

GETTING INTO CHARACTER: CULTIVATING IDENTITIES IN A TEEN-THEATRE PEER-  
EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York

2011

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the  
Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of  
the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Abstract**GETTING INTO CHARACTER: CULTIVATING IDENTITIES IN A  
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Advisors: Professors Michelle Fine and Suzanne C. Ouellette

This study investigated the role of community theatre participation on adolescent and young adult identity development. The theatre program, known as The SOURCE, focuses on sex-education through a peer-education model. The experiences of young adults, who are now aged 18-34, were examined through interviews (N=20), identity maps (N=9), and a survey (N=64) in order to understand how participation in this group influenced their development. While much of the literature documents the successes of such programs *while* youth participate, few document the longer-term impacts of such participation (Saldaña, McCammon, Omasta, & Hines, 2011). Data reveal how such involvement informed the youths' developing social and interpersonal lives, and their broader understanding of self.

The findings show four broad effects that span micro- to macro-level contexts. First, The SOURCE is a unique "safe space" for youth, co-constructed by KT (the director) and the engaged youth, that privileges youth voices and experiences. Second, participation in the theatre program provides an opportunity for developing counternarratives of what it means to be an adolescent, how adolescents and young adults can act as social agents in their communities, and how sex education through peer-education methods can present such opportunities. Third, the findings show that theatre is a particularly valuable medium for engaging in developmental processes because it affords the participants opportunities to "play" with identity while

simultaneously expressing emotions and experiences, in addition to learning empathically about the diversity and multiplicity of others. Finally, The SOURCE experience becomes embodied in ways that inform future decisions, identity development, and personal relationships. Narrative analysis of these findings and the mechanisms of such persistence, or “traveling power of self,” are discussed.

While these findings are encouraging for The SOURCE and from a positive youth development standpoint, they raise important questions about limiting such spaces through broader policies and budget reductions. It is suggested, in the conclusion of this dissertation, that removing the opportunities for participation in such spaces for youth amounts to a “relational injustice,” which may have long-term developmental implications.

## Acknowledgments

Everyone says that writing the acknowledgments section is the best part of the dissertation writing. I have been excitedly saving this for the very end, but now I find myself worried that I will inevitably leave someone out or somehow inadequately convey the depth of gratitude I have for my friends, family and colleagues. After all, I feel like the process of finishing this degree has given new meaning to that phrase, “It takes a village...”

So many wonderful people have helped me along the way, in manners both large and small. Before I even entered the program, Suzanne Ouellette began the process of guiding me in profoundly wise ways. Insistent that I *had* to start reading months ahead of the start of school, Suzanne told me simply that I should enjoy myself before the craziness of graduate school set in. But, if I *had* to read one book, I should look at Ignacio Martin-Baro’s text on *Writings for A Liberation Psychology*. With such a simple recommendation, Suzanne laid the groundwork for an insightful and poignant mentoring relationship. Her wisdom of “life” advice met with her scholarly prowess in ways that never ceased to amaze and inspire me. Suzanne saw me through the rough-and-tumble beginnings of graduate school and ushered me into a deeper understanding of my own scholarly identity. She modeled a wisdom that I can only hope to bring my students one day.

A particularly fortunate thing happened my second semester. Suzanne was scheduled for sabbatical (usually an unfortunate thing, for students) and Michelle Fine agreed to oversee my advisement. Our relationship instantly blossomed and I decided that I could not foresee completing the program without having them both as “Co-mentors” in the truest sense. A swirling combination of energy and brilliance—I had no idea then just how lucky I was. Michelle brought a dynamism and energy unparalleled

by anyone I had ever met. In both passion and wisdom, Michelle represents an amazing combination of depth and breadth. If I can match even a fraction of this energy and true excitement about the ideas of students then I will consider myself a success. Michelle's insistence to always understand the social justice relevance of everything that we were studying met with Suzanne's deep commitment to the intimate workings of personality. Together, their guidance was simply unstoppable.

As I assembled my final committee I was fortunate enough to find myself among some amazing scholars. Deborah Tolman joined the faculty prior to the completion of my dissertation proposal. Her guidance brought forth a commitment to relational and narrative methods that advanced my work exponentially. She eagerly set aside the time to meet with me and entertain the "big questions" of interpretation and analysis that were so critical to my findings. Wendy Luttrell joined our faculty during the writing of my dissertation. Her work had inspired me for years, and working with her in person was something to be treasured. Wendy instilled in me a confidence and spirit that I will forever cherish. Finally, I felt fortunate to have Greg Dimitriadis agree to serve as an outside reader for the dissertation. Another scholar whose work I had admired, Greg was a wonderful addition to the committee. Having worked together on a conference panel, I knew Greg's enthusiasm for both the subject matter and the theory underlying this project. His work encouraged me to look larger than the scope of this project, and to question the underlying systems at play. He inspired me to make claims about the profound ways we are shaping the lives of our youth. With the five of them I had assembled what can simply be referred to as a "rock-star" committee. Peers and colleagues were constantly in awe of the five of them and, at my dissertation defense, I found myself in the same position. I feel so fortunate to have convened such a stellar team of mentors and guides.

The sixth floor of the GC, my academic home for seven years, has brought with it a string of fellow students who, over the years, have become close colleagues. Early in my first year Brett Stoudt took me under his wing and guided much of my early introduction to the program. Maddy Fox and María Torre have served as a source of endless inspiration. Their work is explicitly critical and justice-oriented in ways that I only hope I can emulate. Their door was always open to me and, over the past few years in particular, I have relied on them for much guidance and direction. María and Brett ushered me in to my first academic conference and with Maddy I feel I have grown from fellow student to fellow scholar. I respect all of their work for its theoretical depth and practical importance.

Likewise, Sara McClelland and David Frost were constant guides along the way. Just moments ahead of me, in terms of the program, they represented the best of what I hoped I could be. Their measured guidance and keen focus on method and theory were profoundly inspiring. They mentored even before mentoring was part of the job description and showed me the true meaning of collegiality.

Shaun Wiley, just a couple of years ahead of me, is such a wonderful friend and colleague. Ever an endless source of social psychological knowledge, Shaun's passion for the subject matter never ceases to amaze me. Measured and wise, Shaun represents the teacher and scholar I hope to be. Together with his wife, Rachel Wiley, I found instant comfort both ideologically and intellectually. You are both so important to me.

And, finally, to my best friend and colleague, Rachel Verni. They paired us as "buddies" when you entered the program and we quickly became so much more. You have always known when to "talk shop" and when not to. Your dedication has inspired me and I can only hope that I have done the same for you. I'm thankful that the

program put us together, but I'm certain that our friendship and collegial relationship will thrive regardless. I remember the day you interviewed; I was excited then and am so grateful that you chose to join us. I had no idea how much it would mean to me.

There is a life outside of school (I'm told), and my life outside of school is what kept me going. My family was (and is) endlessly supportive. For as long as I can remember I was *always* going to go to college. It wasn't a question of *if* I go to college but *where* I would go, according to my parents, Jim and Robin Futch. I took that decree and ran with it, determined to carry it to its furthest possibility. They supported me when I decided that I *had* to move 1700 miles away to pursue my dreams. They each inspire me in their own ways. My father's attention to detail and work ethic is astounding. My mother's commitment to *all* students and her endless dedication to public education inspired me. Though my studies may span a variety of topics, I have never quite been able to "leave" the arena of public education. Her commitment, passion, and drive to make education the best it can be is perpetually invigorating for me. I may have fought it for a while, but I can say with 100% satisfaction, that you won. The value of education, the *right* to education, was instilled by both of you and I will not let go of it for myself and for the students I will meet in the future. And, to my sister, Genevieve Futch, we are so different and yet so alike. Though you deal in planes and space shuttles while I deal in "ideas" we both bring an energy and enthusiasm that seems critical. Your gumption and determination fuel me in ways you might not know. You are blazing pathways in your own field and I am ever so proud of you. All three of you inspire me daily. Finally, and practically as much a part of my family, Jason Reigal kept me fed, energized and focused throughout the entire project. Ever a reminder of the important and intangible things in life, you encouraged me to foster connections and relationships that I might

otherwise have let slip by. Your kindness and compassion were both comforting and motivating. You helped me in ways you might never know.

And, to Judith Kubran, our fearless leader and guide. You have helped me (and all of us, I presume) in ways that may be intangible but are no less critical. In the hustle and bustle of graduate school, which can often result in us neglecting the very core of ourselves, you serve as a reminder of “life” –that it both happens and is worth happening. You nurture us as much in the Graduate Center as you do outside of the Graduate Center. Your guidance and energy are a force to be reckoned with. I cannot imagine the last seven years without you. Thank you for reminding me of what was important in life, both in terms of what I deserved and what I wanted for my future.

Perhaps most importantly, to KT Curran, The SOURCE, the Design Team members, and Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida. You welcomed our team with open arms and made us instant members of The SOURCE. This project, quite simply, could not have been done without you. We knew we were entering a sacred and powerful space, but the effects of it were more long lasting and far-reaching than any of us could have imagined. KT, your energy is unparalleled. If I could bottle your passion and commitment to youth I think we would have a panacea for the masses. The energy you inspire in the youth you reach is simply awe-inspiring. Sarasota and The SOURCE are profoundly lucky to have you.

Finally, this research was supported, initially, by the Leslie Glass Foundation. Leslie saw the importance of The SOURCE and compelled us all to take notice. Subsequently, the Doctoral Students’ Research Council and The Graduate Center recognized the importance of this research through a dissertation fellowship and student research grant, respectively. The support of all three of these organizations made the project as strong as possible and gave it the recognition it deserved.

To everyone: my sincerest and profound thanks. I would not have survived the process without your insights and wisdom. In the true spirit of traveling power, I am excited to see how your love and dedication will continue to grow within me.

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## Chapter 1

Introduction: "Saving the world, one show at a time"

## Chapter 1, Introduction: “Saving the world, one show at a time”

### *Opening*

Regardless of the actual space that houses “The SOURCE Teen Theatre” – they’ve moved a bit over the past few years – a few things remain constant: a black backdrop curtain, a series of black boxes that comprise the “props”, a compassionate and dedicated director, and a revolving cast of Sarasota, FL teenagers who infuse the room with noise, energy, laughter, and experience. The logo of The SOURCE (Figure 1) conveys to viewers what they need to know: this is a theatre group that deals with “real” issues. The bold type tells you they mean business, but the figure doing a handstand at the top lets the viewer know they are also about energy, freedom of expression, and movement.

Figure 1. SOURCE Logo



When I first entered the practice space for The SOURCE, located in a small strip-mall in Sarasota, I wasn't sure what to expect. But as I wandered around the room and looked at pictures of beaming adolescents, picked up leaflets on safe sex

and peer-pressure, passed a bowl of condoms sitting next to a large boom-box on a table covered with even more pictures, I was certainly intrigued...

### *This Study*

Popular opinion on sex-education, the over-sexualization of youth in pop culture, and differing views of what information teens should have access to implies a flow of information: power and knowledge *from* adults *to* youth. The SOURCE reverses this direction. At The SOURCE, teens narrate *their* fears and desires, express *their* knowledge and emotions, and explore *their* excitement and ambivalence through theatre and peer-education. This dissertation sits at the intersection of national and local politics, sexuality and sex education debates, youth development policies, and individual young adult lives. It uses an ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and dialogical (Hermans, 2003) approach to investigate how peer-education theatre can simultaneously serve as a medium for engaging youth by allowing them to speak back to culture, and allowing us (researchers, adults) to understand the social and political impact of these debates on the lives of youth. Building on critical ethnographic studies of spaces for youth activity (Gallagher, 2007; Weis & Fine, 2000; Deutsch, 2008), I will closely examine the experiences that young adults narrate as they look back on their participation in a teen-theatre group as adolescents. My aim is to understand how adolescents navigate their multidimensional identities in a variety of contexts (home, school, community) by studying how their involvement with a specific community theatre program informed their social and interpersonal lives. I am also interested in understanding how the developmental tasks were accomplished, and the life “lessons” learned (or not) during their theatre participation travel to new spaces and contexts.

*The SOURCE: “Real life, Real theatre”*

Sarasota, FL - “where urban amenities meet small-town living”<sup>1</sup> - is the geographical locale for The SOURCE. It is an arts and tourism based community approximately 30 miles south of Tampa. Located on the Gulf of Mexico, it is known for its beaches, shopping, and as the home of New College. As of 2000, the population of Sarasota was approximately 50,000 and composed of mostly white (76.91%) and middle- to older-aged (median age = 41) individuals. African-Americans made up approximately 12.4% of the population and Hispanic or Latino Americans are approximately 14.7%. In terms of age, approximately 20% were under the age of 18 (Census Bureau, 2009).

Socioculturally, The SOURCE sits at an interesting intersection of arts and public health. As one of the primary youth theatre programs in the area, it attracts a range of talent and interest: from students attending the nearby arts magnet school to students who are interested in joining the group for reasons aside from acting aspirations (social connections, political activism, peer education, etc.). However, the fact that The SOURCE is affiliated with Planned Parenthood is not lost on the director or the participants. This observation is particularly important for Florida, which was just ranked one of the worst states in the nation (second only to Texas) on five key sexual health outcomes (SIECUS, 2009). Their commitment to topically relevant and educational plays is at the forefront of The SOURCE’s goals. As they state on their website<sup>2</sup>:

We do plays about believing in yourself and following your dreams.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sarasotagov.com/index2.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thesourceteentheatre.org/>

We do plays about sexuality, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. We do plays about finding out what it means to be alive and taking responsibility for the choices we make every single day.

The SOURCE consists of a group of students, mostly 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders, who attend weekly meetings and perform plays in a dedicated space in the Southwest and Central Florida Planned Parenthood Offices on Central Avenue in downtown Sarasota. Students are drawn from local schools, including a magnet arts school, but have a varying range of acting experience and interest. The plays, which deal with a variety of issues such as peer pressure, sex and sexuality, dating, bullying, and health, are performed for the communities and schools in the surrounding area. The SOURCE has existed for twenty years and is supported financially by the Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida (PP-SWCF).

The weekly meetings consist of a variety of activities, from improv acting exercises to peer-education workshops. At the beginning of each school year The SOURCE advertises the meetings and auditions in schools, the local newspaper, and by word-of-mouth. The meetings take place each Monday for the duration of the school year. In addition to the meetings, participants work collaboratively to create, rehearse, and perform plays related to issues that teens face. These plays are performed in The SOURCE's own space, and in community centers and schools throughout the surrounding districts.

Over the years, many plays have been developed and each year a few are selected to "tour." The cast works with KT Curran<sup>3</sup> (KT), who has directed The SOURCE for the past 20 years, to revamp and revise the selected plays. Though KT writes much of the script, she draws on shared experiences and works collaboratively with the cast

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<sup>3</sup> KT is the only person explicitly named in the study, all other participants are given pseudonyms throughout the rest of this dissertation.

members to make the plays timely and resonant. While health and appropriate sex education are the explicit commitments of the group, they also seek to produce plays that speak to all the experiences of teen life. Some participants go on to pursue acting as a professional career.

There is also a second group, The SOURCE21, which consists of older members (and a few graduates). It puts on plays that are more broadly political, such as *The Day I Opened My Eyes (DIOME)*, a series of monologues addressing global reproductive rights which has toured nationally. The SOURCE21 generally operates in 6-week cycles. In an advertisement for participation in the group, its goal is described as using “theatre to explore issues surrounding independence, the journey towards self discovery, sexuality, and many other vital concerns that face young adults in the 21st century.”

Under the guidance of KT and with the support of PP-SWCF, The SOURCE has grown into a solid community theatre program that tours nationally, provides plays for middle and high schools throughout southwest and central Florida, and produces public service announcements aimed at raising HIV/AIDS awareness. KT estimates that they have performed for thousands of students and residents. The videos on their YouTube channel, which include the PSAs and trailers for their plays, have accumulated 8,941 views over the last three and a half years.

### *The Plays*

Seven of the plays that KT has written have been published. Each semester, the cast members select a new play to produce and perform. As part of the production process, the plays are revised as the cast sees fit. This emphasizes their participation and their effort to make it more “real” for the audience. Below are descriptions of

four of the plays that are often referred to by the study participants. These descriptions came from a SOURCE brochure:

*The Girl I Used to Be:* A hard-hitting play for high school students that examines the lives of several teens caught up in the drug scene. This play tells the story of a young dancer named Cassidy whose life begins to fall apart after she falls in love with a teenage drug dealer. When Cassidy discovers her boyfriend is HIV positive, she is forced to examine the choices she has made.

*The Angels Must Be Smiling:* A heart-warming story about the friendship between Angelina, a sensitive middle school student, and Christopher, a young boy with AIDS who comes to her school. This play examines the myths and misconceptions about AIDS and offers some important truths for young people. For middle school students.

*Freshman Year:* A play for eighth and ninth grade students that tells the story of three friends whose lives are forever altered by events that occur during their freshman year. The play explores the problems of teen pregnancy, date rape, and sexually transmitted infections.

*The First Time Club:* Four girls seeking adventure decide to create the First Time Club. The play begins in innocent childhood and takes the girls into the age of AIDS. Their friendship is tested when one of the girls becomes HIV positive. For upper middle and high school students.

Though the plays may at first appear startling in subject matter or over-reaching in their attempts to educate youth, they are based in large part on the stories young people have told KT over the years. KT writes new plays and revises current ones based on discussions at The SOURCE weekly meetings, conversations over coffee with participants, and events that happen in the Sarasota community. KT is the first to admit that their work is “intense,” but she is firm in her belief that it is representative of the youth she knows and, more importantly, essential for youths and adults alike to witness and discuss.

### *Research Questions*

In this study I focus primarily on the participants and their experiences in order to understand how The SOURCE moves through their selves, as contextualized by their environment and historical moment.

I pose the following four research questions:

- 1) What does participation in this teen theatre group mean for these adolescents' developing identities and understanding of self?
- 2) How do the young adults who have participated in this theatre group construct the story of their experience?
- 3) How have the experiences in this group shaped their lives as young adults and extended, if at all, beyond the setting of the group?
- 4) How does The SOURCE—as an organization and as a space—contest, complicate, or expand upon our ideas of developmental spaces for adolescents?

By exploring these questions I will address the interpersonal and psychological experience of involvement with a community theatre organization and the ways these

experiences extend both temporally (through the lives of the participants) and spatially (into the schools, community, society, etc.). Thus, these questions have theoretical and practical importance. The theoretical significance exists at the nexus of social, personality, and developmental psychology. If, as I outline in the literature review, adolescence can be understood as a socially constructed developmental stage, then observing personal experiences with adolescence in a setting outside of school or home will help expand theories of adolescent identity development. At the practical level, these questions encourage a critique of spaces most often provided for adolescent development (i.e. schools) and will clarify the characteristics and impact of youth spaces that are effective, freeing, encouraging, and supportive.

These questions served as the macro-level guidance for conceptualizing the dissertation, data collection, analysis, and writing. In engaging these questions, a second set of more data-grounded questions emerge and make up the bulk of the analysis, as explained in the following organizational statement.

### *Organization of this dissertation*

This dissertation tells my story of observing, engaging, and admiring The SOURCE for the past three years. Through this experience, I learned as much about designing and executing a well-planned research study as I did about the power that participation in a teen theatre program could have for a young person. Having provided some context and background information on The SOURCE, I begin Chapter 2 by reviewing the literature on adolescent lives in context and the development of identity from a narrative standpoint. These two approaches are inherently social and process-driven. At one level, this review considers how adolescence is a socially constructed phenomenon and thus subject to social control and regulation. However,

this literature review leads into a more person-focused exploration of my data by considering the narrative construction of identities and the personal, interpersonal, and social influences on this construction. Essentially, the literature review sets up two positions – adolescence and emerging adulthood are socially constructed stages of development and identity is narratively constructed within the self over time – and poses a question: what can narrative approaches to identity teach us about how adolescents are actively engaged in constructing their own identities in relation to these social realities? One answer to this question is provided through the data in this dissertation.

In Chapter 3, I outline my methodological choices, which draw on a variety of mixed-methods aimed at capturing what I assume to be the inherent multiplicity of self, the social aspects of identity development, and the experiences of adolescence and young adulthood in all of their dimensions (social, temporal, spatial, ecological). I explain how the project was originally conceptualized, the participatory origins of this project, the practical constraints we encountered, and the multiple methods used (interviews, mapping, online survey, follow-up interviews). I also outline my oscillating and dialogical approach to analyzing these multiple sources of data.

The following four data chapters present the findings, and the analytical pathways that generated them. Each of the data chapters explores this overall question of identities developing in context and how a narrative lens helps us understand these processes. There are four data chapters that explore different facets of this question. Specifically, I look across levels—from personal identity development to issues of space, social context, and social discourses—to understand the developmental experiences these specific SOURCE participants narrate.

Chapter 4 "sets the scene" by considering the space and place of The SOURCE, from its physical characteristics to the psychological atmosphere it creates. This chapter explores the space that The SOURCE creates and the relationships between peers and with KT that develop within it. In order to understand the space, particularly that of the "Monday meetings", I outline what I see to be the social contract (Goodnow, 1995) of The SOURCE and the collective SOURCE-member identity that participants craft.

Chapter 5 begins by presenting the actual words of SOURCE members to frame how *they* understand the experience of adolescence. I did not want to presume that these adolescents were necessarily any different from other adolescents; instead, I wanted to understand how they saw themselves. Second, I introduce three main counternarratives that I heard in the data which contest popular notions around adolescence in general, and sex education in particular. These three counternarratives are: 1) adolescents as knowers and educators; 2) adolescents as influential in the world around them; and 3) sex education as an opportunity for dialogue and engagement rather than a threat to the safety of youth or morality of the nation. When discussing each of these counternarratives, I also explore the more general role they either introduce or reinforce to SOURCE members. Through this reinforcement of particular roles – namely adolescents as responsible peers, and as engaged global citizens – I examine how these counternarratives actually serve as a form of "identity work" (Chase, 2005) that is developmentally important and that has real social consequences. In the context of this study I view these social consequences through the specific case of sex-education; however, I think that the social and developmental processes observed through the counternarratives could exist in other topical areas

that youth may be engaged in, such as education, criminal justice, and healthcare systems.

Chapter 6 looks more closely at the medium of theatre used by The SOURCE and how it functions on both social and personal levels. I argue that theatre is a particularly useful medium for accomplishing the previously discussed narrative shifts. I discuss their personal experiences of acting, relating to an audience, and embodying characters on stage. In performing different characters I argue that youth have the opportunity to imagine “possible selves” and engage in what Josselson (1996) terms “internal revisions.” I also consider how the theatre aspect of The SOURCE provides a common goal or interest that brings diverse youth together in the interest of learning from each other’s varied talents and diverse experiences.

After exploring the relationships that develop in this context, particularly the unique relationship with KT, I move to a discussion of what I have termed “traveling power” in Chapter 7. This chapter suggests that the development that occurs in The SOURCE through dramatic performance and the crafting of psychologically useful identities *persists into the future in developmentally important ways*. I look at how experiences and lessons of The SOURCE travel, both immediately into college or careers and into later life experiences.

In addition to the four data chapters, there are three vignettes that focus on four of the participants and how my experiences with them deepened my own research process. The first two vignettes recount my experiences conducting follow-up interviews with Elizabeth and Elena. They were selected for practical and conceptual reasons (as I explain in the methods section). Practically speaking, they were still in Florida and willing to be interviewed. Conceptually, they were involved from day one of the project (through the design team) – so I had a variety of data for them,

including the maps. From informal communications with KT and via their Facebook profiles<sup>4</sup>, I knew that each of them had undergone a life transition or experienced a “turning point.” For Elena, it was the birth of her first child, at the age of 21. For Elizabeth, a participant who had returned to serve as The SOURCE’s assistant director, it was her decision to take time off from theatre altogether. Alan and William, the two men discussed in the third vignette, presented me with moments to reflect on the meaning of methodological “interruptions” in both interviewing and analysis. In all three reflexive vignettes I explicitly engage my own subjectivity and reflect on my own development throughout the research project.

In the concluding chapter I situate the findings in the broader sociohistorical moment. In this way I participate in what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) describes as the “paradoxical” nature of theorizing: to make theoretical claims we first have to begin with context, zoom in to the level of specific details, and there we find results that speak to more universal themes. The concluding chapter returns to larger themes by suggesting that if spaces such as The SOURCE are critical for youth development, how do we continue to support such spaces and, if such spaces are under siege in the current neoliberal moment (which they appear to be), what impact might this have on individual development?

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<sup>4</sup> Elena and I are connected on Facebook after she sent a friend-request when the study was over.

**Chapter 2**  
**Literature Review**

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following line of argument is made in this dissertation. Identity is enacted socially and in engagement with broader contexts and investigating it can serve as one lens for understanding those social contexts (Hammack, 2008). Therefore, young adults, are crafting their identities while engaging with broader social discourses or “master narratives,” one of which is what it means to be adolescent and then a twenty-something in the US. Social activity—in this case, participation in a peer-education theatre group—is a medium through which individuals can do “identity work” between these two spheres, shaping and being shaped in turn. Following this line of thought, this literature review investigates the master narratives or discourses of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Additionally, it reviews extant literature on identity development and narrative approaches to understanding such phenomena, as well as the empirical literature on the role of theater participation for young adults.

### *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood as Socially Constructed Concepts*

#### *Adolescent stories, Told and Untold*

*“Adolescence is not a fixed stage in a life-cycle, so much as a terrain of encounters between growing persons and the adult world.”* (p. 11, Connell, 2005)

Defining adolescence(nts) is a complex task, and yet the results of such definitions, both scholarly and colloquial, have important consequences for the treatment, perception, and experiences of young men and women in our society. Perhaps a definition escapes us because adolescence, like so many other periods of our lives, is full of variation influenced by sociohistorical factors, geography, time, race, gender, class, etc. Regardless of one’s stance on the definition of “adolescence,” we

can see that in the current historical moment it is simultaneously a time of personal transition while also a popular category for regulating the bodies of millions of individuals during the teenage years of their lives—from education, discipline, criminal justice, driving and other legal rites of passage, social status and sex education. In all spheres of life youth embodies adventures of self and identity that stem from their own emotions and phenomenological experience and are intertwined with external pressures and rules resulting in complexly constructed and performed identities in a variety of spaces.

Nancy Lesko (2001) and Mike Males (1996) have served as some of the more vocal critics of our society's collective treatment of adolescence as a turbulent time requiring restriction and control. Their work systematically dismantles the prevailing “*sturm und drang*” (storm and stress) model of adolescence that began in the early twentieth century with G. Stanley Hall's book, *Adolescence* (1904). As Lesko argues:

The adolescent, a being defined as "becoming" and hence, potentially in peril (in today's terms, "at risk"), was a trope for turn-of-the-century worries about unknown futures and the ability to succeed and triumph in changing circumstances. Adolescence was a social fact produced through a set of both educational and material practices that functioned as a technology to regulate the lives of young people, as well as reinforce dominant social norms at a time of great transition and uncertainty. (2002, p. 132)

Thus prescribed were a set of norms or paths through adolescence in which a young person was expected to proceed in order to ultimately make it through the perilous bodily transitions and exit as a particular form of social citizen. In a time of uncertainty for the nation, the direction of the future was placed squarely on the

backs of youth, but their ability to successfully navigate their own "becoming" was held in skepticism. Males (1996) examined every prevailing preconception about youth (sex-crazed, drug-obsessed, lazy, dangerous, etc.) and uncovered empirical evidence that served, if not to completely debunk each myth, then to at least complicate and contextualize the issues. Like Lesko, he took a contextual and deconstructionist approach to understanding adolescence as a construct, but he also placed the treatment of youth into an economic frame, suggesting that the policies stemming from older generations, based in large part on the fears he debunks, will lead to further economic gaps and decreased opportunities that will put the young at a perpetual disadvantage. The uncertainty and regulation that Lesko highlighted dovetails with Males, who argued that older generations use this skepticism to enact economic policies that ultimately set youth up for struggle, if not outright failure, by de-funding their schools, healthcare, etc. Janet Finn and colleagues Lynn Nybell and Jeffrey Shook (2010) also presented the necessity of viewing policies related to childhood with an eye toward the influences of neoliberal economic policy. They provoke researchers to question how social policies change – and social programs shrink – in response to neoliberalism and the push toward the free-market and privatization of nearly every aspect of our lives. However, in addition to looking at how broad economic policies shape social policies, they also ask us to look at how those broad policies shape the ways we begin to answer questions about childhood, such as what we mean by protection or what institutions we feel should be established for children.

One such system of protection that is directly relevant to this dissertation is the advent of sex-education in schools and abstinence-only education in particular. While the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

shows that most parents (93% of parents of junior high school students as of 2007) support comprehensive sex education for their children in schools, there are still a number of states that accept federal abstinence-only until marriage (AOUM) funding<sup>5</sup> despite the overwhelming lack of support for its long-term effectiveness (Santelli et al., 2006). Florida, where The SOURCE is located, had left the specific decision as to whether to provide abstinence-only or abstinence-plus (which includes contraception information) up to individual school districts, although they did recently introduce the Healthy Teens Act in the legislature in January 2010. The bill, which is still in committee, “would require any school that receives state funding and offers sex education programs to provide comprehensive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate information.”<sup>6</sup>

When considered in the context of how adolescence is socially constructed, the interplay between school-based sex education (SBSE) and adolescent identity becomes even more complex (Bay-Cheng, 2003). The social construction of teens as hormone driven and hyper-sexual resulted in fear-based sex-education policies, according to Bay-Cheng, which further narrowed the idea of ‘acceptable’ teen sexuality and omitted any discussion of desire (Tolman D. L., 2002; McClelland & Fine, 2008). It also supported a largely heteronormative script (Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003), and ignored the myriad of other social and personal factors that influence sexual decision making. As Fine and McClelland (2006) argue, the fear-based creation of policies omits the opportunity to discuss desire, gender experiences, queer sexualities, or anything deemed outside the norm. While there are clear public-health consequences to withholding information from teens and young adults, from a developmental

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=522&grandparentID=477&parentID=523>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1213>

perspective it could also be argued that framing teen sexuality in this narrow manner will influence how the teens in turn understand and frame their own thoughts and experiences related to sex. As McClelland and Fine (2006b) further argue, "Young women's bodies and desires take intimate shape in responding to and contesting public policy shifts" (pg. 301). When very narrow stories are told about the kinds of "acceptable" sexual behaviors, anything else is used to label the teenager as deviant or "other."

In observing a different social system, but taking a more explicitly narrative approach to understanding how sociocultural contexts influence both the stories told about youth and the stories youth are *allowed to* tell, Morrill, Yalda, Adelman, Musheno & Bejarano (2000) closely examined the interplay between youth lives and social context. They looked specifically at the field of youth criminal studies and found that stories of youth violence tend to depict youth as "uncontrollable or unsuccessfully controlled by school, family, religious and legal institutions" (p. 522). Such stories, they argue, reify "adult-centric" narratives and do not take into account the experiences of youth from their own perspective. This subsequently leads to adult-centric interventions aimed at reducing youth violence. Using narrative analysis, they found that listening to and analyzing youth conflict-narratives led to a better understanding of "conflict-handling practices." Listening to such youth narratives and building on the "local knowledge" of specific communities could greatly improve policy efforts. Such findings of the psychological value of allowing youths to tell their stories could no doubt inform the silencing sex-education practices we currently face. This dissertation looks at the local knowledge built in one program – The SOURCE – located in one community – Sarasota, FL – to further understand this interplay of the

stories participants tell about themselves and how these fit in with broader social discourses.

*Emerging Adulthood: The latest crisis?*

Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) has been critiqued as a socially constructed and unnecessarily delineated developmental stage (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Conceptualized as the time period between adolescence and adulthood (18-25), Arnett has argued that the current trends we see among twenty-somethings – taking longer to get married, not settling in to a specific job or career – are actually the result of this particular developmental stage. These “postponements of commitment” (Côté & Brynner, 2008, p. 251), are often popularly conceptualized as the “quarter-life crisis” (Robbins & Wilner, 2001) or “What is it with 20-somethings?” (Henig, 2010). Conceding that there are definitely shifts in how the current generation approaches jobs, relationships, and family life, Hendry and Kloep (2007) argue that the suggestion of yet another stage of development misses the mark. The trends are useful, they argue, but more telling are the outliers and the compendium of factors that lead to such trends (aside from simply age). Moreover, a singular definition of “adult” (and “adolescent” or “emerging adult” for that matter) leaves out much variance in terms of culture, gender, class, race, etc. Building on such critiques and the broader framing of adolescence (above) as societal and economical, Côté and Brynner (2008) outline a structural and economic argument for the current trends of young adults and suggest that far from any sort of developmental stage in need of a remedy, what we are actually seeing is young adults developing creative coping mechanisms to deal with shifting structural and economic forces. Rather than “freely choosing” to delay their entry into adulthood in favor of other identity moratoria experiences, they suggest that such delays are actually agentic responses to increasing unemployment, economic

instability and social anomie (Côté & Brynner, 2008). I present these arguments to reinforce how contextual factors and social perceptions can influence development and our preconceptions about *how* development should proceed.

Lesko, Males, Hendry and Kloep, and Côté and Brynner all problematize theorizing standard trajectories of development removed from context. While all of these critics alert us to both the social construction of adolescence and the social constraints under which our young adults develop, they do seem to agree that there are transitional experiences and identity developments occurring during these time periods. However, as Hendry & Kloep (2007) pointed out, and a point that I think is central to any inquiry of development, such identity development is far from unique to adolescence or emerging adulthood, and is more a function of the natural processes of life-span development which are anything but linear and highly implicated in social structures and relationships with others. Thus, it is useful to look at processes of identity development in adolescence and young adulthood in order to understand how such development occurs, but not at the expense of assuming that it is the *only* time in one's life when such development and transitions occur. Keeping this caveat in mind, I would like to turn to how social and personality psychology understand identity development, in general, and its role in teen and young-adult development in particular.

### *Identity Development in Adolescence*

Erik Erikson (1968) provided one of the best-known conceptions of adolescence as based on identity processes. Building on Freud's theories, but in far more psychosocial ways, Erikson argued that adolescence is essentially a time for trying out

identities and various roles. The primary crisis of this stage, he argued, is one between identity and role confusion—the extent to which we craft a cohesive sense of identity and all that entails as well as the struggle we experience as we try on various demeanors, attitudes, and selves in an effort to find what “fits” (or, at least, what fits for the moment). While this critical moment in life is no doubt confusing for the adolescent undergoing the various metamorphoses, it is also confusing for those around them who may perceive the shifts as fickle or the emotions as somehow short-lived or false. As a stage theory, Erikson’s conceptualization implied that an individual must achieve some sort of endpoint in order to advance to the next stage. For adolescence, then, a coherent identity ought to prevail over a sense of role confusion. A coherent sense of self is the precursor for moving to the next phase of development—the experience of personal relationships (intimacy vs. isolation). While Erikson’s theory of identity development has been most notably criticized for its hierarchical and stage-like structure, Sage Rose and Cecil Robinson (2006) argue that such critiques are too essentialist and allow for a quick dismissal of the psychosocial aspects of his theory and the insight it offers into *processes* of identity development. They suggest that while Erikson’s theories are in need of revision, there is room for multiplicity, dialogue, revision and relationship in his theories. These are the psychosocial aspects I am interested in exploring.

Accepting that identity development is psychosocial implies that external “others”, be they institutional or individual others, will influence and shape development based on their expectations and reactions to individuals. How has this role of relationship been conceptualized in terms of adolescent identity development? Some scholars have argued that identity development in adolescence is premised on a development of autonomy and separation from adults in order to find one’s individual

identity (Blos, 1962). Others have recognized this drive for autonomy as agentic (Beyers, Goossens, Vansant, & Moors, 2003). And still others have suggested that what occurs is simply a shift in attachment patterns from adults to secure peer relationships (Allen & Land, 1999). In their work with young women, Carol Gilligan and Lyn Brown (1993) focused on the ways in which the emotions, desires and identities of young women are suppressed as they balance the complex demands of society and, perhaps most strikingly, the demands of others. The selves of young women, they argued, become relationally entangled in the desires of others to a point where young women often lose a true sense of themselves. In a broad exploration of masculinity development and the various experiences of young men worldwide, Connell (2005) came to a similar conclusion that only relational approaches can better help us understand the developmental processes that occur during adolescence and young adulthood and, as suggested by the previous literature discussion, throughout the life course. While adolescents are trying out various identities and roles they are also trying out the ways in which others respond to them in each role. Psychosocial and relational branches of psychology allow us to understand that it is not only how the adolescent feels as she experiments with the identity of the obedient girl, the angry girl, the dominant girl, the competitive girl, etc. that is important, but also how others respond to her and how she feels and acts based on this interaction and connection with other(s). The experience and understanding of these interactions between selves and others is what comprises "the self" for relational psychologists (Robb, 2007). Adolescent identities are thus co-created out of the agency, hopes, and desires of the young person as they interact with interpersonal, sociohistorical, political, and cultural contexts. In her work with adolescent girls, Deborah Tolman (1996) looked at how these external others are present and influential in girls'

development of their sexual subjectivities. She examined how young women develop their sexual identities based in part on responses to perceived stereotypes and societal expectations and in relation to their own understanding of their desires and relationships to their bodies. This work is an example of how the sociocultural influences that Lesko, Males and others want us to pay attention to combine with the deeply personal and felt experiences of young adults that psychologists have emphasized.

Taken collectively, the above literature presents an understanding of adolescence that is quite different from the earliest conceptualizations of the adolescent coined at the turn of the 20th century (Hall, 1904). Their work highlights the centrality of identity, social systems, relationships and broader policies, respectively. What is clear is that the systems we have in place for youth (particularly schooling, see Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991) and the various rules and expectations they are subject to (such as driving, drinking limits, etc.) converge to create a time period that is bound to result in identity exploration, as adolescents and young adults work to orient themselves within such systems and reconcile such authoritative discourses with what resonates to them internally (Bakhtin, 1981). Adolescence is then seen as a social construction that simultaneously serves a societal purpose (e.g. control and surveillance) while it is continually negotiated and redefined by both individuals and society. The more dominant forces shaping this definition are the social systems already in place (such as the justice and education systems) and the ever-powerful cultural media (Best, 2000; Dimitriadis, 2001; McRobbie, 1991). The recognition of these key players is important but should not come at the expense of understanding the role of adolescents *themselves* in both shaping what it means to be

an adolescent and in narrating how they experience adolescent development. In their work with children and adolescents, Wendy Luttrell and Greg Dimitriadis started with an emphasis on youth knowledge and agency as the beginning for inquiry. Recognizing the increased attention that the rights and needs of youth are being given worldwide, Luttrell (2006) used ethnographic techniques and innovative methods for working with youth (i.e. giving youth cameras and using the photos as the basis for group and interview dialogue) that explicitly privilege their perspective, interpretation, and experiential “lens”. Dimitriadis (2008) called for more participatory methods that privilege youth knowledge, and for researchers interested in “studying youth culture” to think critically about how each of these terms become operationalized in our theory, methods, and findings. Thus the theoretical arguments presented in this literature review have direct implications for how we frame our research questions, understand ourselves as researchers, and our participants as “youth” or “adolescents.” In the next section I bring narrative approaches of identity to bear on these topics, arguing that they offer a constructive way of witnessing agency, voice, multiplicity, development, embodiment, and the experiences of developing subjectivities.

#### *The Narrative Construction of Identity(ies)*

*“...the process of identity development represents the link between self and society” (Hammack, 2008, p. 224)*

Accepting that the way we understand developmental stages is in part socially constructed, what does psychological literature say about *how* the social is embodied in self and identity, at the individual level? Further, acknowledging that identity is a primary focus during adolescence and emerging adulthood (while not discounting that it is actually a lifelong focus but that it may become particularly foregrounded during

these times), how might we better understand the identity processes as they are occurring? Identity can serve as a useful frame for understanding the concepts discussed in this dissertation because the identities of adolescent, teenager, and young adult are identities that are actively and socially “put upon” the participants at specific chronological times in their lives. By understanding their experiences through a frame of identity, particularly their narrative depictions of identity, we can better understand how each of the participants actively engaged these ascribed identities, contested and revised them, and what they ultimately learned from these experiences that became part of other identities (student, woman, sexuality), future identities, or overall subjectivity.

*Clarifying the terms of “narrative” and “identity”*

Bearing in mind that “‘identity’ is an intellectually seductive concept” (Deaux, 1991, p. 77) in that it has widely scattered conceptual roots and a multitude of meanings, and that ‘narrative’ possesses perhaps as many interpretations, a full explication of “narrative identity” is probably beyond the scope of this dissertation. I do, however, have in mind particular concepts that guide my use and understanding of the term. I adopt the stance that identity is both actively constructed by an individual and socially negotiated continually, throughout time and space. As Josselson (1996) explained, “In forming and sustaining our identity, we build a bridge between who we feel ourselves to be internally and who we are recognized as being by our social world” (pg. 27). To this I would add that the way this is negotiated, or how this bridge is constructed, is relational and dialogic (Hermans, 2003). It is at once informed by the way we interact with others and the way we discursively engage the scripts that surround us. As Hammack stated, identity is “defined as ideology cognized through the

individual engagement with discourse, made manifest in a personal narrative constructed and reconstructed across the life course and scripted in and through social interaction and social practice” (2008, p. 223). And so we move from how a person feels internally and how others recognize this, affectively, to a dialogical and narrative consideration of how this story is told and re-told. Thus, I do not take a static approach to identity, rather I follow Somers’s (1994) heed that, “One way to avoid the hazards of rigidifying aspects of identity into a misleading categorical entity is to incorporate into the core conception of identity the categorically destabilizing dimensions of time, space, and relationality” (p. 606). Somers continues by arguing that “conceptual narrativity” – or bringing a narrative lens to studies of identity – is a key way of incorporating these destabilizing concepts.

Narrative thus enters concepts of identity in two important ways that warrant a clear distinction. There is the assumption that identity is crafted and enacted narratively; in discourses one engages with and the stories one tells about their life. In this approach, narrative identity offers a useful way of understanding personality as it is central to how a person experiences their self and understands their personal functioning in a broader world (Singer, 2004). Narratives serve an organizing function that helps us see relationships between our thoughts, emotions, actions, and experiences with others (McAdams, 1996). Thorne and colleagues (Thorne & McLean, 2003) have proposed a “process model” to explain how the stories we tell about ourselves becomes entwined in our own developmental processes.

Distinct from this, but still related, is the idea of a narrative approach to *analysis*, which presumes that because of how identities are enacted and performed, a narrative lens to analysis is a key approach to understanding the processes of identity development. I propose that, building on Hammack’s note above regarding identity

serving as the link between self and society, taking a narrative approach to studying identity is the most effective way to observe how adolescent and young adult development processes unfold in The SOURCE setting and throughout time.

Narratives—the stories we tell about ourselves and others—as units of study provide a useful conceptualization of the practice of identity construction as it relates to self and behavior. I see narrative identity theory as providing not only a conceptualization of how we interact with others, but as also providing a more useful window into how these interactions and the constructions of our myriad identities contribute to our overall sense of self.

A narrative lens also provides room for emotion, embodiment, and relationality in a way that many sociological approaches to identity and self, such as Goffman's (1959) "dramaturgical self", do not (Reynolds, 1993). In this way narratives allow for a more explicit investigation of how these youth engaged in "identity work" in this theatre setting that simultaneously privileged their voices, acknowledged social influence, and situated the entire inquiry developmentally. In particular, it appears that participation in The SOURCE, as discussed in the analytic chapters, constituted the creation of a distinct, albeit temporary, "SOURCE-member identity." Narratives thus appeared critical to identifying and explicating *processes* of identity development, such as the creation of a temporary identity for a specific purpose. Indeed, this emphasis on process developed in my own work in part as a response to critiques of psychosocial theories lacking explication of such process. Skinner, Valsiner, and Holland argued that "sociogenetic theories mostly reiterate the claim of the social constitution of individual psychology without furthering ideas of the processes by which this happens and without properly acknowledging the social tensions and contestations that individual narrators must navigate" (2001, p. 11).

Therefore, a primary aim of my research is to uncover these "tensions and contestations" by studying the narratives of young adults as they describe their lives in transition.

*Bringing narrative to bear on young-adult development*

The point at which I encountered my participants was of particular importance. Though they range in age from 18 to 34, they were, for all intents and purposes, loosely categorized as young or emerging adults. As explained further in my methods, I asked them to equally reflect on their past, present, and future, hoping to encompass their memories of adolescence, their current experience of young adulthood, and their thoughts on what the future may look like. They were still very much in the process of becoming, for as Josselson notes, "Developmental psychology presumes that people are "formed" by the end of adolescence and tends not to look beyond – into adulthood" (pg. 7, 1996). This study was interested in the processes of this becoming as conveyed through subjective experience and interpersonal relationships, rather than how it fits into a specified developmental stage or hierarchy. As previously explained, adolescence and emerging adulthood are largely socially constructed (or constrained) concepts to which we, as a society, ascribe an inordinate amount of value and expectation. Popular notions of "at-risk youth" and the "quarterlife crisis" have infused our cultural discourse with worries about youth. Josselson's narrative work, in describing women's identity development and their "revisions" of identity, offered many parallels and guidance to understanding young-adult development as she chronicled the ways in which a society yearns for a clear, coherent image of what a woman is (in my case, adolescent or young adult). In negotiating this image, society collectively sets out to "fix" women in another way, by "repairing" their deficiencies

so that they will fit the patterns of our imaginings. We are quick, as a society, to point a scolding finger at women and then to offer them advice” (p. 9, 1996). This same approach could easily be applied to other social categories, such as adolescent and young adult. Perhaps it is that as gender recedes into the backdrop of identity politics (at least in current popular culture), the next great wave of identity struggle and definition will be placed on the backs of our teenagers and twenty-somethings?

Narratives, in emphasizing process, also informed both Josselson’s and Mishler’s (1992) decision to use the term “formation” instead of “development”—which implies a stage-like linearity—offers much more room for agency and growth than the negative connotations and suggested stagnations of emerging adulthood. As Mishler (1992) found in his study of the work-identities of craftsmen, taking a narrative approach to identity formation was particularly useful when engaging the participants retrospectively. His engagement with the narratives of participants allowed him to identify a series of “episodes” that ultimately traced the formation of a craftsman identity over time, showing the processes Skinner et al. long for. For Mishler, the way the story is told and the present way that the participant drew meaning from the events of their lives functioned as how the identity of this person can be understood to have formed. Narratives, therefore, served to offer some coherence to a person’s current identity(ies) and to convey to the other (interviewer, in this case) how that identity came to be.

The role of narrative in identity development becomes even more central to this project in Chapter 5, where I take up the creation of counter-narratives as a form of resistance at the organizational level of The SOURCE. Morrill et al. (Morrill, Yalda, Adelman, Musheno, & Bejarano, 2000) suggest observing youth narratives in specific, local contexts – of which The SOURCE is one – which implies,

...a partial reconceptualization of youth and adult cultures as multiple, sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting, bundles of narratives that come to be intertwined with local contexts. From this perspective, we can begin to think of the building blocks of culture as different narrative styles in which various aspects of reality are accentuated, constituted, or challenged, just as others are deemphasized or silenced. (p. 556).

Taking a contextual or organizational perspective to narratives of identity that take place in The SOURCE allowed me to ask which narratives are heard, which are produced and co-constructed, *who* are these narratives in response to, etc? Such an approach allowed the identity work taking place in The SOURCE to be positioned in a larger culture that has its own "bundles of narratives" as well.

*Honing the focus on process: Dialogical-self theory*

With regard to the narrative construction of social identities, which I believe the literature shows us are constructed out of both social realities and discourses as they combine with internal motivations and experiences, what might be an even more theoretically tangible process by which this occurs? In other words, how might the *processes* occurring in The SOURCE be further operationalized within psychological literature? With respect to theatre and performance, the theory of a dialogical-self (Hermans, 2003) provides even more clarification on how these experiences of narrative reality and narrative constructions may inform the formation of our personal identities and multifaceted selves. Hermans's (2003) theory of the self as dialogical grew out of a presumption that the mind and body are inherently connected and the emotional, visceral, and psychological experiences one has are incorporated into the

mind and cognitively understood through image-schemas and spatial orientation within the self. Dialogical self theory essentially presumes that the self is multi-voiced, embodied, spatially organized, sociohistorically contextualized, and decentralized. While experiences may seem to occur “inside” of a person, they are actually in constant dialogue, or interaction, with the context and individuals (real or imagined) that surround them. Summarized as a “multiplicity of I-positions...the dialogical self emerges from a reformation of the Jamesian (James, 1918) I-Me relationships in terms of Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel” (Hermans, 2003, pg. 100). The intrinsically social self conceptualized by James (1918) is interpreted in light of Bakhtin’s (1981) work with voice and dialogue, author and characters.

Dialogical thinking has informed notions of self and identity for decades, beginning most prominently with Mikhail Bakhtin, a literary theorist. This work was further expanded upon in psychology by Hermans and Kempen (1993) and their theory of the dialogical self. For example, Bakhtin argued, in his notion of “ideological becoming,” that through the process of developing our own identities or ideologies we often work through internally powerful discourses and reconcile them with outwardly authoritative discourses to establish a guiding ideology that feels appropriate for our self. Recognizing various discourses within and outside of the self is neither discordant nor harmonious. Rather, it leads to a process where the individual questions and amends their ideological consciousness. Although Bakhtin theorized the self in a variety of ways (Nielsen, 1995), his concept of ideological becoming captured the self operating in a social setting and has been particularly useful for psychologists. Observing the ideological self implied an observance of the complex and interconnected idea systems within the person rather than isolated thoughts and concepts (Freedman & Ball, 2004). Reminiscent of Erikson’s notion of the adolescent

struggle between “identity and role confusion,” Bakhtin’s (1981) ideological becoming seems particularly relevant to connecting the theoretical framework to the practical experiences of developing youth in a theatre program. More recently, Hermans and colleagues (Bertau, 2004; Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Verhofstadt-Deneve, Dillen, Helskens, & Siongers, 2004) have investigated how Bakhtin’s theorizing can apply to the narrative construction of a “dialogical self.” Hermans has posited that the self is essentially composed of a “theatre of voices” that represent various characters, personas, and individuals (both real and imagined) relevant to a person and that they are in constant interaction with one another through dialogue. Thus, even in metaphor, dialogical self theory allows a way of understanding the transactional experience of literal theatrical engagement under investigation in this study. Recent empirical studies, primarily in developmental literature, support this connection (Bertau, 2004; Verhofstadt-Deneve, Dillen, Helskens, & Siongers, 2004).

Building on these understandings of identity(ies) as representing an interplay between the self and society, as being in continual development or process, as formed relationally and dialogically with others and told through stories that attempt to reconcile these many factors, I am interested in the creation of a SOURCE identity at that moment in time for the participants, and how it comes to be enveloped, diffused, discarded or centralized into other identities the participant formed upon leaving The SOURCE. Thus, there are essentially two key moments at which I see identity and narrative converging through dialogical exchange that are the focus of my investigation. The first is at the time of involvement in The SOURCE, where the creation of a SOURCE-member identity is narrated by the participants and discussed further in Chapter 4. The second is in how this identity, after it was no longer directly

relevant (i.e. they “graduated” from the SOURCE) persisted as part of the “theatre of voices” (Hermans, 2006) within the person and later informed future formation of identity(ies). Before diving in to the data, however, I want to pause and consider an aspect that makes The SOURCE further unique in this investigation: its use of peer-education theatre as a setting that made visible many of these processes of identity formation and even encouraged active engagement with multiplicities of self.

*Theatre and Peer-Education as Constructive Spaces for Identity Work*

The arts allow young people to experience themselves and the world around them through distinct aesthetic modalities – through their bodies, through sensual language, through the visual. They allow young people to share their work with their peers, to take risks in public, performance settings, to get authentic feedback. (Dimitriadis, Cole, & Costello, 2009, p. 362)

Despite the fact that funding for school and community arts/drama programs continues to be cut, there is scholarly consensus that arts and drama provide an important tool for understanding one’s self and community. Many areas of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education have investigated the impact of community and youth theatre programs on the personal development of the participants/actors, the influence within the community, and the broader ability for theatre to counter hegemonic/oppressive discourses (Gallagher, 2007; Mattingly, 2001; Wright, 2006; Chapman, 2000; Guhathakurta, 2006). The body of research is rich with evidence that theatre, in particular, serves many purposes for both individual and societal development by allowing an opportunity for personal expression and creative reaction to the conditions in which its participants live. In the literature reviewed below, I

address distinct aspects of teen-theatre and peer-education theatre that are central to this study: documented successes of working with youth through art, the interpersonal and intersubjective consequences of such engagement, and the personal and psychological experience of engaging with the art of theatrical performance. These aspects are presumed to converge on the identity formation processes and personal development of the performers in profound ways.

Kathleen Gallagher (2007) found in her studies of drama classrooms in urban high schools that drama offered opportunities to negotiate identity development and social relationships for adolescents. At a time when young men and women are developing their identities, navigating social pressures from peers, family, and society, and trying to understand the emotions and thoughts going through their minds, what can participation in a theater group mean for their developing self? In her ethnographic study, Gallagher argued that a pedagogy of drama “asks that the ‘natural’ (often stereotypical) images of ‘self’ and ‘other’ be given an element of the conspicuous” (pg. 86). Youth were allowed to openly interrogate the identities and labels they assumed, and those that are placed on them. As she found, students contrasted this space with the street, one that allows for little experimentation with aspects of self and identity. More importantly, while creating the space for experimenting with identity, the drama classroom also provided a direction for this experimentation: “Drama pedagogy offers a sense of trajectory, that is, identities/characters that can shift, change, take action, and move forward” (Gallagher, 2007, p. 87). This space, she argued, sits in direct opposition to the traditional and now increasingly prescribed curricula and pedagogy of the everyday classroom. In her work with students across these schools, she found that the most

striking and perhaps the most important shift that occurs in the drama classroom is that it relies upon difference and conflict to build a story, to build movement and action. Whereas other rooms in the school often suppressed difference, drama depended on it, “drama takes difference as its starting point, rather than its challenge” (pg. 88). Gallagher also acknowledged her observation that the fictional realities the young men and women enacted in their performances were often in constant dialogic interaction with the lived realities of their own lives, the power dynamics they experienced, and the social pressures they embodied. In addition, drama seemed to provide an alternative means of recognition for the youth, whose modes of interacting - “alternative literacies” - with culture and each other were often discounted by the educational system. Similarly, Mattingly (2001) argued that in modern American society, young people have limited “access to the resources and institutions that shape representation” (pg. 449); as a result they often did not possess the cultural and social capital to resist popular images of youth, particularly “at-risk” youth as criminal and/or dangerous. Therefore, both are examples of how community theatre, as a medium, offered a chance at representation, expression, and recognition not normally available to youth.

Looking more specifically at peer-education (PE) around sexual health and sexuality, Ashcraft (2006) found in her ethnographic study of a teen sex-education PE group known as ESPERANZA, that the creative use of peer-educators made the topics more approachable for students. She also argued that ESPERANZA, in its plays and demonstrations, was able to actively counter dominant scripts of adolescents and heteronormativity. The group presented adolescents with gender-neutral information (e.g. “internal condom”) while simultaneously presuming that adolescents were capable of handling such information. While the plays and workshops were effective in

distributing information to adolescents, one of Ashcraft's critiques is that the opportunity for critical discussion around the "tough" questions of relationships, power, gendered expectations, etc. was lacking in the face of more "test-like" post-performance workshops. However, in documenting a peer-education theatre program in Nigeria, Samuel Kafewo (2008) conveyed a compelling antidote to the avoidance of such critical discussions. In the program he worked with young women would create plays that consisted of two scenes. In between scenes 1 and 2 the facilitator would "pause" the play and ask the audience for reactions to the choices that the protagonist is faced with making. Premised on the work of Freire (1970) and Boal (1985), he argued that this approach is particularly effective because the content of the plays grew from youth's actual concerns and there was an expected component of audience interaction. As he argued, "The project demonstrated that the world is not static and handed down, and that by using a dialogic approach, adolescents can move from lack of knowledge and a culture of silence in a paternalistic system of education to participation, dialogue and freedom to learn" (Kafewo, 2008, p. 208).

In their meta-analysis of research on "the impact of participation in performing arts on adolescent health and behavior", Daykin, Orme and Evans et al. (2008) found that the studies yielded data on four main areas: interactions with peers and social skills; knowledge and attitudes associated with HIV/AIDS; knowledge, attitudes and behavior related to sexual health; and knowledge and behavior-change dealing with alcohol, tobacco and illegal drug use (p. 255-256). In general, they found that most adolescent health interventions that employed dramatic arts reported positive outcomes. They found the most support (and the most studies) for positive influences on social skills and peer relations with mixed outcomes on specific knowledge and behaviors related to HIV/AIDS. One area they found lacking, and which this study

aimed to contribute to, was the use of performative arts outside the clinical setting. In addition, they noted a lack of studies on “process issues” (control, stakeholders, participant motivation, etc.) versus many more studies on specific outcomes.

Thus peer-education is premised on the understanding that peers respond more positively to other peers, rather than adults, who they often perceive as unable to relate to their specific circumstances or experiences. Yet Geertz (1986) notes that truly knowing another’s phenomenological experience of the world is essentially impossible. We can only learn about their experience, he argues, through external expressions. With regard to peer-education then, there are important interpersonal and intersubjective obstacles to overcome, and theatre may be key in aiding this process. Kapferer (1986), in studying exorcism rituals of the Sinhalese, suggested that a *performative* experience (ritual, in this case, but he leaves it open for a variety of performative experiences such as drama) may be a way of having a shared, mutual experience that results in the transformation of both parties. As he argues,

Art and ritual share potentially one fundamental quality in common: the Particular and the Universal are brought together and are transformed in the process. The Particular is universalized beyond the existential immediacy of the individual’s situation so that it is transcended, even while its groundedness and specificity are maintained, to include others in what is essentially the same experiential situation (1986, pg. 191).

It is this externalizing potential that Dennis Francis (2010) found so compelling in his work with a peer-education youth drama group in South Africa. More specifically, Francis investigates how Forum Theatre (FT), a variant of Augusto Boal’s well-known Theatre of the Oppressed, can be used to externalize controversial and/or personal issues into a dramatic forum where perspective can be gained and discussion

and dialogue can occur. In considering Francis's study in light of Kapferer's declaration, the "particular" of individual curiosities about sex and the "universal" of the fact that many youth are having sex but unable to talk about or voice their experiences have an opportunity to meet in the third space of the stage, where character(s) and audience can interact with a degree of safety and protection. The specific sexual-health knowledge conveyed still grounds the experience, but the dialogue on stage takes on more of a characteristic of play. However, as Francis found, the space of safety created within any arts programs and the willingness to engage in dialogue about difficult or controversial issues can greatly limit such transformative potential. If participants do not feel free enough to speak openly, to ask questions, or to reflect on how the topic is relevant to their own lives, then the dramatic medium (particularly as embodied by Boal's techniques) will have a limited potential.

Thus theatre has intersubjective (Benjamin, 1998) potential that is directly relevant to peer-education. But there are also individual considerations: experiences of engaging personally with a medium of art. At a more explicitly psychological level, Benson (2001) argued that when we are engaged with art (regardless of the format) we exist for a moment with the art and return to our self transformed, in either minute or profound ways. Engagement with a piece, either in viewing or in creating, can provide an awareness of the world that expands upon what we once knew; thus, when we return to the real and tangible moments of our everyday lives it is with this added knowledge and experience. Such knowledge, it can be argued, becomes added to our "repertoire" (Hermans, 2003), and thus contributes to how we will interact with and understand the world henceforth. In the theatre space, one becomes engaged with a piece by physically acting out a character and vocalizing their experiences, or by the performance of others. Benson's approach suggests that the engagement with

the characters, with other cast members, with the audience, or materials can provide everyone in the space a “teachable” moment where they are cued into a perspective different from, but not necessarily unrelated to, our own. As Park-Fuller (n.d.) has argued in her documentation of the Playback Theatre technique, such “third spaces” lie somewhere in between “indeterminacy and order” (p. 7) where “identities and social structures are composed and re-constructed through joint performances of personal experience and expression” that she calls “performativity for pedagogy.”

John Dewey also theorized extensively on the personal experience of art. He describes a “transactional experience” in which “the experience changes by undergoing a transformation of the self...[and the] object of experience changes through the acquisition of new meanings” (Jackson, 1998, pp. 5-6). Dewey and Benson both view a person’s interaction with art as a moment of personal exploration, expansion, and experience. These experiences do not simply vanish when we disengage with the piece (i.e. leave the museum and return to the busy streets of New York or exit the theatre and go out for dessert); instead, they remain with us as feelings that we have felt and perspectives we have witnessed and they will inform our future experiences in the world. Considered together, Benson and Dewey’s philosophy combined with Gallagher’s empirical findings help explain what may be occurring psychologically in the space of youth theatre. A psychological grounding of the aesthetic experience, building on Dewey (1934/2005) and elaborated on by Benson (2001) and Greene (2000), acknowledges the transformative power of any aesthetic experience, whether it be a dramatic performance, a ritual, song, dance, or the viewing/observing of art. These theorists viewed the aesthetic as having the potential to momentarily challenge the self and its current ways of knowing with a new perspective, providing the impetus for personal transformation. Take, for example, a

recent article documenting the successes of a theatre program—The 52nd Street Project—in New York City (Shattuck, 2008). In this program, students engaged with theatre and workshops by writing their own plays that were then performed by well-known celebrity volunteers. The experience allowed the youth to work with highly skilled actors to bring their imagined scripts to life. The project provided “at-risk” youth with what the artistic director simply calls “an experience.” Such engagements constitute “an experience” because the extrinsic meaning becomes intrinsic (Jackson, 1998).

This dissertation, therefore, examined such “experiences” as well as the creation of such “third spaces” that allowed them to occur. Moreover, this dissertation examined how these experiences and understanding of such spaces persist within the individual participants, even as their time in The SOURCE comes to an end and they move on to new arenas of life.

With this understanding of how adolescence and young adulthood is socially constructed, and thus how those constructions can become ascribed identities that come with expectations and social control, this literature review suggests that there are other ways of working with and listening to youth. Theatre is just one such way, but it is the focus of this dissertation. Additionally, while theatre offers invaluable opportunities for identity development, it also affords opportunities for learning about the self, through engagement with performance, and for learning about others through the shared space that such performances allow. I would now like to shift to *how* I used these theoretical underpinnings to frame my inquiry into better understanding the experience of participating in The SOURCE.

### Chapter 3

Engaging the dimensionality of The SOURCE: Methods and Analytic Framework

## Chapter 3, Methods and Analytic Framework: Engaging the dimensionality of The SOURCE

### *Introduction*

Any study of The SOURCE has to be designed in such a way that the full dimensionality and layers of what it means to participate in The SOURCE can be captured. With a history spanning two decades and a central focus on reproductive health and sex-education, the method(s) must also engage history, discourse, power, and relationship. Additionally, The SOURCE's own commitment to aesthetically engaging their participants and audiences through dramatic performances demands that the method(s) also engage or, at a minimum, appreciate this experience of creativity and performance. This realization, coupled with my own scholarly interests in the social world as experienced at the individual and interpersonal levels, led me to search for multiple methods that would allow me to compose a compelling and richly layered narrative that felt both authentic, representative, theoretically useful, and compelling. Informed by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) reassuring guidance to produce a narrative that both informs *and* inspires, Weis and Fine's insistence on recognizing the contextual, relational and "textured variations of identities" (2004, p. xviii), and Ouellette's reminder that "every story one hears...represents a multitude of voices" (1996, p. 359), I attempted to design a study and establish an analytic framework that would be as multidimensional as that which it was observing. In the spirit of "oscillation" (Weis & Fine, 2004), I often found myself constantly moving between methods, theory, and data.

Because of this constant movement and how the elements of this dissertation grew out of a broader study, the story of the methods and analysis is one best told chronologically. As with any study that blends evaluation, participation, and

dissertation, its journey is bound to be complex. What began as an evaluative study of The SOURCE planted the seed for this dissertation, "a study of *the experience of being part of* The SOURCE." I imagine the Aamon's Knob, the mountain in the Smokies that my grandparents used to live on, and our journey to reach their house, slowly winding around and around while eventually reaching our destination, which towered above where we began. In many ways the process for this project was similar. I began at the foot of the mountain with a team of researchers, brought in to evaluate the impact of The SOURCE on participants and the community. In ways that could be considered a "grounded theory" approach (Charmaz, 2005), I built on this experience—the data and findings—to begin the analyses anew, this time foregrounding the questions I hoped to answer for my dissertation. Though the questions were similar, they had changed throughout the first engagement with The SOURCE and had become explicitly more grounded in social and personality psychology. They had become *my* research questions. This chapter tells the story of how *this* dissertation emerged out of the larger project of evaluating the SOURCE. To fully disentangle the two would be impossible, because they informed one another; rather, my aim is to show how the dissertation unfolded over time and in relation to the original evaluation work.

#### *October 2006 (Watching a Play)*

In early October, Leslie Glass contacted Michelle Fine and indicated she would like to fund a study of The SOURCE Teen Theatre. Leslie is a best-selling mystery author who divides her time between New York City and Sarasota and who founded an organization to provide research fellowships for students engaged with social issues. She had worked with CUNY in the past, funding the *Changing Minds* study on higher-education in prison (Fine et al, 2001). Michelle asked if I would like to take on such a

project, with the explicit agreement that I could use the data for my dissertation as well. I agreed and two projects were born.

The first step was for me to travel to Sarasota in late October to see a performance and meet the director of The SOURCE, KT Curran. On this trip I saw a performance of *The Day I Opened My Eyes*, a SOURCE21 play that had recently toured nationally and dealt with issues of global reproductive rights. To say that I was stunned would be an understatement. Having grown up in central Florida, I knew the sociopolitical climate quite well and I was impressed to see young adult actors engaging such weighty issues as the "Global Gag Rule" and honor-killings. I met the cast, KT, and had a meeting with Leslie to talk about the project.

It was inevitable that data collection and my preliminary thoughts on analysis would begin at this moment, following one of Maxwell's (2003) rules for qualitative research. One result of the "Epistemological Foundations" course I took my first year of graduate school meant that forever ingrained in my mind was a triangle with theory, method, and evidence each occupying one point. Always connected, it was also a reminder to me that they often developed in tandem, influencing the direction each would take. This image became my guide for envisioning how my dissertation would grow out of this project.

#### *December 2006 (Getting to know The SOURCE)*

On December 8, 2006, Leslie Glass held a gathering of people who would be involved with the larger project. Planned Parenthood administrators and a team from CUNY, consisting of myself, Michelle Fine, Sara McClelland and Melissa Rivera, met with KT to discuss the project. At this meeting we discussed the purpose and focus of the evaluation study, the timeline of each phase, the deliverables and funding. It was

also made clear that from this larger study I would carve out a project for my dissertation.

Knowing the history of The SOURCE, which at that time spanned more than twenty years, and recognizing the importance of understanding the organization in its full environment, we wanted to develop methods that covered time and context. Additionally, because the primary researchers were not thespians (except for Melissa), and because The SOURCE is unique in its topics and affiliation with Planned Parenthood, we wanted to build in an opportunity for SOURCE members to guide the research. This commitment grew out of our collective practice of participatory action research methods and our recognition that such methods privilege the voice of the participants, who we deemed to be the experts on what it meant to experience The SOURCE (Lewin, 1946; Heron & Reason, 1997). With this in mind a date was set for a two-day "Design Team" meeting of a small group of SOURCE alumni to discuss what methods could be used to engage all former members (alumni from the past 20 years) around what it was like to be involved in The SOURCE. It was also established that the data collected would be used for a "product" to be determined as the project progressed: a musical of first-time sexual experiences and a set of monologues grown from SOURCE member stories were the leading ideas.

#### *March 2007 (Design Team and Identity Mapping)*

##### *Design Team*

On March 30-31, 2007, we convened what we called the "Design Team", a group of past SOURCE members, ages 18-32, who came together for a weekend of thought, reflection, and discussion on the meaning of The SOURCE in their lives.

We relied on KT to assemble the Design Team, since she had existing rapport with the members and their contact information. We explained to KT that our main goal was to have a team that was as diverse as possible in terms of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and experience with SOURCE (level of previous acting experience, role in the SOURCE, etc.). KT, Melissa, and I had numerous conference calls with each other to discuss potential Design Team members and the plans for the weekend retreat. We recognized that relying on KT to help us recruit design team members could be problematic in that only those that had a positive relationship with her would respond. In our conversations with KT we often discussed such possible biases and asked KT to try and recruit not only on the more commonly identified levels of diversity (race, class, gender, etc.) but on diversity of experience with The SOURCE, as well. Though we have no way of knowing how the data may be skewed toward those who had positive experiences with The SOURCE and KT, the aim of the study is to understand *what* was important and *how* it manifested in their lives since. Table 1, below, presents the demographics of the Design Team with respect to the more common aspects of diversity that psychological studies tend to report. The piece of demographic data that may be of most interest to the reader is the age and years participated, which show a range of participants who have since moved on from The SOURCE as well as some who have found ways to continue their involvement in The SOURCE, even a decade later.

Table 1. Design Team Demographics

Name (Alias)	Sex	Age	Race (self-defined)	Years Participated	Socioeconomic Status (self-defined)
Richard	M	32	Caucasian	1990-1996	Raised lower class, ever rising
Melissa	F	24	Black	1996-1998	Middle-class
Elizabeth	F	31	Caucasian	1991-1994, 2005-2007	Raised upper class, currently middle class artist
Tyler	M	18	Bi-racial	2003-2005	Upper class
Grace	F	20	Black/White	1999-2005	Middle class
Michelle	F	21	Human	2000-2003, 2005	Middle-middle class
Aiden	M	22	White	2001-2004	Middle class
Elena	F	19	Hispanic	2002-2006	Middle class
John	M	18	Caucasian	2005-2007	Upper middle class

The agenda for the two-day meeting is in Appendix 1. The activities for the March design team meeting grew out of previously documented participatory action research approaches with youth and adults (Fine, Torre, Burns, & Payne, 2007; Schensul, Berg, Schensul, & Sydlo, 2004). Michelle, Sara, and I presented the team members with a series of activities that were designed to acquaint the participants to each other and to us, as they were from different cohorts of SOURCE casts.

It was also important to us and to KT that "the energy" that made The SOURCE familiar to the participants be re-created so as to help the group bridge generations and encourage a greater level of comfort for sharing and reflecting. The trust and camaraderie of The SOURCE was, presumably, something they could all identify with even though they may have participated in The SOURCE up to a decade in years apart. This was done through a series of movement/acting warm-ups at the start and end of each day. In addition to the warm-ups, we had the participants create "identity maps" (discussed in the next section) that allowed them to "visually depict The SOURCE in their lives, then and now."

The Design Team members also participated in a group discussion about what the study should cover and, in breakout groups, worked on generating survey questions (discussed below, final version in Appendix 2). We were interested in having them generate a set of survey questions to see both what *they* would focus on about The SOURCE experience and *how* they would phrase questions to their peers. Because we were not "insiders" to The SOURCE, we wanted to survey questions to grow topically from their conversations, consistent with the PAR methodology cited above, because we presumed they were the experts on what it meant to partake in The SOURCE (whereas we were trying to learn about that very experience). They also created a revised demographic form for participants to use (based on a critique of the demographic form I provided) (Appendix 3). Their main revision was to eliminate close-ended questions. They wanted demographic information, particularly race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status to be open-ended so that people could express these as they wished. Though this would present challenges for analysis later on in the process, in terms of drawing conclusions across groups, they were collectively very adamant about these questions remaining open. Though close-ended questions have been shown to achieve greater response rates, they have also been shown to have higher frequencies of inaccurate responses (Griffith, Cook, Guyatt, & Charles, 1999). Ultimately, I decided that if there were to be any statistical analyses performed at the level of groups then I would have to form groups based on the open-ended responses. This was one of the first moments that I realized the sense of "openness" created in The SOURCE and the appreciation for diversity and self-definition. These themes would recur later at all points of data collection and analysis, as I discuss in the coming chapters.

The Design Team participants were compensated \$200 for the two days. At this point in the process we hoped the Design Team would be able to meet at two time-points. This first meeting was intended to discuss the types of methods we would like to use and the questions we'd like to ask to learn about The SOURCE. The second meeting was intended to serve as an analysis retreat, where the Design Team would return to understand the data. This ultimately proved to be financially and logistically beyond our means, as many of the Design Team members dispersed across the country for school and career moves. Though it was unfortunate that I was unable to reconvene the Design Team to work through the initial analyses of the data, I was able to return to The SOURCE at several points, to witness performances and to conduct two follow-up interviews, and I used these moments as a space to discuss my preliminary findings with participants and to gather feedback from them.

### *Identity Maps*

The nine Design Team members each created an "identity map" during the first part of the two-day retreat. We presented them with large, poster-size sheets of paper, markers, construction paper and scissors and asked them "How has SOURCE been in your life from then to now? Where does it live in you, travel with you?" We encouraged them to represent their selves, the influence of others and the emotions surrounding their depictions on these maps. This mapping technique was an explicit attempt at spatializing identity(ies) and a creative way of asking participants to visualize their myriad facets of self. As Sirin and Fine (2008) have found, mapping exercises elicit images of selves that are filled with multiplicity of identity and conflicts within selves that are often depicted in profound ways. Such visual methods have a history, particularly in child psychology, of eliciting spatial drawings that are considered as representations of psychological experience and which can illuminate

underlying psychological processes within an individual (Winnicott, The use of an object, 1969). However, such approaches have also been critiqued for the resulting "adultist interpretations" of children's drawings rather than the result of bringing them into the research in a participatory sense (Young & Barrett, 2001, p. 143). Thus, my use of maps sat in between, attempting to at once gather a different representation of process while explicitly inviting the participant to engage with the research creatively. Building on the pioneering work of Jodelet and Milgram (1976), I have had success with this method in other projects, particularly for its ability to provide another piece of data from the participant that can sit in constant dialogue with their interview, survey, or observational data (see Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine & Sirin, 2011 for dialogical uses of this method).

The decision to use identity maps was one of the first moments where my ideas for this dissertation, as it sat in relation to the larger project, began to develop. My interest in these maps had grown from a previous project (Fine, Stoudt, & Futch; Futch & Jaffe-Walter, 2011) with immigrant young-adults who attended International high schools in New York City. In this project they were asked to map their journeys, from home country to where they are now, including their experiences in the schools. These maps produced a plethora of data—in the form of particularly memorable visual narratives—and also spurred my thinking about development as it occurs across time and space. I became specifically focused on how mapping, as a methodology, can serve to interrogate one of the core social-personality psychological questions - the relations between self and other, the hyphen between social and personality.

The maps proved to be a very fruitful experience for the SOURCE Design Team members as well. The time that we had allotted in the agenda was not nearly enough—the members worked for nearly an hour on their maps. They set up supplies

around a large bank of tables; some of them opted to work on the floor. As they worked they talked to one another, sharing stories of mutual friends who were in SOURCE. After they finished their maps we hung them up around the room and conducted a "gallery walk" where everyone walked around, observing each other's maps. Each member then presented his or her map to the group. These presentations were often very emotional but, as we had hoped would happen, the space seemed welcoming and comfortable enough to share such personal experiences. All of the maps produced that day are available in the Appendices (Appendix 4) and parts of them are present in the analysis chapters.

The maps supported my efforts at getting to know The SOURCE, witnessing the kind of sharing that happens in that space, and understanding the participants' relationships with one another and KT. They also supported my desire to create a "portrait" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997) of The SOURCE, one that represented the various paths participants took through the space, what they found most influential, and what they carried with them. Though I have used mapping with various groups since then, the maps produced by The SOURCE Design Team members were some of the most creative and detailed that I have ever seen. My interpretation of this is three-fold. First, I think the participants were given extra time and extra materials, which resulted in such detailed maps. Second, though they were creating individual maps, they were in constant conversation with one another, sharing memories and stories. Most likely this helped spur their recollections and provided more content for their maps. Third, and something that I explore further in the data analysis chapters, I think the maps connected on a creative level that was familiar with The SOURCE participants and that allowed them to use a more expressive mode to "perform" (in the drawing sense) what SOURCE meant to them. As the visual narratives created by the

maps were so memorable, and as they were completed early in the study, I often found myself recalling them while reading through interviews or looking at survey data. In this way they were involved dialectically (again, in "oscillation") in my analysis as a source of data for fleshing out the interview findings and as a means of visually depicting the themes I heard across interviews.

### *Summer 2007 (Interviews)*

After witnessing a performance, meeting with KT, and working with the Design Team, I was gained a clearer understanding of the magnitude of The SOURCE experience. I realized its role in the community, the powerful content of the plays, the importance of the regular meetings, and the deep connection that members shared with KT. Using all of these observations and experiences, I crafted a draft interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews that we (the Design Team) decided would take place over the summer. I circulated this protocol to KT, Melissa, Sara, Michelle, and the Design Team members. After much feedback, we had a final protocol that aimed to cover three time points: the participant's experiences during their years in The SOURCE, their reflection on these experiences *since* the SOURCE, and how they understood the current relevance of The SOURCE in their lives or community.

Participants for the interviews constituted a purposive sample (Patton, 1990) in that they were selected because of their previous participation in The SOURCE. As explained below, we attempted to stratify the sample in terms of the years of participation as well as varieties of participation (plays, meetings, directing, etc.). These methods presumed that, to an extent, participants were self-selected in that they felt that the SOURCE presented a valuable enough opportunity to "return the

favor” in some way by participating in the study. The question driving this study, therefore, was not whether or not SOURCE was important, but *in what ways* it was important, and how the participants narrated it. I made use of what McLean et al (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007) call “situated stories” – stories told in a specific moment for a specific sociocultural purpose – to understand the relevance of SOURCE to my participant’s lives. In other words, the participants constructed, with me as a researcher, a narrative about how and why The SOURCE resonated with their lives. Furthermore, I was interested in the development of identities and since narratives, and the narratives we selectively tell, are reflective of the identities we claim (Spector-Mersel, 2010), asking participants for stories of their experiences and their interpretation of how it influenced them was an appropriate method for discussing such interests. As Rolling (2010) noted, narrative work is, “research that seeks not to prove or disprove, but rather to create movement, to displace, to pull apart and allow for resettlement” (p. 99). While the methods used in this project grew out of a larger project that did seek to demonstrate the importance of The SOURCE, the aim of the interviews was to understand the meaning participants ascribe to this importance and how they felt its presence, both then and now, in order to understand how The SOURCE may have influenced their identity(ies).

The questions were designed to answer some of the issues that the funders (both the Leslie Glass Foundation and Planned Parenthood) wanted to know about The SOURCE, and my own interests as well. I knew that I was most interested in identity across time, and so I made sure to structure the interviews as loosely as possible (though structured enough to keep me on track, as this was my first experience conducting these types of interviews). I also wanted the interviews to produce narratives that I could then analyze for this dissertation. As Hammack (2008) explains:

...the personal narrative provides meaning and purpose by creating continuity in time for the individual...perhaps even more significantly, in linking identity and narrative in an individual, we link an individual life story to a particular cultural and historical narrative of a group (p. 233).

I knew that I wanted to understand individual experience and development as it occurred in and through this larger group (The SOURCE) and the community (of Sarasota, and beyond). Therefore, I felt co-constructed (Mishler, 1986) narratives would be the most useful. Because the ability to conduct lengthy life-story interviews was beyond the scope of the funded project and my abilities, as someone who lived 1300 miles from the research participants, I decided to use questions that I thought would elicit narratives, in the form of stories, from the interviewees. The questions were open-ended and broad enough serve as launching points for a dialogue between the interviewee and myself on the meaning of SOURCE in their lives. One of the first questions they were asked was simply "tell me a story about your time in The SOURCE." This proved to start the interview in compelling ways more often than not. Robert Weiss (1994) argued "Any question is a good question if it directs the respondent to material needed by the study in a way that makes it easy for the respondent to provide the material" (p. 73). In following his methods for helping respondents "develop information" I explained how the questions would flow from a retrospective look at their time in The SOURCE, what they have been doing since then, and where they find themselves now, so they would understand the overall arc of the interview and the information they would be asked about.

Like the Design Team, we relied on KT's connections and knowledge of past SOURCE members to help recruit interview participants. Again with an eye toward diversity of both identity(ies) and experience, she was able to find 21 former SOURCE

members who were in the Sarasota area (or willing to drive a short distance) and willing to be interviewed. Conducting the interviews during the summer proved to be a very good (though inadvertent) choice, as many members were home from school to visit their families. Table 2 (below) presents a demographic breakdown of the SOURCE participants interviewed. While analysis looked across the participants' holistic experiences and does not occur on the basis of these demographics, I consider the following pieces of data to be helpful in conceptualizing the sample of individuals who contributed their stories to this study.

Table 2. Interview Participant Demographics

Name	M/F	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Years in SOURCE	Survey/ Map	Inter- viewer
Aiden	M	22	White	Gay	2001-2004	Map and Survey	M
Alicia	F	36	African American	Straight	2006-07; SOURCE21		V
Anna	F	26	White	Straight	1995-97; 2001- 02 as AD		V
Ashley	F	25	White	Straight	1995-2000	Survey	V
Beth	F	18	White	Bisexual	2003-2007 <sup>7</sup>		V
Doug	M						M
Elena	F	20	Hispanic	Straight	2002-2006	Map and Survey	M, V <sup>8</sup>
Elizabeth	F	31	White	Straight	1991-1994; 2005-2007	Map and Survey	M, V
Eva	F	20	White	Straight	2002-2005; SOURCE21	Survey	V
Jennifer	F	43	White	Straight	80-82	Survey	V
John	M	19	White	Straight		Map and Survey	V
Kristen							M
Leah	F	22	White	Straight	2000-03; SOURCE21		V
Liza	F	25	White	Straight	1999-2000	Survey	V
Matt	M	20	White	Straight	2002 approx	Survey	V
Mariah	F	21		Bisexual	2002-2004		V
Ryan	M	18	Mixed	Straight	2006-07		V
Sarah	F	26	Mixed	Straight	1994-99		V
Tyler	M	19	Bi-racial	Straight	2003-2005	Map	M
William	M	33	White	Straight	1989-1992		V

<sup>7</sup> Participants ended The SOURCE at the end of the 2006-2007 school year and were interviewed during the summer after their participation was over (they graduated).

<sup>8</sup> These two participants also participated in follow-up interviews. Melissa conducted the first interview, Valerie conducted the follow-up.

Alan	M	3?	African-American	Straight	1993-1996		V
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I conducted 16 of the interviews and Melissa Rivera, Ph. D., my colleague at CUNY, conducted the other five.

*January 2008 (Online Survey)*

The third phase of the project was to design an online survey (Appendix 2) in order to gather data from a larger pool of former participants than those being interviewed. This was designed in a similar manner to the interview protocol. At the Design Team meeting we worked in groups to generate large posters of topic areas the survey should cover and questions that should be included. The amount of ideas generated by the team members was staggering. Topics ranged from how The SOURCE influenced members morally; how it influenced understandings of sexuality, citizenship, and responsibility; and memorable audience reactions. Some members wanted to ask questions about sex-education in general and others argued that it would be helpful to know if survey respondents had ever dealt with sexism, racism, bullying, mental health issues, or abuse. One group of DT members created a list of comparative questions that asked survey respondents to compare sex education in school vs. The SOURCE. In sum, the DT wrote out more than twelve pages of possible survey questions that they felt were relevant to understanding how SOURCE may have influenced former members.

After the meeting I synthesized the topics into general areas and combined repetitive questions. I drafted an online survey, taking into consideration questions that would be better suited for an interview, and how long it would take a person to complete the survey. I also made sure to include some questions that were directly

relevant to my dissertation topic, such as favorite and least favorite characters to play, memorable moments with the audience and the feeling of The SOURCE environment. The survey was circulated to KT and the Design Team members. After receiving their feedback and revising the survey it was submitted for IRB approval and data collection began at the end of the month.

The link to the survey was sent as a message to The SOURCE members via MySpace and through email from KT. Using a list of all previous participants, KT tried to reach as many as possible by phone or email to let them know about the survey and provide them with the link. KT estimates that she tried to contact 200 former members from the end of January to March 15, when we closed the survey. Given that each year approximately 20 students participate in the SOURCE and some of them participate for multiple years, this number of 200 represents all of The SOURCE participants that KT had at least some contact information for from the last 18 years. KT emailed the link to those who she had email addresses for, asked them to send it to others they may still be in touch with, and posted the link on The SOURCE's MySpace page. For those that she didn't have email information for, she tried to contact them by phone so that she could send them the link. This is one of the main limitations of online-surveys, which is the inability to know exactly how many people were reached. It also represents a limitation of working with students after high school, when many of them move and become more difficult to find (although with the current explosion of social networking I think I would have had an even higher return rate if I conducted the survey now). There were 58 responses to the survey and, based on KT's estimate of sending it to 200, this would give a response rate of 29%. The following table provides basic demographic information for the survey respondents.

Table 3. Online Survey Respondents' Demographics (N=48)<sup>9</sup>

Gender	Female (32, 66%) Male (16, 33%)
Age	18-20 (16, 33%) 21-23 (17, 35%) 24-29 (10, 20%) 30+ (5, 10%) Mean = 23.2 yrs.
Ethnicity	White/Caucasian (35, 73%) Black (1) Hispanic (2) Other: biracial, French Canadian, Half Indian-Half American, I don't really!, Irish, Italian, Mostly German, Pacific-Islander

*Mid 2007 - Mid 2010 (Preliminary Analysis)*

Though my analysis began, at least informally, the moment I witnessed the first performance by The SOURCE, it more formally began after the interviews were completed. My requirement for the larger project was to produce a more general report for Planned Parenthood and the Leslie Glass Foundation, by documenting the results of the study. The Executive Summary of this report is presented in Appendix 5. This analysis was largely thematic and aimed at providing transcriptions of the quotes and key findings to enable KT and others to create a series of monologues that would be presented at a Planned Parenthood fundraising event.

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<sup>9</sup> Answering the demographic questions was optional

Working with two research assistants, we transcribed the interviews and coded for a specific set of themes. These codes were generated from my own experience in the interviews as well as the specific needs of Planned Parenthood and the evaluation.

- Development
  - Personality
    - Self-esteem
    - Speaking up/being vocal
    - Empathy and Helping Others
  - “Life” Discoveries
  - Sexuality
  - Sex Education (STIs, Teen Pregnancy, Decision Making)
  - Activism
  - Professional Development (as an actor, as a nurse, as a teacher, as a social worker, etc.)
- Adolescence
  - Help through difficult times
  - Being a peer educator
  - Dealing with peer pressure
- Beyond SOURCE
  - Performing Nationally/Locally
  - Being a “spokesperson”
  - After the program
    - How did it stay with you?
    - When are you reminded of it?
    - Decision making
  - Replicating the SOURCE
- KT
  - Qualities as a leader
  - What helped/didn’t help
- Theatre/Acting
  - Finding voice
  - Embodying a character
  - Reacting to audience

The 11 interviews<sup>10</sup> that I conducted were subjected to this coding analysis because they were of the clearest audio quality and would be easiest to transcribe in the amount of time that we had for the evaluation report. From this coding I produced a report for Planned Parenthood that provided quotes covering four categories: space (sharing a common experience of warmth, safety and diversity); self (the impact of SOURCE on participants’ sense of self); community (either fostering a sense of community or speaking to the Sarasota community specifically); and long-term (how

<sup>10</sup> Alicia, Anna, Sarah, Matt, Alan, Ashley, Eva, Beth, Liza, Leah, Mariah

the experiences stay with participants after they graduate/move/grow-up). This report represented a move from the above “organizational categories” to what I began to interpret as more “theoretical” or “substantive” categories (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). However, at this point the analysis was still strictly thematic and primarily *emic*, in that it was culled directly from the participants’ language and experience.

I began analyzing the data with a focus on this dissertation after the final report was submitted to the foundations. The preliminary results were presented at *The International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry* in May of 2008 (Futch, 2009; Futch, 2009) and *The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues* (Futch, 2010; Futch, 2010). These presentations marked the beginning of my more *etic* approach of bringing in the theoretical concepts that I was interested in (Maxwell, 2005) and the beginning of my narrative and identity-based approach to analysis (discussed below). Working with the text of the same 11 interviews, I developed a series of four papers around how I began to see the data sitting in conversation with theoretical frames. Specifically, I presented two papers in 2009 on *theatre as a site for negotiating adolescent identity and resistance and education through theatre participation*. At this point my thinking and engagement with the transcripts was largely about the theatre experience and the developmental and social opportunities provided through such participation. A year later I developed two additional papers, one on *the creation of “safe spaces” for adolescents* and a second on *sex-education and teen theatre as “relational justice.”* Thus at this point, a year later, my thinking had clearly shifted to spatial and more macro-level topics, such as sex-education and justice.

Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre document their experiences with “writing as inquiry” (2005) and I firmly believe that the writing I engaged in for the preparation of these four conference papers constituted a major shift in my analysis,

from the categorical codes of the previous evaluation reports to the kind of interpretive and theoretical work necessary for a dissertation. This work is represented in the following analysis chapters. But this work had another methodological consequence, in that it led to my decision to conduct follow-up interviews with two participants.

*May 2010 (Follow-Up Interviews)*

Two participants, Elizabeth and Elena, were interviewed twice, once in 2007 and again in 2010. Melissa had interviewed these participants the first time and I conducted the follow up interviews.

The follow-up interviews were intended to serve two functions. The main purpose was to understand the role that The SOURCE had played in the lives of these two women during the three years since the Design Team met (they were original participants in the Team). Second, I knew through Facebook and conversations with KT, that each of these women had experienced some significant life events, and I was interested in learning more about how their relationship with The SOURCE was involved in these events (since both of them still maintained ties to the organization). They were also two participants for whom I had "full" (i.e. complete) data sets since they had participated in every aspect of the study.

The decision to conduct follow-up interviews was a result of the analysis that was occurring between 2007 and 2010. As I wrote conference papers and presented the mapping data, I gradually developed new questions and before writing this dissertation I wanted to meet with them to talk about these questions. I wanted to know if the powerful experiences described in the first interview still resonated three years later. I also wanted to talk about my interpretations thus far and my findings,

particularly about the importance of the non-judgmental space, to see if I was interpreting the data in a way that seemed to make sense to some central SOURCE members. This was a loose form of "member-checking" (Angen, 2000) aimed less at confirming any sort of "universal truth" of SOURCE experience and more geared at informally reflecting on how their understanding of their SOURCE experience, and my own understandings across the project, had grown over the past three years. The follow-up interviews were less structured than the first interviews, as I felt much more comfortable with the participants, The SOURCE, and the experience of interviewing. The "protocol" (which served mainly as a conversation guide to keep me on track) is in Appendix 6. I wanted to use this interview as a place to understand their overall life experience as well as ask them where they saw The SOURCE in their lives and in what ways it has changed. Both participants had completed an identity map as part of the design team and I wanted the mapping to be a focus of the follow-up interview. Over the course of the previous three years, the mapping methodology had become increasingly prominent in my other work and this study represented an opportunity to engage longitudinally with the maps. When I met with each of them I showed them their first map and gave them a new sheet of paper and asked them to extend the map to address the last three years. This exploratory exercise proved useful in providing a topic of discussion as well as giving these two participants two visual time points of data. I introduced the maps and second mapping activity approximately halfway through the interview so that we had ample time to reflect on the present before considering the past since I was most interested in understanding their current reflections on The SOURCE and its meaning to them. The first maps, combined with their additional maps, provided a lot of fodder for discussion and reflection. Each of the participants and their two maps are looked at more closely in the vignettes.

*May 2010 - Present (Continuing Analysis)*

While the following chapters present an in-depth analysis of the data, a few of my general approaches to analysis should be explained here since with qualitative research projects the analytic strategies are as much a part of the design and planning (Maxwell, 2005). This section explains my approach to the analysis that was specific to this dissertation (including the development of the conference papers).

Through the analysis I wrestled with delineating between analytic strategies that operated at different levels (Maxwell calls them memos, categorizing strategies, and connecting strategies) (p. 96). With regard to the first, I began logging my thoughts in the form of informal notes and analytic memos throughout the entire research process. After observing a play, completing a days worth of interviews, or transcribing an audio file, I would try to record any notes, epiphanies, or questions that came to mind. As the analysis became more focused I also created more general "coding" memos and a memo for each participant's interview. I also created a "general" memo that served as a sort of catchall where I would write seemingly random or half-formed thoughts that often birthed new insights (and memos) as I read through more interviews.

I found the distinction between categorizing and connecting strategies very helpful. Memoing became not only a first step, but also a vital aspect of interpretation as the process of writing often helped me work out more complex thoughts that I may not have developed otherwise (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). However, I found it both challenging and exciting to engage the *categorizing* and *connecting* strategies. The categorization or coding process was especially challenging because the data were rich with description. My first attempt at "open-coding" a transcript resulted in 109 chunks of text coded with 38 codes after reading only half the transcript. Recognizing

that this approach was sending me down the road of a 38-chapter dissertation, I tried to ground my codes more closely to the theories that had guided me thus far and the research questions I had developed.

Because I had done all of the transcribing and had prepared reports for the organization as well as conference papers, I already felt very close to my data; familiar with the voices of my participants and aware of some of the major themes from the interviews. Thus, for this dissertation project I wanted to figure out a way to approach my data anew while going further in-depth in engaging theory and narrative techniques. Ultimately, I ended up blending techniques that I felt helped me best understand both my research questions and the rich stories my participants conveyed.

Informed heavily by Susan Chase's guidance on listening to narratives (2005), I read each transcript and wrote memos that included simple lists of codes and "interpretive comments." Sandra Jones (2001) argued that interpretive questions consist of asking questions about how the narrative is organized, what metaphors are being used, the plot of the story, and how the narrative links to other stories in the interview. I kept these questions in mind as I read the transcripts and also allowed myself to make notes of other elements, particularly discussions of relationships and identity that seemed provocative. For example, the following is an excerpt from a memo created while reading Beth's interview:

*At 7:37 is Beth narrating a way that SOURCE facilitates a fluidity of friendships? Although she narrates experiencing two different groups, she doesn't seem to have trouble moving between them.*

*At 8:24 Beth narrates her relationships with friends but brings in the element of power and knowledge by suggesting that SOURCE gave her an "upper hand" of information. But she also complicates this at 19:35 by mentioning again the power of teaching as well as the responsibility, then, for protecting.*

*Relationships can span from a relationship or understanding/recognition of the self to close, personal relationships (friends, family members, KT) to larger relationships with the*

*audience, whether it be a sense of teaching (mostly) or a sense of sharing. Also relationship to characters (Beth 13:31)*

*Relationship to acting? is that part of this voice? (Beth 16:22)*

*At 16:22 Beth makes the move from acting to psychology - the difference between trying on identities and finding yourself in a character and how that feels in SOURCE vs. trying on identities at school in order to impress others.*

*Is there a corollary to doing the plays, such that witnessing is just as important? Or can be just as important?*

*For Beth the audience reaction was most influential. This raises the role of recognition and reciprocation. Aside from simply being viewed during the performance, each cast participates in "talk backs" at the end of the performance where the audience members can ask questions or share. In conjunction with the recognition of being seen, there is the reciprocity of sharing. Beth describes this eloquently at 27:14.*

*For the performance voice I am mainly looking for the experience of acting and performing, however at 48:24 Beth narrates a different type of performance, that of performing identity for others.*

Informed by Gilligan et. al.'s Listening Guide method (Gilligan & Brown, 1993), which argues for multiple listenings for different voices in order to understand the full dimensionality of the narratives and the participant's experiences, I also read the transcripts multiple times, listening for different voices based on the themes that had emerged from my earlier engagement with the data. Specifically, I listened for a theatre/performance voice, a relationship voice, and a voice of the collective SOURCE (or "we") that explained what it meant to be a SOURCE member. I was greatly aided in this process in a more efficient manner through the use of qualitative data analysis software (NVivo8). I made the most use of two features: coding and memos. I could quickly code themes and generate new codes that I could then go back and organize into clusters or hierarchies as my analysis developed. For example, while fleshing out my understanding of a collective "SOURCE-member identity" I developed the following list in a memo as I read through multiple interviews:

**What is enacted, performed, felt, shared across the narratives?**

*The collective identity of SOURCE is spatial, temporal, emotional, and embodied.*

**What is expected:**

- diversity
- openness
- comfortable
- dedication
- responsibility of voice
- sharing of experiences
- activism (at least with respect to peer education)

**What is provided:**

- EDUCATION/KNOWLEDGE
- acting opportunities/practice/help/exercises
- comfort
- non-judgment
- confidentiality (mostly)
- warmth
- welcoming
- recognition/reciprocation
- exposure

**What travels:**

- knowledge
- responsibility of voice
- openness to difference/tolerance
- learning to see all sides of an issue/situation, "everybody has a story"
- activism (sometimes)

Additionally, while reading a single transcript I could have multiple memos open where I could address plot and voice issues *within* a single transcript as well as have memos that related to particular voice (theatre or relationship, for example) where I could add reflections to this theme developing *across* transcripts as they were reflected in this particular participant's narrative. I found this approach particularly helpful in keeping the "whole" narrative, and thus the "whole" participant (as I knew them) forefront in the analysis.

The next step, after memoing, is more difficult to describe because it was based on taking a "writing as a method of inquiry" approach (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) as well as bringing the different pieces of data in dialogue with one another (Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine & Sirin, 2011). To aid my process of writing as inquiry, I used

writing software called *Scrivener*. It allows the development of individual notes, the compiling of these notes, and continual rearrangement. It also allows for working in a split-pane, where two notes are open at once and you can easily move between them and view both at the same time. Originally designed for screenwriters, the program offers a flexibility not found in traditional word-processing software, but sits outside the coding environment of a qualitative software program. It allows the author to continually expand upon, shuffle, rearrange, combine, and separate ideas. Building on the memos I had produced, I outlined three tentative analytic chapters: counternarratives, theatre and identity, and space and travel. My process was both grounded and circular. As I re-read the transcripts with a focus on each of these topics, and began writing the chapters based on my memos, I was able to further the analysis. Based on the memos, I would assemble quotes that were exemplary of my observations in the memos and then make the shift to explain what was exemplary about them, and how they advanced the developing narrative that I wanted to tell about *The SOURCE*. As St. Pierre notes (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) in her description of writing as “nomadic inquiry”, “a great part of [nomadic] inquiry is accomplished in the writing because, for me, writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled *method* of discovery” (p. 967). Through the writing process it became clear that there were four components to the story I wanted to tell (splitting the third chapter into a specific chapter on space and one on “traveling power”). The writing process also allowed me to compile the memos into categories (represented by the chapters), fortify them with quotes and exchanges, and revise them as their complexity became revealed to me. The four analysis chapters that follow represent the final (for now), more polished versions of these multiple,

grounded, dialogical iterations - of my continual movement between text, theory, maps, surveys, and voices.

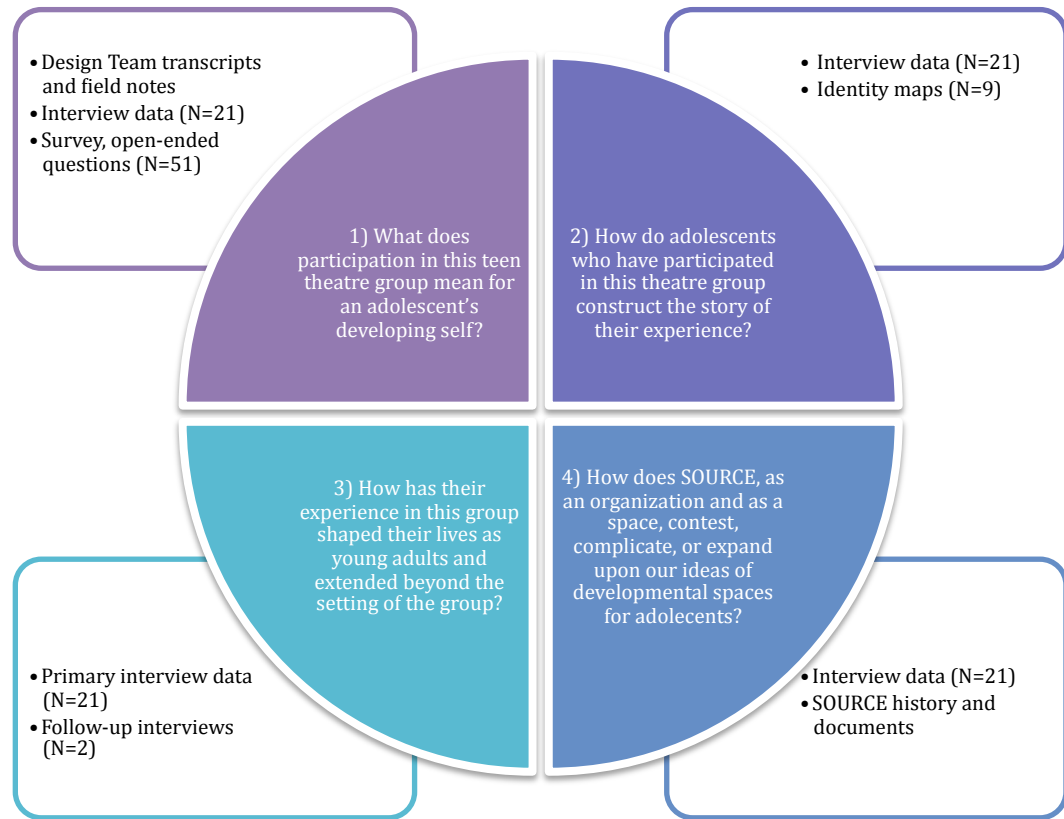
The interview data definitely provided the most fodder for analysis and makes up the bulk of this dissertation's findings. This method of data collection offered the best way to go in-depth with participants to understand what participating in The SOURCE meant to them and how it informed their own development. For this dissertation I used data from 18 of the 21 interviewees.<sup>11</sup> The three that were not used were due to poor tape quality. As I listened to their interviews I simply did not feel confident enough in the transcription process that I was accurately hearing what they were saying. Thus, 18 interview participants were used for this study, providing a total of 20 transcripts.<sup>12</sup> My observations of plays and performances and my experience at the Design Team meeting also served to orient me to the feeling of being in The SOURCE environment and the type of space it creates. The maps served as a constant visual reminder of how The SOURCE exists in the lives of the Design Team participants and have been held in constant dialogue and juxtaposition to the other pieces of data (Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine, & Sirin, 2011). The survey data represents a larger sample of SOURCE participants and I used this data as a way of triangulating and confirming/expanding the findings I crafted from the interviews, maps, and Design Team events. The figure below (Figure 2) represents how all of these elements of data tie into the original research questions.

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<sup>11</sup> The three that were not used were: Doug, Kristen, Tyler

<sup>12</sup> Elena and Elizabeth had two transcripts each (first interview and follow-up)

Figure 2. Questions and Methods Matrix



*Notes: How the data were handled*

Given the number of phases of the projects, the number of participants and the number of co-researchers on the project, handling the data was a large and complicated task. There were a few missteps along the way regarding the interview tapes. Technology provided some problems as one interviewer had newer technology to record the interviews and the other interviewer was using a much older cassette tape recorder. The older technology made the tapes very difficult to listen to and decipher. As a result, I made the decision to send some of the more problematic tapes to a transcription service in Manhattan. The transcription service ended up losing some

of the tapes, despite me going through every single box in their closets to try and find the missing tapes. Four tapes from three interviews were lost as a result of technology and my own naïveté about backing up the data.<sup>13</sup> The remaining tapes were turned into digital files and promptly backed-up. The digital files could be transcribed using a digital audio transcribing software called “Transcriva.” This software does not automate transcription (like Dragon and other speech-recognition programs), rather it connects to a foot-pedal and allows the listener to transcribe the interview and link this text to the locations in the audio file. The quotes were then text files that could be placed into Word or Excel tables or qualitative data software. NVivo8 was the software chosen for data analysis since The Graduate Center has an institutional license. The survey data was downloaded from Survey Monkey as an Excel file and imported into SPSS where it could be sorted and analyzed.

A note on transcription; my chosen style of transcribing was to try to capture the flow of the speaker’s voice, including their stops and starts, pauses, and non-verbal utterances (“um” and “ah”). I took Riessman’s assertion that “transcription is deeply interpretive” (2008, p. 29) very seriously and tried to consistently capture the pacing, style and tone of each speaker. I did not transcribe with the detail that some discursive psychologists use, with second notations for example, because my interest is the stories the participants tell and the overall narrative constructed in their interview. Both I and the other interviewer used a lot of non-verbal utterances to indicate listening and recognition (“mmhmm”) and these are included in the text (in brackets) in such a way as to be present but not break up the transcription of the story.

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<sup>13</sup> For that reason those three interviews are not even included in the listing of participants. Thus, the 21 interviewed represent the 21 tapes we had in our final possession.

**Chapter 4**

**The "space" of The SOURCE**

#### Chapter 4: The “space” of The SOURCE

*“...all spaces are productive spaces. Space thus becomes a key element in the production of social power and power relations” (Gildersleeve & Kuntz, 2010, p. 20)*

*“...a site of possibility is a point of access to discovering and creating knowledge, resources, and power—one’s own, and that of the communal group. It is a place where individuals can learn to share power, channel it, as well as deploy it; a place of exchange where we learn from one another and provide aid to one another. It is a site of interdependence.” (Park-Fuller, n.d., p. 6)*

*Whereas education is an important venue to explore, understanding how adolescents negotiate social categories and construct self and Other in sites in which they voluntarily participate is also imperative. In this exploration, we learn more about how to shape settings in ways that align with youths’ developmental needs and innate competencies. (Deutsch, 2004, p. 20)*

#### *Introduction: Considering “space”*

Grossly simplified, Tuan (1977) argued that space is a more abstract idea held in our consciousness and that through our experiences we transform space into a more physical, defined place. This distinction, of human experience and action serving to co-construct and imbue meaning into a specific place, which in turn contributes to our attitudes and awareness of space, was useful for understanding the identity work that

could take place in different spaces. When identities are positioned as influencing and influenced by space and place, as I previously did in the discussion of performing identities, this distinction becomes even more useful. As Hall et al (1999) have noted, “Emergent identities require space of their own in which to assert themselves, and are also grounded in (if not tied to) the specificities of particular locations” (p. 505). The idea that identities can be directly tied to location and, moreover, the social relationships of such “locales” (Creswell, 2009), became important to consider as I continually heard participants narrate the different identity pressures they felt in different spaces. Weis, Fine and colleagues (2000) have explicitly explored such spaces for youth and how they influence identity development, opportunities for engagement and “border crossing”, and provide opportunities for resistance. Terming them “construction sites” they observe that such spaces, which usually take the form of after-school programs, sit at the margins of traditional pedagogical spaces but serve as central and vital places of identity construction for urban youth. This chapter explores the space (loosely defined) that The SOURCE creates, the relationships between peers and with KT that develop within it.

Participants in the interviews often characterized the space of The SOURCE as distinctly different from other spaces, particularly school. Using their descriptions and this juxtaposition, I looked at what is unique about mental/psychological space that The SOURCE created. The space of SOURCE is defined through the words of participants and their experiences of entering on the first day. Their impressions and their journeys and their words of what it meant to come back to the space (for the interview) informed the understanding of the psychological meaning this space holds. I then examined the Monday meetings that took place in The SOURCE space to better

understand: a) the social contract crafted in these meetings and b) the meetings as a place for creating a collective identity of SOURCE-member.

After describing the space and the meaning of the meetings, I also examined the ways relationships were constructed in SOURCE. Peer relationships were redefined as mutually beneficial and were able to instantly develop based on the social contract. Though there were instances where this contract was violated, which I documented, the recovery was seen as part of the process and was defined as educational and useful. Second, youth in this space had an opportunity to engage with an adult, KT, in a way that is often very different than other relationships they have with adults. Though KT had to embody the simultaneous role of leader, she is able to do so in a way that did not alienate youth. I examined how she did this and considered the implications of this from a programmatic/organizational standpoint.

#### *What is the space of The SOURCE?*

*“In SOURCE people really don’t censor themselves.” Aiden*

In the online survey portion of the study I asked participants to “provide five words to describe the space of SOURCE.” There were five separate spaces to encourage one-word responses and, though I had respondents who spanned twenty years of the SOURCE and its various locations, they all described a very similar perception of the space. Figure 3 (below) is a visual representation of their answers, the larger the word the more frequently it was used.



different from other spaces for youth is that these ups and downs were equally accepted. When Alan, one of the first SOURCE participants, recounts the tensions around race that occurred in SOURCE (see *Vignette: Interruptions with men*) he juxtaposed this with what was happening at the same time in school, where racial tensions were met with the “banning” of Malcolm X t-shirts or white shoelaces. Little, if anything, is “banned” from discussion at SOURCE. “Openness” is a defining characteristic of a collective identity of SOURCE. Aiden, a younger and very reserved member of the Design Team, when asked to describe SOURCE in one word, chose “opening.” This, despite the fact that in his interview he stated that:

...because I was homeschooled and I was out of the scene and, I just felt very distant from the crowd...A so I always felt like I was a little, sort of an outsider, but, still part of the group, definitely the core group.

One could read into this quote a conflicted identity, where one part (outsider) sat in opposition to the other (core group member). In the context of SOURCE, however, these two conceptualizations were seen as aspects of Aiden’s experience that may be contradictory but that can live together. Both are valid and, even though he felt like an outsider at times, he narrates the experience as primarily fulfilling and “opening.”

The openness wasn’t limited to accepting others, but also applied to accepting one’s self. Aiden continues,

I think in the meetings, I, it opened me up, and made me accept a lot, made me accept myself. Um, certain aspects about myself that I didn’t accept.

Aiden’s story is more complex though, because even while he felt more opened up, this was a private feeling and not something he necessarily felt or trusted in

others. Aiden openly admitted that he rarely shared his own feelings or experiences. It was not necessarily that he didn't trust the members; more that he did not feel compelled to verbalize his thoughts. Yet he still found great value in listening and participating. His experience captures Fedele's (2004) description of "resonance" – an important precursor for empathy and a necessary component for any group that encourages connection. She explained that one form of resonance occurred in which:

...the ability of one member to simply resonate with another's experience in the group and experience some vicarious relief because of that resonance. A member need not discuss the issue in the group, but the experience moves her that much closer to knowing and sharing her own truth without necessarily responding or articulating it. (2004, p. 210)

There was no forced choice in SOURCE. Members brought what they wished and took what they needed. It very much mirrored the space of the group psychotherapy setting and some members explicitly said that SOURCE meetings were their "therapy." Such comparisons of the SOURCE meetings as similar to effective group therapy settings are not too tangential. As Fedele (2004) further argued:

The fluctuations between diversity and similarity create a rhythm that permeates every facet of a group's behavior. The goal for group work is to choreograph that rhythm into movement through a mutual empathic process. The experience of similarity allows the group to hold feelings of diversity within connection. The role of empathy is crucial to hold divergent realities within an empathic relational context. The mutuality of empathy allows all participants to feel understood and accepted. The leader, in creating a safe relational context, fosters connectedness

within that safety by working to enlarge the empathy for differences.”

(p. 203)

The medium of theatre became the focus that allowed that work to be accomplished “behind the scenes.” Theatre provided a vehicle for moving in, for creating a space that allowed for expression, conflict, and discussion. Aiden continued:

[SOURCE] brings people together, number one. Number two, they all have a common interest, which is theatre and art. Um, and so once they can elaborate on that together, then they can go and learn other issues. Once you’re successful in the art—like I don’t think KT brings up anything controversial in the first, you know, month or two. It’s after she’s created this core group. And you’ve, we’ve all grown together because you’re working on activities and, uh, exercises that help improve your acting skills. So, uh, it’s a learning process.

I asked Leah, a young woman who left The SOURCE to pursue a career in politics, to try and describe further the bond of trust that developed between SOURCE members, particularly when attendance at the meeting could be fluid and the meetings could at times be quite large (30 people or more). Though at first she struggled to identify what kept the sense of trust and confidentiality alive (“I’m not really sure, to tell you the truth”), she eventually described how once you played a theatre game and shared a little, then your guard came down and “people get used to that, they don’t want to break that, they don’t want to be the one that jeopardizes that for everyone.” Thus, there is a shared responsibility to protect the space that is so opening and accepting.

### *Monday Meetings*

While the aspect of The SOURCE that garnered most of the attention was the plays they perform, there was an equally important aspect – The Monday meetings. The SOURCE met for two hours every Monday from September to May for the last ten years. These meetings often gathered 20-30 young people (sometimes more) who may or may not be involved in the current performances. For example, of the survey respondents (N=58), 79% (N=46) reported that they attended the meetings weekly, 17% (N=10) attended the meetings once or twice per month, and only 3% (N=2) did not attend meetings. Participants earn community service hours for attending the meetings and time spent performing, which helps with college applications and Florida scholarship requirements.

A key element of The SOURCE meetings was the “confidentiality policy” that members read and sign (Appendix 7). The policy is designed to foster trust, is strictly enforced and, as the interviews suggest, most members abided by it. In her work with young mothers, Wendy Luttrell (2003) found that trust was a key element in encouraging such play among adolescents. Indeed, trust was a frequently used term by former SOURCE participants, and it was often coupled with non-judgment. There was a synonymous expectation that a participant could express their feelings and not be judged, while at the same time trust that those feelings would be held in confidence. This discussion of trust, which lead to the expressive freedom required for play, is introduced on the first day and reiterated throughout the SOURCE meetings. The survey responses confirmed this sense of trust. Of the 51 respondents who answered the question “to what extent did you feel you could really trust everyone in SOURCE” 26% (N=13) felt like they could trust everyone in the room, 57% (N=29) felt like they could trust most people in the room, 12% (N=6) felt like it was mixed in terms of who

they could/couldn't trust, one person felt like there were only a few people they could trust, no one reported that there was no one they could trust, and 4% (N=2) indicated that they weren't really sure.

The intensity and importance of these meetings was also conveyed through responses to the open-ended question, "If you could bring someone to SOURCE, who would you bring?" This question, designed by the design team members, elicited 43 varied responses. A number of individuals wanted to bring conservative figures in the media or future political leaders in order to "show them" what smart, responsible, educated kids have to say about sex. Others wanted to bring a family member or close friend so that they could either share in the activities and benefit from them or so that they could finally understand what it was like to be a SOURCE member. Others continued to convey the sense of responsibility, wanting to bring all the kids who don't have transportation on a SOURCE bus so that they could benefit from the meetings, or wanting to bring their sorority sisters so that they could become educated too.

What all of these responses conveyed are two things: one, a willingness to open the space to others who may not necessarily "fit" there (conservative politicians, older family members); and two, a recognition that the space has the power to influence and change – that once a person enters they most likely would leave the space having changed in some way. The responses of who they would bring and why indicated a confidence in what the SOURCE provided those who participated. Nearly a third of the 43 responses wanted to bring someone who could "benefit" either from the information or from sharing their experiences and having an "outlet." Half of the responses indicated that they would like to bring a close family member or other person they were close to (i.e. best friend) either to benefit or to share in the experience of SOURCE so that they could understand. Though I was unsure as to what

information this survey question would yield it definitely showed the power and importance of participatory instrument construction. The design team members literally clamored for this question to be included and the responses tapped into a desire that I might not have otherwise identified; a desire for building connections through sharing information and experiences. As I reflected on this finding I realized that of course this is what I've been hearing over and over, but it was helpful to see it confirmed in a creative way through another form of data.

Many of the interviewees were asked what or who brought them to The SOURCE. For many it was a friend who was already involved or their desire to participate in some form of theatre. But what did participants feel as they went to SOURCE for the first time? As you can see from (Figure 4), participants were overwhelmingly nervous and excited as anyone joining a new group (but one they have heard good things about) would be. Their nervousness and excitement quickly waned and made way for feeling welcomed and comfortable.

Figure 4. "How did you feel on your first day at SOURCE?" - Word Cloud<sup>15</sup>

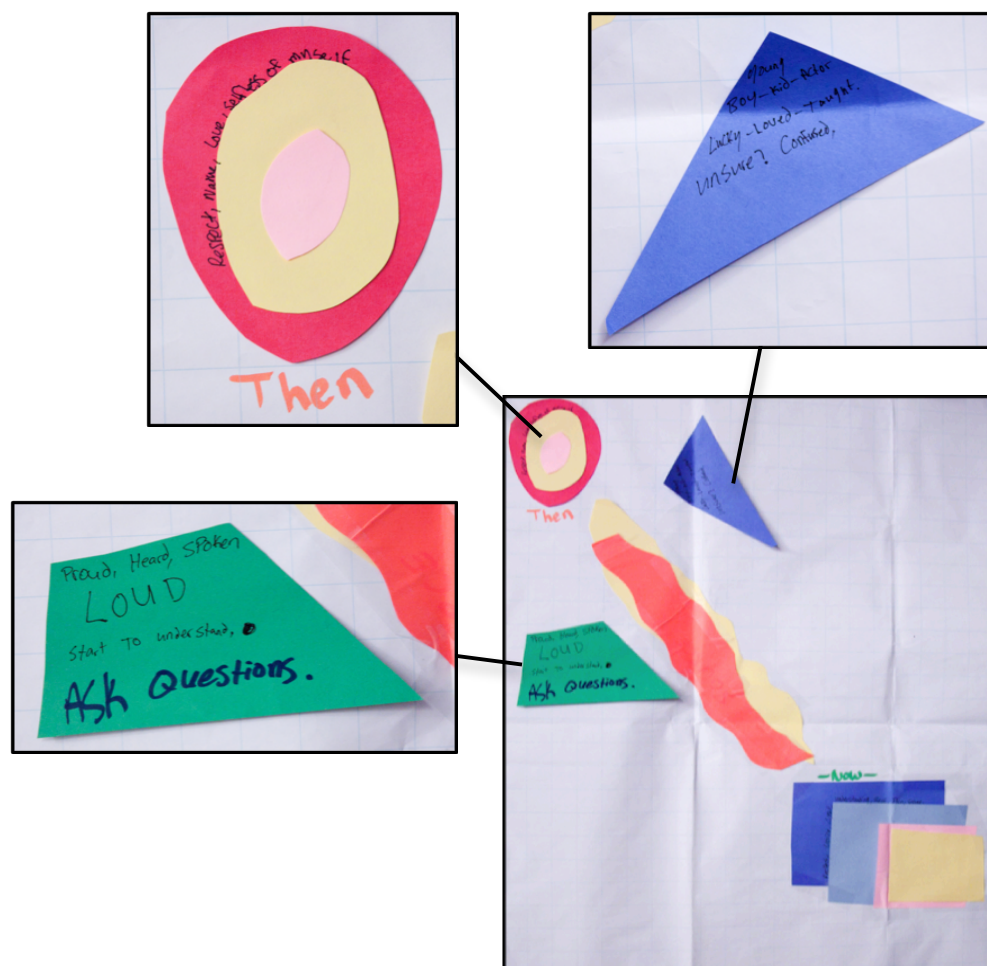


Aiden's map (Figure 5, below) provided a visual for understanding this process of entering the space of SOURCE, filled with insecurities, and the process of growing through engagement with the space. I interpreted the concentric circles to be depicting the space of SOURCE and its multiple layers of protection that envelope

<sup>15</sup> Generated on wordle.net

each participant like the dermal layers of our own skin. Aiden used the words "respect, name, love, selfless of myself" to describe it "then". His own feelings about himself, presented in the blue triangle that is drawn at an angle as though jutting into the curves of the space, are "young, boy-kid-actor. Lucky, loved, taught. Unsure? Confused." Moving through the space, on the path to "now" and across the wave-like path of "SOURCE" he shows himself becoming "Proud, heard, spoken, LOUD. Start to understand, Ask Questions." He showed the process of bringing the uncertainty, nervous and excitement described by survey participants, meeting the openness of The SOURCE space, and what could happen when these two forces combine.

Figure 5. Aiden's map of The SOURCE space



*OTHER SPACES: "Opposite of freedom"*

In their work attempting to understand the decline in school motivation and achievement often observed during middle school, Eccles, Lord & Midgley (1991) observed that such declines are less a result of changes within the student, and more often a result of changes in the environment. They found that a mismatch between the psychological needs of early adolescents and the expectations and opportunities of the middle school environments contributed to a decline in motivation. This study is exemplary because it shifts the focus from the individual bodies of youth to a systemic lens, observing characteristics of the environments created for students. Though The SOURCE is not a traditional school-based environment, the participants often juxtaposed it to such environments. It was also a space where many of the participants spent much of their time outside of school. Since the participants responded so positively to The SOURCE, it is worth asking what the nature of its environment may be in terms of the psychological opportunities it offers participants and how it meets their specific needs and desires.

I was able to learn a lot about what the SOURCE space meant to participants by asking them to describe a space or place that felt *different from* the SOURCE. Sometimes I would have to ask them this question directly. Other times they simply brought it up in talking about the space. I was struck by how often I heard them describe school as a place that represented the opposite environment of SOURCE.

The meetings for me were very much about hearing what everybody else had to say like, I loved the SOURCE meetings because I could see all different kinds of backgrounds: people who I would never hang out with and be friends with and hear what they had to say and hear their voice. And it was so interesting to hear all of that. And I could really, you

know, in school we never had that place. (Mariah, F, 21, participated 2002-2004)

Mariah continues,

SOURCE to me represented freedom, while not, I mean, I didn't hate school, but it represented the opposite of freedom.

Hammack argues “the balance between [self-processes of] differentiation and integration may vary according to the perceived existential security of the group” (p. 228). Though he frames this position in terms of Israeli and Palestinian conflict, suggesting that the developmental process of integration may be more present for a group experiencing “identity insecurity,” it was useful to consider this distinction when juxtaposing The SOURCE space with other spaces the participants described. This theoretical observation manifested in the data when participants described other spaces, particularly school, that felt entirely different from The SOURCE. Indeed, when they described these spaces they often accompanied these descriptions with stories of differentiation – of cliques, conflict, or lack of recognition. Although many observe that The SOURCE was filled with students from various cliques (the cheerleaders, the “freaks,” etc.) they described a place where that diversity was welcomed and discussed.

What made SOURCE so different from these places? A number of participants used images of borders, boundaries and walls as they juxtaposed these spaces. These words conjured images of freedom, release, and unveiling that suggest that what occurs in the space is both cathartic and developmental.

Cause I notice a lot of times in schools people feel a little jaded because you're used to – I remember when I was in high school and middle school like, having to have your guard up, you couldn't really

show emotion in school, it's not the place for that. It's interesting, with SOURCE, they could break those barriers and see kids like, open up.  
(Beth, F, 18, participated 2003-2007)

This reminded me of the notion of liminal or third spaces (Beech, 2011; Bhabha, 1994) – “threshold” spaces that exist between two worlds. The SOURCE was very much between school, home, and community, but its activities were relevant to each in that what happened in the space happened to individuals who then carried those experiences outside the walls of The SOURCE. I explore this further in the last chapter, but I first want to describe what happens – collectively – in the SOURCE space to ensure that such an environment is able to exist with such a diverse group of youth.

#### *The Social Identity of SOURCE-member*

Deaux reminds us that “Beyond the question of how identities are defined is the question of the meaning associated with an identity” (p. 83, 1991). This distinction applies at the level of the group – The SOURCE – as well. While there are clear definitions (with some degree of variation) of what a SOURCE-member is, participants also narrated the broader personal, interpersonal, and social consequences of what it meant to be a “SOURCE-member”. Through a shifting collaborative of teens (shifting in the sense that the cohorts change at least some members every year and participants don't always attend all of the meetings), they have developed a shared identity – one that is premised on confidentiality, responsibility, non-judgment, and honesty. I interpret this identity as fleeting but highly valuable: it served a specific function in the moment. The members then left The SOURCE with an identity that became incorporated into their own concept of selfhood. The tasks engaged in while

creating this identity (what Vygotsky would call sociocultural activity) were like ways of practicing with others and adding the relational accomplishments to one's repertoire.

In my listenings to stories about the SOURCE I heard participants define this SOURCE-member identity in terms of what was expected in/at The SOURCE, what was provided by The SOURCE, and what stayed with them even as they left The SOURCE. These expectations constitute what Goodnow calls a "social contract, a set of patterns of rights and obligations" (1995, p. 285). Generally speaking, participants who enter the space expected (and could expect) diversity of life experience, openness, comfort, dedication to acting, activism or both, responsibility for having/expressing voice, to share experiences, and to engage at least somewhat with activism in the form of peer-education. In return, The SOURCE space, fellow members and KT would provide: education (first and foremost), acting opportunities, practice, help, improv exercises, comfort, non-judgment, confidentiality, warmth, welcoming, recognition and reciprocation, exposure to new ideas, and dialogues.

Foremost, the collective identity of SOURCE-member was based on mutual understanding. Leah explained:

My friends, I don't think they really understood it. I was also like a cheerleader and uh, I don't think they could really understand that like, difference – I mean they never really saw any of my performances, my close friends, but when I talked about it, they could see I was passionate about it. I don't think that they really understood it per se. I think they were more involved in the basic high school thing and I think this was why I loved it so much because it was different and I got a chance to have different kinds of friends, instead of cheerleaders. Or

football pla—you know? And there were those people in SOURCE but there's also very like eclectic—different people as well. So that's what I loved about it, too.

This sense of mutuality or reciprocity, also known in the developmental literature as “consensual validation” (Youniss & Smollar, 1985) underlies all of the interactions at The SOURCE. While it feels, as Leah narrated above, like something shared and different from other settings, it is enacted practically by sharing experiences openly at the meetings, listening to one another, responding to one another, and trying to understand where the other person may be coming from. Having such interactions, particularly in adolescence, may be especially important because such validation:

...results in an understanding of the world that is constructed by the self in a relationship with another person through a cooperative process with that other person. Thus, it leads not only to an understanding of experiences and events but also to an understanding of the self and of the other” (Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

Moreover, that The SOURCE is a space composed almost exclusively of teenagers served two important functions: first, it meant that the teens were more likely to feel this sense of mutual understanding because it felt more empathic and less unilateral (Youniss & Smollar, 1985); second, the privileging of teen experiences and learning through shared understanding continued to reinforce the counternarrative (discussed in the next chapter) that teens were valuable sources of knowledge. Part of the social contract of The SOURCE, then, was to establish this mutuality at the forefront, and evidence would suggest that they do. Simply entering

the space with a willingness to participate guaranteed one's entry, so to speak, into relationships of consensual validation.

The collective identity of The SOURCE serves a function of ensuring mutual respect. Simply holding the identity of SOURCE-member grants each young adult the opportunity to engage in meaningful relationships that carry the characteristics of close friendships (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). These experiences of reciprocity may also be one of the primary reasons that participants consistently juxtaposed The SOURCE space as distinctly different from other spaces, namely school. With its set standards of achievement and relationships based on authority and discipline, school presented more unilateral experiences in which adolescents do not have the chances for mutual exchange of ideas and evaluation of those ideas. As Youniss and Smollar (1985) argue, in unilateral relations "the self is under judgment from someone whose approval is sought and whose standards are predetermined. In such relationships, the self is likely to present only qualities that would be approved, while hiding those aspects that would not be approved" (p. 138).

#### *The KT Factor*

*"Well we can't clone KT so that's not gonna work." -Alicia, when asked how to replicate The SOURCE.*

*Artists know about spaces opening in imagination, even as they understand what it means to be situated in the world and to speak (or paint or sing or dance) from the vantage point of their situations. They tell us what happens when they experience new beginnings, when they are enabled to see through new perspectives. There is a clearing, a*

*lightning, a reaching beyond what people are convinced they know.*

*(Greene, 2000, p. 293)*

After many conversations with participants, observations of their plays and practices, discussions in interviews and reading through survey responses there was one finding that was qualitatively indisputable: The SOURCE exists and is meaningful for its participants primarily because of the efforts and energies provided by its director, KT Curran. As the participants would say, repeatedly, *KT is The SOURCE*. From an evaluative or programmatic standpoint this raises more than a few questions. If The SOURCE was really as psychologically meaningful and important for young adults as it appeared to be, and if it served the vital function of educating youth about health and sexuality, how could we replicate such a program so that other youth might benefit? And, if KT is key to The SOURCE's current influence, is replication even possible?

The more phenomenological side of me would begrudgingly admit that The SOURCE could never be replicated. It exists from a seemingly miraculous and cosmic alignment of organizational funding, community support, adolescent enthusiasm, and energetic leadership. Moreover, it exists in its present form because of the community's need for information, the youth's desire to engage in theatre that is unlike the other theatre programs in Sarasota, and the relatively solid presence of the specific Planned Parenthood branch that supports it. Viewed in that way, The SOURCE shouldn't necessarily exist elsewhere. Replicability is not really a useful goal in this situation; rather, we should consider the factors that have colluded to create The SOURCE and the characteristics of these factors that could be cultivated elsewhere. KT is such a factor and, as shown in this section, she possesses an ability to both lead and relate to her cast members in a way that profoundly affected them.

In 2001 KT penned a reflective essay for *Sarasota* magazine, the region's primary arts and style magazine founded in 1979. In the article she states:

My first year as SOURCE director, I was unprepared for the emotional deluge that poured out of these kids. It seemed all I had to do was smile, look one of the teens in the eyes and ask, "So, how are you doing?" And they would be off on a two-hour monologue of such heartfelt complexity and despair that I was left reeling. (2001, p. 66)

In her orientation to youth, KT embodied what McLaughlin et al call "seeing potential, not pathology" (1994, p. 96). She was steadfast in her determination that despite any mistakes they might make, the SOURCE members were always in a position to grow. This, in part, seems to have enabled her to exhibit what SOURCE members continually refer to as "non-judgment" because she primarily viewed youth as individuals who needed to express themselves and be heard, not individuals who needed reform, punishment, or "help". One sentiment echoed repeatedly in the transcripts was the ability to talk to KT in an open, non-threatening way. KT was able to subvert the usual power imbalances that exist in youth-adult communication (Drury, 2003) by refraining from patronizing, lecturing or judging, all of which are discursive practices that reinforce the power differential the youth report feeling from virtually every other adult in their lives. As Aiden explained:

KT has this wonderful ability to bring people in, and, you feel like when she's talking to you, she's only talking to you. And when she's leading the group, she's leading it because she cares about you ALL. And, she just embodies warmth, and you feel protected when you're around her.

KT *has* power, and she wields it often; she teaches the "hard lessons" when they need to be taught, she writes the plays (or at least the first drafts of them) and,

as Aiden says, she *leads*. But there is something qualitatively different about the “power” she holds and the “power” that is exerted in other spaces since participants in this study did not interpret her power as problematic or restrictive. In recent work on leadership, Steve Reicher and colleagues (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005) reconceptualized effective leadership as one that eschews a division of power and instead draws on a collective social identity in order to transform their social reality. They made two arguments that were key for understanding KT's influence: 1) leaders are interested in shaping identities; and 2) that the relationship between leaders and “followers” is one that develops dynamically over time. In addition to her skills as an effective leader, KT also depicted the important qualities of “VIPs” (very important non-parental adults) that adolescents have been shown to be most responsive to: high frequency of support, low experiences of conflict with the VIP, and mutual expression of importance of the relationship between adolescent and adult (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002).

With respect to development over time, KT also embodied an understanding and profound trust in *process*. Perhaps this stemmed from her theatre training or orientation toward expression, but she not only trusted that situations and groups have to gather a momentum of energy, have to express this energy, and then be re-grounded or re-focused. Whereas many adults may fear the unbridled energy of a room full of adolescents, KT feeds off of it, gently harnessing it and guiding it while simultaneously drawing from it. Leah described the “freedom that KT provided” in the meetings as:

...this perfect balance between getting like a tad out of hand and then bringing it back. Like, people had, I mean everyone in SOURCE is very dramatic and fun. So, there's like a point where it's like a little crazy

and that's what is fun. And then there was also a point where like, I mean, in meetings we'd talk about serious things. We'd have like someone come in and tell us about like, STIs or, or anything like that, so you were being educated, but you, sometimes didn't even notice, because right before that you guys did like a role-play, something fun. So it was like a really good balance between those two things.

It is interesting that she positioned "being educated" as both not-fun but also as something that, when paired with moments of expression, can happen unnoticed and, presumably, unresisted.

Despite the overwhelming approachability and openness that KT possessed, she was still able to guide the participants and, when necessary, teach them with some "tough love." Stories about these moments often were provided when I asked participants to "recall some lessons learned in SOURCE that you carry with you today." Many of the lessons hinged on responsibility. Whether it was something as simple as Liza learning the importance of arriving on time to a more emotional lesson, they all depicted KT's ability to walk a fine line between being a "cool friend" and exerting some authority and guidance. For example, Anna had committed to putting together a soundtrack for the "Secrets" play with another member. When her grandmother passed away she arrived at the meeting without the soundtrack and KT was unhappy with them for breaking their commitment. The lesson, Anna recounts, was that you can't break commitments even when life throws you "twists and turns." The lesson was "hard" to learn, she explains, and she was very angry at KT for "being insensitive" but, "It was a hard lesson but one of those lessons where you think to yourself I could have made a different choice, you know, I could have done something differently, and now I know, now I know."

These lessons were hard to learn and involved a range of emotions, as Anna recounted in her feelings of anger. Ultimately, however, most participants understood that KT wasn't judging them, she was trying to help them learn these tough lessons in a safe environment. Stories like this one provided further evidence of KT's perceived "balance" and her ability to hold the multiplicity of the youth - their mistakes and triumphs - at once. In response to this balance, participants also recounted sharing stories that were scary or that they would not have shared with other adults. Mariah explained:

KT is the least judgmental woman I know. And, you know, it was hard because she cared so much about all of us and we'd be telling her, even though she was kind of like a mom to all of us, and we'd be telling her, you know, really scary experiences and situations we put ourselves in. But I mean, if we didn't have her to talk to about that I don't know what would have happened to a lot of them.

From the interviews it seems as though the participants saw something reciprocal about this relationship. She let them be completely open and who they "really are" and did not judge them in any way. This seemed to earn her some credibility and trustworthiness such that when there was some criticism or a "lesson" to learn they were willing to receive it from her. I witnessed one of these moments when traveling with them to a show:

*(Field notes) As we pulled into the parking lot for Renaissance on 9th, which seems like a conference center, one of the members pointed out that the sign said 93 degrees. They quickly unloaded the van and set up the stage first, so that it would be in place before audience members started arriving. There were cameras in the room and a series of*

*microphones set up along the stage. Apparently an educational video group was there to record the play. It was Shana's first play with the SOURCE (I think), but not her first play in general, as she attends [a performing arts school]. Because of all the microphones and their distance from the stage it is really important that the actors "go loud." Shana seems to be struggling with this and KT is firm in telling her that she HAS to speak up but is very sympathetic. She goes over to her at the end of the rehearsal and has a long talk with her. You can see that she is instructing in a really balanced way.*

Though this example is not about sexual behaviors or choices, it still shows KT's willingness to let the participants know that she had expectations, and that they needed to (and could) live up to them.

### *Conclusion*

*The notion of multiple and provisional perspectives fuses with a vision of spaces that are not closed in, that are open on all sides to the unexpected and the possible. They are not and cannot be closed to the search for meaning, which takes so many forms. Reflection on, thinking about lived and perceived actualities is what gives rise to understandings and to meanings. And all of these are contingent on the need to communicate with others – to conversation and dialogue. When there is no need to communicate, experience is not shaped, not formulated; nor are the meanings that are found. (Greene, 2000, pp. 298-299)*

There is a growing body of literature on the construction of “safe spaces” (Stoudt, 2007) - contexts that allow for the expression of multiple identities or the discussion of sensitive topics, for example. The SOURCE served to create both an internal and external safe space. In her work with young urban women, Jennifer McCormick (2000) documented the creation of “aesthetic safety zones” through the experience of writing and sharing poetry. She described such a zone as “a sanctuary that allows her to speak and demands that we listen” (p. 191). As a creative activity poetry provided a way for the young women she worked with to “gain control over self-representation” (p. 181) in terms of how they were perceived in their urban high schools and allowed the young women to creatively display their multiplicity and complexity. Whether we call them safety zones (McCormick, 2000), safe spaces (Stoudt, 2007), or free spaces (Centrie, 2000), the underlying assumption of all of these concepts is that youth need spaces that allow for multiplicity, for paradox (Winnicott, 1971), for process and for dialogue. Such spaces allow for identity exploration, personality development, and an understanding of relationships between selves and others. These spaces may be grounded in a physical space (such as the theatre space of The SOURCE) but what is most important is the shared psychological space that is created by its members. The spaces, in allowing for multiplicity and dialogue thus foster the creation of relationships and connections across experience. The relationships created in The SOURCE, with other peers and with KT, exemplified what Jordan (2004) called “relational awareness” – the ability to gain some distance and perspective on the actions and consequences through “a nonjudgmental stance, an ability to notice and observe without becoming totally immersed or caught in the experience.” KT embodied this relational awareness and respect for developmental process and instilled it in The SOURCE participants by creating a unique and open space.

## Introduction to Vignettes

Three vignettes are presented in this dissertation and they serve several purposes. Foremost, they were intended to serve as “release points” (McClelland & Fine, 2008) in the writing to add to the dimensionality of my experience, the methods, analysis, and interpretation. They function as such release points by interrupting what could otherwise be a seamless narrative of introduction, method, data, findings, and conclusions. The vehicle through which I developed these vignettes was a process of both creative (or my attempts at it) and reflective writing on moments that gave me pause throughout the entire project. In the first vignette I chronicle my interactions with Elizabeth and how her story shows what The SOURCE can represent in a person’s life, even when they have to actively step away from it for their own growth and development. The second vignette is the story of my interactions with Elena. These interactions made apparent my own reactions, biases, and premature conclusions and forced me to interrogate my own positionality with respect to this project. The third vignette describes two moments, each with men, in which the necessity of listening deeply and compassionately was made poignantly apparent. With each of these two participants, Alan and William, I experienced moments of transgression, either against the dominant narrative of “SOURCE-as-safe-space” or against the presumed (on my part) safety of the interview environment.

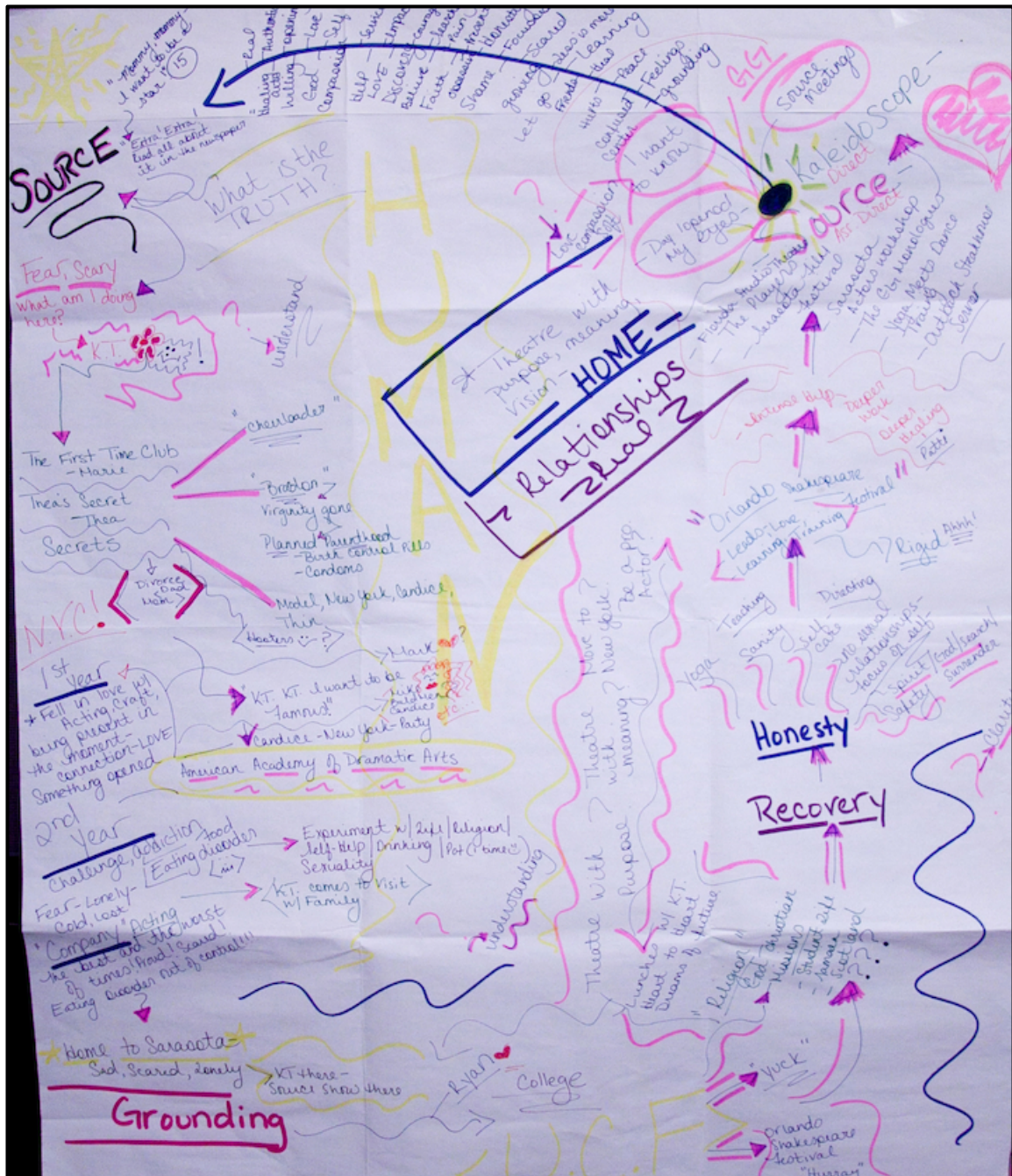
The vignettes are intended to provide the reader with moments of reflexivity that further contextualize the methods, analysis and findings. They represent points for further exploration as well as moments of deep understanding.

**Vignette: "I abandoned my life and became a waitress"**

I did not interview Elizabeth the first time. Though we met and interacted with one another during the design team portion of the study my co-researcher, Melissa, had the opportunity to conduct the first interview with Elizabeth. As one of the older members, and one who had returned to participate with The SOURCE in a few capacities (as both SOURCE21 actor and SOURCE assistant director), I knew that Elizabeth had had a very rich experience with The SOURCE. She was invested and eager in the study from the start.

Elizabeth's map was full; that is the best way I can think of to describe it. Literally every square inch of space on that rather large sheet of paper was covered with handwriting, hi-lighting and drawing. The journey her map took was almost like a game board; it began in a corner and wove up and down until completing back at the "start." Her experience with The SOURCE was clearly very intertwined with many other aspects of her life.

Figure 6. "Human" – Elizabeth's first map.



Her openness and honesty in recounting her experiences were what any interviewer would hope for. She was very introspective as well. Her eyes were fierce and I had the sense that she was looking directly inside of me. Her height and impeccable posture ensured that she had a presence in any room. Though in her map

and interview she documents the intense struggles she had throughout her life, I had the sense that she could overcome anything.

Which explains my second interaction with her...the follow-up interview. Three years later I returned to talk with her again, not knowing where her life had taken her or what she was up to these days, only knowing that KT thought it would be good to talk to her. Before the interview began I stopped by KT's office and Elizabeth was there. Before interviewing she had a question to ask me: why hadn't we met again as a group? What had happened with the study in the past few years? This question, quite a fair one at that, had the instant consequence of shifting our interpersonal dynamics. I was now the interviewee and I was being held accountable. I explained, with regret, about the lack of funds to bring everyone together once they had all moved away and begun college. I explained that logistically it wasn't feasible for the project but that her curiosity was justified and that I was sorry it had not been fully explained to her. I felt in the back of my mind my own frustration at my lack of experience; how my newness to research, participatory or otherwise, had had a real impact on this woman's perception of research. To my relief, Elizabeth conveyed that she understood and that of course it was fine, she was just curious. As quickly as it had put me on edge, her at-first-brusque demeanor and angular face relaxed and she stood up so that we could go into the other room to conduct the interview.

In the interview I found out that she had recently taken a break from The SOURCE and from all of acting. Though she had directed her own ensemble and had worked with an arts project, in addition to still working with The SOURCE, she decided that she had to step back from all of it. She had decided to work as a waitress and try to re-ground herself. The acting work was getting too intense and she had recently suffered heartbreak. But in this heartbreak she had learned a valuable lesson that, as

she shows in her second map, “dependence on another person won’t work.” And so she was attempting to redefine her life where her sense of happiness and completeness grew from within. I wanted to know more about her realization that she needed to take a break and step back from The SOURCE, and how she understood this decision in the context of her broader “story” of her experience with The SOURCE (research question 2). I asked her about the break directly and the exchange went as follows:

*Valerie:* And so, the last, the last time that the group, the one time that the group met and then that you met with Melissa was three years ago [yeah]. Um [wow], and, so what has--you said that you um, you "abandoned your life and became a waitress--

*Elizabeth:* (laughing) yeah.

*Valerie:* So what have the last three years had for you?

*Elizabeth:* Ohhhhhh, they've been--it's been--it's been a--it's been a difficult couple of ye--I mean, it's been really difficult um, which is of course like part of me is like is that the thing to say? And like the res-- but I think you probably just want the honest data [Yeah!!], I mean, I would think that that's [yeah]. Basically what happened was, um, cause I was, I think at that time I was assistant directing the SOURCE and I was also working with [name of theatre company] which was with adults with developmental disabilities, and really what happened was, um, I had had a situation in my life that, um, uhhh--really kind of like rocked my world a little bit, and it was a personal situation with another person, who um, really was not about him, but it was kind of about what he represented, and he kind of like, didn't mean to, but accidentally sort of like ripped the scab off my heart, or something, or

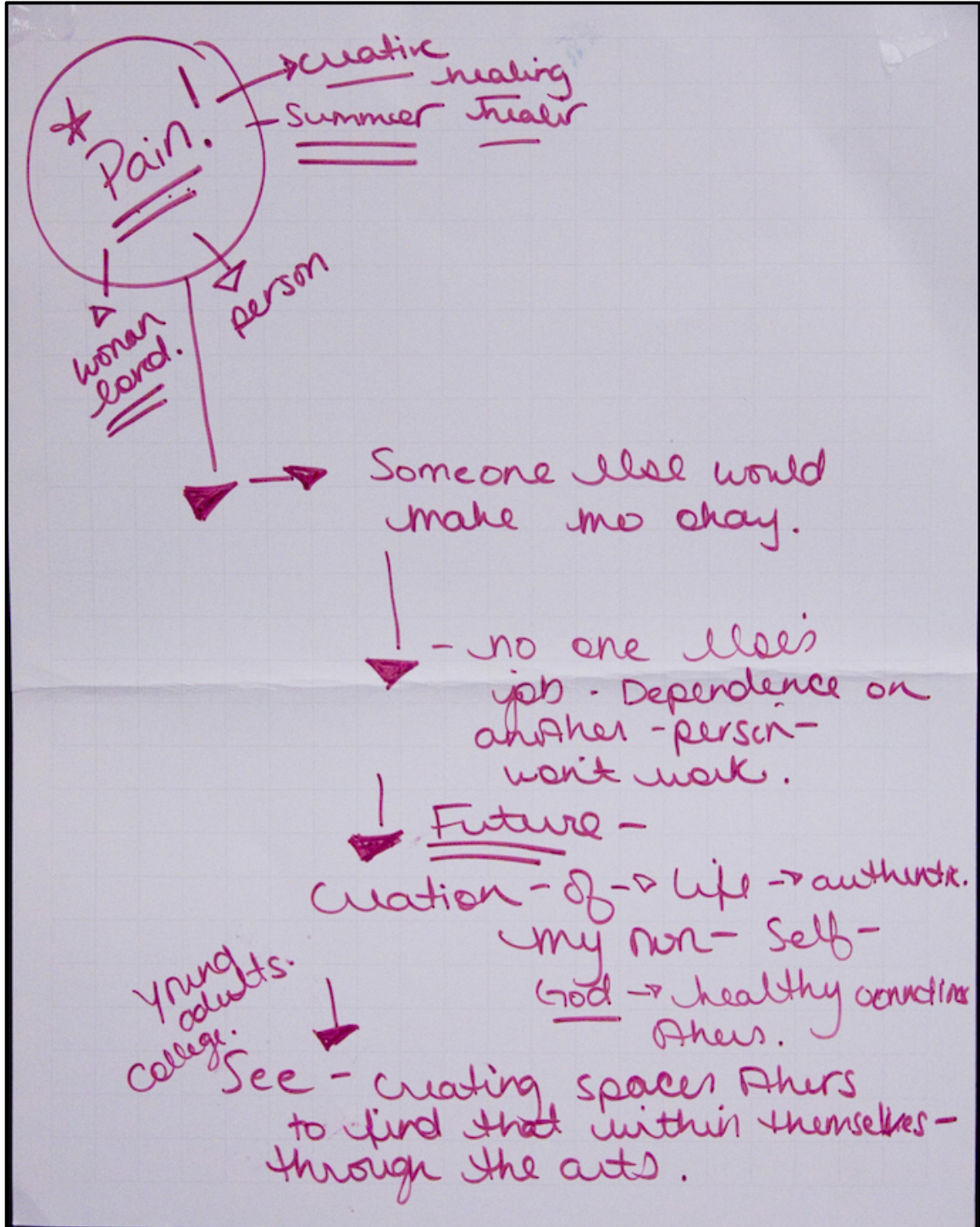
so. And there was a year and I'm not sure if that was, I think it might have been the next year from the time that we met [mhmm], but it was just like everything, and it wasn't like my world externally fell apart, but like inside I just like, was just in a tremendous amount of pain that kind of got activated, you know, through this person, but it really--like I don't know how to describe it, it really wasn't about him, but it was just kind of about like he was the catalyst I guess [uh-huh], that's kind of what I've been able to see. And what happened, through that, uh, and he was very much connected to my personal life but also my creative professional life [mhmm] and so in that, um, through that next year just, I, I seemed to just slowly need to like break away from being in the outputting mode, and [I see] and because giving to people and, because because this was the way I described it and I really feel like this, I'm very grate--and that's why I say I'm very grateful to go and be a waitress right now because I know I can show up and I can do that job well and I can do it without needing to be fully available and fully present, but I'm still doing the job well. [mhmm] It was heartbreaking to be doing theatre and to be doing things with people in a, because if I can't do that with my full heart and soul it was heartbreaking to try and do it--not that we're all gonna be like ever 100% all the time, I mean that's an unreal expectation [mhmm], but I came to, within myself, that, that I needed to go and just do something that I could do well and feel good like I'm doing it well enough, but whereas like doing things that were involving other people at such a deeper level, if I'm not fully

capable of being available then I needed to pull away and take the time to be available for myself. Which is really what I did.

For Elizabeth it was a personal relationship that “rocked her world” and put her overall relationship with theatre in jeopardy. She recognized that she wasn’t fully present when she was acting in her other projects, or present at The SOURCE. While I interpreted this as showing a connection between her sense of self and her artistic medium, I also saw it as describing her sense of self and relationship with The SOURCE, more generally. Though from her map we see that she usually returns to The SOURCE and to KT for a psychological recharging when things in her life got tough, she couldn’t do that this time because it was so intertwined with the artistic medium she valued most. I wanted to know more about what it meant, at this time in her life, to actively step away from what had been a source of comfort and energy for over 15 years. This curiosity, for me, was grounded in my fourth research question: persistence across time. I could tell from her experience that her trajectory with The SOURCE, and with theatre in general, was anything but linear, and I wanted to know more about this. Her checking-in and checking-out over the last 15 years told me that something happened in this space that allowed this flexibility and I felt this may add dimensionality to my understanding of “travelling power” (discussed further in Chapter 7). I asked her to talk more about this decision (to step away) and as the interview progressed she explained that the tricky thing about safe spaces is that they can open you up (and can open wounds) but “it’s ultimately us” that has do the rest of the work of self-development. Throughout the interview she explains a constant sense of realigning her focus to herself, on listening to what resonated with her, and responding honestly to her thoughts and feelings.

When looking at her first map she seemed almost surprised as she remarked at how obvious it all appeared. When I asked her to explain she directed me to see the “cycles”. The first map showed her clearly what she didn’t know then (just three years ago) but that she understood now, that her life moved in cycles and, essentially, she should trust the process. She identified for me some recurring patterns on her first map that, for her, constituted these cycles. These patterns included moments of difficulty or heartbreak, a return to a safe space, and a consequence of growth and development; the cycle then often repeated itself again in the next phase of the map. In her second map she used this recognition of cycles and extended it into the future, confident that she will come back to the arts, specifically to create “spaces [for] others to find that [happiness] within themselves through the arts.” She writes, in the middle of the page, the ultimate lesson she has learned from her cycles and uses the bottom third of the page to carry the map into the future. She expressed to me that she was in a moment of exploration, deciding what she would like to do next as she slowly reacquainted herself with the arts anew. (See map, next page.)

Figure 7. "Healthy Connections" – Elizabeth's second map.



My discussion with Elizabeth and the imagery of her maps brought to mind what a "secure attachment" (Bowlby, 1969) to The SOURCE might look like. Her first map

documented her physical returns to the space, the events of her life in between, and how she cycled back, returning to The SOURCE as an assistant director. She was focused on relationships and establishing “real” and “authentic” connections with others, and I interpreted this to mean that she felt The SOURCE (and, of course, KT) provided a model for such a secure relationship. She was able to completely walk away from it all, confident that it will still be there when she is ready to return, confident that she *will* return, and confident that the space will welcome her with open arms. In addition, her words in the excerpt above - about being a “good enough” waitress, resonated for me with Winnicott’s (1969) theory of the “good enough” mother. A basic interpretation of this theory is that a “good enough mother” provides just enough for her child to feel confident that she will be there, but not so much so that they are prevented from having to test their own mettle. The difficult balance to find is in not having the child feel abandoned. In many ways this is also similar to Vygotsky’s (1978) zones of proximal development, the idea that a person can be pushed only so far at a given point in time, and that to push too far is unproductive. In the space of SOURCE, then, Elizabeth found a zone that pushed her, that opened her up. But, as she said, the space can only do so much; the rest is up to the individual. Later in her life, after leaving The SOURCE, when she experienced a drastic pain, what Winnicott might consider “being dropped” she struggled to find a place where she could recover some grounding, some sense of herself. The pressure of “being available” for theatre meant that she couldn’t “be available” for herself; and so she found a position in life that she found rewarding but that she didn’t have to be fully present for, so that she could focus on her inner self (waitressing). She described herself as now very firmly in an exploratory phase, learning about art therapy programs and deciding where to go next.

**Chapter 5**

**Adolescen(t/sce), Being and Becoming**

## Chapter 5: Adolescen(t/sce), Being and Becoming

*“I really enjoyed your play because I want to be a doctor when I grow up so it was important to me because I care about these things even though it doesn’t seem like it.”* Comment from a 6th grade student after seeing “The Angels Must Be Smiling”, April/May 2002

*“Where most adults don’t see adolescents as, uh, of value, or they don’t realize the value they have. And KT realizes the value they have. She respects them.”* Aiden, former SOURCE participant, age 22

*“...young people...are positioned at the leading edge of many aspects of contemporary social change, and experience acutely the risks and opportunities that new social conditions entail.”* (Hall, Coffey and Williamson, 1999, p. 501)

In this chapter I explore how past SOURCE members understood adolescence (as a developmental phase) and adolescents (as persons) and the counternarratives (Solis, 2004) they employed to resist popular notions of both. One advantage of interviewing a range of participants retrospectively was that some of them had arguably just reached the end of their own adolescence while others had time to process their adolescent experiences or to engage in work where they were once again working with adolescents (e.g. teaching, social work, etc.). As I engaged with them in interviews and listened to their stories during the analysis I began to hear that part of the “story of their SOURCE experience” (research question 2) was a recognition of the complexity of adolescence, particularly that adolescents, even themselves, are never

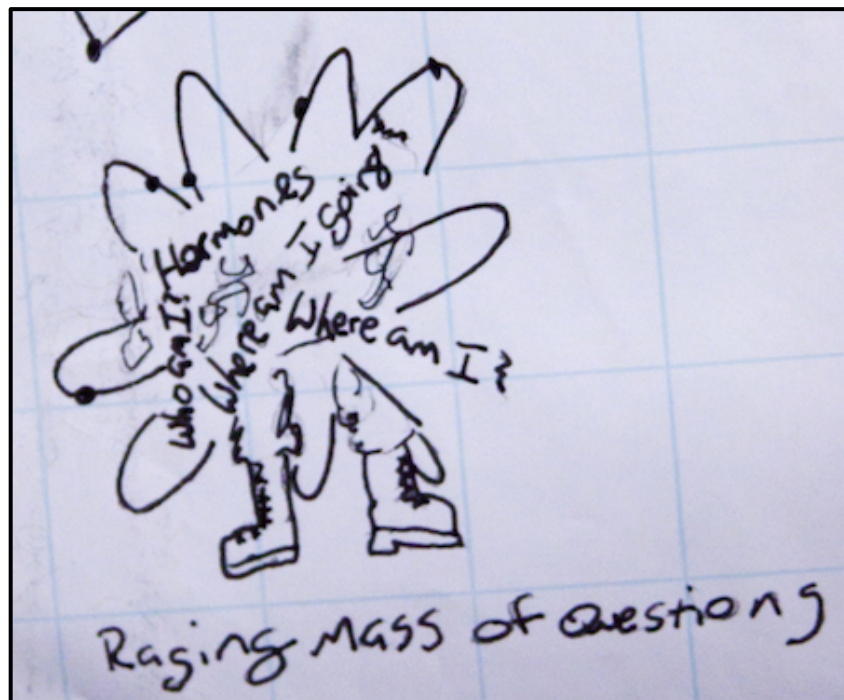
perfect. Yet, despite this lack of perfection, they had important things to say and do, as adolescents and as members of a Sarasota community of youth. Second, I heard them describe The SOURCE as a place where they could actively take up this complexity and the challenges they faced as adolescents – lack of information, lack of respect from adults – to simultaneously craft counternarratives of adolescence and cultivate positive self-identities (Young, 1990) as adolescents (research question 4).

In general, I heard The SOURCE members narrate a sort of "double consciousness" (DuBois, 1903) around their experiences as adolescents. They recognized how society broadly perceived them and contended with their own developing sense of self to reconcile what were often disparate perceptions (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Many of them narrated struggling to understand their own selves and positions in society and how they could contribute to the community around them while they felt most adults treated them with skepticism and a lack of trust, or as individuals in need of containment. Mike Males in *The Scapegoat Generation* (1996) puts it succinctly, "At a personal level, American adults really believe adolescents are crazy" (pg. 274). He cited drastically elevated estimates of adults' perceptions of adolescent distress, depression, and violence. Moreover, when researching adolescence, ethnographers and other researchers tend to also engage their own adolescence and the struggles *they* faced, projecting them onto the youth they are studying (Biklen, 2004). This adds yet another layer of potential complications in that the very people positioned to hear what adolescents have to say and how they interpret the world around them may be simultaneously rehashing their own youth experiences or, more detrimentally, privileging their own interpretation as somehow more wise or experienced than the youth they are engaging and thus re-creating problematic power dynamics (Biklen, 2004). In listening to former SOURCE members I

tried to keep my own adolescent experiences at bay, instead focusing on how *they* understood their pathways through that time in their lives.

As I listened to former SOURCE participants I heard them actively contest popular narratives of adolescence while, interestingly, also adopting or relying on them as well. As the image from Richard's map below (Figure 8) shows, past members recognized that adolescence was, at least in part, a turbulent time of life. But as I listened I began to realize they were accepting some of the popular notions of adolescence while refusing to narrow the discourse, instead broadening it with their counternarratives.

Figure 8. "Raging mass of questions" - Close-up section of Richard's map



In Maisha Winn's *Girl Time* (2011), she presents readers with a number of stories that show the varied ways of teens' being and becoming. This display of multiple stories reiterated that there was not one "script" of adolescence but multiple ways of relating and narrating. While adolescence, and increasingly, emerging adulthood, are continually reified as distinct transitional life phases, it is important to

resist the pressure to narrow them down to a singular way of being experienced. The data presented in this chapter as drawn from interviews with my participants does not seek to confirm or deny adolescence and young adulthood as distinct life phases – in fact, many participants themselves adopt the dominant “storm and stress” narrative – but rather to show the dimensionality of these experiences. Such dimensionality, built on recognizing “positive” differences (Young, 1990) is key to responding to popular discourses of adolescence by showing that there are multiple paths through this life stage. For me, dimensionality also meant considering multiple aspects of experience, the personal, physical, temporal, spatial, and developmental.

Presented here are a series of “counternarratives” (Solis, 2002) of adolescence, as narrated by the participants. These were narratives that resisted the popular notions of adolescence, as perceived by the narrator, while delineating other ways of being and understanding oneself in the world. I begin by showing how the participants narrated their understanding of what it meant to be an adolescent. Across many of the narratives I heard participants continually explain how they felt adults, teachers, parents, and other, older, members of society perceived them. This discussion served to establish their perceptions of the “dominant” narrative of adolescence as they perceived and experienced it. Following this discussion are three specific counternarratives that emerged through my listenings of the interview data: adolescence as knowers, adolescents as agents who could respond to larger social forces, and sex-education as presenting more opportunity than threat.

*Why counternarratives?*

*Assumptions of the universality of the perspective and experience of the privileged are dislodged when the oppressed themselves expose*

*those assumptions by expressing the positive difference of their experience. By creating their own cultural images they shake up received stereotypes about them. Having formed positive self-identity through organization and public cultural expression, those oppressed by cultural imperialism can then confront the dominant culture with demands for recognition of their specificity.* (Young, 1990, p. 155)

As Lesko (2001), Males (1996) and others have argued, adolescents have been cordoned off as a distinct group in our culture. Much is expected of their development and many rules and evaluations are imposed. A more general critique has been that these expectations are representative of the interests and experiences of only one group – white, middle/upper class males. Many studies have critiqued this presumed trajectory of adolescent development, and its corresponding pathway to adulthood as very narrow and unable to account for the actual complexity of adolescent lives (Gilligan & Brown, 1993; Dimitriadis, 2003; Lesko, 2001; Hendry, 2007). How, then, are adolescents and young adults presented with opportunities to express their “positive difference” as Young (above) would encourage them to do? How might they develop counternarratives of youth? The first step to understanding counternarratives is to recognize the cultural power of narratives, that they at once are created by and encompassing of culture (Solis, 2002). The construction of counternarratives, by researchers and youth alike, is at once critical, oppositional, resistant and, as Nancy Deutsch (2008) would remind us, always in relation to the dominant narratives. As such, our understanding of the complexity of dominant narratives is thickened while our imagination for the seeds of what might be is nurtured. For me, this idea of constructing counternarratives (by individuals or groups) brought up corollary concerns about how they were expressed and “heard”— in the form of recognition or validation

– by others. Building on Hammack's earlier stated argument that identities form out of the meeting of self and society we see that narratives of self, and counternarratives of response, emerge at the intersection of selves and contexts. Adults and society determine what is "normal" or "appropriate" in terms of youth development and, subsequently, what are "marginal" or "abnormal." Youth thus respond to, engage with and contest these constructions. Within The SOURCE, they interrogated these constructions and recognized the depth and variety of experiences that most youth experienced, such that they could not be so easily relegated to one group or another (e.g. "normal" or "abnormal").

As theories of social identity and self-categorization have shown (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), there is a psychological function to identifying-with or being identified-as part of a certain group. While Deaux (1991) pointed out that this could provide a source of self-esteem, it could also provide a source of shame or unrest. When most people think of "teenager," the first adjectives to come to mind are rarely positive in nature, rather we may tend to remember our own teen years with discomfort or recognize those years as ones of storm and strife (Biklen, 2004). The SOURCE members used this language, too. They recognized that they were "just teenagers" but they also actively contested what this should mean. As previously discussed, there was value in the collective membership of SOURCE and the creation of a SOURCE-member identity, and I think this was in part in response to the assumptions they felt adults made about them. I see the counternarratives that I discuss below as integral to the creation of the collective SOURCE-member identity and, after considering how they functioned collectively in that space, I want to now identify what these narratives were developed in response to. After first presenting data on how The SOURCE members understood adolescence

in general, I present three distinct counternarratives that I heard across participant interviews: 1) that adolescents can be positioned as "knowers" with knowledge and experience who can also serve as educators; 2) that adolescents are social agents capable of responding to broader social forces; and 3) that sex-education, in this case, can offer an opportunity for education, engagement and dialogue, rather than pose a threat to the moral order of society or a danger to youth.

*What it means to be an adolescent*

Very few people listen, especially to a teenager. ... It's very hard for a teen to find someone who will listen, to find someone to actually care and want them to speak and want to know about them and their issues.

(Sarah, 26, 8 years since participation)

Adolescent identities are co-created out of the agency, hopes, and desires of the young person as they interact with interpersonal, sociohistorical, political and cultural contexts. This co-creation, as the participants in this study narrated, was far from transparent or uncomplicated. As Luttrell (2003) explained, such contexts tend to compete with the desire and needs of youth, forcing them to engage in splitting their own thoughts and desires from what is deemed socially acceptable or appropriate. With regard to sexuality, in particular, she noted that "Insofar as girls are discouraged from actively thinking about and expressing the power of their sexual feelings, they are left unprepared to cope with a key task of adolescent identity and development—reconciling personal desires with social demands" (pg. 141).

In these interviews many of the participants were perfectly willing to relay the complexity of adolescent desires and social constraints. The SOURCE participants were frequently willing to demystify any sort of angelic image of what it meant to be a

SOURCE-member, or the idea that SOURCE was an instant panacea for adolescent troubles. As Mariah and Alan explain:

It wasn't like SOURCE came along and all sudden we were like, these little perfect angels. No, we were all still struggling and we all still did destructive things, oh my God! And we'd be able to go into SOURCE and talk about it. And KT and the other people would kind of help us get to the bottom of why we did it and what was going on, and there was never any judgment. (Mariah, 21, 3 years since participation)

Just because we were at The SOURCE getting good information doesn't mean we were living good lives. ... But at least in the back of our minds it [the information] stuck there. For me at least. (Alan, M, 11 years since participation)

Struggle, even destruction, was still a part of adolescent life. However, rather than meeting such struggle or destruction with punitive measures or restrictive dialogue, an equal part of the experience of adolescence for SOURCE members was self-knowledge and education. There was recognition, by SOURCE participants and by KT that individuals were always *in process* in their own development. Development became an activity, something that was discussed, observed, critiqued, but not treated fatalistically, as though the experiences of one day or one situation were somehow equivalent to who a person was. What it meant to be an adolescent, then, was to make mistakes but to talk about them with others in order to understand them. As I listened to stories from older participants I also realized that this was more than an approach to adolescence, it was simply an approach to life in general. This

recognition that life is filled with mistakes but that the important part is talking about them and understanding them is in itself a form of counternarrative, one that acknowledged the lifespan of development and the continual opportunities for growth out of conflict and complexity. In the following exchange with Ashley (25, 7 years since participation), in which we were actually talking about the experience of acting, she engaged this dominant narrative of adolescence as an "emotional time" but also talked about what she learned about adolescence, in general:

*Valerie:* so is there something that's important about that [taking on a character] for teenagers, to like...

*Ashley:* um...well, for, I mean, obviously yes

*Valerie:* yeah

*Ashley:* but like, why, I mean, how can I articulate thousands of reasons why it's important. um... because...I mean, first of all, like, it's...like, when you're a teenager, teenagers are, especially -- well, no not especially teenage girls cause teenage boys can be incredibly difficult too, can be worse -- so for all teenagers, like, it's um, it's an emotional time. And teenagers are, extr---myself included---are extremely self-absorbed, and irrational, and this was a great place to -- where you really...being that way just wasn't really cool and, it just wasn't, wasn't really an option.

*Valerie:* you mean here?

*Ashley:* at the SOURCE, yeah. and it really, really completely changed my personality. Because, I became, just, so much more accepting. So much more confident, um, and, and um, just so much, so open to new things and new people, and um, and I, it really helped me I think in high

school a lot to have as many, and, in high school it's helped me always, I think, to just like, have um...have, be as open with people as I think I can be.

In the excerpt above, Ashley is asked why it is important for teenagers to have the opportunity to theatrically perform and embody characters, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. What I found striking about the above exchange, however, was the almost flippant style with which Ashley conveyed the emotion and “irrationality” of adolescence. As a graduate social work student, Ashley worked with truant youth and was familiar with the struggles of urban adolescents. Yet rather than respond to this assertion with some sort of proclamation that that is simply the only option for teenagers, she recognized the impact of context and opportunity, particularly as provided by The SOURCE:

Ashley: ...my internship this year is with adolescents and I would constantly think about, um, I-I worked with truants a lot, and truancy is [yeah] just chronic skipping, yeah, and I mean I would think about the SOURCE constantly because I would think to myself, if only these kids that maybe like, aren't the best students in the world, um, like if ONLY they had something like the SOURCE that was interesting to them, or motivated them, or some fun place to go with some cool chick like KT, that was just, like if only they had something like that.

Rather than presume a doomsday approach to a lost generation, Ashley recognized that much of the turbulence of adolescence was borne of the circumstances that surrounded youth. Nancy Lesko (2001) argued that adolescence has become “a handy and promiscuous social space, that is, a place where people could endlessly worry about, a space that adults everywhere could watch carefully and that

could be imagined to have many visible and invisible instabilities” (pg. 6). Lesko is critical of the ways in which adolescents have become a group for surveillance and control, similar to women, homosexuals, and other minority groups. Unlike the school cafeteria cliques (Adler & Adler, 1995), classroom tracking that places students at a disadvantage (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000), or the popular media where young celebrities are sexualized only to be later criticized for being too sexual - this peer education group became a place where, yes, mistakes were made, but the goal was to understand why they were made. To “put it out on the table” was seen less as exposing and more as freeing. Participants refused to fetishize the issues that they faced or to give them an exaggerated deterministic power over their lives. Anna stated it clearly by saying that:

Like with SOURCE you just put it out on the table and then no one can feel uncomfortable and if you do then it’s okay but at least it’s all out there, you know, at least it’s all out there, no questions, nothing. ... Of course it’s a little uncomfortable, of course it is, but then once you get past that, you know, just like with SOURCE...it’s really life stuff that someone needs to tell you about.

The lack of extreme or punitive reactions around the participants’ issues encouraged them to be put into the open where they can be discussed. Sharing their experiences with one another was profoundly important when viewed from a dialogical perspective. Engaging with one another around an issue through discussion provided an opportunity for “becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981) in which individuals encounter various dialogues and incorporate them into their own discourses. Rather than shutting down the conversation, participants in this program were encouraged to share their experiences, even if they didn’t always make the right choice. The monological or

authoritative voice establishing what adolescents should or should not do was persistently denounced in favor of other ways of understanding adolescence.

An undercurrent of adolescence that persisted through nearly all of the interview narratives was that SOURCE (and KT, in particular) offered a space of non-judgment that was unlike any other space. Implied in these stories was that much of adolescence was about being judged and evaluated. The cliques of school, the pressure to “be” a certain way, these were all taken as part of the “natural order” of adolescence as it was generally experienced. As Sarah (26, now a middle school teacher) explained:

[SOURCE] is the ideal environment for any teen, really, I think, because there’s so much openness...and they’re caring and everybody cares about everybody else in there and it’s not, nobody’s judging you, it’s not like school at all whatsoever where at school everybody’s judging you it seems like.

Thus, adolescents were recognized as simultaneously often judged and capable of judging while also in need of a place to be free from such judgment. This recognition of the need for such a space at this time of development often took the form of participants imagining their lives without SOURCE or recognizing people and groups where a space like The SOURCE was needed.

Aside from an in-the-moment recognition of what it meant to be an adolescent in SOURCE, participants also narrated a shifting stance toward their understanding of adolescents in general through participation in SOURCE. Alicia is a 36-year old SOURCE21 participant who has been practicing and performing with members who are significantly younger than she is. She explains how she has reconceptualized here views of young people:

I could say, oh, being a role model for young people but, no, it's also being a student of them because I learned that, yeah she's 17, and before the SOURCE, before her, my thing of, "oh, those kids, those crazy kids" or whatever and actually seeing her as a human being, as a woman, I learned from her...[she is] such a beautiful person, beautiful example of what kids can be today. Are they all? Of course not, but more the benefit of the doubt that, wow, there's some genuineness left here, this is pretty cool, so I'm not so quick to judge all teens as being bad.

Teenagers are thus capable of being "beautiful", "genuine" and of teaching adults. Thus the narratives of "what it means to be an adolescent" presented by The SOURCE participants were narratives of dimensionality in that they show growth and perspective while containing multiplicity and even contradiction. Adolescents were not presented as either/or, dichotomous individuals whose actions revealed them as either "good" or "bad" kids. They were presented as capable of making mistakes but of learning from them as well, of connecting and offering support to their peers, and of participating "ardently" (Greene, 2000) in their world. Aiden narrated this when he was asked by Melissa to talk about any "universal concepts" he may have learned in The SOURCE and he replies, "...the respect that people have for each other. The tolerance... And the fact that we make plays. And, (ahem) an opportunity for people to learn. Not only about themselves but about the world around them." Leah, a younger former participant who is only a few months out of The SOURCE and who had just spent a summer at a pre-college experience makes an even broader observation that young people yearn for a positive experience in their lives:

Like it [SOURCE] fulfilled, I think every person needs to feel like they're doing something good, or positive. And I think it really fulfilled that for me.

The following section outlines three specific ways that I heard The SOURCE craft antidotes or counternarratives to the prevailing cultural perception of adolescents as in need of discipline and control. The counternarratives took the abstract spirit of Leah's quote and presented practical ways that The SOURCE actively contested and redefined what it meant to be adolescent.

*Counternarrative: Adolescents as “knowers” and educators*

*Under what conditions will [adolescent's] spontaneous interests be transformed toward constructive purposes? This cannot be accomplished by adult manipulative tactics; it must involve a process of reciprocal exchange between growing persons and their environments.*

(Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984, p. 236)

Through the multiple listenings and readings of the interviews I eventually began to hear repeated ideas, or themes, emerge from the data. Those initial themes I had identified in the earliest evaluation report—community, self, importance of space and long-term influence—were echoed across the interviews, regardless of how long it had been since the individual had participated. In some cases it was surprising how members from completely different cohorts would employ strikingly similar metaphors to characterize their experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). One such metaphor that I consistently heard was knowledge as providing an “upper hand.” In this way the participants squarely situated themselves in a relationship of power in which the defining commodity was information:

Beth: Well, naturally, you know girls talk and they love to talk to each other about that kind of stuff [boys, relationships, sex]. And I always felt like I had an upper hand in knowing (yeah), um, more information than they did, and I always kind of, you know, whenever they did like start talking about it, I'd always kind of chime in and be like, well, you know [with] my little facts. But um actually I did think they did come to talk to me about that kind of stuff, because "oh, Beth knows because da-da-da-da-da" (pause) but um yeah, I did think they did come to me for that kind of stuff.

In repeatedly hearing former members describe knowledge as power I wanted to further understand generally how this knowledge produced shifts in power and, more specifically, how knowledge around The SOURCE's particular subject matter – sex education – was particularly able to prompt these shifts.

The SOURCE participants were trained as peer-educators as part of their involvement in The SOURCE. During the weekly meetings, which included theatre exercises, they also often had a health educator address a topic related to safe-sex or they had discussions to explore facts and experiences related to a specific issue like pregnancy or condom-use. These experiences in the meetings prepared the teen actors with information for the "talk-back" portion of performances where audience members had a chance to ask the actors questions on just about any aspect of the play. When the students became the educators - in this case around issues such as peer pressure, substance abuse, and sex education - the focus shifted from internalizing problems to externalizing them. Students became those who held the knowledge rather than those most likely "at-risk" to make bad choices.

Ninety-four percent (N=49) of survey respondents agreed (N=18) or strongly agreed (N=28) that The SOURCE gave them information to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health. Additionally, 86% (N=42) indicated that they made healthier choices because of SOURCE. Rochelle's map (Figure 9 and 10 below), produced during the design team meeting, shows how this knowledge influenced her own decisions and her interactions with other peers:

Figure 9. "I was open with myself and others" - Close-up of Rochelle's map

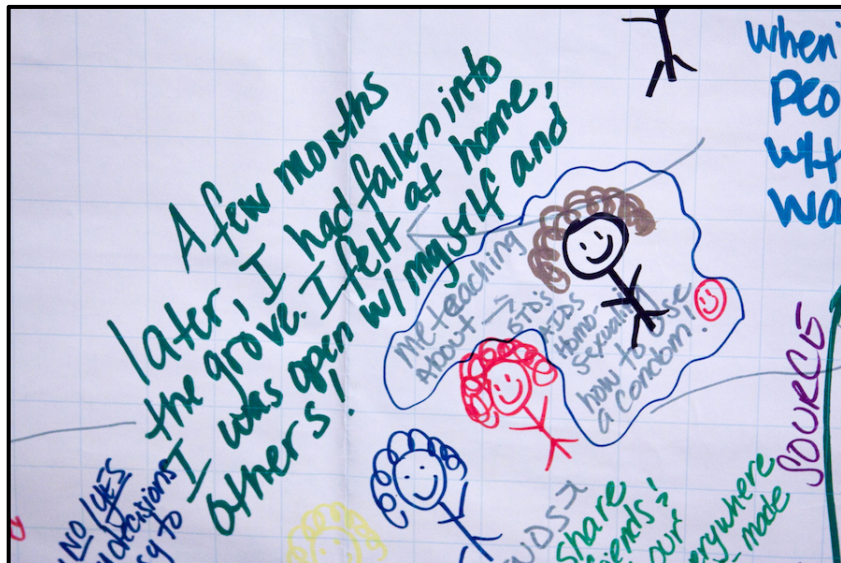
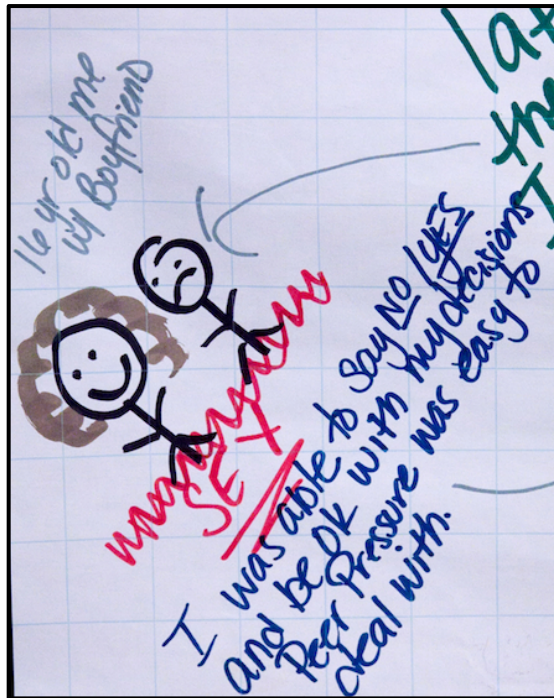


Figure 10. "Peer pressure was easy to deal with" - Close-up of Rochelle's map



While the participants were clearly “empowered” by their knowledge and willingness to listen, they also benefited from what appears to be a shift from the epicenter of adolescent crises. Though abstinence-only education positions youth at the moral crux of society, these youth claimed a different epicenter - one of information.

These “real” things translated to knowledge that was useful in real-life situations. Participants found themselves answering phone calls from friends-of-friends who had heard they might know the answer to a sex-related question; they recounted teaching their siblings how to use condoms or having the safe-sex “talk” with them; and they narrated living in dorms and having a roommate share a story of date rape after having only met one another. Thus, this knowledge and information that stemmed from adolescents as knowers and persons capable of handling and digesting sexual health information persisted in the minds and lives of SOURCE members:

*Alan:* Well, for me, being a member of this group, it was jammed in my head, "safe sex, safe sex, safe sex," not just for the sake of not, for avoiding becoming a father at an early age but you know for the sake of becoming a statistic [yeah] of HIV infection, of other STD infections. We would see pictures, hear stories and stuff like that and they were downright scary, scared the hell out of me. So, that's what I got out of this.

*Valerie:* So the knowledge that you got was, was terrifying (laughing) and you know, rightly so, the stats are scary. Was--did it feel at all, hmm, empowering or--?

*Alan:* VERY empowering [yeah]. Very empowering. I mean cause... I get with friends and people that I would just meet for the first time and for some reason they just felt comfortable enough to spill their guts out to me and they'd tell me about this and they'd tell me about that and I'm just like, they're like "oh, you must think I'm a horrible person", I'm like "look, we're human beings.[mhmm] Human beings do stupid things. We make mistakes. You know, No one's to judge anybody" I says "The only issue that I'd have in here is if you did this and you did that, did you use safe sex?" [mhmm] I don't know how many times in my life since from the moment, from the last time I was at a SOURCE meeting until now that I've said that you know I'm not gonna judge you for what you did. We have emotions, we have tendencies, we have things that tempt us and stuff like that, did you use safe sex? [mhmm] Did you use a condom? Basic things, did you use a condom? And that's where my reaction would vary where I'd be shaking my head or breathing a sigh of

relief [yeah]. Because like, you know I'm, just I'm-my whole-I'm big on safe sex. [Yeah] So yeah, it was empowering because I felt that I had something, knowledge that could save my life [mhmm] and if I could pass it on to someone else I could save theirs too [mhmm] so yeah it was, um, it was empowering, just like getting self defense skills, just like getting um psychological self-defense skills to defend yourself against something, that was definitely something that happened. [yeah] And I was damn thankful that I had it.

First, it is critical to note that in this interaction *I* offered the counternarrative (empowerment) and Alan quickly picked it up and elaborated upon it. He considered what he narrated to be empowerment (i.e. he agrees with me and repeats the word), but it actually seemed that what he was narrating was privilege based on knowledge and information. He was in a privileged position because he knew things (about sex) and could protect himself ("self-defense skills"). While he contended with the notion of judgment - he repeatedly said that he told others he wasn't going to judge them "*but*" he might "shake his head." In his job and in his life he was willing to hear and listen to what may have happened and to provide assistance *but* he wants others to know that there are other ways they can enter sexual situations and that perspective and information, rather than risk, is what he could pass on. He understood why the decision to not use a condom may have been made (or avoided), but throughout his interview he engaged each counternarrative to underlie his assumptions that everyone (from his adolescent relatives to the adult women he works with) begins from a stance of knowing, that when you have information you are capable of making informed choices and that sexual health education is one of the most important venues for

conveying these messages. This began in The SOURCE when he and others from his year (particularly Richard and William) conveyed the urgency they felt around educating others during the beginning years of AIDS/HIV awareness. This commitment, which began for him in the late 1980s and early 1990s, continued into his current work and family life.

This notion of persistence or travel-across-context will be discussed further in the final chapter but the above quote is included here because it brings up the corollary to the adolescents-as-knowers script. In the spirit of the old adage, “with great power comes great responsibility”, SOURCE members also found that with the knowledge they received came a sense of responsibility to both themselves and to others. Collectively, across the narratives, they explained this responsibility to each other, to themselves, to their peers, and to future people they may encounter. As Alan said, the knowledge could save his life and, if he passed it on to others, could save them as well. Aiden contrasted this knowledge with the knowledge he learned in school:

*Aiden:* ...At SOURCE we got the facts, which is amazing, because you don't get the facts anywhere unless you go find it yourself. And so then I was given the tools to go and research and navigate and try to figure things out on my own. And if I had questions I came back to SOURCE and I would ask either, you know you ask either the group collectively, or you ask individuals who you knew had the answers, or you could ask the sexuality educator who came in every once in a while.

*Melissa:* So in comparison [to school]?

*Aiden:* SOURCE was a wealth of information.

Aiden, while receiving a wealth of information and hearing various stories, did not feel compelled to act out or become more promiscuous, as popular culture may lead one to believe though scientific research has not supported it (Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty, 2008; Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers, Summers, & Schleifer, 2006). He explained that he wasn't sexually active while he was in SOURCE, not "until after, until I grew up!" He also narrated a perspective that other members described, how the awareness and knowledge and respect extended to oneself such that you don't want to put yourself in dangerous or risky situations. As Elizabeth stated, when she gained an understanding of herself she also gained a respect for herself:

I think that is the core of SOURCE. I think that the philosophy that SOURCE and KT and when I've been working have brought to it has been if you have a core self, you're, you're choices sexually will be just smarter, they will be safer, you will want to take care of yourself because you love yourself. And ultimately, I can think of every time that I didn't make wise choices was because some, on some level, I was not loving myself, taking care of myself, for some reason in that moment that person became more important than my needs to take care of myself. So, for these kids, the teenagers, it's like, instilling that in them, and um, I just think it's, on so many levels. And, I also just go to the fact that as people leave SOURCE and do a lot of things that aren't maybe the healthiest things for them, and it's like I do think that that seed is always there, that they then know that there is a way to take care of themselves and oh yeah, somebody really did care about who I was at that point and oh, yeah yeah yeah, I did learn that there are all

these different ways to be empowered and not be a victim to all these things out in the world.

Elizabeth argued that this openness and understanding of self, what she considered a “core value” of The SOURCE, when coupled with the practical knowledge and health advice, will make youth less apt to make risky decisions because, quite simply, they would respect themselves too much. The notions of risk and responsibility thus become tied to self, identity, and the recognition received from others. Even if someone later found himself or herself in a situation where they were making unhealthy choices, Elizabeth referred to The SOURCE as a “seed” and a reminder that “somebody really did care.” As Elizabeth explained, risky behavior becomes reframed not as a purely voluntary choice or a moment of teenage defiance but as relational (“that person became more important”) and representative of larger struggles of recognition that everyone faces, teens in particular. Empowerment becomes tied to knowledge and safer choices through the vehicle of self; selves become understood and explored when they are given a space for connection and sharing. “SOURCE is a place or maybe one place in their [teens] world where they might get that [connection],” concluded Elizabeth.

In a similar vein of watching one’s own behavior, becoming a source of knowledge for one’s peers also meant that these peers were, in effect, relying on and looking up to SOURCE members. Though many of the interviewees would be the first to admit that their behavior was far from perfect, they did narrate a sense of needing to be responsible for their actions because their actions were influential outside of themselves. In Liza’s (F, 25 years old, 7 years since participation) point of view when others would ask her for advice she:

...often felt like I was more contributing to people's lives and in doing that there's a lot of responsibility in kind of being a good person and kind of keeping on the straight and narrow because people are going to come to you for advice...it helped me have a focus and, and really want to be a good person.

Similarly, in the open-ended survey responses one member, when asked if SOURCE had any negative impact wrote, "Kind of. Simply because I had so much information that when people around me got STD's or pregnant I felt a bit a fault for not giving them more information." Similarly, Aiden remarked, "I think that because I'm aware and have knowledge, it's a responsibility to share that."

This shift in rhetoric from "risk" to "responsibility" signals a broader shift in which adolescents moved from the problem that is under surveillance or control to individuals who possessed knowledge, power, responsibility and most importantly, could act as agents of information and change. As shown by Liza's example above, risk to responsibility broadens from simply being responsible for conveying information to being responsible for focusing on relational responsibilities and serving as a role model. This urge for responsibility, though, seemed to stem from the self and relationships with peers, versus being an imposed responsibility mandated by parents or teachers. This allowed for some room for slippage, for reality and emotions to sometimes test this responsibility. Such slippage was understood because the overall goal was a general upward trend, but there were no illusions of perfection, just expectations of honesty and reflection.

Implied in this idea of adolescents as knowers, and responsibility as sharers of knowledge, are dual notions of access to information and silencing/voicing knowledge. The idea of access to knowledge (Goodnow, 1995) provided another way of

understanding how The SOURCE crafted a counternarrative of adolescence. In other spaces that the participants occupied, particularly school, the discourse was most often unilateral or aimed at them and stemmed from their teachers as both instructors and disciplinarians. By granting these adolescents with access to knowledge about their own bodies, they opened up the types of discussions that could occur, which in turn introduced to the adolescents new roles of knower, sharer, educator, as described above. Mariah, one of the more outspoken members of The SOURCE who has since moved to New York to pursue an acting career, captured these dual notions well:

I guess I learned how dangerous silence is and how powerful a voice is. I guess, you know, because in general the way that young people are treated and the lack of information they're given, they're so many, they're so many young people out there that are getting HIV, that are getting AIDS, and that are getting pregnant and making really destructive decisions, and it's because nobody, nobody talks about anything, you know. ... We talk about guns and violence, but we don't talk about sex and we don't talk about these issues that young people are faced with everyday. ... So that was really interesting to see how, how dangerous silence is. And then to see how powerful voice is, you know, in SOURCE people would have the ability to talk about anything, to talk about their own feelings and to talk about things they had been through and, you know, let it out. You know, we'd read poetry sometimes, you know, we'd do improvs, and really just let it all out, get it out of our heads. And it was so healing for so many people that I know, including myself, it really was so therapeutic for us and really made us, you know, stop and think before we did something that was so

destructive. Because we were able to talk about it, discuss it, get it off our chests, not let it, keep it inside of us and eat us away.

Mariah's story also performed the helpful psychological task of explaining how the experience in SOURCE translated into action and behavior. To her, silence was dangerous because dialogue was important. Dialogue was important because it offered not only catharsis, but also information and understanding as well. This catharsis helped clear the mind, she explained, and the dialogue served as a reference for future action, in the form of "stop and think." This understanding of SOURCE as a dialogical reference-point will be examined more closely in Chapter 7, but for now I want to stay with Mariah's recognition of voice and how it lead to a second counternarrative of adolescents as capable of engaging larger social forces.

*Counternarrative: Adolescents as capable of shaping the larger social climate*

A key assumption made in The SOURCE was that everybody had something to say and all were expected to contribute. What was intended to come out of this sharing and the resulting discussions was recognition of one's own voice. Similar to the previous use of a metaphor of "upper hand" to delineate the counternarrative of adolescents as knowers, I noticed particular and frequent references to SOURCE as providing a place to find one's voice as an adolescent and young adult. This idea of voice implied both that the participant had something important to say and something that needed to be heard. In building off of the previous discussion of the power of possessing knowledge, this counternarrative of adolescents as capable of responding to larger social forces or conditions repositioned teens as agents and actors in their own surroundings.

This observation was particularly relevant to SOURCE because of its own demographic makeup. While the group is certainly diverse, and perhaps more diverse than most students experience in their social circles at school, it does exist in a community that also has considerable wealth and privilege. While not all participants are affluent, a number of them are from upper class families and majority groups. For them, this notion of finding a “voice” was often paralleled by a critical consciousness or consciousness-raising experience. Leah (22, 4 years since participation) was part of a group that travelled to Mexico to learn about reproductive rights issues there in preparation for the monologues in DIOME. As she recounted,

I specifically remember instances in Mexico where I'd be like, what if this is me, what if I had no reproductive rights, what if I wasn't allowed to have, um, things that I - what if didn't want eight kids and I had to have them just because I didn't have a choice and I didn't have a say and I remember thinking thoughts like this, and it not being real that those people ever existed before then, just like some like commercial you see like, you know, but like those people had nothing but yet they were so welcoming and so nice, and I remember thinking all those things, and about how family is like the same everywhere and I remember thinking things like that, like having these thoughts and writing them down. And I remember later, I wrote my college like acceptance essay about it, and um, things like that or like I wrote a um, a senior paper about, um, the effects - it was more like the effects of um, reproductive rights on um, on um women and their mental health. And I remember researching and thinking this is just because I had this idea, just because of what I saw.

Mariah also realized her place of privilege and the importance of civic involvement and how the information she learned in SOURCE informed that part of her self.

Mariah: Because of SOURCE at a young age I kind of learned, you know, the power of my voice, and that I felt – being actively involved, and I, I started thinking about, you know, when I am 18 and I can vote, what are the issues that are going to affect my life? You know, I learned about those before I could vote – which is good – so when the time to vote came, you know, I had a good solid background in what I believed in and what I didn't.

This idea of engaging larger social forces that both Leah and Mariah (among others) narrated was important due to the dialogical nature of such an act. Bakhtin explains the process of “ideological becoming” in which an individual’s internal, persuasive discourse is negotiated in relation to the broader, more pervasive authoritative discourses of their culture and environment. Essentially, ideological becoming is the process of “selectively assimilating the words of others” (Bakhtin, pg. 341, 1981). Bakhtin argued that each person has an “ideological self” that is composed of systems of ideas that govern the ways in which they view the world (Freedman & Ball, 2004). This self is created through interactions with the social world via the medium of language. In addition, the numerous idea systems within an individual coexist and develop in relation with one another. Mariah’s quote, above, alludes to this process wherein involvement resulted in critical thinking and awareness which resulted in identifying what she did believe and what she didn't. The SOURCE provided, for her, an avenue of becoming. The finding of one’s voice could thus be considered part of becoming – recognizing what seems internally persuasive and dialogically engaging with the authoritative discourses of school and community (and

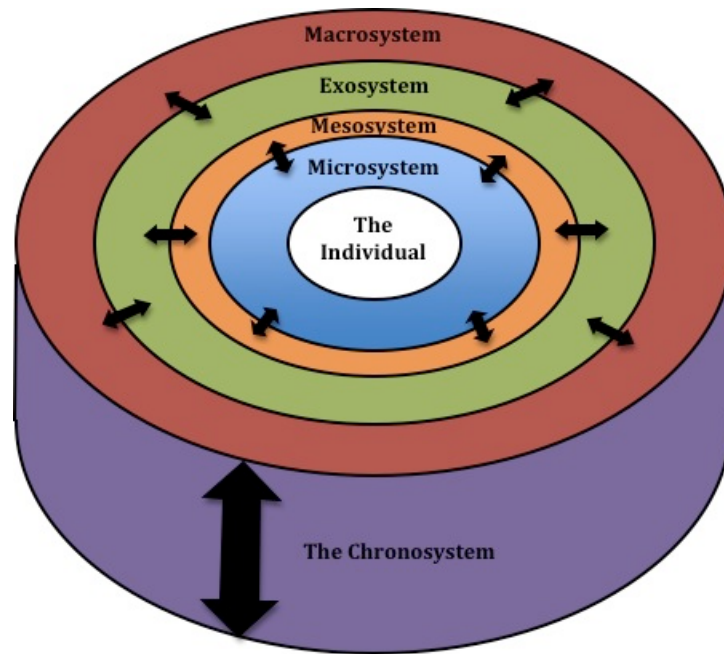
sex education, in this case). As discussed further in the next chapter, the medium of theatre and performance seemed to greatly aid in the discovery of what was internally persuasive for SOURCE participants. Mariah continues,

I don't think any of us, we all just felt so powerful because at 18 you have no power for the most part. You have no voice, you're in school, you're being told what to do, you need a hall pass to go to the bathroom, you know, so you have no power, and then all of a sudden we were part of this whole thing where, where we all had solid beliefs and people disagreed with us, but we stood up anyway, and we spoke our minds. And I think that was so empowering for all of us, to see that we actually had an impact on the community.

The corollary to having a voice is the expectation that it would be used. This idea further resisted any notion of teens as being “seen and not heard” and thus lent more credence to the SOURCE’s counternarrative of teens as capable social agents. This idea of a responsibility to use one’s voice was discussed in the section above, but the narrative of adolescents as capable of responding to the larger social climate involved a responsibility to speak in circles that were even broader than one’s social circle.

In his model of ecological development, Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed a series of nested circles that describe the ecological life-space (Lewin, 1939) of the developing child (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Development Model



Beginning with the individual (and considering their race, sexuality, life circumstance, sex, age, health, etc), these levels gradually build from the individual's microsystem, which includes the people they most readily interact with (parents, teachers, friends), outward through a mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The mesosystem is the most explicitly relational aspect of the theory and is the level that accounts for interactions between the child's lifeworlds – how family relationships affect school relationships, etc. The exosystem encompasses things that are not directly related to the child but that still have influence on them, such as a parent's occupation. The macrosystem is the broadest system and accounts for the general "culture" in which the child lives, which can include race and socioeconomic status. Operating in and around all of these levels is the chronosystem, which accounts for time: both the individual's developmental transitions throughout life as well as the historical moment in which these are taking place.

Thus, whereas the previous discussion of responsibility and adolescents as knowers focused more squarely on the close interpersonal relationships between

friends, teachers, and family, this counternarrative is different for its emphasis on the meso- and macro-systems in Bronfenbrenner's theory. Consider the two examples below, from Beth and Elizabeth, which show how they used The SOURCE to address these social systems:

*Beth:* But, I mean, I was actually on like a board of people who were trying to, get LMS [Life Management Skills] to be not abstinence only and to teach contraception but then, the school board just decided to rule out LMS and they're like combining some other class, so, that fight was over, we didn't even get to do that.

*Valerie:* So, you wanted, so talk a little bit more about that. You were on a board?

*Beth:* Um, (ahem) KT actually hooked me up with, um, this woman who was trying to go to the school board and trying to get, um, it was - I guess the classes were divided up into some schools taught LMS-A, and that was like abstinence only, and then there was LMS-AB, which is abstinence plus and it was like, abstinence plus contraception [right]. And um, Sarasota counties schools were just "A" and we were trying to get it "AB," so we were going to go, like, to the board, give this big presentation about why, you know, get surveys and all these kinds of things. We had all these things set up. And then the school board just decided to do away with that class.

*Elizabeth:* My senior year when I was running these retreat things [yeah] I ran the section on sex, and was in a senior retreat team talking to juniors about sex. Being like "ok, and so what happens when you do do

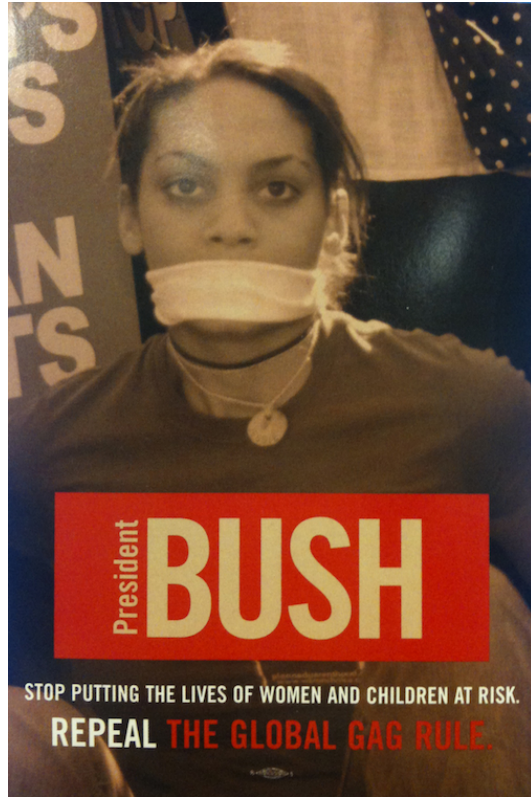
it?" In this Catholic—Yeah, and I didn't think there was anything wrong with that. I felt very strongly about that because everybody WAS having sex. So I thought let's talk about it honestly. ... I mean, we snuck a SOURCE play into [her school]. Because my religion teacher was really cool. So, we would never I mean, Catholic school (right) you know, but we totally snuck it in, drive with the van, KT was like "are you sure this is alright" and I'm like "sure it is! Mr. John said we could go in!" and we did First Time Club in our religion class and he was like really open and it was awesome.

Though Beth wasn't ultimately successful in her bid to change how the mandatory Life Management Skills (LMS) class was conducted, she was still engaged with activists and prepared to argue for a change that would have influenced students district-wide. And Elizabeth, while working within the smaller context of her school, is essentially subverting the dominant religious doctrine of her school by insisting that students talk honestly about sex since it was a very real part of their lives. Both of these examples also highlight the mediating role of influential adults and The SOURCE in helping each of these students enact their broader-based social influence. This should not detract from the quality of these experiences for the participants and is one of the developmental strengths of The SOURCE in that it provided such bridging experiences.

The primary point of this finding is that this was a counternarrative that existed in The SOURCE and was both encouraged and reinforced by members and their activities. The scale of its use varied with the particular interests of the members. In Figure 12 (below), for example, we see one of the broader uses of this narrative from a SOURCE member who travelled to Washington, DC to protest the global gag rule of

the Bush Era. This photo was used on a postcard generated by Planned Parenthood with information on how to contact Congressional representatives.

Figure 12. Responding to Larger Social Forces



While not all members participated at this level of scale, nor were they pressured to, they were certainly encouraged in their efforts to be social agents in settings outside of The SOURCE and outside the realm of their direct interpersonal networks. The SOURCE provided them with opportunities to do so.

*Counternarrative: Sex Education as Opportunity, Not Threat (“There’s no answers other than ‘don’t’”)*

“Adolescent sexuality often provokes public panic.” (Ashcraft, 2003, p.

37)

The SOURCE's organizational history bookends historically provocative events in sexuality history. They began during the late 80s and gained community recognition in the early 1990s at the height of the AIDS epidemic. The members who were interviewed who participated during this time narrated a poignant sense of urgency for educating and protecting their peers and themselves. As this sense of urgency waned, the focus of SOURCE gradually shifted in response to the sociopolitical times. In the late 1990s discussions at SOURCE still included safe sex practices but also encompassed renewed debates about a woman's right to choose and parental notification for minors receiving abortions. Most recently, the sociocultural milieu has placed abstinence-only education at the forefront of discussions on teen sexuality. The participants' continual declaration of The SOURCE as an open-minded and welcoming space begs the question as to if they would be as open to discourses of abstinence, whose proponents have succeeded, in some cases, at banning the SOURCE from performing plays in local schools.

The participants I interviewed echoed this historical trajectory in recounting their experiences of The SOURCE. Earlier participants conveyed many memories of sex education moments (learning statistics, how to put on a condom, wearing a pregnancy belly) as well as the sense of urgency and fear they felt about the prevalence and danger of HIV/AIDS. Later participants were also more engaged with decisions about if and when to have sex or their reasons for abstaining. Anna explains the trajectory of The SOURCE's history and its receptivity to abstinence discourses,

I think in the beginning it was more about sex. So maybe people that you're talking to who are a little bit like later, um, involved, because I, I think SOURCE got some flack for that, for talking too much about sex and not promoting abstinence. They're promoting safe sex. ... So I

mean, it definitely was, but then more as it progressed, it became less about that and more about self-awareness and, I don't want to say abstinence but, um, well, you're exactly my age, you know, in like 2000 there was like a huge like straight-edge and everyone is like holding out, and abstinence became like the new safe sex. So I think during that time...kids were feeling more empowered about abstinence. Um, so then they, so then SOURCE started to promote that a little bit more. You know, talking about that, it's your right to choose and to hold yourself out and you know and to wait. You know, and that's ok too. You don't always have to, if you're gonna have sex, you don't have to do it just cause you're doing it with a condom, you know what I mean?

Anna goes on to explain that she felt this shift was representative of the shift in the community's discourse on sex, a preferred discourse of abstinence, and The SOURCE's role and responsibility to respond to this shift. An important distinction, however, was that the discourses were not treated as mutually exclusive in The SOURCE. Instead, what was emphasized is a freedom of choice, to choose how one wanted to engage in sex or not.

Alan: To me the whole philosophy behind being pro-choice means that you also have um the right, you also have the right, you should have the right to know that you can choose to be safe or not be safe. (Mhmm) You know, If you're gonna choose, choose wisely. Choose to use prophylactics, choose to use contraceptives, you know choose, choose somebody that you feel safe with. You know, um, That's what choice means to me. (Mhmm) You know, that's what I liked, that's what I liked about Planned Parenthood and the SOURCE, that not only would you

find information on abortions and stuff like that but you could also find informations, information on how to avoid having to have an abortion, [mhmm] to avoid to avoid having to go to the health department because you might have been exposed to something [mhmm], you know so pro-choice meant a lot of things to me...

Operating under the assumption that youth want accurate information because they ultimately want to make informed choices offered The SOURCE and its broader community a different way to think about the role of sex education. As Males (1996) argues, much of the impetus behind abstinence-only education is misguided in that what young people need is “a political and health establishment whose officials have matured out of their current phases of blaming the nation’s adult-caused sexual ills on eighth graders” (pg. 76). As he points out, many youth don’t necessarily want to have sex, but those that do are in need of information to make smart choices. And the participants, as the quotes below indicated, were smart enough and savvy enough to balk at scare tactics and the notion that “no” was the sole and correct answer.

Leah: I don’t remember having it [sex education]. Or maybe it was there but like, it was probably pathetic. I kind of almost remember something in middle school. Of a chart or something. I don’t know if you’ve seen “Mean Girls”? That movie? But it’s so funny, “you’re gonna die if you have sex so just don’t” or “you’re gonna get gonorrhoea and die” and it’s so funny because I feel like that way they talk about it is so unrealistic and, I remember even like statistics like, um, you know the more children or like pre-teens are taught abstinence, just the more they just shut off and what-not. And I just think that, with SOURCE no one is promoting, like, bad things. I remember in some plays people

were drinking or like talking about doing drugs. But it always showed what could happen if you do those things. And also that your life, isn't, over. I don't know. It never felt like, ok, the end of the show is, everyone is miserable and never like, would never have sex, never do anything. It more showed people's reactions to if they do make a mistake what could happen or how they're gonna handle it, or what's gonna happen. I think it was just more, it's not black and white. And I think you're taught black and white before. You're taught there's no like, you know, middle ground. You know there's no answers, other than "don't." You know what I mean?

Further building on this assumption, that youth want information to make choices, Leah tells us that such realistic discussions can include consequences without coming across as adult-driven, unilateral "scare tactics". Leah continues:

I think it's [theatre] like, the only kind of, to me, education that um works in situations like that, um, I just think that teenagers are so jaded by like what um, you know right and wrong, and like who they're going to listen to and their mentors are sometimes like, Lindsay Lohan, so I think it's like, it's like important to see real people doing real things.

In this interaction Leah was previously talking about the experience of teens performing plays for other teen audiences and how that's the only kind of education that she thinks really works with topics like sex and sexuality. Present in her comments, and in the comments of other participants, was this notion of "real" and "un-real" – teens dealing with the real situations in their lives and adult-driven abstinence education as unrealistic. They highlighted a disconnect or mis-match

between what teenagers experienced (or know of others experiencing) and the responses they received from adults. Rather than viewing sex-education as any sort of threat, they understood the situation completely differently. The threat is in not receiving information. Rather, the information – primarily the mode of exchanging information from teen to teen – was actually a place for opportunity, a chance to have discussions that felt real, relevant, and engaging.

A frequent complaint from adolescents regarding sex education is that the programs seem out of touch or irrelevant to their own lives (Ashcraft, 2003). Much of what teens learn, Ashcraft noted, is gleaned from popular culture but remains unanalyzed or undiscussed because these references are often not brought into sex education. As Ashcraft (2003) continued:

...educators and others establish a dichotomous relationship between mature adults who are responsible and apparently always regard the consequences of sex and immature teens who are irresponsible and see themselves as invulnerable....This discourse effectively positions youth as the other, emphasizing the differences between adults and youth, while obscuring important similarities. Consequently, this perspective often silences and devalues student voices and ideas. Sex education programs that do not value youth voices seriously limit their ability to reach teens...In so doing, they draw on and reinscribe dominant discourses about adolescence and youth, denying students ways of expressing their realities and reproducing adversarial relationships between youth and adults. (Ashcraft, 2003, p. 44)

Counternarratives took on particular relevance when considering sex education because the way adolescents are viewed will shape the perception of what information

they can and cannot “handle.” SOURCE was at a particular advantage in engaging this counternarrative of sex-education-as-opportunity for two main reasons: 1) its medium of teen-theatre and 2) it’s “locale” (Cresswell, 1996) as neither home, nor school, but a peer-network. With regard to the medium, theatre seemed to mitigate the polarizing effects that discourses of teen sex and sexuality often produce, particularly in terms of politics. The stories were “real” enough to be relevant but they weren’t actually “real” in that the youth weren’t necessarily acting out their own experiences. This put the topic at a safe distance, external enough from both cast member and audience to be discussed, similar to the oft-used “I have a friend who...” technique. More importantly, SOURCE sat outside of both school and home, two places which, as Coleman, Kearns, and Collins (2010) found, offered some of the most restrictive places for teens to talk about sex. Limited only to the “biological facts” that everyone can agree upon, schools often eschew discussions about emotions or desire, leaving teens to have these discussions in their own informal (and often uninformed) networks (Coleman et al., 2010).

This idea of the promise of peer-education teen-theatre for education in these settings is considered more in-depth in the next chapter. But I want to close by recounting an experience I had that helped solidify the importance of these three counternarratives in my interpretation of how SOURCE operated. The experience, was actually the *last* experience I had with the SOURCE, the concluding moment of this four-year study.

During much of the last decade the emphasis and funding for Florida districts has been on abstinence-only education, a philosophy premised on the idea that providing students with any information about contraception will encourage risky and/or promiscuous behaviors. Each school district is required to teach abstinence as

the "expected standard"<sup>16</sup> for sexual behavior; whether or not they choose to provide additional information about HIV/AIDS, contraception, STIs, etc. is determined at each district's discretion. Should they choose to supplement their curriculum, they are still bound by Florida statute to emphasize abstinence as the only guaranteed form of protection. The SOURCE is fundamentally opposed to this and presumes the stance that knowledge and information lead to choices that, when the consequences are properly understood, will (usually) be healthy. Whereas these social pressures led to The SOURCE being banned from Manatee County schools for a number of years in the 2000s in favor of abstinence education, the discourse of abstinence is as welcome in SOURCE as information about how to use a condom and where to get birth control. As Anna explained above, it is folded into a larger discourse of choice and informed decision-making from the basis of identifying what one wants and needs from an intimate partner. Interestingly, when I returned to The SOURCE three years later there had been yet another shift. Manatee County, the same county that had banned The SOURCE years before, had just been recognized as having one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the state of Florida. During my visit I had the opportunity to see a group of SOURCE members perform "Freshman Year" to an audience of young men and women from Manatee county as the opening event for a summit of county leaders to consider ways of addressing the situation. In my field notes from that day I recall the situation:

*On the drive to Manatee County/Bradenton, we talked about the situation of sex education in Manatee. Apparently this last semester the county had 32 girls in MIDDLE school get pregnant. So they've invited SOURCE in to do some work to address the issue. SOURCE was*

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1213>

*banned from Manatee schools 15 years ago but they have been able to selectively work with a few. KT said that with all of the activity that they've been doing in Sarasota, they haven't really felt the loss. But, she noticed, Manatee has. KT has been working with the Healthy Teens Coalition, I think, to bring some of this back. But she said there is a small, vocal minority who don't want it there and they keep it out. While we were chatting the cast-members were going through their lines. They were practicing lines in reverse scene order, which they found fun.*

This recollection summarizes the way the three counternarratives presented in this chapter converged in The SOURCE and their environment. While riding in the van (and managing, somehow, to not get carsick) I sat amongst teenagers who *knew* their stuff. They knew their lines, they knew facts about sex, they knew gossip at school, and they knew a sense of confidence. They recognized the irony of the situation they entered but understood that Manatee was a county that needed their help and their presence, and they were eager to provide it. Having witnessed the play they were about to perform and participated in previous talk-backs, they knew the show, which was being presented to a mixed audience of students and policy-makers, would provide interesting discussion and, ultimately, opportunity. Thus, they were both knowers and social agents, and they were there with the explicit purpose of using a play about sex as an opportunity, not threat, to open up a very necessary dialogue across students, teachers and policy-makers.

### *Closing*

*Children are always and everywhere involved in the construction of their worlds. Thus it is imperative that we acknowledge children and youth as fully human beings, rather than “human becomings,” and take their voices and views seriously. We can begin by educating ourselves about the myriad ways in which children are critically engaged in their social worlds, grappling with the realities of their lives, and taking individual and collective action to challenge and change their life circumstances, no matter how constrained they might be” (Finn et al, 2010, p. 251).*

Recognizing the humanity of adolescents is vital to their development and their functioning in and throughout their life-worlds. In cultivating counternarratives of adolescent life The SOURCE both acknowledges the “becoming-ness” of youth with their “being-ness.” That they are in-process is recognized, not simply by static recognitions of storm and stress, but by assumptions that they are learners, agents, and actors. That they are human with specific needs is recognized by the content they are presented with and the expectation of what they can and will do with this content. In summarizing what she learned from The SOURCE, Elizabeth says, “the sense of what my rights are as a human being.” In the two chapters that follow I look more closely at both the method of engagement offered by theatre and the impact that this has on an individual’s personal development across time and place.

**Vignette: Interruptions with Men**

I think it was merely coincidence that they were both men and that they both taught me about uncomfortable moments in research. I think it was merely coincidence. At least, I hope it was.

Alan and William were the participants with the softest voice and the fewest words, respectively.

*Alan*

I can never forget interviewing Alan. Here I am, this perky young white girl who knows nothing about The SOURCE but wants people to pour their hearts out and reflect. And here he is, this large, muscular but very VERY soft-spoken black man who, as I would find out, struggled profoundly with racism while in The SOURCE. As I re-listened to the audio of the interview I found the exchanges were almost comical. I definitely pulled on my knowledge from other interviews, and my ability to identify people in the pictures he was looking at to gain a little credibility. I also remember quickly realizing that a little silence and some strategic pauses worked well for him. If I just gave him a moment he would pick up the story and take it further. This interview turned out to be one of the most heartfelt interviews that I had. Alan's interview is also compelling because it is one of the only that is from a very clearly defined "non-actor." He didn't participate in the plays (he tried and "it didn't work out"), but he did do the acting exercises during the meetings. But the acting was not central for him. Being active, however, was. The production of the plays, the sharing of the education and knowledge was very central to what made The SOURCE important for him.

The interview for Alan really hinged on him conveying to me the power of knowledge and the amount of knowledge and education he got at The SOURCE and

how he has carried that with him. He reiterated this constantly. From the collective identity standpoint, Alan represented an interesting identity quandary. As he says himself, most black people weren't into the things he was into, so he was already sort of an outsider. His family, which was his grandparents, didn't really know what he was up to with The SOURCE. So, in terms of finding a place where he felt accepted, it makes his recollection of experiencing racism outside of The SOURCE—and contenting with how it sometimes threatened the space of SOURCE—even more profound.

Alan revealed a moment, nearly 20 years ago, when the protective bubble of The SOURCE was threatened by racism that was going on at school and in the community. This shouldn't have been all that surprising, given the nature of Central Florida (I know, I grew up there), but I was still surprised because I naively thought The SOURCE was safe. It occurred at a moment in the interview when I asked Alan if there was anything that The SOURCE helped him work through as a teenager. A long pause; a quiet reply. *This is where some of the memories...are...not so good.*

Um, you know, as teenagers you know we go through certain phases and stuff like that. And you know, some of the teenagers here hung out with other teenagers that were into like you know the skinhead movement and stuff like that but, you know, like I said, those were just phases. Some of these people that were associated with them, and some of those people who were skinheads, chances are probably aren't skinheads now. So, it was just a little teenage thing. But back in THOSE days, it was a big deal. You know, going to certain places, you know, where you know, there was like live music being played and a lot of the, people that were into like you know alternative lifestyles and dress and that kind of stuff would show up, you know there was always, for me, there

was always that concern of um, (quietly) how many skinheads are gonna be there, who was gonna be there, and stuff like that. (normally now) And the only way, the only thing that this played in-in-in terms of that is that some of these people associated with those people. And you know it was, sometimes I would often suspect that they were even being won over by these people as far as ideology is concerned [yeah]. So, um, that was a concern. Um, but it would go in and out. Phase in and out [yeah]. People would grow up. People would be into things and into-not into things, a lot of these people that were into like, different kinds of music may not even be into it now a days. [Yeah]. Some are, you know, listening to the same kind of music since I was 16. So, it-it was just a, sometimes it was a phase and sometimes it wasn't. You know, so, uhm. ... I mean, I sometimes I, I look at, I look up on it, and I kind of like you know, avert my thinking because you know, like I said, we were just kids. You know, a lot of us in here were dramatic anyway. [Yeah]. You know we were nothing if we weren't melodramatic! [laughing] So um, you know, it was just part of growing up. [Mhmm] You know, different experiences. So. Um. I-I did make big deals about that back in the, you know and if I suspected someone of being racist it was a big deal to me or I'd shy away from them or have like an attitude or something like that, but uh, for the most part, it still was...

He turned the story into a learning moment, a recognition that everyone is in development, that everyone could change and grow, and that the experimenting with racism by people he trusted was simply part of the process. I found this personally surprising, because I'm not sure that I would have been so readily able to forgive and

forget, as he seemed to have done. I wanted to press him further on this in terms of whether or not he *actually* thought that people can grow and change, but felt like it was still too early in the interview. I noted my thoughts quickly and let him continue, knowing that I would bring it up again. However, on reflection, I realized that what he was saying was that he realized these kids around him were probably never really racist to begin with. He recognized that the teens around him were, like him, in search of an identity that fit, a group that they could join and identify with. For me that recognition reiterated something unique about The SOURCE space: it was able to illuminate and interrogate “difference” and encourage the difficult dialogues that, ultimately, facilitate understandings of one’s peers. The SOURCE was still a safe space and, moreover, it was a *working* space where the social and political issues occurring in the community could be discussed.

I didn’t have to ask him about it again because he brought it up later, in a discussion about the one and only play that KT had to cancel when she found out that the actors were “partying” heavily on the weekends while preparing a show about the dangers of drugs and alcohol:

Valerie: So that show was cancelled, right?

Alan: That show was cancelled. Uh, between, between him doing what he did and then me being uncomfortable because some of these people were associating with racists [mhmm] and a lot of that kind of stuff it just caused a whole big cluster and I think (inaud). [Yeah]. It didn't destroy the SOURCE though, and I'm glad [yeah].

What is most interesting to me is how he keeps racism at least once-removed from The SOURCE, by saying that members were “associating” with racists - implying that they weren’t racist themselves. Second, I can’t help but wonder if the last line

applies to himself as much as to SOURCE. The entire story seems to represent a version of “what doesn’t kill (or destroy) us only makes us stronger.” The SOURCE, as an organization, learned and grew from the process of recognizing the extent to which the actors needed to be accountable to the stories they were portraying. He grew, as well, in his recognition that the associations some of his peers were making might have nothing to do with him, but more to do with their own difficulties and “hard times” discovering a place where they fit in (as he explained).

This story is valuable because it represents a moment of threat and a reminder that safe spaces *must be open to threat*. They are not “safe” merely because they are “positive.” They are safe in how they handle conflict and distress, by generating dialogue and working toward a resolution (while also realizing that resolutions may not be possible). It also presented, for me, a moment to try and understand my own experience of “threat” - a moment when the narrative I am hearing does not “sit” well with the other words of high praise and adoration of The SOURCE. Ultimately, the conflict and tension felt and communicated was an example of how The SOURCE was able to serve as a productive space. However, had I not first felt the sense of alarm and disconnect, I would not have known to listen even closer to Alan’s story to better understand how the values of The SOURCE sat in conjunction with the broader community, and how the space that The SOURCE provided was important for young people contenting with realms outside of such a space.

William’s story is also a story of a threat, in a way. Only this time, what was threatening the space of The SOURCE was not outside prejudice, it was me.

*William*

*“It isn’t hard to tell when an interview is going badly.”* (Weiss, 1994, p. 146).

William revealed a moment that can immediately floor any reflective researcher. His was the only interview I really struggled with in the moment. I didn't understand what was going on, as KT was excited to have us talk because she knew his experiences, and he was of course willing to be interviewed. But the interview was simply going nowhere. Nowhere. Fast. I asked questions and got very short replies that were almost evasive. His stories were short and filled with "I don't know" and "I'm not good at being interviewed, it's awkward." In listening to the interview I even grew frustrated with myself. I could hear that my tone had become very soft and that I was trying so hard to encourage him and make him feel more comfortable. But as I listened I felt the tension and wanted to tell my interviewer-self to ask him what was awkward!

At thirty-seven minutes into the interview the conflict finally surfaced.

*In California researchers would follow us [street kids] around and say hey, let me stick this cotton swab up your nose and you take this pill and we'll give you twenty bucks! I don't really trust researchers.*

After leaving The SOURCE, William had travelled west for a number of years, eventually landing in San Francisco. While there he worked with many transient youth. Desperate for money, he explained that scientific researchers for the medical and pharmaceutical industries would pay these youth to participate in clinical trials and take experimental medications. They were paid very little and received poor treatment and, in his estimation, were the equivalent of human lab-rats.

*Therefore. I don't trust researchers. And I see your little tape recorder spinning and it just takes me back there.*

*I am not that kind of researcher.* I paused, both of us nearly in tears. He, having shared an obviously painful experience; me, having felt the shame of the label

under which I was brought into the room. *Actually, I'm not even sure I would consider that research. It's horrible that such things happen. I'm sorry.*

After this breach had occurred the interview completely changed. I explained the bigger study, how it was not a study designed to deceive or exploit any of its “participants” (an unfortunate word, but at least better than “subjects”). I explained my understanding of science, research, and my discipline.

He understood. We continued. The interview recovered, at least at some level, though I still felt exposed and a bit wounded, as I am sure he did as well. He still played obsessively with a retractable pen, and so the audio of the interview is filled with incessant clicking that reminds me of his tension and how it only faded superficially.

\* \* \*

These two moments taught me about the importance of/for interruptions in the research process. These interruptions showed me that the quietest participants can have the loudest stories; that the most reluctant to speak have profoundly valid reasons for such resistance. These moments also taught me that interruptions are critical because they allow for threats to become exposed, for narratives to flat-line, for participants to resist. Interestingly, both of these men made consistent use of the pictures that were under the glass top of the table and scattered about. Excited by some of the original members coming back, KT had dug up as many pictures as she could find. This proved to be more valuable than I could have anticipated. When they seemed to trail off or to lose connection in the interview both men were often able to re-enter the conversation by commenting on a photo, which would often prompt a story. This served as yet another reminder of the power of visuals for collecting stories, and not just analyzing them.

**Chapter 6**

**“No one really understands until they see”:**

**The dimensionality of the teen-theatre experience**

## **Chapter 6, “No one really understands until they see”: The dimensionality of the teen-theatre experience**

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I looked more closely at the actual medium used in The SOURCE – teen peer-education theatre – and how it functioned at macro/social levels and micro/personal levels. I am concerned with what aspects of theatre made it a useful medium for 1) accomplishing the narrative shifts discussed in the previous chapter; 2) serving as a site for personal identity development; and 3) serving as a site for relationship development.

To begin, I argued that the theatre experience and interaction with audiences was particularly useful for reinforcing and building upon the counternarratives identified in Chapter 5. First, the content of the plays built on “real life” experiences of Sarasota teens and presented audiences with “real” scenarios that recognized the realities and pressures adolescents faced in a manner that often countered the usual approaches to adolescents (abstinence-only, punishment, etc.). In this way it affirmed the lives and experiences of both actors and audiences instead of ignoring or suppressing them. The post-show talkbacks continued this spirit of “being real” and being open by positioning both the actors and the audience members as knowers who have experiences and knowledge to share and to glean from one another. In this way The SOURCE was able to take the content and material of sex education but present it in a manner that shows how relationships influence decisions and how teens can act responsibly for both themselves and others, thus presenting responsible sex education as an opportunity for sharing knowledge and learning safer ways of relating/behaving. Second, peer-education teen theatre served as a site for identity development in a number of ways. In performing different identities the youth actors had the

opportunity to imagine “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and even engage in fantasies of other identities that resembled a form of play. Through the improv exercises and meetings, youth had the opportunity to experience a physical and creative outlet for expression. Finally, these experiences on stage and through improv provided opportunities for “internal revision” (Josselson, *Revising herself: The story of women's identity from college to midlife*, 1996) – revising one’s personal narrative to include new aspects of oneself and developing a sense of oneself as more “open to” the differences of others.

*The SOURCE as “real” teen-theatre*

*“I really appreciate you coming out and doing the play for us. I think the reason why we liked it so much was because it wasn’t fake. It was real.”* Comment from a Pace Academy/Teen Court High School student after seeing “Freshman Year”

*“I mean, we’d be performing in spaces this small (indicates the room) a lot of times, you know, we’d be performing, you know, in classrooms and, we weren’t on a stage with lights and all that, we were like right there, you know. So it became sort of like this shared experience with the audience. You couldn’t hide from them and they couldn’t hide from you.”* (Mariah)

There is one primary difference between the work that The SOURCE does and other theatre-based work taking place in the broader Sarasota arts community: The SOURCE plays are generated from experiences of members and are based on “real”

life. They are not classic works written by famous playwrights that are performed in theaters around the world; they are plays that have been written specifically for teens for the express purpose of educating them and providing fodder for discussion.

The plays, written by KT, are based on stories that The SOURCE participants tell as well as stories pulled from local and national headlines. They are constantly revised and updated based on the current cast and, while KT is the director, the actors have the opportunity to improvise and put their own spin on the characters or suggest new dialogue. This commitment to “real” theatre was evident when I observed one of the rehearsals. The cast was practicing one scene over and over again, trying out different positions on the stage, different voice inflections, body movements, and emotional reactions. There were four of them on stage and others in the chairs where the audience would be. The focus of repeating the scene over and over was not simply to learn the lines, but to capture it most authentically.

### *Experiencing a Play*

What follows is an excerpt from my field notes that recounts traveling with The SOURCE members to a local performance of “Freshman Year.” This particular play told the story of three friends and how their lives are changed by the pressures they faced in their first year of high school. As an audience member, I was focused a lot on reactions of those around me. Surrounded by students from a school that served youth identified as “at-risk” by the district, I was particularly curious to hear their reactions to the cast and play. The following section was taken directly from my “raw” notes, written later that evening (and based on hand-written notes during the performance), as I attempted to capture the memory of the performance and my experience sitting in the audience. I present it here to provide the reader with a glimpse of what it was

like to travel with and witness a SOURCE play, and to begin my discussion of the power of theatre and cast/audience relationships for opening dialogue on difficult issues and engendering a sense of intersubjectivity and growth.

*The play begins with the song "Freshman" playing on the boom box. All of the songs seem so carefully chosen. There are some old songs and some newer ones, like a Taylor Swift song. A lot of the audience members are humming along to the songs and even finishing "Because of You." Elena's friend, Alavia, a 22 year old from the Bronx, plays the guidance counselor. She mixes in some Spanish lines and I wonder if this was improvised. I should ask KT about that. The audience seems engaged with the play. They laugh a lot at the funnier parts and issue sounds of consternation when characters make mistakes (like not looking down to see if there's a condom on). At the end of the performance there is a big applause for the cast. KT comes out and asks for another round of applause. KT then poses a question to the cast members. She says that she always changes up the question that starts the discussion and this time she asks them what being in the SOURCE means to them (or some variation on that), or why being in the SOURCE is important to them. The cast introduces themselves and says their age and which school they go to and answers this question. Sasha, one of the actresses, sums things up nicely when she says that being in SOURCE provides "a look at what could happen before it happens." KT asks the audience to share their thoughts about Amelia, the main character. One person states that she graduated from high school about ten years ago and that it's always the same issues that keep coming up,*

regardless of the generation. She says that it means that young people should feel they could talk to other people because chances are they've been there too. Another audience member appreciated the parts where Amelia talks to the audience in side commentary (what is that called?). The members also talk about the SOURCE process. Finally, a young black man in the back has something to say. He's nervous about talking but he does stand up. The audience is quiet. It takes a few tries but he finally speaks and says that he "loved the play." A woman behind me comments that "he's very brave" for standing up and speaking. KT acknowledges how tough it is to stand up and speak at an event with other people and the butterflies and anxiety that people often feel. The conversation turns to gender differences with regard to sex and how for young women sex often means love but for young men sex is often just sex. They come close to interrogating this with Dan (who plays Richard) and complicating it (from the guy's standpoint but not the girls) but they don't really go there. I wish that they would have. They also talk about how they liked Luna's character because she was "straight up" and shows you that what you perceive about a person may not always be true.

Then a guest speaker from PACE stands up to address the audience. Her name is Alicia and she is 23, a single mom of a 4 year old and 2 year old. She is basically conveying, "It happened to her." It seems hard for her to talk about it but she gets through it. The audience is very respectful. KT asks Lauren if she has any questions for Alicia, since she plays the part of the girl who gets pregnant. Lauren

*talks a bit and notes the difference in age from 14 to 19. I can't tell if the commentary is well-received by the audience or not. From my point of view it seems like Lauren doesn't really get it, the struggle that is apparent on Alicia's face when she talks about taking 5 years to get her GED at age 23. But maybe it is received ok by the audience and by Alicia. Lauren doesn't really ask any questions. A member of the audience is an MD who works in a lab diagnosing cultures as STI or not. She says that all she sees is a DOB but that she knows how many young people are being diagnosed. She tells everyone there that if you are old enough to take your clothes off with another person then you are old enough to do the same with your doctor. She talks about how in the play when Amelia doesn't make a decision it is the same as NOT making a decision and says that not going to the doctor to check for STIs can lead to undiagnosed Chlamydia, which can lead to infertility in just 5 or 6 months.*

*Overall I think the play was a powerful experience for the audience. I felt bad when the math teacher in front of me was upset by Tamara's line that the school for pregnant girls teaches you more than "just algebra and junk like that" -- but the aim of the play is to get through to teens, not turn them on to math. KT's status later that evening on Facebook was about how the day was full of reflection and awe for the process of SOURCE and I felt this too.*

These audience talk-back times were critical to The SOURCE experience, for both the actors and the audience. As you see above, they were moments of dialogue across three levels: audience, cast and characters. KT opened the talk-back by

modeling a question and gave the cast a chance to introduce themselves and shift from character back to “self.” She also encouraged relationship and empathy across speakers, asking Lauren if she has questions for the woman who had been brave enough to share her story. These talk-backs seemed a key aspect of The SOURCE plays because they provided moments of reflection, sharing, and connection for *everyone* in the room. These moments seemed to mimic just a small element of what happened in the meetings and, not surprisingly, some of the Design Team members recalled that it was after they first witnessed a play and talk-back that they decided they “had to” be part of The SOURCE. Perhaps more importantly, with respect to the previous discussion of counternarratives, they invited dialogue and participation from youth and adults alike. The characters in the play provided a useful “other” for talking about issues that might have been too personal to bring up otherwise.

The cast members took these interactions with audience members very seriously. In addition to the previous discussion of developing a sense of responsibility to one’s peers, SOURCE members narrated another sense of responsibility, one aimed at the audience. This sense took the form of putting on a good show and leaving the audience satisfied, but not necessarily in the traditional way of theater. Aiden remarked that:

...once I was involved in a show I felt like I had all this responsibility, I had not only had to you know do my role in the production, but I also had to bring something to the audience...I had to bring knowledge and a message, and so that was much more exciting than the actual performance, the fact that we’re able to share something.

Audience satisfaction, therefore, was represented in the form of recognition and sharing in an authentic moment. The audience “talk back” time at the end of the

performances no doubt reinforced this, when audience members were given the chance to ask the performers questions about any aspect of the play, from specific character decisions to how they felt performing. Contrasted to a more traditional theatrical performance, where youth may embody a fictional character on stage only, this approach allowed members to actively move between their character and their “self” in front of and in relation to other cast members and the audience. The fictionalized and performed moments are always concluded with a re-grounding in reality and discussion. In her work with youth researchers on the *Polling for Justice (PFJ)* project, Maddy Fox and colleagues (Fox & Fine, forthcoming) have presented their research findings in the form of “performance labs” where they “play with and dismantle the wall that can separate audience from performer-researcher” (n.p.). Since the gaze of adults is often what leads to policies that limit youth, presenting audiences of adults with data that has shown how these policies are present in and on the bodies of youth has been a powerful technique. More than simply evoking empathy from adult audience members, the youth in PFJ aim to interrogate the collective responsibility of privilege and “make visible the lines of power” (n.p.). Similarly, in SOURCE, the talk-backs that followed the performances allowed for a space that bridged reality and fantasy, where the teenager who had just performed a character on stage became the teenager who had insight, who could answer questions, who could reflect back to audiences their own assumptions and emotions and who, in the case of Lauren, may still be learning about her own stance and privilege. In addition to formally dedicating time and space to process and dialogue, these talk-backs offered key moments of recognition for the cast members. As Aiden explained:

Um, so it made me realize that what I have to say is important. And, that, uh, you know I’m not just a child. I’m just not a kid, um, no

matter how old or whatever, as I am, what I have to say is just as important as anybody else and people can actually look at you. And I think that's what really um, pushed me.

This recognition seemed to be particularly powerful when it came from community members and audiences composed of adults. Having an audience of adults sit through an entire performance and applaud at the end was one level of recognition; having them ask questions and engage in dialogue with the performers was an even more meaningful experience for the actors. Elizabeth, one of the earlier SOURCE performers, told a story of a woman who came up to her after a performance and was so moved by the experience that she presented her with a gift:

Elizabeth: I remember doing First Time Club and this woman walking up to me, she just had tears in her eyes, and she took her ring off, because she wanted me to have her ring. And she said "I just want you to have this, I just want you to have this for what you've given and what you've done." And I just remember that specifically for First Time Club. Um...

Melissa: How did you feel?

Elizabeth: Oh I felt amazing. I had that ring forever. I used to wear it, wore it, it gave me great pride. It was like the first significant experience I had with theater.

There is also seemed to be something more cathartic and ethereal about the interaction between audience and actor(s). When asked to recall a performance that was particularly memorable, Leah told the story of performing on 9/11. She explained that when the cast got in the van to go to the performance they had just heard what had happened but the details were still unclear. KT asked them if they wanted to perform or if they wanted to cancel. The cast decided that since the students were

expecting them, they should go through with the performance and perhaps everyone could benefit from it in some way. She recalled:

And it ended up being very – I just remember all of us like, even the audience feeling very connected just because we, we're already like, hurting. And just, the story grasped us more, even as like I played it so many times. I remember that time specifically, um, the feeling of everybody was just at the end, I remember me crying at the end, like after we had like bowed and I remember the audience being so much more receptive that day, it was like the walls had like, been down.

She continued to explain that the students seemed to open up even more than usual and identify with the characters in the play and ask more questions. It is notable that the dramatic medium seemed to serve two key purposes at a moment of internal distress and conflict. For the cast member, Leah, it provided a release of emotion and a place to enact and have recognized her feelings of being “sad” and “upset.” Second, from Leah’s interpretation of the audience reaction that day, the act of emotional expression and honesty (her real tears at the end) indicated that emotion and sharing had a place in the room. The “walls” came down and instead what existed was an invitation to identify with cast members (“that happened to me too”) and, as Leah said, “not be worried about what someone is going to say about them.” It was interesting that in her next conversational turn Leah juxtaposed this with the space of school, where she perceived that openness to emotion as not welcomed (as discussed in Chapter 4):

Leah: I think that, kids shut off to adults teaching them “this is wrong and this is right” and I think that it just opens up your – people your age group are so, going to commit themselves to something and be

passionate about it that you're gonna listen. Even if someone walks out and doesn't say anything or doesn't, like just straight face, something they're going to connect to one character or their friend was like one character or they felt something for that day, hopefully longer.

*DIOME takes "real" to the next level*

"The Day I Opened My Eyes" (DIOME) was a play that KT wrote in 2002 and that toured for five years. With a small revolving cast who performed five monologues, the play was performed at national conferences, foundations, and colleges in the United States. It was even performed on Capitol Hill. The play featured one monologue from each cast member who performed as a youth from one of five countries: Nepal, South Africa, Mexico, Holland, and Pakistan. In promotional materials the play is described as "hard hitting and painfully honest" in its tackling of such issues as global reproductive rights, poverty, and cultural practices. DIOME was actually my first experience with The SOURCE. Before the study began I traveled to Sarasota to learn more about the organization and to talk more with the funder of the larger study and, while I was down there, the cast was performing DIOME at a local theatre known as The Backlot. The aim of the play was to very intensely make the personal political and to raise awareness of not only the reproductive rights issues of our own country and moment, but how those sat in relation to global reproductive rights issues, particularly (then) President Bush's global gag rule.

DIOME took the goal of presenting "real" theatre and amplified it, presenting audience members with monologues that may be even further out of the realm of imagination than teens having sex or doing drugs. A number of the participants that I interviewed had participated in it. What was interesting about DIOME was that, though

it was somewhat removed from the regular meetings context of The SOURCE, it explicitly represented an ideal “next step” for participants. The fact that it was but a slice of The SOURCE’s history should not diminish the depth of impact it had on those who participated. If one imagines the regular SOURCE meetings as a concentrated “turning-inward” space of nurturance, acceptance, and recognition, then the plays performed in the community represent a gradual “turning-outward” where the work done in the collective, supportive space provides the catalyst for performing the plays. While the energy and transformation is certainly shared between the cast and the audience, the interviews suggested that cast members were deeply affected by their participation in the plays—in both learning and becoming familiar with the characters they represented and by the experience of sharing these monologues with an audience. For DIOME, however, the scale of both the topic and the national tour of the play invoked an image of the aforementioned turning outward as more of a high-speed panning out in which there is suddenly so much to absorb that the scale of impact for each cast member seemed exponentially larger. DIOME took the core principles of The SOURCE and ratcheted them up to a level in which the actors were more explicitly using the monologues to “critique the systems that affect their lives, and make connections that cross cultural, geographic, national, and generational boundaries” (Finn et al, 2010, p. 252).

*Performing Identities; Revising Selves*

*“As I’ve listened to their stories, I’ve realized that many of these young people are living two separate lives. There are the lives they present to their parents and teachers, but also the hidden lives that take place after school and late at night...” KT Curran, 2001, p. 67*

*“It really completely changed my personality” (Ashley, on playing different characters)*

*“We seldom recognize that our stereotypes of adolescents construct the images youth have as models for their emerging identities.”*

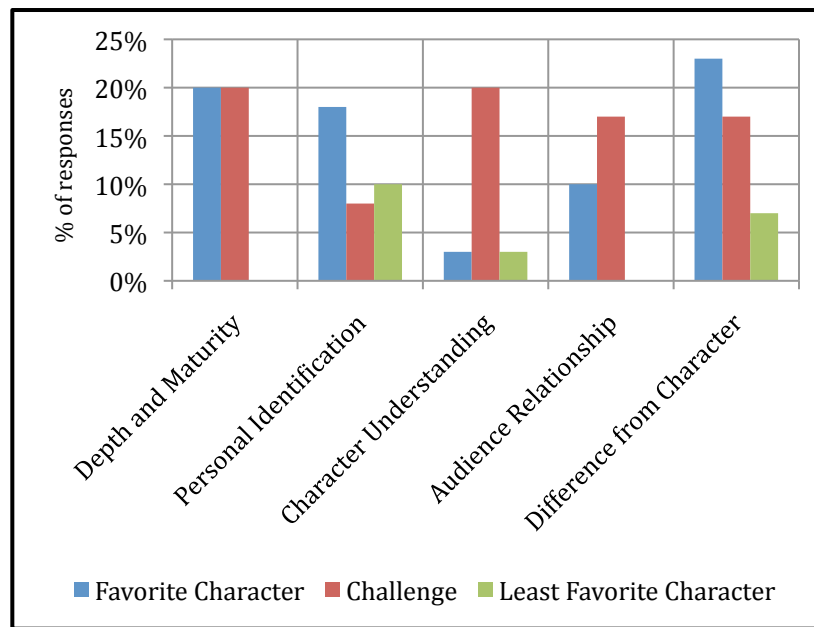
(Deutsch, p. 38)

Josselson (1996) argued that there are moments of “awakenings” that turn the “kaleidoscope” of the self and allow one to see parts of themselves differently, and in a new light. The participants in this study narrated a similar occurrence on stage. In order to skillfully perform a role they had to either find an aspect of that character that related, even if in a small way, to their own self or they had to embody that character to such a degree that they understood what the character was going through and feeling. The result was that they gained an understanding that people were more complicated than they may first appear or, as Ashley, one of the participants explained below, they realize that they have a little bit of that character in them that they hadn’t realized before. These plays, they argued, provided a vehicle for making them less judgmental and more open-minded about their peers.

In the survey, participants were asked three questions related to their experience of performing different characters: a) Which was your favorite character to play? Why?; b) Which was your LEAST favorite character to play? Why?; and 3) What, if anything, was challenging for you about acting or playing certain characters? The questions were open-ended responses that did not limit the amount of space the participant could use. A little over half of the participants responded to these questions (N=39, N=30, N=35, respectively). As I read through the responses I noticed a pattern and set of themes emerge. I wrote out a list of the common themes as I was

reading and was able to decipher 5 categories of responses. I decided to re-read and quantitatively code the responses into the following clusters: the depth and maturity of the characters and topics; personally identifying with an aspect of the character/play; understanding the character and how to portray them; the experience of relating to the audience; and the difference between the participant and the character they played. The graph below (Figure 13) shows a breakdown of these responses and how they related to the respondent's favorite character, their least favorite character, and what they found challenging.

Figure 13. Graph: Survey respondents' experiences performing characters.



This chart shows that depth and maturity of the characters and topics were most related to the favorite characters and what was challenging. Addressing intense issues or characters did not come up at all as related to a character that was not enjoyable to portray. Personally identifying with an aspect of the character was mostly related to enjoying playing that character. Understanding the character and how to portray them was seen as the biggest challenge, by far. This was perhaps something that all actors struggled with, so it made sense that they would

overwhelmingly identify this. It is noteworthy though, that discussions of acting technique and method were largely absent from these responses save for a few who mention it was challenging. The audience relationship, whether it was through the talk-backs or with hoping they would be able to handle the material delivered, was also seen as a challenge. Finally, the experience of playing characters who were distinctly different from and, in some cases, completely opposite from self, was clearly a challenge but it was also the most cited part about the favorite characters. The table below (Table 4) provides some of the survey responses as examples to add some voices to the numbers. The responses included were chosen because they best represent the category and multiple responses were used to show different aspects of how I conceptualized the categories. Following the table, I discuss these findings in light of more in-depth conversations with interview participants about these experiences, particularly around performing a person who was different from them.

Table 4. Matrix of themes from survey respondent's experiences performing characters.

	Favorite Character (N=39)	What was challenging (N=35)	Least Favorite Character (N=30)
<i>Depth and Maturity</i>	(N=8, 20%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It was a mature role that I enjoyed very much.</i></li> <li>• <i>Allison. Because she goes through so many levels in the show and you get to see so many sides of her.</i></li> <li>• <i>...It was interesting to play a character that has to go through this personal transformation...</i></li> </ul>	(N=7, 20%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>... many young people do not have the emotional experience to draw upon in order to invoke real emotion on stage.</i></li> <li>• <i>The issues that the shows address were sometimes hard to face. No one really wants to tell the truth anymore but SOURCE does.</i></li> <li>• <i>...Sometimes I just got carried away with the tragedy of it.</i></li> </ul>	
<i>Personal Identification with Character</i>	(N=7, 18%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>...the role was therapeutic in itself for me. I was 15 and somewhat rebellious myself☺. It was nice to have a safe outlet to release some of my frustrations.</i></li> <li>• <i>I had a similar background ...,And I started getting in to drugs and quit caring about those things. When I performed the play, in a way, I felt like I was telling my own story.</i></li> <li>• <i>A character that was "coming out." Because I questioned my own sexuality at the time and so did many of my peers it felt good to let people know that it was ok.</i></li> </ul>	(N=3, 8%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In the beginning of my SOURCE roles, it was somewhat difficult for me to separate my own emotions from those of the characters. I (and KT☺) had to check myself constantly to not allow "Michelle's" anger to shoot through Marie.</i></li> <li>• <i>My best friend committed suicide when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade so having to act like my friend just got run over in "End of Summer" was very hard at times.</i></li> </ul>	(N=3, 10%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Stewart. Again the only one I played. After playing that role I found when called on to perform improv scenes in meetings I was always pinned as the drug dealing slacker.</i></li> <li>• <i>I didn't have a "least favorite" but I remember feeling like the girl that I played in "Freshman Year" was more like the person that people saw me as than the person that I really was. That was a little frustrating...</i></li> </ul>
<i>Character Understanding</i>	(N=1, 3%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>...when I was able to find all the many levels of that character - her innocence, her compassion, her pain and fears, and her inspiration. When I was able to find all of these different levels, her life experiences did not seem so far away.</i></li> </ul>	(N=7, 20%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In playing Mexico, I was really concerned about accuracy - I didn't want to do a caricature...I really wanted to do her justice.</i></li> <li>• <i>Just becoming a character takes a great deal of effort to actually finally feel like you completely understand how to play any certain character.</i></li> </ul>	(N=1, 3%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I loved them all, but I hated to go through the whole process with Amelia every time. I hated to watch her innocence die. She just made me sad.</i></li> </ul>

Audience Experience	(N=4, 10%)  • I felt our play delivered an important message and it was important to me to get it out there. • I LOVED playing the "bad girl" so I really enjoyed my character in <i>The Good Son</i> . My opening scene was stumbling out drunk onto stage. I felt like a lot of teens could relate to her too. Like they had either been in that situation before or knew someone who had.	(N=6, 17%)  • I think it was harder to make the transition back from party animal to conscientious semi-adult when it came time for the questions from the audience. • The challenging part was talking to my peers after and even performing for HIV/AIDS infected people, pregnant young girls, troubled teens...a lot of people who probably feel pretty hopeless and knowing that I was just acting. Of course people were real and had problems in our cast, but some of the people we visited were on a whole other level.	
Personal Difference from Character	(N=9, 23%)  • Both of my characters I played were very similar and I enjoyed playing them because I got to act like a little bad ass. • It was really fun to play someone who was the complete opposite of myself. It also was interesting to experience what it's like to do the picking on instead of being picked on. • Callie was my favorite character to play because she is nothing like me and I loved being able to be someone else.	(N=6, 17%)  • Just the fact that my character was the complete opposite of me, but I think I overcame that pretty quickly, and discovered that I just might be able to play the girl with the attitude pretty well! • I was a little green to play [character]. I wasn't a smoker or a tough, sexually active girl. It was fun to try to explore a new, mature, character as well, though.	(N=2, 7%)  • The guy that raped girls from <i>Secrets</i> . • It was really hard playing the "nice girl" in <i>First Time Club</i> . It was hard for me to act vulnerable in that way. Vulnerability is easy when its paraded around as sarcasm, but acting naive was difficult.
Other	• Only played 1 character (N=2, 5%) • N/A or didn't say why (N=7, 18%)	• No challenge (N=1, 3%) • Acting technique (N=5, 14%)	• None, they were all fun (N=15, 50%) • N/A (N=9, 30%)

These responses indicate that the opportunity to play with identity was indeed appealing, but via two different modes of expression. Favorite characters could either be someone completely different and thus constituted “experimentation” with identity (“I loved being able to be someone else”), or they could be very relevant to the actor and thus the expressive performance was cathartic (“It was nice to have a safe outlet to release some of my frustrations”). Also, although it might have been

challenging to play someone so different, it was seen as fun and possibly informative (“I just might be able to play the girl with the attitude”). With these trends in mind, I returned to the interview data to further understand the relationship between identity and the experience of acting out characters.

In the interviews I was very interested in asking the participants about the different characters they played and how it felt to “take on” a character. As someone who had never acted (officially) I could only imagine what it might be like to envision the intricacies of a character’s attitudes and behavior and then perform these on stage in a manner that convinced the audience. Most of the participants seemed to reach a consensus that playing different characters was “fun” and simultaneously taught them about themselves and others. Even those who felt like they were playing a character very similar to their “type” still felt like they learned something about their personality. I was curious in learning more about this because I suspected it must in some way help or inform the identity development occurring in adolescence.

One participant, Ashley, really engaged with me on this question. We talked about her experiences at length and, perhaps partly because she was a social work student, she was able to narrate a lot of the feelings she experienced by playing different characters, and the consequences she felt these experiences had on her developing self. In the analysis below I look more closely at a lengthy exchange I had with Ashley about the characters she played. Ashley’s experience with the SOURCE began in 8th grade, thus she played a number of different characters and participated in many plays throughout her high school years. I wanted to focus on this story from Ashley because not only does it convey the experience of different characters, but it also eloquently depicted what nearly every SOURCE member mentioned at some point:

that SOURCE helped them understand not only themselves but others and realize that “everyone has a story.”

Throughout her interview, Ashley narrated a variety of what Hermans (2003) would call I-positions or self-positions: actress, audience member, normal kid, young/youth, teenager, etc. These were essentially identities that an individual contains as part of their multiplicity and positions that they may choose to foreground or background at a given moment. However, this story also highlighted some of the emotive states that Ashley experienced - she often referred to feeling scared, naïve, riveted, and surprised. An overarching theme of her stories about SOURCE was the desire to be “brought out of myself” and SOURCE seemed to provide that for her through acting and engaging with challenging material, something that others reported as well. It appears that SOURCE provided a space where three of her self-positions—self as young and naïve, self as an energetic and fun-seeking teenager, and self as a motivated and riveted actress—could come together to form what Hermans would also call a “coalition” (when two or more I-positions come together to form a new position). The energy and openness of SOURCE, the presence of the audience, and the personality of the character she was playing formed Ashley's coalition. Ashley's story illuminated one way in which the formation of these coalitions enabled her to learn about herself and to learn about others. Specifically, for Ashley it was the process of getting into her character that provided her with the opportunity to learn about others:

*Valerie:* What was your character like that you played?

*Ashley:* um, it was a while ago, but I remember, like, she was, she was a really...I think she was really depressed, I think she was really depressed and I think she was maybe was had been contemplating

suicide and was skipping school and was drinking with her friends, and um, I mean, I -- personally, and this might be [a] different different response than you've heard from other people, but I liked playing those parts, because, like...mm...I...my life was nothing like that, you know? My life was pretty great, my parents were pretty great, and, things were just fine and peachy so it was exciting and interesting to like learn about complex characters and dive into these, you know, that whole acting -- I like acting, too, so that whole acting element. So it felt, felt, it was exciting and different and challenging...

*Valerie:* yeah

*Ashley:* and it was interesting because, I was, I was playing characters that were nothing like me. And I learned that like, ok they're nothing like me, but there's a little bit of all this, there's a little bit of, there's a little bit of bad and good and crazy in all of us. So, like, I could, I can find that place and I can go there somehow...

*Valerie:* yeah

*Ashley:* so, I mean, again, another example of just like expanding my mind, and expanding my horizons and learning about different types of people.

For Ashley the prospect of building a connection to another person, albeit an imaginary person, was a prospect that was “exciting and different and challenging.” There was a way in which embodying a character on stage and experiencing the reaction of the audience to that character was a practice of performing “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These possible selves, whether oppositional to how the young person might currently understand themselves (the “good” girl portraying a

“bad” girl) became opportunities to perform identities that she did not possess in the “real world” but that she could possess and express fairly consequence-free in the theatre setting. She described the experience of understanding a character as expanding her mind, suggesting that she felt a sense of personal growth.

Ashley’s story showed some of the ways that what occurs in The SOURCE mimics the experiences of “psychodrama” (Moreno, 1946). Enacted under the guidance of a therapist and with other clients, psychodrama involves acting out various aspects of one’s personality in order to grow psychologically. As Fong (2006) found:

Dramatic roles can be used as a vehicle for not only experiencing and integrating new aspects of one’s life, but also expressing suppressed shadow aspects of the self. In this way, facets of a person’s personality that have been concealed from others and, more often, from the self can be unleashed (p. 101).

Some participants echoed this interpretation by stating that The SOURCE was often their version of therapy, in that they had a chance to talk about their problems and emotions and experience some cathartic expression. Ashley’s story, above, further demonstrated this idea of acting out various parts of herself and how this ultimately informed her own subjectivity. Similar to Francis’s study (discussed in the literature review) which highlighted the externalizing features of drama, Fong noted that psychodrama allowed participants to move from expression – which relieved tension – to the development of survival or coping mechanisms for dealing with domestic violence (in her study). In The SOURCE there was definitely an emphasis on both expression and development, such that expression was *in the service of* providing a lens for reflection or a device for dialogue with the audience. Ashley discovered parts

of herself that she did not know where there, and thus some ways she was similar to those she had identified as “different” from her. Likewise, the expectation in The SOURCE was that the audience would do the same with the characters and be able to engage in a dialogue about the topic after the performance.

Psychosocial and relational branches of psychology allowed me to understand that it was not only how Ashley felt as she experimented with the identity of the obedient girl, the angry girl, the dominant girl, the competitive girl, etc. that was important, but also how others responded to her and how she felt based on this interaction and connection with other(s) (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Indeed, later in the interview she described a moment when her father came to see her perform this character in a play. While he respected her performance as an actress, he said it was too difficult to watch her play such a sad character and that he wasn't sure she should be involved in the plays. There was some tension in her family about whether she should continue to participate; ultimately she was able to convince her father that she was only acting and that she felt this was important work to do and that the plays were things that other young people needed to see. I asked her to describe for me a little bit more about the process of taking on a character and what that felt like and how she began her work as an actress assuming a new role, to which she responded:

It's really really really hard. And, because there are sometimes where you, you just kind of, you kind of get these ideas about people, and it's like, it's like in life when you meet somebody for the first time. A lot of us, like we meet somebody and for 5 minutes we get an idea about them and we make our minds up about them. And it's like, half the time it's bullshit and like half the time we make judgments and we're wrong and we don't think people are as complex as they are and we

can't relate to them and we just dismiss people because we don't want to. And it's similar in acting because like you think like, I don't like this character, this character's like annoying and stupid. And, or, like, she had sex without condom, well she's stupid and I would have never done something like that. Or, like, oh all this character does is cry all the time and I don't want to play her KT. But like KT would be there to kick our butts and say like, you - like, give - think about it, give, you know, just think, give this person a chance, and like, you, I mean, you can figure it out, you can go there, you just have to, you just have to think that people are EXTREMELY complex and people have reasons and whether they have reasons that you don't agree with or they have reasons that they are doing things, like, they have reasons, and everybody, everybody has stuff that, you know, they have to deal with, so. You know, it's sort of, um, you sort of have to like, have the guts to really look at yourself and look at another person, and I guess it just takes guts because like, you have to learn about empathy, and you have to learn about - because I've had to I've play a lot of characters that I didn't like or that I thought were stupid, um, but like, the truth is like, I was just stupid, you know? I like, I've been, you know, I mean, so and I was like 16 too, so, you know. So it's um, it's a journey I guess, it's a process of just of empathy and understanding, and compassion and examining different choices and, um, and then when you get it [the character] like, it's incredible.

This "journey" of learning a new character provided her with an opportunity to learn more about herself and about others around her. For Ashley the process involved

exercises in both recognition and empathy; recognition of the complexity of others and empathy in really trying to understand them. Moreover, the character almost served as a mirror in which she was able to see parts of herself which, as she said, “takes guts”. The easy option was to dismiss the character and decide to not play it. The harder choice involved facing the character because it also involved facing the parts of her that reflected in the character. Thus, what at first appears to be an exercise in acting quickly moved to an exercise of self-understanding. She described learning new characters later in the interview as “just sort of this weird combination of like, of combining like a fantasy person and yourself and just making it real.” The “making it real” was not only her description of making it believable for the audience, but also of Hermans’s notion of “coalition” (when two I-positions merge to form a new I-position of self) and, even though it primarily occurred on stage or in rehearsals, this coalition taught her something about herself and about others. Later in the interview she described understanding more about the people around her and not being so quick to judge because she acknowledged the complexity of human lives. This “weird combination” seems to represent what Philip Bromberg (1998) terms the “intersubjective space.” In his studies of trauma and dissociation he described “what in every human being allows continuity and change to occur simultaneously and thus makes normal personality growth possible” (p. 9). This space, and the corresponding growth in personality that it fostered, was very similar to Ashley’s experience. More specifically, he described:

...a mental space that allows selfhood and otherness to interpenetrate, and provides the context for continuity of human relatedness *while* self-change is taking place. More recently I have come to speak of it as a co-constructed mental space, uniquely relational and still uniquely

individual; a space belonging to neither person alone, and yet, belonging to both and to each; a twilight space in which “the impossible” becomes possible; a space in which incompatible selves, each awake to its own “truth,” can “dream” the reality of the other without risk to its own integrity. I’ve suggested it to be an intersubjective space which, like the “trance” state of consciousness just prior to entering sleep, allows both wakefulness and dreaming to coexist. (p. 9, his emphasis)

Ashley did not lose herself in the character, but she began to see how she could at least relate to the character and, as she explained it, this made her more open to the complexity in others. The character in the play became an imaginal ‘Other’ that afforded her the opportunity to participate in both her own “wakefulness” and the “dreaming” that she called the “fantasy person.” She concluded the above quote by saying, “when you get it, it’s incredible.” This sense of accomplishment seemed related not only to the success in portraying the character but, since this success depended on empathy and understanding of another, some sense of having achieved personality growth as well.

Mariah echoed Ashley’s experiences highlighting how this sense of openness and understanding functioned in the “cliquish” atmosphere of high school, where individuals were often narrowly categorized. As I investigate further in the next chapter, other members highlighted this ability to take on characters that were different from them as a release and this sense of understanding as liberating in that they weren’t under the “pressure” they felt at school “to be one way”. Mariah explained:

And I think that's [playing different, challenging characters] also what gave like everybody such a good understanding of each other, even if you were so different is that you did try on different characters. So if you were a punk-rock kid, you know, that was more pop and, you know, you didn't hang out with any I guess sort of the preppier girls in school and you never - kind of like "The Breakfast Club" you never really understand what life is like for them, but through acting you kind of had the ability to, to play them, and unders-- like, play them as a character and kind of understand maybe what they were going through a little bit more. But everybody was kind of trying on characters all the time there [at SOURCE], and I think that's what kind of gave everybody a better understanding of each other.

These examples represent Iris Marion Young's assertion that "for people to become comfortable around others whom they perceive as different, it may be necessary for them to become more comfortable with the heterogeneity within themselves" (Young, 1990, p. 153). This seemed to have occurred in The SOURCE, where the realization of heterogeneity of self (as Ashley says, "there's a little bit of crazy in all of us") helped make them more open to heterogeneity of others. This awareness of heterogeneity became, for older past-members, a basis for their broader sense of social insight and critique.

This personality growth through openness and "better understanding" of others was not limited to the four walls and black backdrop curtain of The SOURCE. Leah described how the experience of playing a character and then participating in audience "talk backs" – where audience members could ask the cast members questions – was a learning moment of relationship. When presented with a direct

question from an audience member, “Well, what if that happened, what would YOU do?” she had a moment of “surprise.” She told a story that demonstrated how this one moment taught her a lot about her self and the young woman asking the question. In audience talk-backs she usually could answer from the position of the character she played. But this audience member had specifically identified with her, as Leah, and wanted to know what SHE would do. As she recalled the experience of participating in numerous talk-backs she explained that:

...after a while it [was] becoming natural to talk to them as, like friends.

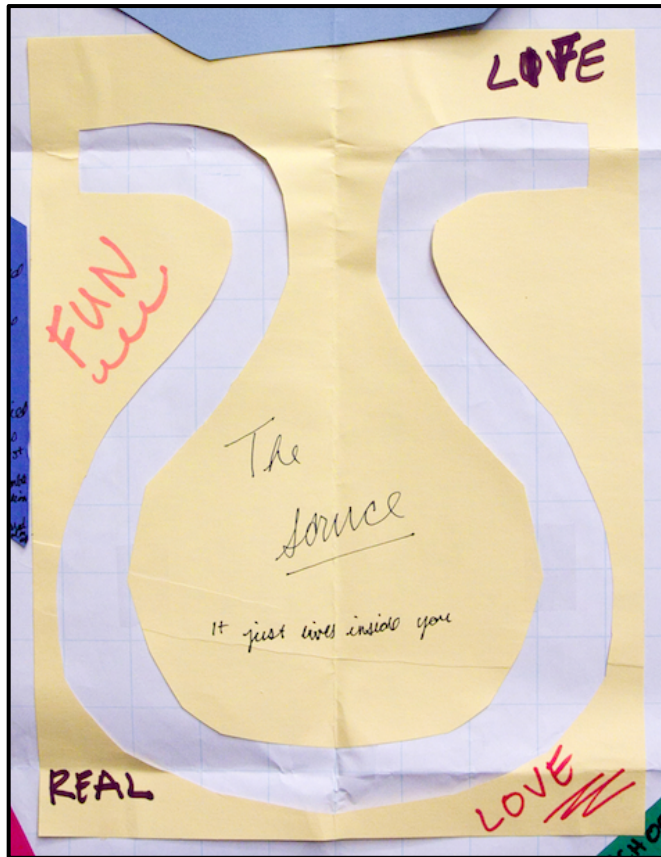
Like, to be like well I’ve never been in that situation but I would consider all my options and then find the best that’s best for me.

Because, you know, if she was dealing with something similar, I can’t give you, you know what I would do, cause that’s not maybe what’s right for you. But they just wanted to know that other people maybe like, have ideas or like concerns, cause I know for me I would have a hard time talking to my parents, or, you know, something, if I went through something similar.

This comfort with responding to audience questions didn’t happen instantly; rather it developed in Leah over time as she participated in more plays. But more than simply comfort, she described a mutual recognition of audience members, as “friends” and as simultaneously different-than her in that what she might do might not fit their circumstances. So, what she described as “becoming natural” was actually more a relational competency of mutual recognition and understanding. While on the one hand many cast members remarked that the recognition of their voice was powerful, Leah has also observed that for the audience, the simple recognition that other teens “have ideas” or “concerns” could be equally powerful.

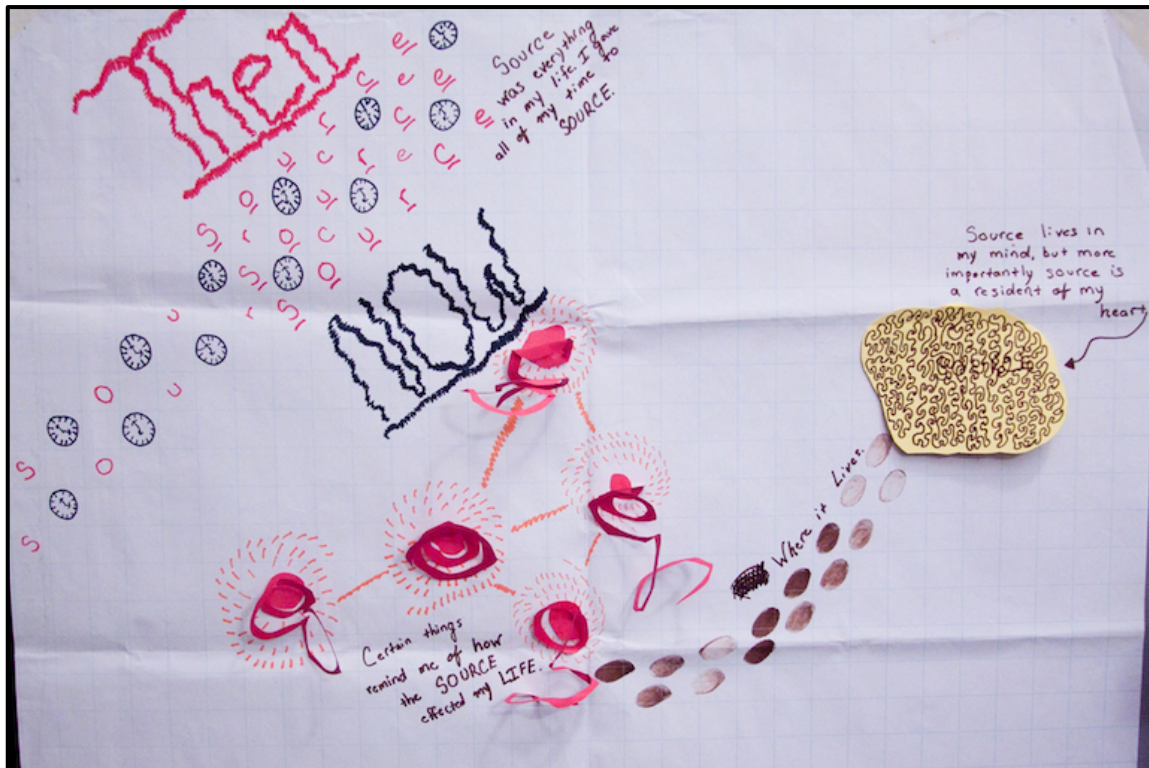
Leah, Ashley, and Mariah's stories all conveyed a sense of development and change over time that occurred through their participation in SOURCE: for Leah it was "after a while" that the talk-backs became more "natural"; for Ashley "it's a journey" to learn how to convey a character; and for Mariah it was through the experience of playing different characters over the years. These examples also showed how this internal growth manifested itself in their social relationships – with each other, with peers at school, with "fantasy" characters, and with audience members. This idea of development brought up the corollary notion of process, something that identity theorists have been particularly eager to capture (Skinner, Valsiner, & Holland, 2001). The maps that were collected from the design team members provided some visuals for understanding this process of internalizing a sense of openness-to-others. Two of the design team participants focused on this sense of internalizing for their visual mapping exercise. In the center of Grace's map (Figure 14) below she had a large, yellow construction-paper box with a cutout shape that is almost womb-like in appearance.

Figure 14. "It just lives inside you" - Close-up of Grace's Map.



Surrounded by the words “fun”, “love”, and “real” she encased The SOURCE with the caption “it just lives inside you.” Around this part of the map she pasted large construction paper boxes that were filled with tiny writing in which she told stories about how The SOURCE was relevant to her life (full images of the maps are included in the Appendix 4). Using a similar representation of this act of making The SOURCE internal, Tyler’s map showed internalization-in-process and how The SOURCE had, quite literally, moved through his body (Figure 15).

Figure 15. "A resident of my mind and heart" - Tyler's Map.



As Tyler explained his map, at first he felt the experience in terms of time, in that he spent most of his time at The SOURCE. Then, as time progressed, he described the “synaptic” firing that would occur when something outside of The SOURCE would connect to something he experienced in The SOURCE (the large red spirals are synapses that literally spring off the page). Using a marker to make thumbprints along the map, which represented his “unique identity,” he concluded with a yellow construction-paper brain that lifted up to reveal a red heart underneath, explaining that The SOURCE had moved from his mind to his heart, and was thus even more internalized as it had moved from a place of thought to a place of feeling (symbolically).

I bring up this discussion of how members visually depicted their internalizing experience because I think it offers a glimpse of the process by which experiences in

The SOURCE become enveloped or absorbed by participants. The maps provided compelling evidence that while The SOURCE was a distinct physical place, located on Central Avenue in Sarasota, FL, it was also a psychological space. It may be that this space enabled a range of possible selves – as experienced in plays, meetings, and improv exercises – that could function almost as imagos (McAdams, 1999), ideal self-images or protagonist senses of the self that functioned dialogically in minds, as I will discuss in the next chapter. In internalizing the experience of SOURCE, participants were thus internalizing a cadre of self-images, identities, and voices that they could draw on in their future social interactions and personal development.

### *Conclusion*

Thus it appears that SOURCE provided a space for individual identity struggles which, as some have argued are particularly prevalent during adolescence (Erikson, 1968), to become intertwined for a moment in the interest of a common goal that a variety of diverse personalities could converge upon. Through working toward that goal, the individuals learned something about themselves that informed parts of their own identities. The individual identities that the participants entered the room with were engaged, reversed, revised and/or normalized in a way that encouraged the kaleidoscope of the self to continually turn. In many ways, the theatre presented a venue where participants could "play" with different voices and identities. Wendy Luttrell (2003), Sharon Stephens (1995) and others have recognized the importance of "play" for development. Drawing in Winnicott (1971/2005) they suggest that play holds important moments for bridging the internal and external, for engaging in what Benjamin (1998) described as intersubjectivity and Winnicott called "potential space." Drama, particularly drama that builds on the personal experiences and emotions of

adolescence, can serve as such an arena for play. In the drama setting, at least as Gallagher and others (Chapman, 2000; Mattingly, 2001; Guhathakurta, 2006) have observed, identities and difference no longer become a basis for exclusion. Students can learn from their peers and collaboratively create new scripts and characters that build on the identities of the participants that value the perspective and uniqueness of each individual. The “play” that occurred was in witnessing and hearing the identities/thoughts/emotions of others and in responding to those, in finding elements of the external in the internal and in voicing a response through performance. In dramatic play creativity was able to bridge difference to build a richer experience. As one member explained, everyone had a talent that they could bring to the setting and, in watching the talents of others, you could learn about them and yourself as well. This sequence of events also mirrors Benson’s (2001) and Dewey’s (Jackson, 1998) view of interaction with art, wherein one is momentarily engaged with something aesthetic (in this case, a theatre performance) and returns to the self and reality with a new perspective, having been transformed or engaged in either slight or profound ways. Providing young adults with the opportunity to engage with each other and with the self in this way seems critical for future development, as argued in the conclusion.

**Vignette: NOT another statistic**

*“And in this narrative, women define themselves in their own terms; we must refrain from evaluating them in light of the prevailing social prejudices. This is perhaps the most difficult part. We feel as a society the right to ask women to live out some ideal. I try here not to be judgmental about these lives. (I can’t say, for example, who is “in denial” and who is not. Denial of what? Of what I believe or you hold dear?) I recognize the truth of the maxim that most people get what they want in life. I haven’t the right to ask that other people want something other than what they do.” (Josselson, p. 10, 1996)*

Elena is one of those participants who stayed with me. She friend-requested me on Facebook and so I was able to keep up with her and witness how her life progressed. Her experiences in the three years between the interviews were not what she had planned, but she is no less ecstatic about them. When I met her at the design team meeting Elena was a young, energetic, and ambitious Latina woman. She had many goals for herself and was excited to be pursuing a degree in early childhood education because she truly loved kids and spending her time with them.

Elena is one of those participants who made me ask myself some hard questions. The work of interpretation is tricky and the opportunities for our own subjectivity to find its way in, often unbeknownst to us, are prevalent. Working with Elena and, really, all of the interviewees, helped me understand that subjectivity is really quite key to interpretation, but that an awareness of one’s thoughts and feelings is even more important. While Elena’s experiences taught me much about The SOURCE, she also taught me as much about myself as a researcher. It feels somewhat selfish to include as much of myself in her vignette, but it also feels necessary as some



A year after the first interview, Elena became pregnant at age 21. In her second map she is standing with her daughter by her side. With the same colors (less red, though) and at least as many hearts, Elena drew a similar flow-chart of the last three years, complete with a picture of her with her “baby bump.” I had seen the drama unfold on Facebook, where she had posted status messages about having to make a decision and being able to do what she needed to do on her own. In my mind, I expected “the worst” (pregnancy). I quickly concluded that this would mean the end of the dreams she had so enthusiastically drawn on her first map. Then, I saw one of The SOURCE’s latest PSA videos. In the most popularly viewed video on their YouTube channel (well over 1,000 views), Elena’s belly is the pun at the end of the segment in which Florida receives an “F” in sex-education. I cringed at seeing this, interpreting it as her body being used as a spectacle. It turned out, as I later found out in our second interview, that she had eagerly participated in this video. A group of SOURCE members had been improvising for the PSA and in a moment of improv they referred to Elena’s belly. What I saw as spectacle she saw as learning moment, and she was willing, if not eager, to participate. After Elena’s daughter was born the photos on Facebook chronicled her growth and all of the adorable things that she did. Elena was simply radiant. Surrounded by a loving family, including relatives, friends, and The SOURCE, she was flourishing. Elena’s second map, produced during the follow-up interview three years later (below), conveys a similar optimism and enthusiasm to her first map.

Figure 17. “All ups and downs are WORTH IT!!” – Elena’s second map.



At the follow-up interview I was amazed at how candidly I was able to talk with Elena. As we went through her last three years there wasn't a dry eye in the house. We both cried as she recounted the amazing generosity of SOURCE members and how the way that she was embraced represents just how accepting and non-judgmental The SOURCE is. She explained how she used the experience to teach the other members to always be safe, that you can get pregnant even when you're on birth control (as she was). She was also doggedly determined to have an open relationship with her daughter, encouraging her to always talk to her and see her as "mommy's best friend."

I reflected on my previous conceptions constantly. As a participant in this project Elena taught me simply: shame on me. The feelings I had of concern for her, sadness that her life would not be what she wanted, or worry that she was simply “another statistic” (a young Latina unwed mother) were simply that: *my* feelings. They most certainly were not hers. And, as she recounted in her interview, she said she had spent enough time dealing with those feelings from other people in her life that I increasingly felt unsettled by my own reactions. She was wonderfully happy. Her daughter, “the most wonderful thing in my life,” she stated, was a blessing and simply another way to fill her life with love. The hearts surrounded her in both maps, the heart that surrounded The SOURCE...Elena is a person that loves love. She loves connection, relationship, sharing, intimacy, family, children, etc. It fuels her and made her beam as she talked about all of those aspects of her life.

Elena helped me hear my own voice in the process, in the analysis and in the listening. She helped me see very clearly that I had “foreclosed” (Luttrell, 2003) on her future in a very narrow and potentially unforgiving way. She became a constant reminder to look to the participant to understand the meaning they ascribe to the events in their lives, for that is what I am most interested in. My “reactions to” their experiences (Gilligan & Brown, 1992) were important to recognize, to hear, and to acknowledge; in this case they represented how I was channeling those dominant narratives of what a young woman or man “ought to” be. Instead, I needed to hear how *she* had made sense of her experience, and how *she* interpreted it.

This vignette aimed to show another moment of reflexivity. Of how my reaction to Elena, her gracious responses to my follow-up questions, and my reaction to myself and the voices in my own head served as an invaluable lesson in what it means to listen, to privilege the voice of the participant before my own initial reactions.

**Chapter 7**

**A Sense of Self, A SOURCE of Travel**

## Chapter 7: A Sense of Self, A SOURCE of Travel

*It wasn't until much later on that I was able to really reflect and be like "wow", you know? [SOURCE] made me who I am. Absolutely." Anna*

*Aiden: "...What you learn at school doesn't really follow you. I think—*

*Melissa: And why do you think that?*

*Aiden: Because it's knowledge, mostly, right? And, in SOURCE you learn about yourself and you learn about soul and you learn about other people and you learn about love. Um, and respect. So those things are always going to be with you. Whether you like it or not."*

*"To grow means to learn to interact with more and more complex dimensions of reality." Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984, p. 282)*

### *Introduction*

Hermans (2004) described the self as a traveler, one that "moves from one position to another and...takes a variety of perspectives on the world [which] open particular vistas and, at the same time, close off others from view" (pg. 298). In this chapter I proposed that there were very distinct elements of The SOURCE experience that persisted, that travelled with the participants as they entered new contexts, new phases of their lives, and new relationships with others. I built my observations of these elements on the participants of this study who, collectively, relay a profound experience of The SOURCE. Was The SOURCE profound for every person who joined or participated in it over the last twenty-plus years? Most likely it was not, and I do not have data to determine this. What I was more interested in, throughout this entire

dissertation, was why and how the experience was considered profound by past participants. For this chapter I would like to further understand those participants who narrated a sense of travel, of carrying The SOURCE with them, and what the elements were that travelled by persisting across time and place?

Aiden (excerpted above) made an interesting observation regarding what it was that travelled. While so many of the interviewees cite the knowledge and the information, Aiden appeared to contest this. Upon closer reading, and in reading other interviews, however, I think he was elaborating on what type of knowledge travelled and what it took to make something able to travel. For Aiden, rote knowledge such as facts had no real ability to “follow you.” Instead, he valued the deeper knowledge he gained about himself and others. This was similar to Elena and others who argued that through the physical acting out scenes and situations, you remembered how to handle those situations better if you encountered them in the future. When things were personally relevant, or made to feel personally relevant and embodied, they took on a greater importance. And through this importance, they were carried and persisted.

This chapter looks at how all of this – the space and the relationships and the lessons – travel (persist) across time. I consider how The SOURCE served as a psychological, dialogical, and imaginal reference point. The experiences of The SOURCE travelled most readily and immediately to college in very real and practical ways, but they also travelled into later aspects of life, providing meaningful opportunities for reflection. The SOURCE was able to provide personal “building blocks” that became nurtured or cultivated in the next phases/steps of life. I share stories from participants who have become parents, teachers, nurses, social workers, etc. to consider how The SOURCE has stayed present in their lives. I show how it was

depicted on maps of design team participants. Finally, I outline what I see to be the elements of this ability to persist, what I term *traveling power*.

### *Liminal Spaces*

Jacqueline Goodnow (1995) encouraged researchers to consider not only the physicality of space, but also the social spaces we encounter and the transitions that occur within, between and/or among them. As she argued, moving from “novice” to “expert” or “single” to “married” can constitute changes in social spaces (p. 274). Particularly relevant to The SOURCE, she also cited knowledge and access to knowledge as an additional form of space in that it was something people were sometimes prevented from accessing or were limited in some way. Between these spaces she raised the issue of the boundaries that existed and their permeability as yet another factor to consider. I found this notion of boundaries and permeability to be particularly relevant to The SOURCE. In its way of acting as a “third space” of transitional development its boundaries were somewhat demarcated as closed off to adults and open to members who abided by the social contract (see Chapter 4). Yet, by entering schools and performing in the community, The SOURCE invited some permeability to its walls by not only entering schools spaces, but by also inviting audience members to participate in talk-backs and thus be a part of and experience The SOURCE’s process. It was these liminal qualities, I will argue below, that made The SOURCE developmentally relevant in that it provided a mechanism for the “lessons” learned in SOURCE to travel across time and space and into new contexts throughout the participants’ lives.

Further, this permeability became even more compelling when considered with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model, discussed earlier. The SOURCE permeated

all of the spheres of ecological development in very specific ways. Building from Bronfenbrenner's model, Goodnow (1995) introduced considerations of "interaction and participation" (p. 280) to various spaces to further understand how different individuals may experience different spaces. She argued that whereas in Bronfenbrenner's model much of the face-to-face interaction was considered to take place at the more micro levels, such interaction could also occur in the macro levels if we considered social factors that could encourage participation and/or interaction. This is yet another place where The SOURCE accumulated developmental impact; it encouraged dialogue with larger social systems (the media, the community) and thus brought youth, who had often felt estranged from these macrosystems, into participation with them.

#### *Third space for adolescent development*

To be an adolescent is, whether popularly conceptualized or biologically determined, to be in-between or to be "not-yet." The irony of course being that we are all to some degree "not yet" but, in our adolescence, everyone (particularly adults) is watching and the stakes seem exponentially higher. Responsibilities or expectations that feel adult in nature – caring for others, succeeding academically – can be experienced at the same time as things that seem to limit one's adulthood – a body that has not yet matured, a restriction on how many hours one can work, or limitations on whether one can drive. Much of the perceived "sturm und drang" of adolescence is no doubt a result of this in-betweenness. The SOURCE had a way of opening up these experiences and laying them bare, ready to be felt, observed, commented on, and revised. As this data suggested, theatre was a critical medium for achieving this. Young people could enter the space and perform an improv scene where they quickly moved about, shouted, cried and sang and, in the next moment,

could shift into performing a character that was pregnant or struggling with bullying. There was a mix of fantasy and play with a balance of “real life” that was key to development (Bettleheim, 1976). The space of *The SOURCE*, the medium of theatre and the topic of peers provided just enough expressive play with enough real-life discussion and content to meet the young person where they were in that moment. At an immediate, practical level this offered a place where frank discussions could be had while also offering a space where larger existential questions of how one wants to engage with and exist in the world could be entertained. This need of being met in the moment was palpable, as Leah explained:

I think, the last person you want to talk about issues, like sexual issues or, you know reproductive rights, is your parents really. And I think it let us, open up, cause it's easier to talk about the play than like what's going on in my life. I think it's just easier to have that barrier and be able to talk about well, you know like what do you think about what happened to her. Or like, I think it just gives parents, my parents something to, discuss. Cause my dad would never say like “oh, what are you doing about like that situation like with your life,” he would never say that. But it would be easier for us to talk about, you know, someone else.

But in a more distal way, it also laid the groundwork for further identity development. A liminal space is the in-between – the “not-yet” and the “soon-to-be” of the adolescent. Psychologists know that identities can change in a number of ways. One can alter the meaning they ascribe to a specific identity (what it means to be a certain race or a certain social status), the salience of a particular identity may shift in comparison to others (being a mother may become more prominent than being a

gardener), and new identities can form as well as old identities disappear completely (the identity of parent, or employee, for example) (Deaux, 1991). To this I would add a more dialectical possibility: that identities can also inform one another, such that a third, perhaps super-ordinate, identity can form (Hermans calls this a coalition, 2003). It is here that I see a key value of The SOURCE.

Adolescents are being propelled by both biology and society toward an impending identity: adult. Their bodies will develop at varying paces but after 18 years of development society will ascribe to them certain rights and expectations. The experience of these expectations is further complicated by socioeconomic status, gender, race, sexuality, etc. But the fact remains that we have constructed a population for which much is “in store” and, as Lesko argued, that we can obsess over how their present actions may influence that future identity of adult. Though I would argue that we are all at all times “in-development”, regardless of our age, our society has ascribed particular importance to adolescence. Yet the abstractness of the future and of the possible selves presents an unclear and unknown picture of what that adult identity could look like. The SOURCE provided not only the immediate psychological benefit of expressiveness and of narrating or acting out anxious feelings or conflicting emotions, it also provided a space to practice some of the expectations of that impending identity. It offered moments where responsibility was required, listening was valued and ability or talent was recognized. As these adolescents moved through the gray area of the teenaged years they experienced these moments and, as “real life” (outside of SOURCE) presented them with similar moments they were not always struggling, at a loss as to what behavior a certain situation called for, because they had at least developed the beginnings of a repertoire of responses. One of the most cited instances of this SOURCE recall was in the years directly following SOURCE, when

many participants became college students. However as time progressed, throughout development, older SOURCE participants narrated the melding of positions that Hermans suggested. The SOURCE seemed able to offer some distinct aspects that persisted and became folded into one's identities – as nurse (Alan's story), parent (Melissa's map), theatre-director (Elizabeth's vignette), educator (Sarah's story), etc.

*Making the transitions from high school to college and beyond*

In some ways, the idea of traveling power is a question of identity salience and the factors that elicit the foregrounding of a specific identity (in this case, SOURCE-member identity) (Deaux, 1991). Yet, I would like to argue that there are further “traveling” aspects to SOURCE. Whether we conceptualize them as ways SOURCE influenced future decisions or how it informed other aspects of one's personality and enacted identities, SOURCE had a way of appearing at moments that made it salient (such as an encounter that mimics a scene from a play). Much of my evidence suggested that this often happened in the years following high school, when college experiences relate to many of the struggles experienced in adolescence, though at a slightly broader scale. Beth, a participant who had just gone to college for her first summer session, explained:

I feel like I've gotten to use this, all this stuff that I learned in SOURCE to like relay to my friends, too. Because I have, I've sat down and talked amongst all my new friends about like watching your drink [at a party] and being so careful. Because, like, you never know...And it's good, because I feel like I'm protecting them. I feel like I'm teaching them.

I am also interested in the ways in which such relational modes of learning about/constructing our identity(ies) in such productive spaces travel to other settings

and/or moments. Does the opportunity to learn and engage, rather than passively accept material as it is presented to us result in a deeper and more meaningful understanding of self and society? In summarizing Dewey's writings on experience and art, Jackson (1998) explained that engagement with art could be labeled as "educative" due to its "liberating effect on further experiences" (pg. 6). It was clear from the interviews that the "knowledge" of SOURCE travelled with participants to their new contexts. Many of the participants talked about becoming the "go-to" person among their friends or dormitories for advice on sexual or relationship issues. In her summer college experience, Beth was constantly educating her roommates about being safe at parties; Leah was approached by a sorority sister she hardly knew to help her cope with sexual trauma simply because the sorority sister knew that Leah had relevant information. Others narrated the process of becoming the one who was always making sure friends used condoms or watched their drink at parties. But in what ways did the interpersonal relationships and identity development that occurred in SOURCE persist in new and future contexts? The interview data suggested that it was through dialectical and dialogical relationships with self, characters, peers, audiences, etc. that a sense of connection and deeper self-understanding emerged.

It [SOURCE] gave me confidence but um, more than anything it helped me communicate and um in a way gave me the experiences that I was lacking in the rest of my life. Just, these really awesome super-fun experiences. And, um, with that, I think that I made like a better friend and a better daughter and I was just, um, I don't know, maybe just.....empowered, kind of, as a person -- as a young adult. (Anna)

I think that SOURCE gave me voice. And, um, it gave me voice and allowed me to...accept what I am and who I am. ... I got to travel to Mexico and sort of be an ambassador of SOURCE and...through that experience I learned how to use my voice. I learned how to talk and represent and um, share. (Aiden)

When they moved on to future contexts (college, the workplace, friendships and other relationships) the participants were able to take their feelings in these contexts and juxtapose it with how they felt in the meetings and theatre space engaging in the issues they felt concerned with. In Tyler's words and imagery, the "synapses" would fire and reconnect to The SOURCE. By blending their "dramaturgical self" with their "informed/educated self" and "passionate self" they formed a self "coalition." This coalition then became a part of their identities that could travel to new contexts. I believe The SOURCE-member identity outlined in Chapter 4 was also key to this process. It taught valuable lessons of sharing and existing in relation to others. Though it was only a temporary identity, one that existed for the duration of their participation in the group, it laid the groundwork for such relational lessons to travel and reappear in new settings. For example, Leah, age 22 and a recent college graduate, explained how the passion she tapped into in The SOURCE translated into her college activities:

And it [the SOURCE] really fulfilled something, for me. Like it fulfilled, I think every person needs to feel like they're doing something good or positive. And I think it really fulfilled that for me. ...When I first got to college and I was like fresh out of SOURCE I wanted to do activism and politics and I did a[n] internship at the Capitol building...so I think it really like led me to see how your passion could be your career, be your

like hobby or anything, and I think that internship also taught me a lot about, you know, people are passionate about different things, and the environment, animals and stuff, that it was neat to see the parallel because passion is passion. ...I just think that for me SOURCE helped me like, you could direct your energy in like a passion, whether SOURCE is like where I am or not, you can help in some way or get people to think in some way.

Likewise, Sarah, who became a middle school teacher, also felt that The SOURCE impacted her in terms of her career:

Being a teacher I would hope that my kids feel safe, that's very important to me. That they have someone to talk to and I hope it's me and even if it's not me that there's somebody else in the school that they can, that they would feel comfortable going to. But I remember as a student that scho—I can't think of one teacher that I had that I would talk to...that built a trust between teacher and student. ... [As a teacher] I try to promote a lot of discussion. (Sarah)

Specifically, what travelled was: knowledge; a sense of responsibility (of voice, in particular); an openness to difference and tolerance of varied perspectives/experiences; learning to see all sides of an issue or situation (most commonly narrated as “everyone has a story”); and, sometimes, activism.

### *Seeing the Traveling*

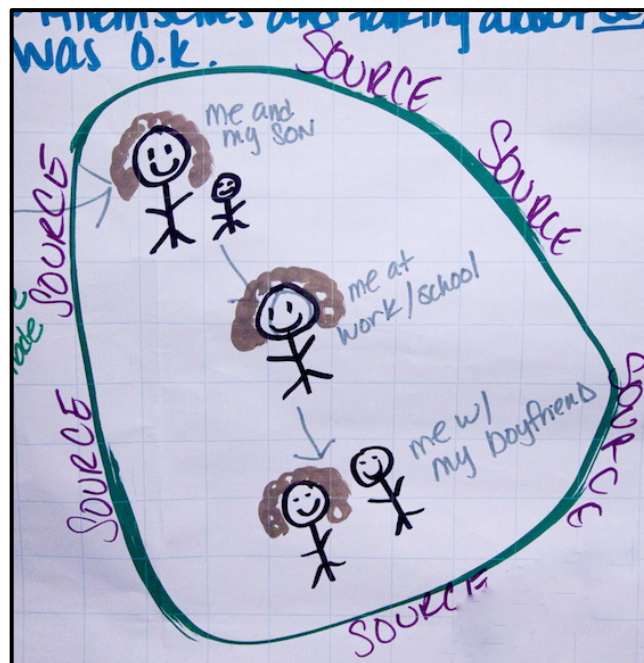
Is there evidence of this liminal space and traveling process on the maps? Maps, which imply a sense of travel, movement and journeys, should be useful pieces of data



When explaining her map, she described how “then” the SOURCE presented her with a bright outlook, shown as a rainbow. She felt “purpose” and, if we follow the arrows, found a “destination”. The middle part of the map, drawn upside down, says “demoralization” – which she experienced after The SOURCE. In the process of regaining her spirit, she showed parts of the earlier SOURCE rainbow raining down. After a spiraling shift she drew a rainbow again, with black outlining. For her, this represented how the brightness she felt and learned in SOURCE had met with the realities she had experienced outside of that setting. As she explained it, she was able to see both of those aspects now.

Throughout all of the maps there seemed to be dual notions of embodiment of SOURCE and being surrounded by SOURCE. Melissa’s map, which also makes use of rainbow imagery, ends with stick-figure drawings of herself with her son, “me at work and school” and “me with my boyfriend.” Surrounding these images is a green circle with SOURCE repeatedly written around the perimeter (Figure 19, below).

Figure 19. Melissa’s map.



Thus, many of the maps conveyed a sense of surrounding, or showed The SOURCE as almost bathing the participants, existing in the atmosphere around them, raining down on them, or weaving its way through their synapses. I interpret this imagery to support the notion of blending, of how the SOURCE-member experiences diffuse across future experiences but are no less poignant or relevant; they have simply become more incorporated into the lives of the participants in less easily extractable ways.

*Closing: Distilling the Elements of Traveling Power*

Thus, my data have led me to conclude that the elements of The SOURCE that travel are:

1. A recognition of **process** and the role of **dialogue**:

Though it began as recognition of adolescence and young adulthood as developmental processes, this understanding of process extended to other relationships, to relationships with The SOURCE, to future friendships, future jobs, etc. Process was not presumed to be linear or necessarily chronological, but “messy” and filled with opportunity for learning. Dialogue was seen, at the beginning of The SOURCE, as a way of sharing experiences and information, as a way of listening to each other, seeing each other, and creating an environment of trust that would facilitate the activities of The SOURCE. More generally, what travelled was understanding that dialogue facilitates finding similarities and bridging differences; dialogue becomes synonymous with “voice” and silence (i.e. lack of dialogue) is perceived as unproductive at best and dangerous at worst.

2. **Memory** and **knowledge** which serve as reference points and create a sense of **responsibility**:

Participants were able to draw on specific memories, from either plays or from the meetings, to guide their actions in new situations, particularly college. The knowledge and information they gained through the meetings helped them navigate complex situations with friends and peers and helped them feel empowered to assist others. In turn, these memories and knowledge also served as the foundation for a sense of collective responsibility. Coupled with the above recognition of voice, many of the members felt obligated to share the information they had (particularly information about sexual health) in order to help and/or protect others.

3. The importance of **spaces** that can hold paradox and the commitment to engage, find or re-create similar spaces:

A number of participants returned to The SOURCE to serve as an assistant director and to continue their presence in the space of SOURCE; others were actively trying to recreate such spaces in their new surrounds or were actively seeking similar spaces. There was an understanding that The SOURCE created a space where the “paradoxes of relationships” (Fedele, 2004) could coexist. Participants recognized that both similarity and difference could provide moments of connection and dialogue; they understood that autonomy existed in dialectical relationship with dependence and that constructive/safe spaces allowed individuals to express and move fluidly between both.

Ultimately, such spaces fostered a “relational awareness” (Jordan, 2004) through a collective commitment to growth and recognition. It was recognized that the members collectively created such a space, primarily through the guidance of KT, and that the space in turn would welcome other individuals and future members. There was an understanding that the space existed to serve its members, not vice-versa, which helped to avoid any classification or slippage of the space to the realm of

cult or fraternity. It was not a group for the group's sake, it was a group that existed to create the space that the members needed it to be. Thus, the spaces that are useful for building these connections must be dialogical, embodied, critical, and relational.

4. The groundwork for **social consciousness**, described as “tension around social issues” and “multiple awareness” (Daiute, 2000, p. 214) and a “releasing [of the] **social imagination**...that responds to the flaws and deficiencies viewed in our society with a sense of what ought to be in mind” (Greene, 2000, p. 300)

This element was most fostered by the counternarratives that SOURCE encouraged and the social critique fostered by their activism, particularly such plays as *The Day I Opened My Eyes*. It stemmed at first from the recognition and realization that adolescents themselves were more complex than dominant narratives or cultural portrayals would have one believe. From this understanding of multiplicity of experience grew a perspective that others, like adolescents in The SOURCE, may also have more complex experiences. This was most readily heard when participants made such realizations as “everyone has a story” (Anna).

In many ways this was also a recognition of privilege for SOURCE members who might not have realized the ways they experienced privilege prior to meeting others, performing for young women in prison, or hearing the stories of youth around the world struggling for reproductive rights.

5. The capacity for **internalized shifts** of identity and subjectivity:

A component of traveling is a shift that occurs, wherein the temporarily crafted “SOURCE-member” identity becomes embodied and absorbed by other identities as the participant exits The SOURCE physically. In this process what was

once a specified identity dissipated and was absorbed in other parts of the self, such that it shifted to become a more embodied subjectivity. Jessica Benjamin (1998) explained such processes as intersubjective, wherein the self (or ego) negotiates relationships and the influences of other persons, voices and objects into its experience. The elements discussed above (process, dialogue, memory, knowledge, space) were manifested in The SOURCE in distinct ways, but in traveling they become more intertwined with the participant's subjectivities, perhaps more diffuse but equally pervasive in their influence. Similarly, Jennifer McCormick (2000) described another type of shift that was more present at the time of participation but that is important to note in how it set up opportunities for engagement: the shift from object to subject. Instead of being a young adult upon which school surveillance practices were enacted (McCormick, 2000) or upon which sex-education was bestowed in limited ways because of a perceived un-readiness or incapability, young adults were re-positioned as subjects. Their subjectivity became the central organizing component in both their individual experiences and the collective zones they are creating.

In conceptualizing the elements of The SOURCE experience that travelled, I returned once more to Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and her observation that qualitative and inductive work requires a careful and "paradoxical" shift from the details and minutiae of data back "up" to theory and the level of generalizability and universal claims (and vice-versa). While I recognize that these participants represent only a piece of the overall portrait of this experience, I found their stories useful in trying to understand, in psychological terms, how safe-spaces can influence developing youth. The above explication of "travelling power" is my effort at conceptualizing these findings in more explicit theoretical terms.

### Conclusion

"SOURCE opens up that life journey"

**Conclusion: “SOURCE opens up that life journey”**

*...societies are seldom so benign as to provide even a sizeable proportion of their youth with niches in the social order which are consonant with their potentials, much less a range of alternatives from which to ‘choose’ and ‘decide’.* (Slugoski & Ginsberg, p. 37, 1989)

Maxine Greene argued that one way of keeping spaces alive, or of shifting “shared” spaces to “public” spaces is through the process of storytelling. The act of storytelling can help us to organize our experiences and reflect on their meaning and our present “doing.” In this dissertation I have told the story of The SOURCE as I have heard it collectively narrated by past participants. I have also attempted to situate it within my own ecological and contextual understanding of social and personality psychology. Nancy Deutsch was keenly aware of the multiple directions of influence between macro-level social forces and local environments. Cognizant of the power of such social forces (economics, systems of schooling and justice, etc.) she does not end the inquiry here. Rather, she engages bi-directionally, considering the ways in which “local environments and relationships can help youth negotiate the larger social world” (p. 5). As a social-personality psychologist, this approach particularly resonated with me. Thomas Pettigrew (1997), a student of legendary personality psychologist Gordon Allport, began his chapter, *Personality and Social Structure*, by quoting Allport: “How can the individual be both a cause and a consequence of society?” (p. 417). If we sit and listen, gather “thick” data and stories of youth, and read/hear their narratives closely—as all of these authors have—we can witness their own processes of “becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981), of speaking to or through dominant discourses of culture or of struggling for the words to resist or redefine.

As a person who has become very familiar with The SOURCE over the past four years and who has given much mental space to the importance of the work that occurs in The SOURCE space, I was surprised by how I continually discovered new ways of interpreting The SOURCE's activities and the participants words that further excavated the depth of its influence. My initial and superficial findings continued to take on greater depth as I read more literature from an interactionist approach or situated The SOURCE both contextually (in sex-education in Florida) and philosophically (as a truly post-modern endeavor). Though I may have at first noticed a theme such as "improved communication skills" as repeated often in the interviews, I was still taken aback when I considered the mode of communication that was taught (dialogical, introspective, respectful) and how it was ultimately premised (inadvertently or not) on "narrative [as] a communicative mode of possibility" (Park-Fuller, n.d., p. 8). Situating The SOURCE in even larger contexts I began to see how it represented a completely transformative way of learning, one that eschewed the "banking model" (Freire, 1970) of learning in which educators simply "deposit" knowledge; rather it redefines sex-education, in this case, as stemming from lived experience and co-constructed from the energy and agency of peers.

### *Returning to Questions and Theory*

In concluding I would like to re-state the research questions that guided this dissertation: 1) What does participation in this teen theatre group mean for an adolescent's developing identities and self? 2) How do adolescents who have participated in this theatre group construct the story of their experience? 3) How has their experience in this group shaped their lives as young adults and extended, if at all, beyond the setting of the group? and 4) How does The SOURCE—as an organization

and as a space—contest, complicate, or expand upon our ideas of developmental spaces for adolescents?

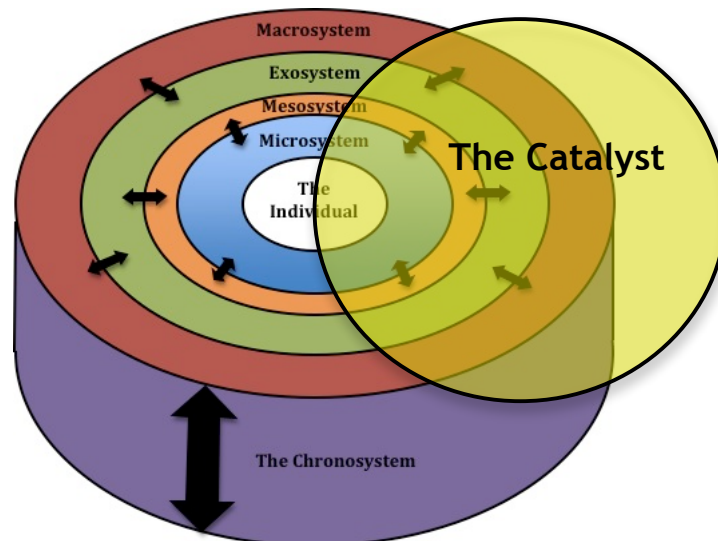
In summarizing my findings I would argue: a) participation meant recognition from others and finding a voice, experiencing a sense of opening, and learning about the multiplicity of ones self and others; b) participants constructed the story of their experience as one occurring in a safe space that allowed for creative, authentic and honest expression; c) the experience, for these participants, served as a launch pad, a shift in perspective, and an understanding that "everyone has a story" and this basic shift in consciousness had the ability to become embedded in the subjectivity of those participants; and d) The SOURCE made effective use of individuals (KT), organizational support (Planned Parenthood) and, primarily, a medium (peer-education theatre) to create performances that brought adolescents, young adults and audiences together in ways that shift the hierarchical conventions of adult-youth power and position adolescents as knowing social agents.

Returning to the underlying theory that guided this dissertation I would make two key revisions. First, with respect to dialogical-self theory, I would emphasize the power of *collective imagoes* and the importance of the individual in the collective *crafting* of these imagoes. In discussing imaginal dialogues, Hermans and Kempen (1993) described the role of the "I" and "me" - the "I" being that which observes the "me." The "I" authors the roles for the "me" actors and, as personal meanings become embodied, they develop as "voices" that can join the stage. To this assortment of positions I would add another key player - the "we." I believe that this experience of The SOURCE demonstrates the construction of such a "we." More than an observing audience or an authoritative figure, the "we" is collectively crafted. More than simply a Greek chorus that observes and comments, the "we" is more fluid and responsive to

the input of the various "I" and "me" positions. Most importantly, the "we" has the ability to change in meaning upon reflection. Elizabeth was not the only member to comment that her reflection on the value of SOURCE changed as she went through her own personal development and transformations. What allowed for this change was the very elements of the individual that become entwined with it. More than a collective group that may form around a common interest or political goal, the "we" of SOURCE is imbued with identity, expression, collaboration, and contribution at the level that feels appropriate for each member.

Second, if I were to revise Bronfenbrenner, I would add another concentric circle to his image of ecology. This circle, however, would overlap with the others and would, for lack of a better term, represent a catalyst.

Figure 20. Revising Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



The catalyst encourages, supports, and facilitates the exchanges represented by the arrows. It can be a safe space, an organization, a classroom, a person, etc., but its primary value is that it works across multiple levels simultaneously. It thus facilitates development by encouraging multiple points of exchange with each system and, most importantly, it engages the chronosystem by traveling with the individual

albeit in shifting forms. The catalyst for these participants was The SOURCE and KT. Catalyst, however, is an imperfect term and only a placeholder for this concept of actively facilitating across levels. In chemical reactions the catalyst is unchanged by the reaction, but I am sure KT would argue that neither she nor The SOURCE has been unchanged by the participants that have passed through its doors. Rather, she has learned, throughout her twenty-plus years of engaging with the organization and its members, as much about herself as a leader and mentor as she has about the need for adolescents to express themselves in such spaces.

*A persisting question, A line of flight*

*Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that grounded theory research can provide a better understanding of a phenomenon about which little is known, and, similarly, Stern (1995) asserts that the methodology is appropriate for investigations of an uncharted area or to gain a fresh perspective on a familiar situation. (Brown, p. 138)*

This last section represents my effort to “gain a fresh perspective on a familiar situation.” To take the findings that safe spaces are important for youth, something that this dissertation supports, and consider how I can take this (for me) familiar finding, and suggest the next uncharted (or less-charted) area of inquiry. For the duration of this project I have primarily focused on what the space of SOURCE looks like, achieves, feels like, and the function it served for the adolescents and young adults who passed through it. This process has been going on for a few years and during that time there was, for me, a persistent elephant in the room, or more aptly, perched on my shoulder as I wrote, whispering “*what about the spaces being taken away?*” While I cannot fully answer that question – what happens to adolescents who

don't have the space of SOURCE (to do so would of course involve some lengthy randomized control trial that is fully implausible) – I can speculate a bit based on the words of SOURCE members, their comparison of SOURCE to other spaces, as previously discussed, and some basic trends taking place in education. Mariah's story about performing in the juvenile detention center was perhaps one of the most poignant places where this idea surfaces. No doubt the fact that she was my first interview of the entire project helped to establish this persistent question. In her story she talked about entering the prison and the way the guards and therapists kept warning the actors that the girls were "bad girls" and that they should watch their belongings, bear with them when they shouted or misbehaved, and not be surprised if they don't really "get" the play. This prelude to their performance could not have been any further from the truth. Mariah recounted how the girls, who ranged in age from 13-20, were engaged in the performance, crying, affirming, laughing and "so into every moment, every single one of them was just right there with us." During the audience talk-back she said the young women stated they wished they had something like SOURCE because they "have a lot of stories to tell." Mariah recounts sharing stories with them and concludes:

None of them seemed like bad girls. And it was just sad the way that the therapists and prison guards kind of down played them to be these criminals. I think a lot of them are artistic girls who never really had an outlet in their lives. And that's when I started to realize like, whoa! SOURCE can really help people.

In an era of high-stakes testing, education is increasingly serving larger social institutions rather than students, teachers, or schools (Landay, 2004) with emphasis on outcome scores and accountability, rather than socio-emotional and personal

development. Education, as Maxine Greene (2000) notices, too often “forbids the expression of different people’s experiences” (p. 110). Nancy Deutsch (2008) echoes Greene’s sentiments in the opening of her ethnography: “For too many youth today, the developmental context is one of oppression” (p. 10).

We must consider the ways that all of these forces converge in the lives of youth to create landscapes of inequality. Above and beyond documenting the ways in which politics create such landscapes, we need to create within our own imagination—as researchers, educators, policymakers—an understanding of the alternatives, of how politics or the state could enable what Craig Centrie (2000) calls “free spaces” - spaces in and out of the classroom where youth are able to critically engage with ideas, build relationships across difference, and understand their own situated-ness and selves.

In their text, *Pedagogical Encounters*, Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2009) contemplate spaces for developing Deleuzian “lines of flight”:

He [Deleuze] asks us to think of these opposing lines, lines of flight and molar lines, and the smooth and striated spaces they create, not as alternatives, but as existing together in the same space. The molar lines of force create rigid striations, and at the same time offer places for experience and experimentation, in which new movements become possible, where old territories can be rethought, re-territorialized, where new connections can occur; where experimentation can open up a new line of flight. But even then, even in the moment of flight, it is necessary to have “a small plot of land,” a place where the molar order keeps us safe (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 161). (Davies & Ganon, p. 21)

Within the context of this "small plot of land" known as the dissertation, I would like to engage the reader on my own line of flight, my place for experimentation. Firmly grounded in the data from this study, my own experiences as a classroom teacher, and the culmination of the last 11 years of higher education, I have begun to conceptualize the notion of "relational injustice" which is, admittedly, only in its infancy. Judith Jordan states:

In a relational model of psychological development, disconnection from others is viewed as one of the primary sources of human suffering. Similarly, disconnection from oneself, from the natural flow of one's responses, needs, and yearnings creates distress, inauthenticity, and ultimately a sense of isolation in the world. (p. 47, 2004)

I want to conclude this dissertation by positioning the findings in the context of relationship, connection and development because *that* is where I see the data having the most power.

I see the broader narrative of SOURCE, as a liberating, empowering, opening setting, as illuminating the deficits of the current grand narrative of high-stakes based tests – the same narrative that allows for the swift removal of arts programs and for the silencing of teacher and student creativity in favor of prescribed curricula. However, I'm not naive enough to think this data speaks to the educational outcomes or influences of such forces; what I *do* think it speaks to is what such limitations – in a space where students spend an increasingly lengthy amount of time – might be eroding in terms of the emotional, developmental, identity and expressive supports they offer youth. Such erosions in turn likely hinder their abilities to develop as fully engaged and connected human beings. I want to position the experiences of the

participants in the SOURCE collectively as a lens through which to question the shrinking relational spaces that exist in schools and in other parts of youths' lives.

By using theatre as its primary method The SOURCE privileges *expression* of experience rather than the actual experience itself. While experiences are no doubt collected, heard, and honored, it is the expression of such experiences, the witnessing and performing of them that represents the true "identity-work" value. The content of the experiences is secondary. What is primary is that youth are gathered together to engage one another and listen and learn from one another. The adult in the room is not going to silence them or judge them for the content of their experience; they are going to thank them for their expression and contribution. Simply put, they will listen and be responsive and open. *This* is relational *justice*. This is relating to youth on a plane that consists of respect, authenticity, and transparency. This is not silencing, judging, grading, gossiping, schooling, etc. Relational justice, therefore, is the idea that teens are individuals worthy of hearing and relating to and that in all aspects of their life (but perhaps most importantly in education) they should be treated as such. To take a topic as embodied and sensitive as sex education and sterilize it to the point of paranoia and fear diminishes our ability to talk about it openly and to learn about it and ourselves. In so many other areas of teen's lives we are shutting down conversation. And, when we shut down conversation and dialogue we shut down relationships. Shutting down relationships impedes identity development, and this is an injustice. Framing it in terms of justice de-emphasizes the role of the individual and connotes a systemic concern, requiring us to simultaneously focus on the individual effects of such injustice but to question the macro-level structures that create and support it.

It has been argued that the hallmark of capitalist discourses is to ultimately drive individuals to bond with objects in order to facilitate a continuous participation in the endless cycle of consumption and production (Declercq, 2006). Building on Lacanian theory, Declercq also argues that these bonds take the place of social bonds – bonding between individuals – which ultimately do not serve consumption because we are able to satisfy our psychic desires and needs through our connections with one another (instead of through purchases). While this may at first seem unrelated to the findings of this dissertation, I want to argue in this conclusion that it is actually a central consideration, and one that has remained with me throughout this process. When sex-education and youth-spaces are considered among a variety of systemic controls – whether they be standardized testing or juvenile justice, etc. – it becomes increasingly clear that what is suffering at every step of intervention and implementation is the opportunity to both dialogue with others and build relationships with them. When we associate information about healthy sexual relationships with only danger and fear, we shut down opportunities for conversation. In the vein of such interests we develop abstinence-only programs that not only promote abstaining from sexual intercourse, but abstaining from any encounters or situations that could possibly even lead to having to make a decision about intercourse. We preclude the very opportunity for learning about choices, dialogue and relationships. In any sociopolitical analysis, then, it has to be asked what this could possibly be in larger service to. If, as researchers have found, the resulting public health benefits are not being realized, then what is? Even if prevailing moral interests are being served it does not discount the fact that there could be secondary effects, namely the breaking of connections, the silencing of voices and the loss of relational connection.

While I grant that it is speculation on my part, as this is not a hypothesis I have fully investigated, I think it serves as a compelling place the findings of this dissertation to “land”. The creation of a space that allows for openness and expression, the production of social and psychologically useful counternarratives, the opportunity to experiment with identity, and the ways that this persists throughout life – these are all moments of engagement, dialogue and relationship building. They are moments where knowledge about the self, other and society is actively generated, revised and contested. Even Erikson decades ago recognized that the exploration of identity that is expected to occur during adolescence would sit in precarious relationship to the subsequent relinquishing of identity required for full capitalist participation (Erikson, 1968). So perhaps this line of flight is not so tangential, after all. While the data from this dissertation show unequivocally that The SOURCE provides a space that is invaluable to the youth who participated in this study, I want to suggest further analysis to consider how this space sits in relation to the current sociohistorical moment as I believe it serves as a valuable lens for understanding broader political forces of silence and control through the focused and purposive limiting of young bodies and minds.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Design Team Agenda

#### Planned Parenthood and the Source

#### Research Design Team Gathering

March 30-31, 2007

#### *PROJECT GOALS*

There seem to be three major functions that this project can serve:

1. Investigating the theater experience, then and now. How did the Source affect the members? How does it still affect them? What have they taken with them? What was important about the theater aspect of the SOURCE?

2. Placing archival material within context. Looking back over the last 25 years at materials they have saved, within context of that particular geographic locale, broader context of society and reproductive rights. (Valerie, dissertation piece).

3. The fact that this was about sexuality (and behaviors) has consequence. Did it affect their sexual biographies? Then? Now?

#### *DESIGN TEAM GOALS*

The research design team will:

- develop interview and survey protocols (questions) and help establish samples (sizes, who, where, etc.)
- define Source (SOURCE as a network, as a safe space, safe haven, etc.)
- share personal stories about their Source experiences
- pilot the research interview protocol

Trust the "process" of the design team. Although they may take things in a slightly different direction, it will/should relate back to what we are interested in some way(s).

**FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2007***The Source in My Life and Our Lives*

9:00 - 10:00	Preparations (KT, V, S and MR)
10:00 -10:10	Introductions and group activity (KT)
10:10 - 10:20	Research Introduction and Consent Forms (Valerie)
10:20 -11:00	Individual Mapping Activity (V)

**Mapping Prompt**

How has Source been in your life from then to now?  
Where does it live in you, travel with you?

Include in maps:

- then and now
- intensity of emotion with

11:00 -11:15	Gallery Walk (MR)
11:15 - 12:00	Individual Map Presentations (V)
12:00 -12:30	Collective Map Development (MR)
12:30 - 1:00	Research in Context (M)
1:00 - 1:30	LUNCH
1:30 - 2:15	Topics Discussion (large group) (V and S) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Methods Overview (types of questions)</li> <li>• Editorial and Statistics...then and now</li> </ul>
2:15 - 3:00	Protocols Development (V) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 small groups - 1 interview, 1 survey (topics and questions)</li> </ul>
3:00 - 3:15	Protocols Discussion (large group) (all)
3:15 - 4:00	Closing Discussion and Reflections

- Valerie will prepare protocol documents for use on Saturday.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 2007***The Source in my Body*

- 9:30 - 10:00 Preparation (KT, V, S, and MR)
- 10:00 - 10:30 Movement Technique with Music and Stillness (Mandy)
- 10:30 - 11:00 Life Story Writing (personal experiences with Source) (V)

*Writing Prompt*

How has the Source lived in your body?

- 11:00 - 11:30 Sharing Stories (V)
- 11:30 - 12:00 Protocols Revisited and Revised (V)

*Discussion Prompt*

Now that you experienced memoir writing, does it change your understanding or thoughts about the survey, interview, major topics of focus? How?

- 12:00 - 1:00 Lunch
- 12:00 - 1:00 Background Information Forms
- 1:00 - 1:15 Interview Introduction (V)
- brief overview of interview process
- 1:15 - 3:00 Individual Interviews (pairs)
- 3:00 - 4:00 Closing Discussion and Stipend Distribution (all)

## Appendix 2. Online Survey

### **SOURCE Survey Welcome Page**

*Thank you for your interest in The SOURCE survey!*

This survey is being conducted as part of a larger study on The SOURCE theatre and its impact on the young men and women who participate in its activities. We are contacting approximately 300 individuals who have participated in SOURCE over the last twenty years.

The survey will take you about 20-30 minutes to complete, so please make sure you have enough time to finish. The questions will ask you about your experiences in The SOURCE and during that time in your life in general. Questions will also be asked about what activities you have done since your participation. There are also some general “personality” questions that will ask you to think about your thoughts and behaviors in general.

The benefits of participating in this survey are that you will help contribute to this study and to research about the impact of The SOURCE. Research like this is needed to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of The SOURCE as a youth organization and help it continue in the future. The only potential risk of participating in this study is that you will be asked to recall memories from your adolescence, and for some this might be emotionally difficult.

All responses will remain confidential. Only the Principal Investigator will have access to the file and when analyzing results all identifiers (name, etc.) will be removed so that your identity is completely protected. You can stop the survey at any time without penalty. I will also make the findings of the study available. If you would like to see them when the study is finished feel free to email me at [vfutch@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:vfutch@gc.cuny.edu).

If you have any questions, please contact the Principal Investigator, Valerie Futch, at [vfutch@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:vfutch@gc.cuny.edu) or 212-817-1913 or Michelle Fine, Faculty Advisor, at [mfine@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:mfine@gc.cuny.edu) or 212-817-8710. You may also contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at [kpowell@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:kpowell@gc.cuny.edu) or 212-817-7525.

By clicking below, you indicate your understanding of the above information and consent to begin taking The SOURCE survey. All responses will remain anonymous. This survey is for SOURCE participants who are now over the age of 18.

Top of Form

- I agree and would like to begin the survey.
- I have decided not to participate at this time.

## SOURCE Survey Basic Information

Great! Let's get started. This survey is structured in sections. First, you will answer general questions about The SOURCE. Next, you will answer some more specific questions that ask you to think about your time in The SOURCE and how it felt to participate, thinking back to that time and then "fast forwarding" to the present. The third section contains some general "personality" type of questions. And the last section has some basic background questions. You may end your participation at any time but it will help us if you answer each question fully. Again, the survey should only take about 30 minutes or less. You can track your status via the status bar at the top of the page. You can return to the survey at a later time, but ONLY if you are using the same computer (and do not clear your cache). So, let's begin!

To begin, please indicate what years you participated in SOURCE activities (meetings, performances, SOURCE 21, etc.):

- |                                    |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1987-1988 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1994-1995 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2001-2002 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1988-1989 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1995-1996 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2002-2003 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1989-1990 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1996-1997 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2003-2004 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1990-1991 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1997-1998 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2004-2005 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1991-1992 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1998-1999 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2005-2006 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1992-1993 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1999-2000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2006-2007 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1993-1994 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2000-2001 |                                    |

Other (please specify):

In general, how did you participate in The SOURCE meetings?

- Attended meetings weekly.
- Attended meetings sometimes (one or two per month).
- Didn't attend meetings.

Other (please specify):

What plays did you participate in? (Either as a cast member or crew.)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The End of Summer          | <input type="checkbox"/> I Want To Know             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Day I Opened My Eyes   | <input type="checkbox"/> The Girl I Used To Be      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The First Time Club        | <input type="checkbox"/> The Tobacco Club           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surviving Lunch            | <input type="checkbox"/> Secrets                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joel's Story               | <input type="checkbox"/> Dear God Let Me Be Popular |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Angels Must Be Smiling | <input type="checkbox"/> The Perfect Son            |

Freshman Year

Decisions

Read My Lips

Cool Kids

Other (please specify):

Do you remember the characters you played for each play?

The End of Summer

The Day I Opened My Eyes

The First Time Club

Surviving Lunch

Joel's Story

The Angels Must Be Smikling

Freshman Year

Read My Lips

I Want To Know

The Girl I Used To Be

The Tobacco Club

Secrets

Dear God Let Me Be Popular

The Perfect Son

Decisions

Cool Kids

Other

To what extent were you involved in acting either prior to or outside of SOURCE? (You can check more than one answer).

- I went to a performance magnet school and was involved in theater arts.
- I was interested in pursuing acting as a professional career.
- I wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue acting as a professional career.
- I enjoyed acting but didn't plan to pursue it professionally.
- I had only done a little bit of acting before SOURCE.

- I had never acted before SOURCE.
- I hadn't acted but I had done other types of performance (dance or voice).

### SOURCE Survey

#### Thinking back...

The following questions will ask you to think back about your experiences during your time at SOURCE. Many of the questions are "open-ended" which means you type in your own answer. There is no right or wrong answer, and the more you have to say the better!

What (or who) brought you to SOURCE? (In other words, what made you walk through the door on your first day?)

What feelings or emotions were going through you on that first day? What sorts of things did you expect? Were you surprised by anything (either in a good or bad way)?

To what extent did you feel like you could really trust everyone in SOURCE?

- I felt I could trust everyone in the room.
- I felt I could trust most people in the room.
- I felt it was mixed in terms of who I could/couldn't trust.
- I felt like there were only a few people I could trust in the room.
- I felt like there was no one I could trust.
- I'm not really sure.

What was your most memorable "audience moment"? (Either a question or reaction, for example).

What is your most memorable moment from SOURCE? (It could have been something that happened during a performance, a meeting, or another activity.)

The next three questions ask you to think back about your participation as a cast member (whether it was full time, touring, or filling in at rehearsal). If you weren't part of a cast during your time at SOURCE you may skip these questions.

Which was your favorite character to play? Why?

Which was your least favorite character to play? Why?

What, if anything, was challenging for you about acting or playing certain characters?

If you could change anything about your experience in SOURCE, what would it be and why?

Let's say KT called you and asked if you could fill in as director of SOURCE for next week. What would you plan for the meeting?

The following questions will ask you to think about how your involvement in SOURCE did or did not influence you in the future. You should think about how you feel now as you look back on that time period in your life.

Did your experience in SOURCE challenge, change or impact your view(s) of:

Abortion	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sex Education in School	1	2	3	4	5	6
Death Penalty	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gay Rights	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sexuality	1	2	3	4	5	6
Contraception	1	2	3	4	5	6
Adolescent Reproductive Rights	1	2	3	4	5	6

(1 = Didn't change, challenge or impact me at all; 2 = Challenged, changed, or impacted me a little bit; 3 = Challenged, changed or impacted me a lot' 4 = Completely challenged, changed or impacted my views' 5 = Reinforced what I already believed; 6 = Doesn't apply to me).

Did Planned Parenthood's sponsorship of SOURCE have any effects over your involvement with SOURCE?

Yes

No

Other (please explain)

Was SOURCE a personal outlet for you during the time you were involved?

- Yes  
 No  
 Not sure

What do you use today as a personal outlet?

Are you still involved in acting or performance?

- Yes  
 No  
 I was for a short time after SOURCE but I am not anymore.  
 I have been involved off and on since SOURCE.

The SOURCE has moved around a lot over the years to different spaces. Think back to the space where you had rehearsals and meetings. Think of five words that best describe that space (they don't have to be in any particular order).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

If there was one person or adult you could bring to SOURCE, who would it be and why?

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
SOURCE had a lasting impact on my personal relationships.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have made healthier choices because of SOURCE.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOURCE gave me information to make informed choices regarding my reproductive health.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOURCE affected my career choice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOURCE affected my choices in relationships.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOURCE affected my political views.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOURCE gave me more self-confidence and self-esteem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thinking back, did SOURCE have any negative impact on you? Can you explain?

This might be the hardest question, but if you had to describe SOURCE with one word, what would it be?









**SOURCE Survey**  
**Almost finished!**

You are almost finished, we just have a few more questions that will help us describe everyone who participated in this survey.

We understand that demographic information is just a snapshot of how you are today, and that sometimes this can change, so just think about yourself as you identify today. We also know that people like to describe themselves in their own terms. Please answer the following questions about yourself by filling in each blank.

What is your age?

What is your gender?

How do you describe your ethnicity?

How do you describe your sexuality?

How much school have you completed?

What is your current occupation?

Do you have children? How many?

What political party (if any) do you affiliate with?

Is there anything else you'd like to add about SOURCE?

Would you be willing to be interviewed (via phone) about your time in SOURCE? If not, you can just skip this question. If so, please enter the best way to contact you. This information will be stored separately from your survey responses and will not be associated in any way with your responses to previous questions.

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Other:

**Thank you for your interest in this survey!**

## Appendix 3. Demographic Form



Design Team March 2007

Background Information Sheet

We appreciate you sharing this information with us as it will help us understand your experiences further. All of these

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Alias/Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_

When did you participate in the Source?

What years were you involved?:

What grade were you in:

How old were you when you were involved?:

What was your role in the Source? (performer, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Attended weekly meetings

Performed in Source

Performed in Source21

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_ then, now

Economic Background: \_\_\_\_\_ then, now

How would you describe your political views?: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your current occupation? If you are a student, what are you studying?:

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 4. Maps of Design Team Participants: presented in order of time since participation in SOURCE (age).

Tyler, Male, 18, participated 2003-2005 (9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> grade)

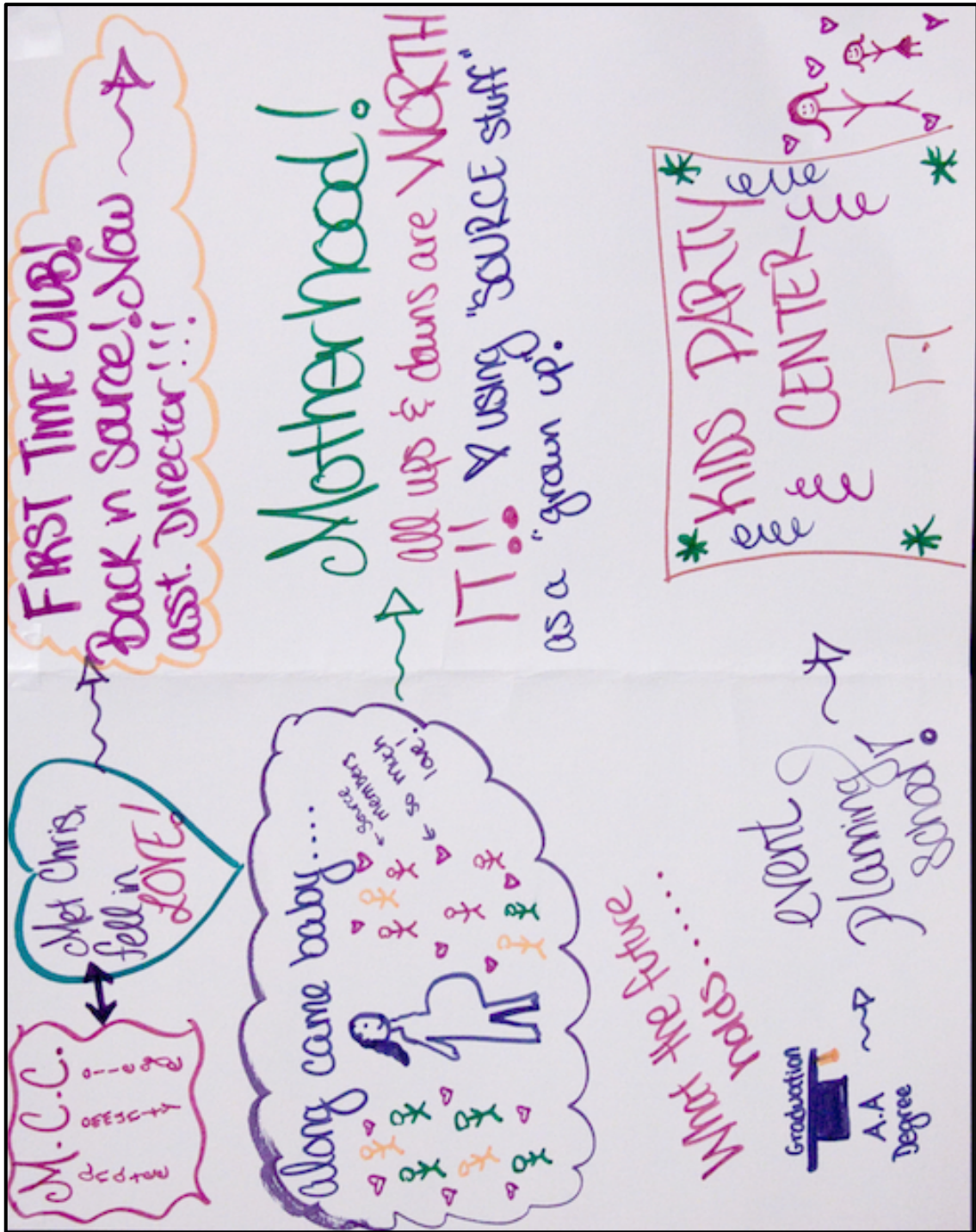




Elena (Map 1), F, 19, participated 2002-2006 (9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grades)



Elena (Map 2)



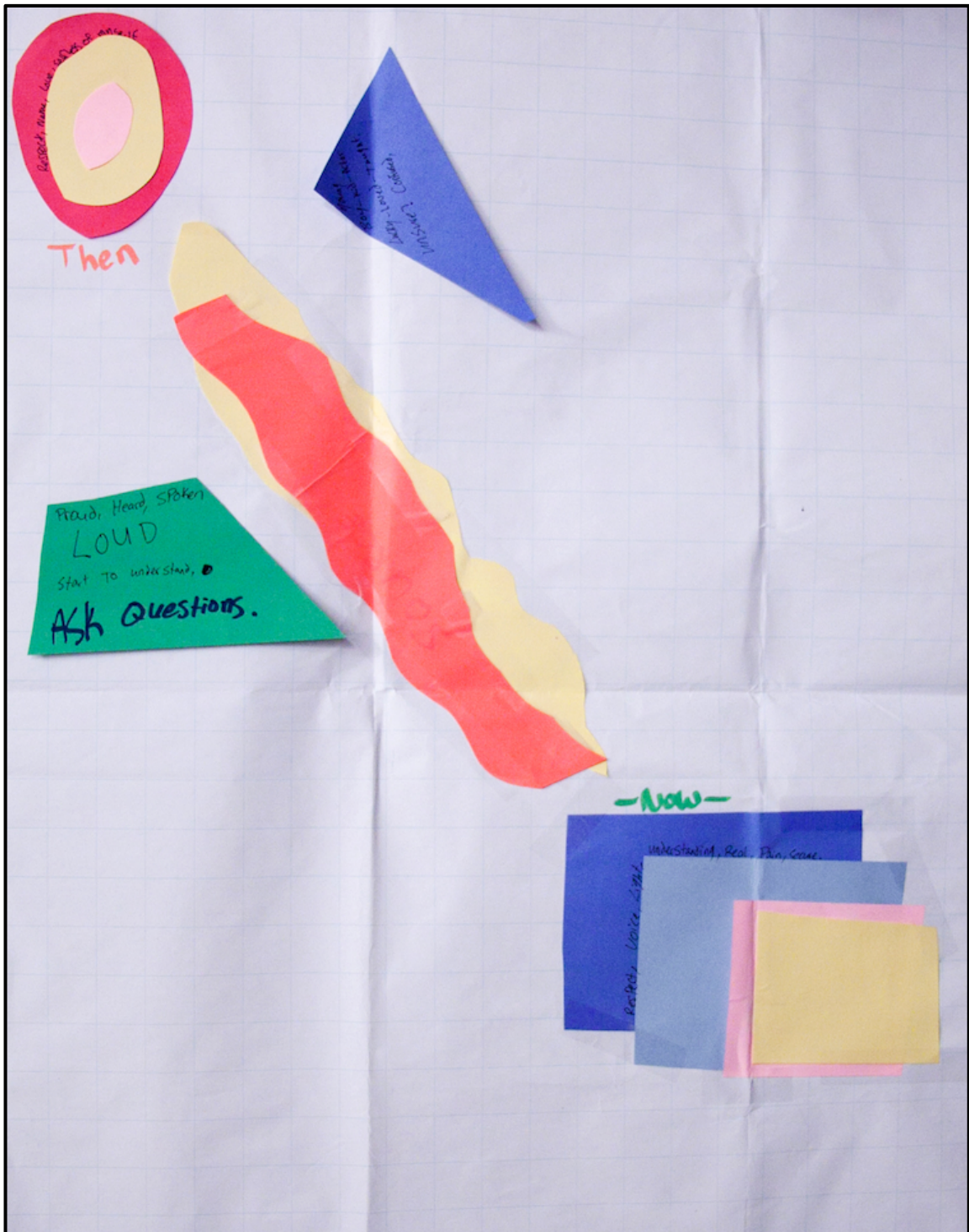
Grace, F, 20, participated 1999-2005 (6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grades)



Michelle, F, 21, participated 2000-2003, 2005 (10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade)



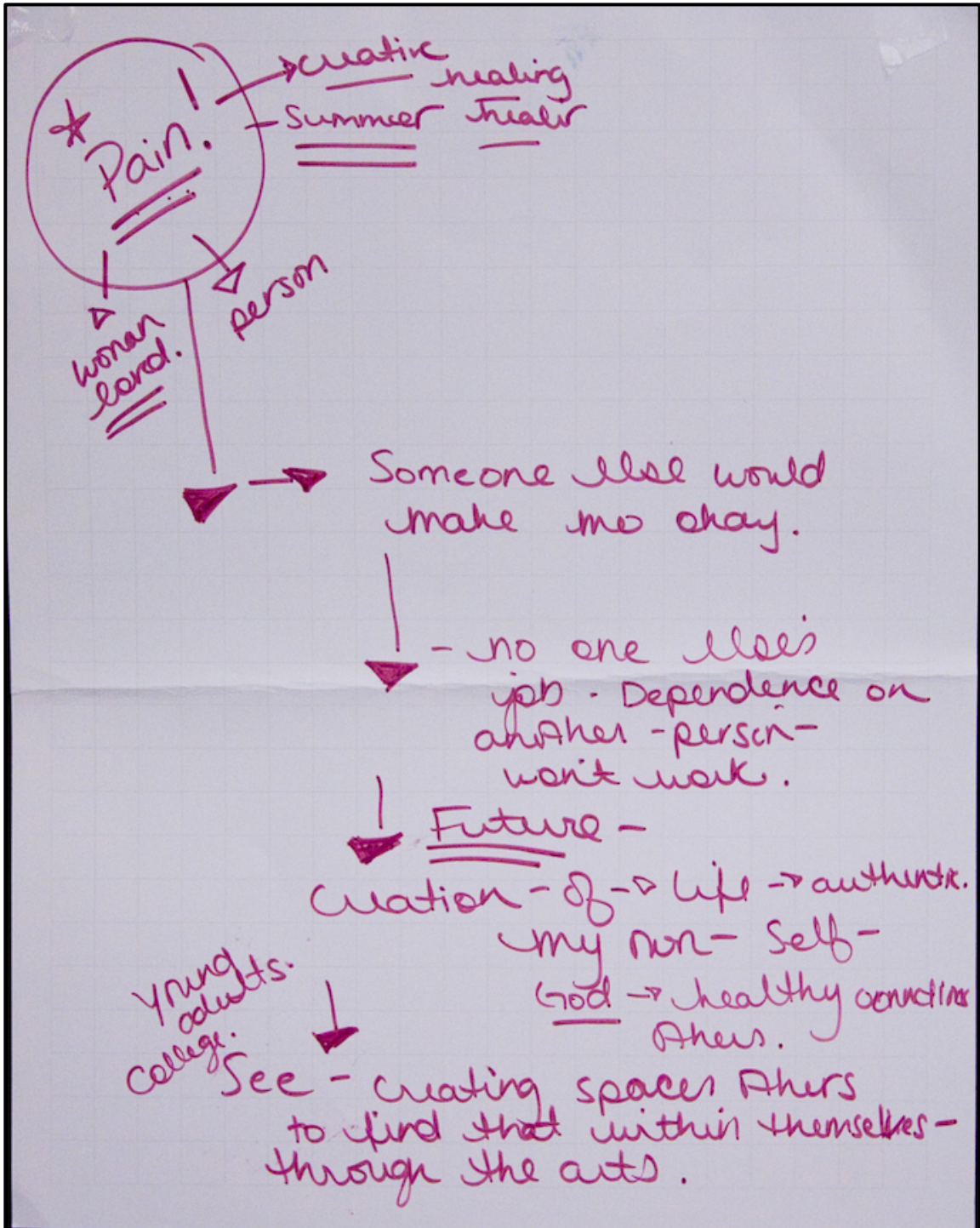
Aiden, M, 22, participated 2001-2004 (9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade)







Elizabeth (Map 2)





## Appendix 5. Report to Leslie Glass Foundation



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Center for Human Environments/Youth Studies Research Group  
CUNY Graduate Center

365 Fifth Avenue, 6<sup>th</sup> floor

New York, NY 10016

Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida, Inc.  
2055 Wood Street, Suite 110  
Sarasota, FL 34237

October 29, 2007

Dear Directors of Planned Parenthood and KT Curran, Director of Source Theatre:

As you know, with the kind and generous support of the Leslie Glass Foundation, for the past eight months we have had the pleasure and privilege of studying the practice and impact of the Planned Parenthood SOURCE Theatre project as it has evolved over the past 25 years. To date we have undertaken intensive interviews with 22 SOURCE members ranging in age from 18 to 42; 35% men and 65% women, of varied racial, ethnic, class and sexuality backgrounds. At this point, we are launching the second phase of our research, a web-based survey to be completed by a sample of up to 200 former SOURCE members.

When we first conceived this project, nearly a year ago, we were already in awe of the SOURCE. Having witnessed the power of *The Day I Opened My Eyes*, and hearing stories from KT and past participants, we knew that there was an important story that should be told, that *needed* to be told. Supported by the arts community in Sarasota, we knew the SOURCE was subverting the conservative forces sweeping through the nation and southwest and central Florida. Instead of silencing youth voices, SOURCE was inviting young men and women to be educated, active and informed about their own health, reproductive, and social choices. Informed -- and creative -- education seemed primary.

However, after listening to the stories of nearly 25 men and women who had participated in the SOURCE beginning in 1982, it became immediately apparent that the story was bigger than we had imagined. SOURCE was more than a community arts program with a sexual education twist...SOURCE was a *lifeline*.

The rich diversity of stories all shared a common thread: SOURCE was like

no other place. Their lives, which were primarily spent at home or at school, forced them to enact various roles, to put on different masks, to continually hide a part of themselves. In SOURCE all of that was left at the door; they could simply *be*. Yes, like youth throughout the nation, they still struggled with stresses of adolescence, for a few depression, addictive drugs, unhealthy relationships, and school. The difference was that in Source these young people were allowed to be honest about their struggles; they were allowed to face them. This vital act, of facing the reality one lives in, had no other outlet, no other place that it could be expressed. But through meetings and performances, movement exercises and improvisation workouts, they were able to release, react to, and reflect on the emotions pulsating through them.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

We write this memo to offer two preliminary conclusions from our research and to make a recommendation. We have been studying the project for more than eight months and have, we believe, some important insights to offer from the analysis.

From a systematic review of all of the interviews and our preliminary survey-contact with a larger population of respondents, it is clear that:

- 1. The SOURCE is a powerful vehicle for empowering young women and men to become peer educators, creatively address the realities of adolescence, and impact their community through participation in the arts.**

The SOURCE intimately and positively affects the young people who are involved, as well as those who are audience members and the young people touched by those who have participated. Our data suggest that once a SOURCE member, these young people carry the passions, commitments, generosity and wisdom of SOURCE to their new surroundings – in college, work, and community organizing. There is a rich diaspora of young adults affected by, and affecting others because of SOURCE.

However, the dramatic impact of SOURCE as a peer education tool is only the first chapter of the broader story of SOURCE. To say that it ends there would be a disservice; rather, it is vital to understand that in this 21st Century in American society, SOURCE is a national model for positive youth development in a country where public and private institutions have become significantly less developmental and more punitive.

A young woman described SOURCE as “a completely liberating experience.” When she was asked to think of a place that was exactly opposite, her response was *school*.

Thus, our second conclusion finds that:

- 2. The SOURCE creates a much needed “free space” for positive youth development, where young women and men can flourish emotionally, intellectually and professionally, while they simultaneously navigate the treacherous waters of inadequate sex**

**education, underfunded and under-resourced classrooms, and vanishing arts programs. In this context young people are learning to be health-ful and helpful, to make informed choices and to organize with others for quality services for all youth.**

By creating a safe environment where adolescents can shed the various masks they spend their days creating, the SOURCE sits in stark contrast to the restrictive, prohibitive, and draining environments for youth. The SOURCE provides a constructive way to combat the “thoughtlessness,” as Maxine Greene (1995) would say, pervasive in modern society. The SOURCE itself is able to provide this mirror to its participants and this is something they carry with them for the rest of their lives; a tool that informs their steps upon graduating from the SOURCE and every step thereafter.

Spaces for youth to co-construct positive identities and realities, to struggle through turbulent adolescent issues, and to find a voice and use it to inform others are quickly diminishing. All of us, throughout our various research efforts and experiences with youth over the last 10-20 years (collectively) have seen the depleting nature of the environments youth have available to them. But in one afternoon of the SOURCE, we saw the stark contrast of life, vitality, vivaciousness, and passion of youth.

### **Recommendation**

The SOURCE is a national model for positive youth development and has much to offer adults interested in youth leadership, sexuality education and theatre. Based on our data-driven findings, and this new understanding of the long and deep reach of the SOURCE, we recommend an expansion of the research, and a re-envisioning of the products that can be produced. As we travel the country and talk about the impact of the SOURCE, educators, youth workers, sexuality practitioners, organizers and parents want to know HOW to create such spaces in their own communities. We believe such a product is both possible, given the research and the work, and fundamentally necessary.

We recommend that the Graduate Center at the City University of New York and the Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida continue our collaboration to develop a series of monologues about personal transformation based on the narrative data for use in live theatre performances as well as for online educational video clip presentations so that youth can appreciate the power of these stories, other educators/organizers can glean the critical elements of such a youth development project, and the essence of the SOURCE can be disseminated broadly.

In sum, we thank you for our collaborations and congratulate you on a project that has deep local and far-reaching national impact. We hope to continue our work with you over the next year.

Sincerely,

Michelle Fine  
Valerie Futch  
Melissa Rivera

## Appendix 6. Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol (Semi-structured format)

#### Opening dialogue:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the Planned Parenthood/SOURCE project. The goal of this project, as you may know, is to understand the role that The SOURCE plays in the life of young adults and how this may or may not affect them in their future. We are conducting interviews with approximately 30-50 individuals as well as an online survey and study of SOURCE documents.

I will begin by going over this consent form, which informs you of your rights as a participant. In this interview, I will ask you questions about your time in The SOURCE, during adolescence, and your current experiences as they relate to The SOURCE. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question in the interview or to end the interview completely at any time. You are being compensated \$20 for your time, and you will receive this regardless of whether or not the interview is completed.

The interview is designed to take approximately 90 minutes. I have a few main questions that I would like to be sure that we cover and you will have the chance to talk about anything you feel is important that I may not have asked about.

If it is alright with you, I would like to audiotape the interview so that I make sure I remember everything we discuss. Only myself and my co-researcher, Melissa (Valerie) will hear this tape. We will have the tape transcribed, and there is a chance that KT (the director of SOURCE) may want to read the transcripts in order to help her understand what The SOURCE means to participants, but all identifying information will be removed. If you decide at the end of the interview, or at any time in the future that you only want sections of your transcript available to her, rather than the entire transcript, please let me know and I will honor that request.

Is it okay if I tape-record this interview?

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

(Note to interviewer: The questions in bold are intended to be asked first. Only return to the other questions if time permits.)

Background: "Before we get started with the actual interview I'd just like to ask a few background questions about your experience with The SOURCE."

1. What years were you involved with The SOURCE? (Years in date format – i.e. 1998-2001 – as well as years in school – i.e. 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grade.)
2. Were you a performer? In what plays?
3. How often did you attend the meetings?

#### Part 1: Involvement in The Source, A Retrospective Look

1. **Tell me a story about your time in The SOURCE, try to go with the first thing that comes to mind.** (Probes: What was it like the first time you walked through the door to The SOURCE? What was your favorite performance, why?)
2. **How do you think your involvement in The SOURCE influenced your relationships with your peers, family members, school, etc.?** (Probes: did you feel supported by your parents/peers to join The SOURCE? Who encouraged you? Did your involvement result in any conflict(s)?)
3. **Why did you join the Source?** (Probes: Did a friend bring you? What activities were you interested in participating?)

4. How was The Source helpful (or, was it helpful) in dealing with the pressures teens face in their everyday lives?

Part 2: Reflections on long-term impact of The Source

1. **Are there times when you are reminded of your experience in The SOURCE? When does this usually occur?** (Probes: Has there been a situation where you have remembered an experience in The SOURCE and used it to navigate that situation? Have you talked about your experiences in The SOURCE with other individuals?)
2. **What are some "lessons" or experiences you learned in The SOURCE that you still carry with you today?** (Probes: Did you learn anything particularly useful from a play? From a fellow member? From the director? What influenced you the most about your involvement in The SOURCE?)
3. How has being in Source affected how you look at the world around you?

Part 3: Current thoughts on issues relevant to The Source

1. **Do you think The Source activities are still relevant today? More or less than they were when you participated? Why, or why not?**
2. **Could you describe for me how you see The SOURCE as it fits into other areas of the community – such as school, community arts/theater, etc.?**
3. Are you currently involved in any theater or peer-theater activities?
4. How would you rate the sex and health education you received in school? In the Source?

#### **SOURCE Follow-Up Interview Questions (May 5, 2010)**

All of the individuals I have chosen for follow-up interviews have had a life-change since the last time we met. I will have about an hour with each. The concepts I'm most interested in expanding on in my dissertation are:

1. Traveling power - given that their lives have changed (births, marriages, new jobs/careers, moving to college) I think I'd just like to ask the same question again "are there times today when the SOURCE comes back to you" to see if the answers are similar in terms of what persists even when lives change.
2. Mapping as method - this is an opportunity to have them revisit the maps. I'll have them with me and I am not sure if I want to have them add on to the maps with another sheet of paper (continue the journey another 3 years to today), edit/comment on the maps (like with sticky notes), or something else.
3. Relational self - I've been thinking a lot about what I've heard in the interviews and there's this sense of "forced identity fragmentation" that occurs in places *outside* of the SOURCE that seems relationally unjust (both inter- and intra-personally). Like, they report not being able to have a true self or be true to themselves outside of SOURCE but being able to be who they were, in all of the complexity/multiplicity, inside of SOURCE.
4. Embodied/emotional self - this may not be a concept to interrogate with the interview but more an analysis idea for the maps.

I realize that in my proposal we had discussed taking more of a life-history approach, but I'm worried I won't be able to adequately do justice to that method. It seems I'll only have about an hour with each of them and I'm just worried I'm not going

to be able to get that level of data. So I think I'd like to keep the questions broader and have it more conversationally structured.

Elena:

Elena was on the original design team and completed a map (attached) and an online survey. In her interview she talks about the openness of the SOURCE, her close relationship with KT, and her decision to abstain from sex until marriage. Since leaving SOURCE she has been involved as a co-director and has had a baby girl with her (ex)boyfriend. She was planning on double majoring in education and social work and I'm not sure if she's still in school or not. She still seems to have a close relationship with her family. There's an obvious question for her - the baby - but I'm not sure how to ask that.

Elizabeth:

Elizabeth was one of the older participants in the design team. Her map is so filled with words that it is hard to read but it essentially depicts a full circle with her going off to school, struggling through relationships and eating disorders, and coming back to Sarasota to help with SOURCE and find her footing. She now directs her own theatre ensemble and is very involved in the Sarasota arts community.

Interview Questions:

I would like to begin the interview by asking them to tell me about what has happened in their lives in the last three years, since we last spoke.

Then I would like to show them their map and:

- 1) Get their reaction to it. Do they remember it? Would they add or change anything?
- 2) Have them amend it to include the last three years.
- 3) Let them edit/correct/embellish it in any way (if they want).

I would like to ask them next about the way SOURCE, or the experiences learned in SOURCE fit into their lives now, and if this is any different than it was then.

Has their perspective on the meaning of their SOURCE participation changed or grown in any way? (Especially since they felt so political and we've had a shift in government.)

Finally, I think I would like them to end the interview by telling me about their favorite space/place in their current lives. Where is it? What do they love about it? How does it make them feel? Who else is in that space (either physically or mentally)? When do they get to go there?

And, of course, do they have any questions for me?

## Appendix 7. Confidentiality Policy

## **CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

Confidentiality is one of the main ethical principals of The SOURCE Teen Theatre and Planned Parenthood of SW and Central Florida. Because The SOURCE deals with important health issues of a personal nature, at times members will divulge private information in the course of the theatre work. Anyone who chooses to become a member of The SOURCE Teen Theatre deserves to know that her/his right to privacy will be protected by staff and volunteers at all times.

1. All conversations involving personal issues are private and confidential.
2. Any personal conversations that you hear indirectly between staff and SOURCE members are private and confidential.
3. Any time a SOURCE member is on Planned Parenthood Property they should respect the right to privacy of Planned Parenthood clients, and clients should not be recognized unless they acknowledge you first.
4. At no time should private information about SOURCE members or Planned Parenthood clients be shared without their permission.

Signature:

Date:

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