the only thing that is beautiful. I have used an essay by bell hooks and a story by Nneka Chukwuelue.
I am not familiar with Chukwuelue’s work, so I call Elizabeth to ask her about it. I am confused because at one point her script says:

“My mother is American and my father is Nigerian.”

I do not know whether those are Chukwuelue’s words or Elizabeth’s. Elizabeth tells me that it is Chukwuelue’s story, which amazingly parallels her own—except for the fact that Chukwuelue has darker skin than Elizabeth. Because of her lighter skin, Elizabeth did not necessarily face the same types of hardships that Chukwuelue discusses.

Elizabeth’s script raises new issues about skin color. Her script references “the brown paper bag test” and the “ruler test.” These tests are prime examples of African-American standards for beauty.

Elizabeth and I spend time discussing the whole mentality of light is right. We both have a lot to say about the matter, because we both have suffered from this mentality, although, of course, in different ways.

Reading Elizabeth’s script makes me realize that our script must change. The original plan, to perform the first script and then add a second part, must change. We have more texts and issues to include in our performance. Also, I do not want to leave our perspectives till the last part of the performance. Our perspectives should be embedded throughout the entire script. Now, I think we will have to re-construct the entire script to include these new texts and issues, as well as our own perspectives.

Wednesday, April 2

I meet with Jay at 10 a.m. to discuss the thesis performance. While talking to him, I realize that our scheduled performance space will make it hard to perform the
same type of introduction. Our performance space is a relatively small lecture room with fixed tables and chairs. The tables will make it extremely difficult to push my audience back and create space the way I had in the Georgia performance. I also face the possibility that room will be filled to capacity, making it impossible to create additional space. He suggests that I try to find another space - a space without fixed seating. I ask around about possible rooms, but space is limited. Finally, Dr. K. Taylor suggests that I ask a theater student to try to reserve the Black Box theatre, a small and intimate room that would be perfect for our performance. We frequently tell the story of how a former graduate student, Amanda Gross, was able to use this room for her performance. Using space in the Theatre department is a dream that is almost never realized. Amanda’s success has become mythical within the department. I am excited about the possibility that we may be able to use the room. If we can use the Black Box Theatre, our performance staging can change completely. One possibility would be to push the audience entirely back to the walls, creating an awkward space for them - much like the marginal spaces minorities often are forced to occupy in society. The new possibilities reinforce my determination to revise the original performance script completely.

Thursday, April 3

This morning I have a scheduled meeting with Tam at 10 a.m. I fear Tam is developing a pattern of canceling rehearsals. Tam needs a wake-up call at 9:30 a.m. and I call her to ensure her attendance at the meeting.

Primary Objective:
My primary objective is to obtain Tam's stories, so I can finish compiling all our stories and finish the script.

Evaluation of Tam’s progress:

Tam is having a difficult time committing to the performance. She does not seem to understand the basic premise of the performance. Unlike Elizabeth, she did not develop a critical performance on the topic of Asian-American standards of beauty or identity. I feel the need to explain to her the process of building a good argument against certain texts. Weeks ago I asked her if she knew of any texts by Asian-Americans or about Asian-American identity, like bell hooks’ discussion of black women. I asked her if she could identify the bell hooks for Asian women. She did not know, so I did research for her. I found a number of texts by Asian-American women: Maxine Hong Kingston, Roxana Ng, Trinh Minh-ha, and Evelyn Lau. I wanted texts that described the Asian-American female experience.

I made several copies of the texts, and I asked Tam to read them and write down some comments about the pieces. I encouraged her to include other literature from Asian-American women, if she knew of any. I used Elizabeth’s inclusion of Chukwuelue as an example. She made a face and said, “More work, Mel?” I was not asking her to write an essay. I only wanted her to write down her thoughts and reactions. “Don’t worry about structure,” I told her. “I just need to know your thoughts so I can start building a script.” She was giving me a look that indicated she did not understand completely. I sat down with her and went
through some of the stories. For example, in our original performance, Tam performed a poem by Nellie Wong that started with these thoughts:

I know now that once I longed to be White...

I asked Tam whether that was her experience—whether she ever felt a “light is right” mentality. Tam had some thoughts on the issue, and I told her to write them down. She seemed to understand, so I asked her to give me those notes on Friday. She said she would do her best.

Plan for next meeting:

I have to make sure Tam remembers to write down her notes for the script. She is busy and does not seem willing to complete the work. I am worried that she will not do it.

Friday, April 4

By Friday, I know Tam has forgotten the script notes. I do not pressure her about them. We run into one another at school this morning and decide to go to lunch. As I get into Tam’s car, I see the stories I have given her days before, and ask about them. She says, “Oh, yeah, I forgot about them.”

I do not think Tam does this on purpose – to spite me. She genuinely wants to help me, I know. She simply does not want to do the work. I realize Tam will not write her parts of the script on her own, so I beg her to meet me again on Sunday night and she agrees.

I am busy working on my own stories, while I wait for Tam’s stories. Right now, I almost wish I could simply focus on my own. If I had that luxury and freedom, I would be
finished already. I do want Tam and Elizabeth’s participation, however. I am going to have to do my best to try and make this performance as painless as possible for the both of them. Tam frequently talks about her life and about issues that would be appropriate for the script, but for some reason she has a hard time putting her stories down on paper. Therefore, I will have to sit down and go through the script with her and try to get her stories into the script. We will have to work together to write her own words into the script.

I will be lucky if Tam remembers to show up on Sunday. My best option is to call her all weekend and remind her, but I do not want to make her mad. I will definitely call her on Sunday and remind her. Once I get her to devote some time for the rehearsal, I am going to try and obtain some of her stories and re-write the script for her.

Sunday, April 6

Primary Objective:

I must re-write the script with Tam.

Objectives and Goals:

At the beginning of our meeting, Tam indicates that she is stressed about her course load. She tells me that Elizabeth and she have talked about quitting the performance. “You don’t really need us, do you, Mel?” she asks.

I want to tear up and cry when she tells me. “Tam, without Elizabeth and you, there is no performance,” I respond.

She says, “I know, I know, we talked about that too.”
I do not know how to handle this piece of information. The very thought of Elizabeth and her sitting down and talking about quitting the performance makes me very sad. I did not want to cause them any further stress.

Tam sees my stricken face and says, “Don’t worry about it. I made a promise to you, so I’m going to keep it. But remember, Mel, I am doing this all for you.”

I try to tell her, again, that this is our performance, but it is little comfort for either of us. I do not know whether to feel concerned about how close I came to losing them or relieved and grateful that they would not quit on me because they do not want to hurt me. I want the two of them to feel like this is our performance, instead they feel like it is simply an obligation to me. I do not mean to put any additional stress on the two of them, yet I already know I have been. Formal rehearsals have not even begun yet. I began to feel extreme pressure to put this performance on all on my own.

**Evaluation of our progress:**

I decided to not waste any of her time and I immediately tried to go over the script with her. When we got through the first page, I noticed we were making slow progress. Tam said a lot of interesting things like, “I hate when people ask me where I’m from.” She said so many interesting things I could not write them down fast enough. I decided to interview her and tape-record her stories. At the beginning of the interview, Tam seemed a little wary of talking about herself - maybe because of the presence of the tape-recorder. When we have casual conversations, Tam freely shares her experiences with me. I think the tape-recorder made her worry that I would start analyzing her. At one point during the
interview, for example, she talked about her strict father. Suddenly, she stopped and said to me, “It’s like you’re a therapist with that recorder thing…”

I tried to make her as comfortable as possible. I realized that the interview seemed too formal and she is used to talking with me very informally. We kept the interview very conversational, using informal language and grammar. After our interview, she felt a little better about the performance. I explained to her a little more about the production concept, and she seemed excited, but no less stressed. I spend all night transcribing Tam’s interview. Later, I read the transcript and realize that I can use a lot of the interview to start revising the script.

Plan for next meeting:

I made no formal plans to meet with Tam until I could transcribe the tape and read through her interview. I know that I will see Tam at school, and I know I always can call her to discuss the performance. Having Tam and Elizabeth as friends has its advantages; I know I can always reach them.

Monday, April 7

I plan to revise the script using Tam’s interview and Elizabeth’s script. Elizabeth has given me a copy of Nneka Chukwuelue’s essay, “The Chocolate Trial,” so that I can have a better understand her script. I plan on reading the essay and finding a way to incorporate it into the script.

I spend most of the day editing the original script and deciding which parts to keep or toss. I decide that we will keep Holmes’ poem, “Failure of an Invention,” as a base text, so the primary structure of the performance will be the same. The rest of
the performance riffs on various parts of the poem. I am not sure we will keep the
same beginning. I decide to throw out most of the White people parts, except for the
very beginning. As I am writing the script, I start incorporating a lot of pieces from
our conversations. I include our first conversation at Petit Jean, when we discussed
our names. The script thus far maintains a conversational tone among the three of
us, as if we are simply sharing our experiences with one another. I am finding a
steady flow in writing the script, and suddenly I stop. At one point, I include a part of
Elizabeth’s script that says: “On many occasions, I have been called ‘smut’, ‘black’,
‘charcoal,’ and have heard every ‘Yo mama so black’ joke I could recite them in my
sleep.”

As I write this part into the script, I feel a natural need to continue her thought,
and ask about the jokes. I think, Elizabeth can tell some “Yo mama so Black” jokes, I
can include some typical Mexican jokes, and Tam can chime in with some Asian jokes.
The section can reflect the use of ethnic or marginal humor, especially our own use of
marginal humor among the three of us. I start to write the section down in the script, and
then I stop because I am worried that I might offend Tam or Elizabeth. I do not know if
Elizabeth will feel comfortable including “Yo mama so Black” jokes. I do not know how
these jokes are or have been used around her culture. Would they be offensive if Tam
and I told them?

When I see Elizabeth, I ask her about the jokes. She tells me that they use the
jokes around each other all the time, and it does not bother her. She thinks it is a cool
idea to include them in the script. I also ask Tam if she would be offended, and she
does not seem to care. She does not know any good Asian jokes, so I think of including
the one I always heard growing up. I show her the joke, and she says “Ha, Ha...” I include that moment in the script, too.

Anytime Elizabeth sees me, she asks, “So where’s my script?” I know I should have a full script already, but I feel like the script is still developing. The script thus far is five pages and I feel like I am only a third of the way through. We have much more to discuss and include in the script. I find it extremely difficult to decide what to include because we cannot possibly include everything. I decide to show the developing script to the girls, and see if they approve of my progress so far.

Tuesday, April 8

I see Tam at school and ask her to read the 5-page script. She takes the script and walks away, saying she will get back to me. She looks busy, so I suspect that I will not see her until tomorrow. Twenty minutes later, Tam comes back with the script.

“Mel, the script is all wrong,” she tells me.

She starts complaining about the changes in the script. She points to the last four pages of the script and says, “What is all this? This was not in the first performance.”

I explain to her that I feel like the script has to change almost completely because we have to add our own experiences. She does not seem to understand and says, “This is just more work for me.”

I try to comfort her and tell her that this will only make the performance better, but it is little comfort to her. She says, “Boo” to me. I realize that Tam still has the wrong goal in mind: to just get the thing done with so I will get off her back.
Just when I think all hope is lost, Tam says to me, “Well, you got my part all wrong.” She explains to me that I misquoted her in one part of the script. Even though I tell her that I got that part directly from her interview—word for word—she tells me that I misinterpreted her words. I explain that is why I need her to write this in her own words. She is silent, while she looks over the script again. She looks up and says, “Okay, let’s talk about this.” We go to lunch, and discuss the script. Together we are able to revise other parts. I think Tam is beginning to understand the performance somewhat, but she continues to express some confusion. At one point during our lunch, we almost had an argument over a piece of dialogue in the script.

I decide to have us introduce ourselves by saying our names and starting a dialogue about our name—much like the very same conversation we had at Petit Jean. Tam thinks her part is great. She gets to say, “My name is not Tim or Tom.” She even adds in some other names she has been called by mistake. She does not like, however, that Elizabeth gets to talk about how no one can pronounce her last name, Okigbo, correctly.

“It’s not the same thing as my name,” Tam tells me. She did not honestly like that I was comparing Elizabeth’s problem to her own. I tried to argue with her that it is the same thing, and the script only reflects the real conversation we had about names months before. We argue back and forth on the issue, and she finally says, “Do whatever, Mel. It’s your performance.”

I am concerned that Tam does not understand the name issue, but I think the argument shows that she is starting to care a little more about the performance. Her closing comment in the argument indicates, however, that she still thinks of it as an
obligation. Elizabeth may be thinking the same way, but at least she makes a greater
effort to help me. She asks for the script almost daily so that she can help me move the
process along. Tam, on the other hand, does not ask for the script or about my
progress. Whenever I give her a script, she gives me a look as if to say, “Oh, you’re still
going through with this?”

Nevertheless, I feel like I am making more progress with Tam with each passing
day. One of my new goals has become to help Tam understand and become more
excited about the upcoming performance. Ultimately, I think I need to help both of them
to understand.

While working with Tam on the script, I realize that I need more stories from
Elizabeth. I think one of the reasons I cannot finish the script is because I do not have
enough of Elizabeth’s stories. I call her and make an appointment to see her on
Thursday afternoon. I think I will tape-record her interview, just as I did with Tam.

I met with a Theatre student today to try to reserve the Black Box Theatre. I am
not successful. My plans for the introduction are going to have to change. I think at this
point, I will not be able to create my space as I did in the first performance by pushing
people towards the back. I will have to come up with a different idea, because I still want
to play with the notion of space in some way.

Thursday, April 9

Because I need to obtain more stories from Elizabeth, I plan to tape-record an
interview with her today. I still maintain the goal of helping Elizabeth and Tam
understand the performance text better. Since Elizabeth shows more interest in the
performance, I believe she will reach this goal sooner. She does not seem to have a problem talking about herself or her heritage.

We spend an hour discussing Elizabeth’s “Black” experience. I ask her to expand on some of the things she had already mentioned to me in casual conversation, such as being called an “oreo.” We spend the majority of the interview discussing new issues she raised in her script, such as the “brown paper bag test.” Elizabeth’s experiences reflect some of my own. For example, we both faced problems with skin color. As she tells me of how she used to cover herself up during the summer, I am reminded of how I used to do the same thing when I was younger. The interview turns into a conversation between the two us as we shared our stories.

I think Elizabeth understands more about the goal of performance, or maybe she helps me understand it more. I certainly realized additional things about my own experiences while talking to her. I am not on schedule. I thought I would have a complete script by now. I am revising my plans and goals constantly because I am finding it difficult to finish the script. My first priority is to finish the script. I plan to have a complete draft of the script by Monday, so that I can show it to Tam and Elizabeth for revision. I ask both of them to meet me on Monday. We will work out a concrete schedule later.

Friday, April 11

The three of us are together for Honors Day – we are all being honored by the department. As we sit around talking to one another, Elizabeth asks about the performance. Actually, she asks when rehearsals will begin. I roll my eyes because she
already has forgotten that we set a date to meet on Monday night. Elizabeth asks how often we will be having rehearsal. Just when I have lost hope that these girls will ever care about the performance, Tam replies to Elizabeth, “Probably every day since the performance is in two weeks…”

The comment may have seemed insignificant to the two of them. To me, Tam indicates that she remembers the performance date, and that she is aware of the rehearsal time involved. I feel that the comment is a huge step towards our goals.

Monday, April 14

Primary Objective:

As tonight will be the first official rehearsal for the performance, we need to have a read-through of the script.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:

I spent all last night and all today trying to complete the script for tonight, so Tam and Elizabeth have not read the whole thing. My goal is to get their input on the script and the performance. Hopefully, we can spend tonight revising the script.

Evaluation of the cast’s progress:

Both Tam and Elizabeth show up late to rehearsal and with bad attitudes. Apparently, tonight is not a good time to rehearse, because both of them have had a long, hard day. They walk in and say, “So what do we have to do? How long is this going to take?”
On any other day, I would have felt comfortable enough to tell them to cut the attitude out. Their stress is genuine, though, and I do not need to add to it. The last thing I need at this point is for them to quit. I realize that my rehearsal plans might have to change a little. I need for them to be in a good mood while we are going through the script because I desperately need their creative input. I promise to make this up to them somehow, and I promise to buy them drinks after practice. The sooner we get done with rehearsal, I told them, the sooner we can go drinking. After that promise, they were truly committed to the rehearsal.

I gave them the script, and we read the script out loud together. I explained that the script is not finalized, but that it should give them the basic concept of the performance. I encouraged them to re-write their parts if they wanted. Nevertheless, we had a very productive rehearsal, and in the end, Tam and Elizabeth said that I did not need to take them out for drinks. I insisted on treating them, though, because I was proud of their hard work and it was the best way I could think of to show them my gratitude.

Evaluation of the director's progress:

I have been at my utmost to develop the performance script. I do not have an introduction yet, nor have I settled on an appropriate ending. I have been concentrating so much on nurturing Tam and Elizabeth’s participation in the process that I have not worked much on my part. I have been pushing that aside, and I probably will keep doing so until I see that Tam and Elizabeth completely understand. At this stage of the process, all I can do for them is to keep
encouraging their active participation. We seem to be progressing because we have a script. Hopefully, we can keep up the good work.

Plan for next meeting:

   Tam and Elizabeth said they would go home and work on making corrections on the script. We will meet tomorrow afternoon, so we can continue revising the script.

Tuesday, April 15

Primary Objective:

   We will continue revising the script. We probably will spend the time reading through the script and, perhaps, develop some blocking.

Evaluation of the cast’s progress:

   I deliberately set low goals for Tam and Elizabeth. Their attendance at rehearsal is half the battle. Elizabeth walked into the rehearsal with a few revisions, but she was still working on some as rehearsal began. When Tam saw Elizabeth making some revisions, she said, “Oh yeah, I forgot to do that.” I did not say anything, but I gave her some time to make revisions before we began. I developed an ending for the performance, although I am not sure if I am satisfied with it. As in the first performance, we end with the last few lines of the poem:

      No matter what we’ve tried
      Your soul America
      I’ve never been able to bear.
We spent the majority of our time reading through the script after we revised the entire thing.

Since parts of the old script still remain, we have to work through those parts that once involved the White people. For example, during the “I hate Meskins” part, the White people usually said:

I hate Meskins
You’re a Meskin
Why don’t you go back to where you came from?

I decide that this part would be just as effective if Tam and Elizabeth say it to me. We work through the part and decide that this works just as well, if not better.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

My primary duty as the director of the show has evolved into adapting the rehearsal plan to accommodate Tam and Elizabeth’s needs. Today I had to adapt the performance plan. Apparently they are overwhelmed with the idea of performing on both Friday and Saturday. Jay advised me to have two performance days—that is usually how it is done. Tam really does not want to perform twice, and Elizabeth does not want to take off from work for two days. They still talk about canceling the show, but that is not an option anymore. I have done too much work to cancel the show. I finally made a deal with them – if they perform with me on Friday, we do not have to do it again on Saturday. They feel much better about that plan.
We scheduled a meeting for Wednesday. I told them if that rehearsal goes well, we will not have to meet officially on Thursday or Friday. This weekend is Easter, so we will not see each other again until Monday.

Plan for next meeting:

As the script seems almost finished, we need to start blocking.

Wednesday, April 16

I ask Jay for some advice on the ending and he suggests that we keep the ending open to the audience. We can finish our stories and I can open up discussion by saying, “Now that we’ve shared our stories, maybe you can share yours.” Hopefully, that will generate some discussion.

Primary Objective:

Since we are not scheduled to meet again until Monday, we need to develop blocking for the script.

Evaluation of our progress:

Our work over the last couple of days seems to have a clearer understanding of the performance. We can run through the script steadily. Tonight we performed a run through of the script, and work through blocking for the entire script. As we ran through the show, we worked on tempo and pacing. I was extremely proud of our progress. We divided the script into scenes and give the scenes names like “Entrance,” “I hate Meskins,” “Racial jokes,” “Good hair.” We took the time to work on some scenes that needed in-depth work. For
example, the racial jokes scene did not seem to be flowing well. We had to work on our timing.

We also discussed how this scene should end. I was not quite sure how to continue on with the script. Elizabeth suggested that we just stop laughing and move on. We played with her idea. Midway through our rehearsal, I became worried about how this scene might look to the audience. As both the director and a performer in the script, I face the same problems I had in the first version of the performance— I did not know how the scenes looked to the audience. We were practicing in the Communication Apprehension Lab, a small quiet space. I realized that two of my fellow grad students were next door, so I asked them to come in and watch our joke scene. We went through the scene a couple of times with them, and they gave us positive feedback. Their feedback was helpful, since I could not tell how that scene might be interpreted. I was afraid of offending the audience. They confirmed that the scene was humorous and stated that they believed it was important to include it in the script.

Evaluation of the director's progress:

This rehearsal was a positive experience for all of us. We seemed to bond with the animating idea of the performance. Tam and Elizabeth still could use a change in attitude, but they are beginning to understand the goals of the performance. They constantly are thinking of ways to revise their parts. I continue to encourage this behavior because I know that they are thinking of ways to strengthen their performances – which means they care.

Plan for next meeting:
We agreed to take Easter weekend off, but I made them promise me to commit to the performance next week.

Thursday, April 17

As part of my rehearsal plan, I must spend some time developing the program and flyers for the performance. I make plans to meet with Kelly to develop the fliers. I realize that in order to make fliers, I need a title for the performance, and I do not have one yet. I talk with Juandalynn in the morning and she suggests that I keep the name playful and fun. Her suggestion for the title is to use our nicknames for each other. Together we develop the title: “Enchilada, Fried Chicken, and Eggroll: Performing Culture, Performing Me.”

While we are making the flyer, Kelly suggests that we use a picture of the three of us as a background. Although I do not have an official meeting scheduled with Tam and Elizabeth, I call the both of them to meet me, so we can take a quick snapshot of the three of us. When I finish the fliers, I show them to Tam and Elizabeth hoping that the fliers will make them excited about the performance. Elizabeth seems excited and tells me that she has already invited most of her friends. Tam, on the other hand, seems more nervous when she sees the flyers.

Later that day, I show the script to Juandalynn. She reads the script in her office and Elizabeth stops by to chat. Juandalynn tells us the script is good, but it needs a stronger ending. We talk about how we have struggled with the identities placed on us by White people and by our own people, but there is no part where we take ownership of our identities. She tries to explain to me that we are missing a third part. She tries to
explain more thoroughly, but I do not understand. She says that I can leave the script the way it is because of time constraints, but I should understand that it is missing a part.

I go home that day confused and stressed. I do not know if Tam and Elizabeth are up for changing the script this late in the game. However much I want the performance to be good, I do not know if it is possible now given that the script is missing some factor I do not even understand.

Friday, April 18

I go to school and talk to Jay about the script and he confirms what Juandalynn has said. We need to build a third space in the performance. Tam has gone home for the day, so she does not know about the change. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was with me yesterday and has heard the whole thing already. I find her at school and we go to talk to Juandalynn about the script. Juandalynn basically gives us more ideas on how to re-write the script. We do not need to re-write the whole performance, but we basically need to re-write the end. She suggests we expand on the notion set forth by Chukwuelue of being put on a metaphoric trial for your identity. She begins her essay by saying:

Imagine being put on a trial in court and told you were guilty of a crime you had committed before you even came from your mother’s womb. Add a twist to the vision and imagine the people who were prosecuting you were your boyfriend/girlfriend, family, friends and associates.
Since essentially the three of us are on trial for claiming an identity, we can play with the notion of standing before a jury of our two different cultures. The ending should include a section where we develop a verdict: we are guilty of being part of both cultures, but we are not ashamed. I talk to Elizabeth and she says that she is willing to work on this change with me. We call Tam and tell her the news. She does not understand, and I cannot explain it to her really because I realize that I do not fully understand myself. I tell Tam to not worry about it right now. We will meet on Monday, as planned and I will think of something then. I cannot imagine how much this need for change will affect our rehearsal schedule for next week. Basically, I am planning on having a long week until the performance.

Saturday, April 19

I see Elizabeth at the gym on Saturday morning. As we are walking to our cars after our workout, she tells me that she has been thinking about what Juandalynn was telling us on Friday. She told me that she went home and did some work on the ending of the script. I am pleasantly surprised that Elizabeth has done this for me on a Friday night. I did not even ask her to work on the script for me; she took the initiative. Finally, I am getting through to Elizabeth - she is beginning to think of the performance as our project and not just mine.

Sunday, April 20

Elizabeth has made some revisions, but I still did not know what to do about the script. I am still confused about how to re-write the ending. Today is Easter Sunday, and Juandalynn has invited me over to her house to have brunch. At brunch, she shows me a tape of Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry, a series on HBO that showcases
poetry performances by a cast consisting primarily of minorities. Usually, the poetry deals with social issues, including the ethnic experience. Juandalynn thought of the tape because she envisioned my performance as similar to those on the show. She showed me a performance by Vanessa Hidary entitled, “Hebrew Mamita.” In the performance, Vanessa discusses her experience as a Jewish woman and explores how she constantly battles against images based on stereotypes of Jewish women. She begins with a story of how she met a man at a bar and revealed to him that she is Jewish.

“You’re Jewish?” he asks her in disbelief. “You don’t look Jewish. You don’t act Jewish.”

She says, “The way he said that made it seem like it was a compliment – that I don’t look like my people. Well, you know what I told that man? I said, I told him...”

And while everyone else watching the video with me expected her to say that she got angry at him, I knew that she was going to say that she said nothing to him. I watched the performance in awe because she might have well been telling my own story. I thought of all the times I have been in the same situation and I said nothing, sometimes because I did take it as a compliment.

At the end of the performance, Vanessa reclaims her Jewish identity. She asks, “What is a Jewish person supposed to look like?” She declares that she is speaking for everyone who has been told that they do not look like their people. “Impossible,” she tells us. “Because you are your people. You just tell them that they don’t look – period.”

The performance gives me chills as I watch. Juandalynn tells me that the performance is exactly what she is looking for in my own. Suddenly, I understand exactly what she means.
Juandalynn acknowledges that it may be too late to add this into my performance. After all, we perform on Friday. I am inspired by Vanessa’s performance. I do not want an average performance; I want a performance that gives people chills just as Vanessa’s did with me.

I ask to borrow the tape. I go home and watch the tape over and over. I re-write the introduction of the performance—at least part of it. Vanessa’s performance inspired me to talk about my own experience with comments like “You do not look Hispanic to me.” When I say nothing, I am not only disappointing myself but other Hispanics as well. The introduction will be about the process of reading different Latina literature and not finding my story there. I spend the rest of the night revising my parts of the script.

I do not know how this will affect our rehearsal plan. By now, we should be performing run-throughs of the script. Instead, if we go through with the plan to re-write the ending, we will have Monday to re-write and only three days to rehearse. My new goal is to persuade Tam and Elizabeth to get on board with me on this revision. I know Elizabeth is willing, but I am not sure about Tam.

Monday, April 21

I talked to Tam earlier in the day and told her about the re-writes. She only seems stressed about the situation. I tell her that I will help her out as much as possible.

She says to me, “It’s your thesis. I’ll do whatever you tell me.”

At this point, I do not have time to argue with Tam. She is at least willing to re-write the ending with me, and I will take whatever effort I can get from her.
Objective:

I read Juandalynn the introduction I wrote last night and she said it is good. I am relieved that finally I grasp the concept of creating a third space for our performance. I feel much more excited and stressed about the performance, because the performance is in four days. I will spend the time I have tonight with Elizabeth and Tam to include the third space into the script.

Evaluation of the cast's progress:

As a way to mentally prepare for tonight’s rewriting session, I have decided to show the girls the Def Poetry video to help them see my vision. As I pull them around the T.V., they start making jokes and I think that this might be a mistake. If they do not see the performance as inspiring as I found it to be, then I might never be able to reach them.

Elizabeth was familiar with Def Poetry, because she loves Russell Simmons, the creator. Tam was not familiar with the program.

After I showed them the performance, I turned around to check Tam’s and Elizabeth’s reactions. They both smiled at me and told me how they loved her. “She makes me want to cry,” Tam told me, and I knew that she sincerely meant what she said. I was extremely glad that she was moved by the performance.

I explained to them that I want our performance to be the same way. We should all want our performance to make people cry.

They seemed to understand and we started working on the script together.

For the first time since January, when we started this process, I felt like we were truly working effectively together. As we sat down to work on the script, I
read my introduction to the girls. I was nervous anticipating their reactions. After I
read the introduction to them, I looked up and saw smiles on their faces.

Elizabeth said, “Wow, I know how that feels…”

Tam nodded in agreement, “Yeah, I’ve been through that…”

We talk about it for a while before we get back to the script.

We went through the script and which parts needed to be cut or revised.

Elizabeth had a clear understanding of how her part needs to be revised. Tam
was beginning to understand a little more, but I still felt the need to direct her in
making changes. I told her, for example, “Here’s where you’re going to tell me
how proud you are to be a Vietnamese woman…” or “I want you to tell me at this
point in the script, in your own words, how it felt when you…” I felt like I was
writing her parts for her. All she had to do was fill in the blanks. Being Asian
means ____ and ______.

At the end of the session, it was evident that we all had a lot of revisions to
complete.

Tonight, I made a huge leap in helping Tam and Elizabeth to understand
the purpose of the performance. I did not ask them to go home and re-write their
parts. Elizabeth suggested it because she needed more time, and I believed her.
I did not know what to expect from Tam. I knew she was busy tonight writing an
essay for one of her classes. I decided I would just be satisfied if she had
completed even minor revisions by tomorrow. I spent the night working on my
own revisions. I continued my work in constructing an introduction, but I had very
few ideas to work with.
Plan for next meeting:

Elizabeth and Tam promised to e-mail me their revised script by tomorrow morning so that I could put it all together. If all goes well, we should have a completed script by tomorrow. Then, maybe we can read-through the script and develop blocking.

I developed the following rehearsal plan to help structure our progress. On Tuesday we will work alone and finish the script. On Wednesday, we will work in the performance space – Terrill Hall 120 or 121 – whichever space is available. I have asked Kelly and Juandalynn to come to Wednesday’s rehearsal and help us out. On Thursday, we have our final “dress” rehearsal with Jay and Kelly.

At 1 a.m., I am still working on my revisions. I receive a call from Tam. Since it is 1 a.m., I am expecting the worst. Instead, Tam asks me a question about the script.

“Listen to me,” she tells me. “It’s 1 a.m., I have a paper due tomorrow, and I am working on your stuff. You got me thinking about this at home now…”

I am tired and cranky, so Tam’s tone of voice sounds sneering to me. I tell her, “Oh, cry me a river, Tam. We all have work to do…”

We continued to exchange rude comments with one another for a few minutes. Then, Tam says, “Whatever, Mel. Can I talk to you now?”

I stop to listen to her. Tam wants to change a part where she is discussing her light skin. Originally, in the script, she is just rambling about her skin color and her nose. Instead, she wants to discuss how too many people – the white girls, the Asian girls, her family – all expect her to cater to their expectations. “It’s like I was a rubber band being stretched from both sides,” Tam says. “Can I say that in the show?”
I was silent. Maybe I was in shock. I exclaimed, “Yes, Tam. That’s exactly what I wanted!” Her idea gives me an idea about how to continue that thought and we spent some time changing parts of the script together over the phone. After we work on the script for a while, Tam says, “All right then, I’ll work on this some more.” She promises to give me her revisions tomorrow, and I do not even question her promise. I believe she will do the work. After I hang up, I continue to work on the script. Suddenly, I stop to think about what just happened with Tam. “Wow,” I say to myself. I consider the moment a true breakthrough. Tam is thinking of the performance on her own time; maybe she is thinking of the performance as her own. I am certain we are going to be okay.

Tuesday, April 22

Primary Objective:

We meet with Kelly tomorrow to rehearse for her, so we must complete the script by the end of tonight. We also have to develop blocking for the rest of the show.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:

My main goal is to maintain our positive energy as we work toward the performance. We are under extreme pressure, and we need to keep focused.

Evaluation of our progress:

Tonight we gelled as a cast as we put together our final script. Luckily the girls sent me their revisions earlier today. I am relieved. I spent all day reading their revisions and compiling the script. I showed the revised script to the girls, and they spent some time reading through the script and questioning my editing
choices. The girls have a lot to say about themselves. Last night really helped motivate them; overnight they had written a lot of text. In putting together the script, I have had to edit their parts for time’s sake. The justification I offered them was simple: Did they really want to memorize more lines? They agreed with my decision. We spent an hour revising the script together. When we finished we read the script out loud. The last part of the revised script reads, “What you see is what you get and if you don’t see me, then you just don’t get it.” We all decided to read that part together. Once we finished, we smiled and exclaimed out loud, “Hallelujah!”

We got up spontaneously and started doing the old ethnic dances we developed from the first performance. We all seemed to feel a sense of accomplishment. When we finished our celebration, Tam sat down and looked at the script.

“This is good,” she said. Her tone of voice sounded sarcastic to me so I gave her a sardonic remark, “Shut-up.”

I got up from my seat, and she grabbed my arm. “No, Mel,” she said seriously. “This is a really good thing we’re doing here.” I smiled at her; I realized she had finally used the word “we.”

I was so happy that I hugged her. “It’s our performance,” I told her.

“I know,” she said.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

Tonight, I felt like I shed the role of director. We worked together on blocking the script, and both Tam and Elizabeth have good suggestions. For
example, Tam suggested blocking for my story about the first time I heard the word Mexican in first grade. In the story I describe how a school-mate came up to me and asked, “Are you Mexican?” Tam suggested that she play the role of Judy. For some reason, moments like this one make me want to tear up, because they are real breakthroughs; Tam and Elizabeth are expressing a genuine desire for the success of the performance. They are finally showing commitment to the performance; they are beginning to think of the show as our performance, and not just mine alone.

Plan for next meeting:

Tomorrow we will work in the performance space with Kelly, so we have to be prepared. We agreed to go home and work on our memorization of the script, so we can have a full run-through of the script with as few stops as possible.

Wednesday, April 23

Warm-Up:

Casual conversation has become our normal method for warming up for rehearsal. The conversations generally last from fifteen to twenty minutes. I encourage conversation, because it helps us relax and feel comfortable. Additionally, since the performance flows like conversation among the three of us, the activity prepares us for the performance.

Primary Objective:

Today is our first and only opportunity for a dress rehearsal in the actual performance space. We probably will spend time revising our blocking as we
become accustomed to the space. Also, Kelly and Juandalynn will attend the rehearsal, and will give us some comments about the performance. I advise the cast that it will be a long night.

Evaluation of the cast's progress:

In the afternoon, Elizabeth came by my office and rehearsed lines with me. They are all under intense pressure right now to memorize the script. Even as Elizabeth practiced with me, she was revising her script. I am not worried about Elizabeth having problems with memorization. She works best under pressure, like me. She used a lot of improvisational lines when we went through the script. Tam, on the other hand, does not work so well under pressure. I encouraged her to make as few corrections to the script as possible because I knew she needed time to memorize her lines. She does not perform improvise as well as Elizabeth, so everything must be scripted.

Tam and Elizabeth are more committed to the performance than ever before. When I told them that Kelly is going to watch the rehearsal today, they suggested that rehearsal begin early so we can practice before she comes.

We used Terrill Hall 121, the room next to our actual performance room. The room is basically the same, so we were able to practice effectively using the space. I noticed just how much the performance space changed our blocking. We had plans for creating immediacy with the audience, but the room made this task somewhat difficult. We had to move around much more than we were used to doing. Kelly was helpful in structuring our movement. We had a tendency to zigzag around each other. Kelly suggested a few blocked moves for certain
parts of the performance. For example, we should always be up front when the
three of us are speaking to each other. We can stand next to each other, instead
of walking around each other.

The revised script still includes the use of a white person. However, the
white person has only one line now at the beginning of the performance
immediately after Tam gets up from the audience. She tries to make a comment
about being white, but Tam quiets her and sits her down. Christine has told me
that she no longer wants to play the white person, so I ask my friend, Rebecca,
to say the line. Rebecca decided to come to rehearsal tonight to practice with
Tam. She stayed and watched the rest of rehearsal. Juandalynn also came to the
rehearsal to observe. Together, the three of them, functioned as our audience,
and helped us to get used to the presence of others in the room. We were
comfortable performing with each other, but we found it uncomfortable to perform
in front of others. I was aware of my level of discomfort and I only suspected that
Tam and Elizabeth were uncomfortable because they did not seem as lively as
they usually were when we were alone.

The audience’s presence was helpful, nevertheless, because they allowed
us to adjust to possible reactions from an audience. For example, the audience
seemed confused about our use of the papers scattered about the room.
Elizabeth, Tam, and I were supposed to pick up the papers whenever one of us
read a piece of literature, such as bell hooks’ “good hair” piece. We did not make
clear distinctions between other people’s stories and our own stories. Kelly
suggested that we use a stool to sit on whenever one of us read published texts to help clarify the difference to the audience.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

As the director, I am limited in my ability to set goals and objectives for the cast. Tam and Elizabeth come to rehearsal with their own agendas and goals; for example, we need to finish by 11 p.m. because one of them has to call her boyfriend or work on a paper. At first, I accommodated their goals. If one of them said she had to leave by 11 p.m., then I had to let her go even if we had not achieved my objectives. Now, we work together to accommodate each other’s goals. If a cast member wants to leave by 11 p.m., she realizes that she has to help complete our objectives before we can leave. We seem to have the same goals now. We are working for a good performance as best we can, given our individual and collective time constraints.

I have not yet finalized the introduction for the performance. Actually, I have worked my way from the ending to the beginning. In other words, I have developed the last part of the introduction, so I will know how to begin the performance. In rehearsal, I improvised some lines on my different experience as a Latina woman to get us started, but no one expects for me to rehearse the whole introduction.

I went home and tried to finish the beginning. I had many drafts, but nothing sounded good enough. I was not worried, however, because I knew I would be able to come up with something. I work best under pressure.
Plan for next meeting:

The only scheduled events that remain are a dress rehearsal with Jay and Kelly tomorrow night, and the final performance. Our only goal is to memorize the performance—lines and blocking—so we can rehearse without scripts in our hands. As the director, I am going to work to finish the program for the performance. My main goal, however, is to finish the introduction.

Thursday, April 24

Tam and Elizabeth are tense about rehearsing for Jay and Kelly, so I have to make sure they do not start freaking out. Their tension only contributes to my own, and I have enough to deal with. We all keep saying to each other, “The performance is tomorrow…” Then, we tell each other to just “Shut-up.” As in, “Stop making me more nervous.” We try talking about other things before we begin rehearsal.

Primary Objective:

Today we will have our final rehearsal before the performance tomorrow. Since we will not be in the actual performance space, we are limited in our ability to rehearse in full performance conditions. The space plays a large role in how we interact with each other and the audience. Also, our only audience is Jay and Kelly. Therefore, we are more nervous about performing for just the two of them.

I do not usually invite other people to come watch us during rehearsal, because we are constantly working on constructing the performance together. I am afraid the presence of other people will affect our connection. At this point, we have no choice; we have to get used to people watching us.

Objectives and Goals for Rehearsal:
Just like yesterday, I want Jay’s and Kelly’s feedback on the performance to help us make the performance stronger. We have been concentrating so much on building the script that we have forgotten about our delivery. In other words, we are spending too much time worrying about what we were performing, and not enough time on how we are performing.

Together we set a goal to have a good rehearsal. Tam and Elizabeth decide to come early to rehearsal, before Jay and Kelly arrive. We sit in an office and try to run through the performance without using our scripts. We help each other with cues, because we all know each other’s lines. We practice the racial joke scene until our tempo is just right. We laugh so much our faces get sore, and we are told that we are being too loud by a graduate student. We are actually disturbing a graduate communication class across the hall. Instead of quitting, however, we move to another room.

Evaluation of our progress:

Together, I think the three of us were able to have a productive rehearsal. We ran through the performance, and Jay gave us some suggestions on delivery style. Today’s rehearsal seemed more like a workshop session. Jay worked on some specific parts with us. For example, we worked on the ending of the “racial joke” scene where we all slowly stop laughing and continue with the conversation. Jay and Kelly helped us with the ending and gave us some suggestions to make it stronger. We played with some of his suggestions, and decided on a solid ending. I pick up the papers. Elizabeth and Tam take some papers away from me, and we all throw them towards the audience.
Jay's and Kelly's presence is good because we were able to adjust to audience response. Jay is a big laugher, and he laughs at certain, unexpected scenes. His laugh encouraged our performance, as if we were trying to get a bigger laugh out of him.

I feel like Jay's and Kelly's presence was beneficial for Elizabeth and Tam to experience. Jay plays a director's role. Up until now, Elizabeth and Tam have not had much direction from me. That is, they have not had the opportunity to perform for me. Instead, they performed with me. There has been little opportunity for me to truly evaluate their performances and give proper feedback. I wish as a director and performer, I could have realized this before. If we had more time, I would have had this rehearsal with Jay and Kelly weeks ago so we would have had additional time to rehearse.

A tight rehearsal schedule, however, has its advantages - the performance remains fresh. For example, after rehearsing for only two short weeks, our joke scene already seemed a little forced. We got tired of laughing, because we had practiced so much. The jokes seemed old to us. As a group we were able to realize this. We considered changing the jokes a little, but we felt like the Mexican and Asian jokes could not change. Our responses to the jokes were already built into the performance. Elizabeth and Tam made up a little routine with the Mexicans at the Alamo joke. Elizabeth starts laughing about how Mexicans like to pile into cars, and the two of them come and squeeze up to me. This bit of staging receives a huge laugh from Jay, and we did not want to change it.
Elizabeth suggested that she change the “Yo mama so Black” jokes, because there were plenty more. She was serious about the idea, too, because she headed to a computer afterwards and retrieved some more jokes from the Internet. She would not even let us see them, because she wanted for our response to the jokes to be natural. I was proud of Elizabeth’s suggestion, because it proved once again that she has started to care about the performance.

I was amazed to see Elizabeth’s performances come alive during rehearsal. She put more humorous emphases on her parts. For example, she had us all laughing when she discussed how she did not have nappy hair; she just called them “tight curls…” . We never really thought that line was funny until tonight. Tam was not as lively as Elizabeth, but her performances demonstrated that she had put forth a lot of effort.

I do not think Tam has ever forgiven herself for running out of the Petit Jean auditions. She has mentioned it on numerous occasions, especially since she is in one of Jay’s classes. I always tell her that she is being silly because Jay cannot possibly remember that moment. Even if he did, I tell her, he would not hold it against her. She did not mention it tonight, so I thought she was finally able to set that memory aside. Still, I think she felt more nervous in front of him than any of us. She kept up her nervous energy throughout rehearsal, because she is worried about doing well. At one point, Jay asks to see her perform one part and she gets up and starts performing with no problem. Then, she misses a line and stops. She laughs at
her self, and says, “Oh... wait... I missed a part.” Jay laughs and says, jokingly, “Oh... time to freak out... you’ll just have start from the beginning... “

Tam’s jaw drops down and she shrieks with embarrassment, “Oh my God, you do remember!”

Elizabeth and I burst out with laughter, because we know exactly what she means. Jay and Kelly, however, seem confused with all the commotion. I explain to them that Tam remembers that moment at the auditions. Jay laughs and says, “Oh, my... I forgot about that. If you’re still thinking about it, you have problems... I was just making a joke now.”

The whole exchange turns into an uproarious scene between all of us, as we all laugh about it for minutes afterwards. Tam feels embarrassed at first, but then she starts to laugh with us. To this day, however, she still considers that moment as one of the most traumatic events of her life, but she is just dramatic like that.

Evaluation of the director’s progress:

Right now, I am playing more of a producer role than director. I make sure that all the technical aspects of the show are taken care of - the program has been finished, the reception has been planned, and I have collected all the props we need. Besides that, there is not much directing I can do for the show. Elizabeth seems fine on her own, and often will direct me.

Did you bring the stool, Mel? Remember we need a stool.

Remember to stand to the right of me when I talk and don’t forget to ask me this question...
Tam still depends on me for guidance, because she realizes that it is my thesis project.

“It’s your thesis, Mel. I don’t want to mess it up,” she will say to me.

“Tam, just do your best,” I tell her. “They’re not grading you... they’re grading me.”

Although I am not sure if her mistakes will be a reflection of me, I do not really care. My goal as the director is to get her involved, and I have been quite successful.

We are right on schedule. In fact, in a matter of four short weeks, we have come so far that I think a miracle has occurred—either a miracle, or a lot of hard work.

Plan for next meeting:

We discuss among the cast whether we should rehearse tomorrow. I only want us to meet in the actual performance space for about an hour before the performance, so we can go over the show in the space. I do not want us to overdo ourselves with rehearsal. Tam and Elizabeth, however, seem extremely anxious and indicate they need more rehearsal. I tell them that we will probably see each other at school, so let us plan on that. Other than that, I do not want to plan anything. We have been under so much stress that I think it would be best if we just relax a little.

Meanwhile, I still have to work on my introduction. I already have developed one, and typed it out, but it just does not sound right to me. I think at this point I am being obsessive about being perfect.
Friday, April 25

We have no formal rehearsal scheduled for today, because we feel stressed out as it is the performance day. I wake up in the morning, and the only objective I have in mind is to not freak out about the performance. I have worried so much about Elizabeth and Tam that I have not been able to worry about myself. I do not even have my introduction completed. The day goes by in a blur, and I have no time to stop and evaluate the situation.

As I arrive at school, I see Elizabeth in the office rehearsing her lines with my friend, Becky. Becky is reading Tam’s and my parts to help Elizabeth rehearse her cues in the performance. While they are rehearsing, I go over my script and try to re-write some parts. I cannot believe I am rewriting the day of the performance, but I am trying to get everything perfect. Tam comes in after her last class, and starts talking to us. We make casual conversation before I have to go to one of my classes that I assist, Performance of Literature. They want to go to lunch, and I tell them to wait for me. Today is a test day, so while my students are taking their tests, I look over my script and start memorizing my revisions. When I come back, Tam and Elizabeth are still in the office, rehearsing the performance together. I said earlier that I did not want to rehearse, but I jump right into their rehearsal when I see them. Then I suggest we go over it one more time. I feel comforted as we perform together. Then, we decide to go to lunch and keep on rehearsing. We bring our scripts into the restaurant, but we do not really go over the performance. Instead, we talk about other things. We laugh about the situation with Jay yesterday during rehearsal, and start a conversation about our most
embarrassing moments. We start talking about the performance, but we only are
discussing technical things – cues, blocking, etc. We ask each other what we are going
to wear tonight. I have told Tam and Elizabeth to wear whatever they wanted. We do
not need costumes, because we are playing our selves

Tam and Elizabeth discuss what they will wear. Elizabeth is going to wear capris
pants with a black top. Tam thinks she will wear slacks and some cute top. Then, Tam
asks me what I am going to wear. I tell her that I am not sure, yet, because my
wardrobe is the least of my worries. I will have to go home and see. (That is a lie, of
course. I have been planning what I will wear for three weeks now. I can hardly
rehearse my performance without knowing exactly how I will look. I do not want to
admit that to them, though.)

“Wear something pretty,” Tam tells me. “You always wear frumpy clothes.”

I am seriously offended by this statement, because I think I have a keen fashion
sense. However, they always are critical of what I wear. I tell Tam that I was just
thinking of wearing a pair of my baggy jeans, because I know that this choice will upset
her. Tam looks at me and says, “Mel, don’t do that.”

I tell her that I am just kidding. She laughs and continues to give me directions.
“Wear some slacks – the kind that show off your ass,” she tells me. “And some kind of
cute, TIGHT top. No T-shirt. Wash your hair, too. You’re going to wear it down.”

Then, we start talking about hair, and that is another ten-minute conversation. I
ask Tam if she will fix my hair before the show, and she agrees to help me, but only
after she fixes her own hair. She directs me on how to prepare my hair before she fixes
it. “You must put on some mousse,” she tells me.
When we come back from lunch we rehearse the script some more. I go over my introduction with the girls, and they seem to like it. We agree to go home to get ready and meet at the office in about two hours. I have just enough time to go home, shower, dry my hair, put on my clothes and head back to school.

Tam and Elizabeth are late as usual. When they arrive, we have some time to fix my hair before we have to go down and rehearse in the space. Tam tries to straighten my hair, but she yells at me because I did not use mousse. I tell her that we do not have time to argue. Otherwise, we would sit and argue about mousse for a while. While Tam is straightening my hair, Elizabeth is putting on make-up. We start running through our lines as we sit around. Tam interrupts rehearsal to tell me that she thinks my hair is too damaged. She shows Elizabeth my damaged hair. They both agree I need a haircut. They continue to have a conversation— with each other— about how I might look better with shorter hair. I am so mad and frustrated with this conversation that I tell them to shut up and just fix my hair---damaged as it is. They sit back down and re-start the rehearsal. I realize as we are sitting there, how much we act like sisters with one another.

After the hair fiasco, we go down to the performance room, and run-through the performance. I practice my introduction until I feel good about it. We practice the very beginning. I developed a plan with Jay where I will be late to the performance. Tam and Elizabeth are going to come in and wonder where I am. They are going to start calling for me. Eventually, I come in from the back door of the room with all these stacks of research and drop them everywhere. I am going to run around trying to pick up the research and organize it in stacks. Jay will try and help me, but I will deny his help. I
decide to keep most of the research scattered around the room, as a way of creating my space.

We practice our timing of the beginning. I have to enter at just the right moment, after Elizabeth and Tam have yelled out for me a couple of times. Otherwise, the audience will become suspicious and catch on to our little plan. We have enough time to run-through the performance twice. Elizabeth and Tam seem to be fine with the performance. We have some problems with continuity. Mainly, we forget some of our cues. We remember what Jay told us about incorporating our mess-ups into the performance, and this seems to help us.

When we finish, we go back upstairs to my office. One of us mentions that we will be performing in less than an hour, and all of us start freaking out.

Tam starts saying, “What if I forget my lines?”

Elizabeth starts telling Tam to shut-up because she is making her nervous.

Both of them start arguing.

I start worrying about my introduction.

Tam looks like she is going to cry.

I tell them that I cannot deal with this right now. I have work to do.

With thirty minutes to go, I am running around trying to put signs on the front door that say, “Do not enter once performance starts.” I see Jay outside and tell him that we have the beginning scene worked out. He tells me that the beginning will not be effective. He still wants for me to be late to the performance, but he does not want Tam and Elizabeth to say anything. The audience might realize it is a “pretend” emergency if Tam and Elizabeth start yelling for me. Instead, Kelly will walk in with a distressed look.
like she has some bad news to tell Jay. She will whisper to him something and he will come over and whisper something to Tam and Elizabeth. Meanwhile, Kelly will make an introduction to the audience that the performance has been delayed for technical reasons. Hopefully, the audience will think that the performance has been delayed because something is wrong with me. The whole scenario should seem plausible to the audience because almost everyone in the audience has seen me running around the lobby as if I am flustered and distressed about the whole performance. My distress is no act.

I do not really want to change anything right now, especially since we have no time to practice. However, the idea sounds better. Jay says that he will give Kelly the instructions for her part. I have to find Tam and Elizabeth and tell them. He asks me how I am doing and I tell him that I am as good as I can be at this moment. I am worried about Tam and Elizabeth, however. I ask him to go comfort them for a while. Meanwhile, I am running around trying to complete everything. I do not even remember what I am doing. I am so tense that I might just be running for nothing. I know only that I cannot sit down, or I will start panicking. As I am running around, I see Jay in the hallway with Tam and Elizabeth. They are going through some warm-ups together. I am relieved because I hope the warm-ups with Jay will help to soothe Tam and Elizabeth’s nerves. Now, I have to work on soothing myself. I go into the bathroom to be by myself and do some mental warm-ups. Usually, I look into the mirror and say some affirmations like, “You can do this... You’re number one, etc.” I may sound silly, but it actually helps to calm my nerves. Once I relax a little, I look at my watch and realize I have two minutes until the performance. I may actually be late to the performance if I do not
hurry. Then, I remember that I never spoke to Elizabeth and Tam about the change in
the introduction. I run out of the bathroom and try to find them, but they are gone. In
fact, no one is around and I am afraid this means that everyone is seated for the
performance already. I run down to the performance room, and I see Elizabeth
standing in the back doorway. I do not know what is going on. Elizabeth tells me that
Jay and Kelly are doing something, and I try to tell her the news. I tell Elizabeth to go tell
Tam to keep quiet and not yell out for me. It is too late, however, because Tam is
already seated. She starts yelling, “Enchilada, where are you?” and I know the whole
thing is blown. I tell Elizabeth to go sit down and play along. I stand at the doorway and
hear Kelly make her introduction. After a while, I decide that now is the best time to go
in, and I make my entrance.

The confusion over the beginning leaves me quite breathless. Since I am on the
spot up front, I do not have an opportunity to catch my breath. My mind goes blank, and
I forget my next line. I place my box of papers on the desk and look at the audience,
and I know that I have to continue. This moment is what they have all been waiting for;
this moment is what I have been waiting for—all three years of graduate school boil
down to this one moment. I cannot fail myself now.

I start improvising lines about my research. Really, I am feeding off of my
audience’s energy. They seem interested and amused already with the performance. I
start unpacking research and putting it into different piles. They laugh. I start
rearranging piles. They laugh. I start rearranging the rearranged piles. They laugh even
more. I try to make these actions all seem planned, but I am buying time until I can calm
my nerves and think of my first lines. I take a deep breath, and continue. I know I will be just fine.

When I finish my introduction, I start worrying about Tam and Elizabeth. They seem to be doing well, however. We flow through the piece pretty well together. We are feeding off of the audience's energy, even Tam. She really surprises me because she performs with such energy and enthusiasm. Midway through the performance, I remember sitting down, listening to Elizabeth perform a story, and thinking to myself that I cannot remember what comes next. Did I skip a part or am I just lost? Instead of panicking, though, I take a deep breath and decided to just take it one moment at a time.

Together, we went through a lot of struggles to remember our lines, but we knew how to play it off. We kept Jay's advice at heart—whenever we mess up, just play it off and build it into the performance. Whenever I forget what I want to say, I remember who speaks next and I feed the next line to them. We all do this, though. Elizabeth surprises Tam by giving her a line earlier than she expected. Tam looks a little confused, but she goes on from there. Tam blanks out during one of her parts, but she knows I spoke next so she comes up to me and asks, “I don’t know, Mel. What do you think?” I know I have to continue with my next line. We all do this for each other - if we see anyone struggling with a part, we play around a little and pass it off. Towards the end, I see Tam struggling with one of her parts. She is supposed to be talking about how she feels like a rubber band. It is crucial for her to say this, because I have to continue on with that thought. “I felt like a rubber band myself,” I am supposed to say, following her lead. But when Tam starts to talk about it, she seems to be struggling so much that she falls
silent. I go up to her, and ask, “Did you feel like a rubber band, Tam?” Then, she remembers what to say to me. We try to help each other out as much as possible because we all seem to want a good performance. We could not practice this in rehearsal. On the contrary, such teamwork skills only can be acquired in the actual performance. I learn more in the forty minutes of our performance than I ever did in rehearsal.

When we finish the performance, and we throw the papers up into the air, I feel a huge sense of relief. The girls run off and start collecting papers from the ground. I grab them and pull them up front, so we can make our bows. After all the applause, people come up to congratulate me and I start to cry.

Later, the three of us are still in the room collecting all the papers. Tam looks at me with tears in her eyes and hugs me. “I love this girl,” she tells everyone. “She saved my life.” We laugh about the whole rubber band scene, and about all our little mess-ups during the performance. I tell Tam that I am proud of her, and she tells me that she is proud of me. Elizabeth comes over and we tell her we are proud of her. She says she is proud of us, too. Then, we all hug each other. Although the hug only lasts for a few seconds, I believe that moment between the three of us seems more important than the actual performance. Yes, the performance helped us explore our true identities, but more important—it helped us find each other.
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231


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