Spotlight on Memory: Memory Through Psychology and Theater

by

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Lights Up, Curtain Rises 4
   An Introduction to Memory and Theater

Chapter 2: What’s My Line? 11
   An Interview-Based Investigation of Actors Use of Memory

Chapter 3: Memory Behind the Curtain 28
   An Interview-Based Investigation of Designer and Directors Use of Memory

Chapter 4: The Play is Memory 47
   A Review of Presence of Memory in Theater

Chapter 5: Is It All Just an Act? 62
   Psychological Analysis of the Portrayal of Memory in Theater

Chapter 6: The Final Curtain 72
   The Use of Theater and Psychology to Understand Memory in Everyday Life

Appendix 1 75

Appendix 2 76

Appendix 3 77

References 78
Chapter 1: Lights Up, Curtain Rises

An Introduction to Memory and Theater

Human memory is a topic found in almost all areas of psychological study. In the clinical realm, traumatic memories are believed to be associated with disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Cognitive psychology studies the formation, retrieval, and utilization of memory. Social psychology proposes that a culture of people can share some particularly salient memories (Hirst & Manier, 2008). Additionally, Carl Jung claimed that there is a collective unconscious memory that all people share (Jung, 1959).

Unsurprisingly, memory is also something that every person uses and experiences in almost every aspect of everyday life. Memory is used to recall the title of a book, drive a car, decide where to eat lunch, and countless other things. In many of these cases, the use of memory is unconscious or at least unnoticed (Squire & Dede, 2015). Furthermore, as researchers like Elizabeth Loftus and her colleagues have shown, many people often misunderstand and overestimate the accuracy of their memories (2003; E. F. Loftus & J. C. Palmer, 1974). Models of memory processes have frequently been developed to explain complex psychological mechanisms and theories.

As students of psychology, we know that the real world is generally not as perfect or as sterile as a laboratory setting. Not everyone in the world understands their experience of memory in the same way, or as it is described in formal research, therefore, it can be difficult to match a person's perceived experience of memory with
the expected experience based on previous research in psychology. As a researcher, I often need to remind myself that the results of a study in a lab, though an essential tool for understanding psychology, does not represent the full picture of the mind at work. This point is not to disregard the immense merit that research has in the psychological field, but I would argue that utilizing a real-life setting can further the findings. By taking the psychological understanding of memory out of the preverbal white tower and examining it through an art form which is focused on human experience, I aim to show how memory function in everyday life.

Theater has been an integral part of my life for over eight years. As I began studying psychology, I started to see how psychology and theater can be intertwined. Theater is a uniquely human form of expression. A group of people comes together as actors, designer, directors, and creators to produce a story or experience to share with other people. Unlike many other art forms, theater is designed for both the creators and the consumers to be together in the room. Memory is used extensively throughout the conception and production of theater. An actor memorizes pages of text, the memory of the clock in a set designer’s childhood room influences her design of a show, and a director makes decisions on how to portray fear on stage based on remembered experiences of the emotion. Memory is not only used in the creation of theater, but it is displayed in the play performed on stage. Whether overt or subtle, memory is a universal theme in plays from all times and places.

The Two-Pronged Approach

In this project, I set out to examine memory in theater in two significant ways. The first way is through a series of interviews with actors, directors, and designers in
the Wesleyan community. These interviews were designed to prompt the interviewees to examine how they believe they use memory in the creation of theater. Actors explained techniques they used to memorize lines, movements, and songs. Designers and directors reflected on their use of memory when watching or creating a show.

The second approach for examining the relationship between memory and theater is through an in-depth analysis of a collection of shows which I found to portray different types of memory on stage. It is through the dramatic representation of memory in theater that I hope to demonstrate the perceived understanding of memory in relation to the current scientific knowledge of the topic.

The two approaches for examining memory in both the creation of and stories told through theater will give a holistic understanding of the topic. These approaches allow for an investigation in how people believe they use memory and how they represent their memories to others. Studying psychology and theater together provides a better understanding of how memory functions in everyday life.

**Approach One – Interviews**

Though there is relatively little psychology-based research on the relationship between theater and memory, one area in which researchers have investigated is how actors learn copious amounts of lines for plays. Helga Noice, the leading researcher in the field of actor memorization, has shown that there are significant differences in how professional actors and inexperienced actors memorize text (1991, 1992). She has also examined the relationship between body movement and speech recall (Noice & Noice, 2001). Even with Noice’s work, there is still a lot that is unknown in how
actors perceive memory use in theater, therefore, this study hopes to provide new insights into this topic.

This investigation will be one of the first to examine how designers and directors use memory in the creation of theater. Previous theater scholars have considered the representation of different historical periods in theater and how directors draw attention on stage, but none of these writers were examining the direct relationship between theater makers and memory (Arnold, 1991). Despite the lack of research on the connection of psychology and theater design and direction the two topics are still found to be linked. The introductory chapter of a theatrical design textbook mentioned different psychological topics and ideas more than once. For example, the author referenced the psychological theories of color and perceptual blocks explicitly along with many other implicate references to different psychological principles (Gillette, 2013). The connection between the two perspectives is apparent in the use of psychological terms in a theater design textbook aimed at novices.

These interviews are based on the assumption that being experienced in theater will give the interviewee a unique insight into the relationship between theater and memory. A theater teacher in high school once told me that studying about theater would ruin watching theater for me because I would lose the ability to view a play without thinking about the mechanics or decision making behind every scene. Though I can still enjoy theater as a form of entertainment, I did find that as I learned about design, I began to look at theater more analytically. The goal of the interviews
is to utilize the analytical eye which comes from working in theater to see how designers, directors, and actors view their use of memory in theater.

**Approach Two – Play Analysis**

The next two chapters will focus on play analysis through the lens of memory. The first chapter will delve into examples of how playwrights embody memory on stage. Plays examined in this section include *How I Learned to Drive, Hamlet, The Glass Menagerie, Fences,* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.* The depictions of memory in these plays range from dramatic reenactment to a ghost haunting the characters on stage. By examining the diverse examples of memory in theater I hope to understand better how different playwrights are portraying memory to the audience and how this can connect to the experiences of memory in everyday life.

The second chapter will examine how the examples of memories in plays found in the previous section relate to current research on memory in psychology. An article written by Attilio Favorini on the use of memory in theater argued that memory is as important as race, gender, or class, stating "…memory helps locate self on a continuum of characteristics socially constructed and both autonomically and auto-noetically determined, that is, driven by one's neurocognitive profile and history. We may 'have' memory, but memory also has us: it tells us who we are" (2007). I aim to partially close the gap between the laboratory and everyday life by looking at the relationship between psychological research and the representation of memory on stage. By examining what is similar between the two topics, I aim to aid in
understanding people experience of memory compared to what scientific research leads us to believe about memory.

Similar to John Seamon’s book *Memory and Movies*, which looks at how film portrays memory, I propose to examine how the representation of memories in a play can aid in the understanding of human memory (Seamon, 2015). I have selected five plays from ones I have encountered in my work in theater which I believed to contain strong and diverse examples of memory on stage. These plays do not all portray memory explicitly, but they each engage with the topic of memory in some form. I have chosen plays from a variety of time periods. One of the advantages of looking at theater rather than film is that I am not limited to stories written in the 20th and 21st century. The different periods will allow for some of the plays to have been written before the rise of psychology while the playwrights of the more modern plays could have benefited from information learned in psychological research.

I have chosen only to use plays Western authors have written for two reasons. The first is my lack of knowledge of the history and context of non-Western plays. The second reason, and by far the most important, is that there have been studies which have suggested that people of different cultures, especially Eastern and Western cultures, have significant differences in encoding and maintaining of memory (Conway, Wang, Hanyu, & Haque, 2005; Q. Wang, 2008). One study examining the different in priming between Asian American and Caucasian American participants as well as cultural differences in memory concluded that “…cultural self-construal serves both as a constructive filter affecting the way information is initially encoded and represented in memory, and as a reconstructive filter that shapes
memory over the course of retention and at the time of each retrieval” (Qi Wang & Ross, 2005). This finding suggests that a person's culture could be significantly changing the way they encode and represent their memories which could then impact the way they portray their memories in plays. Based off of these findings, I have decided to focus the scope of this investigation to plays from Western cultures.

**Rising Action**

It is fair to say I have chosen an unusual approach based off of the scarcity of previous research in memory utilizing theater and psychology. However, I believe the two areas of study work well together to increase the understanding of memory in everyday life. By using an art form like theater which is designed to portray the human experience to model and understand psychological theories, the theories can be related better to actual experiences. The interviews will offer a glimpse into the understanding of memory of student theater makers in their creation of theater. The analysis of the plays aims to examine the artist’s representation of the playwright’s beliefs of memory. By comparing the presence of memory in theater to the current research, I will be able to show the differences in perception and experiences of memory. It is through these two approaches that I will examine how theater and psychology can work together to increase the understanding of memory in everyday life.
Chapter 2: What’s My Line?

An Interview-Based Investigation of Actors Use of Memory

Introduction

Memorization is an essential aspect of an actor's life since it is in their job description to be able to learn and recall pages of text at a time. Additionally, they are often required to remember specific movements and the words to songs while on stage. Despite the extensive use of memory in acting, the relationship has not been the subject of extensive psychological research.

One of the principle psychological investigators of the memorization techniques of actors is Helga Noice, who was referenced in the previous chapter. Noice interviewed professional actors and found that they widely reported memorizing text utilizing an elaborative understanding of the motivation and context of the scene (1992). In a separate study, Noice tested novice and professional actors for their ability to memorize lines in a scene utilizing either rote and gist strategies (1991). In the rote condition, subjects were told to memorize their lines and received a piece of cardboard which only allowed them to read one section of the script at a time (Noice, 1991). In the gist condition, subjects were told to study the scene as if they were going to audition for a role in the play. Researchers then gave the participants an elaborated recall task in which they wrote down all the lines they recalled from the script and any accompanying thoughts they had during the study period (Noice, 1991). Noice found that professional actors made significantly more elaborations of the script than novice actors in both conditions and were more likely
to take the perspective of the character for whom they were reading. She concluded that actors approach learning complex material by taking the perspective of the character and making inferences on the character's plan even in rote conditions while people inexperienced with acting did not (Noice, 1991). She also found that actors would create different mental maps of the text based on the character's motivations rather than the actual chronology of events in the script (Noice, 1991).

Additionally, Noice and Noice reported a study which found that when people were given physical movement to perform while learning a speech, they were better able to recall the words of the speech than when the same participants were told to stand still while learning the same text (2001). This finding suggests that having movement and gesture while learning a script will aid in a person's ability to remember the words. There is a large body of work done on different memory topics which can be used as a basis for this investigation outside the realm of work specifically focused on memory in acting. A study looking at the ability of expert and novice dancers to memorize dance sequences found that previous knowledge of the movements aided in their ability to learn random dance sequences (Jean, Cabopi, & Ille, 2001). The results of this study could imply that experience with a movement could be related to a person's ability to recall the movement while on stage.

In some theatrical productions, an actor must memorize songs alongside spoken lines. It is a widely-held belief that it is easier to remember words with a melody than everyday speech. However, there has been a relatively small body of research into this belief. One study found that people who repeatedly watched the *School House Rock* music video about the Preamble of the United States constitution...
had better short- and long-term memory for the words of the Preamble than people who were repeatedly shown a non-musical version of the video (Calvert & Tart, 1993). However, they did not find a difference in memory when participants were only shown the musical and spoken videos once (Calvert & Tart, 1993). Another study found that words learned to a melody lead to a higher percent of recall in a later test than those learned to the rhythm of a metronome or with no accompaniment (Wallace, 1994). The researcher concluded that melody played a significant part in enhancing memory rather than just providing rhythm (Wallace, 1994). These findings suggest that memorizing words in a song structure should be easier than plain-spoken text.

Based on these previous studies, I created a set of interview questions for actors in college asking about their experience memorizing spoken lines, gesture and movement, and songs. The interviewees were also asked about times when they had difficulties or failures in memory. This investigation is a self-reported inquiry and not an experiment testing the memorization ability or styles of the actors. I have chosen to interview college students rather than professional actors because college students who act in theater will often fall in between the experience levels of people who have never participated in theater and those who work in theater professionally. I believe this fact gives them a different perspective from the professional or inexperienced actors that researchers typically select for a study in this field.

Through the interview process, I aim to investigate the perception of memory in theater by comparing what student actors believe about memory with what is currently know about memory in psychology. I predict that a majority of the
participants will state that they use the meanings of the lines to help memorize. I also believe a majority will say they use the motivation of the movements to aid in remembering them later on. Finally, I expect that most participants will find that it is easier to memorize songs rather than spoken lines.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited by fliers and Facebook posts on Wesleyan student Facebook pages. Involvement in the study was strictly voluntary, and participants were not paid or given class credit for their participation. The participants were 10 undergraduate students (7 female and 3 male; mean age = 19.3 [SD = 1.16]). The Wesleyan Psychology Ethics Committee approved the study and recruitment method.

Participants self-identified as actors, but some participants had experience in both acting and directing or designing. These participants chose the group they believed most closely aligned with their expertise. All participants needed to have at least three years of experience in acting to be included in the study.

Interviews

The interviews were one-on-one, semi-structured interviews in private rooms. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and a portion of the participants knew the researcher before the meeting. The researcher recorded all of the interviews and transcribed selected parts. All participants answered the same set of questions, and the researcher asked additional questions if it was deemed relevant. After the interview, participants filled out a questionnaire giving information on their demographics, number of years of experience in theater, and the estimated number of
participated shows. Participants were also asked to rate their memorization ability on a scale from 1 to 10.

Data Analysis

Responses from the interviews were organized into different categories for each topic question. The researcher developed the categories after all of the interviews were conducted which were based on the responses given. The researcher determined which category the responses fell into based on the content of the answer. One person could have responded in multiple categories for the same question.

Excel was used to run statistical analysis on the results of the demographic forms to calculate the averages and standard deviations.

Results

Based on the self-reported data from the participants, the average number of years participated in theater was 9.6 years [SD = 3.67]. The average number of shows they had performed in is 26 [SD = 18.74]. Participants self-rated their memorization ability as an average of 7.8 [SD = 1.03].

See Appendix 1 for results from interviews.

Discussion

Throughout the interview process, it became clear that all the participants understood how important memory is to acting. They were all able to describe their particular preference of technique for memorization. Despite a clear focus on memory, all but one of the participants were able to remember a time that they forgot something in a dress rehearsal or during a show. When they were asked to recount these moments, I noticed that many of the participants seemed to be made
uncomfortable by recalling the memory. One actor articulated this feeling the following way:

“It is an actor's bread and butter to recall those things [lines] like they are nothing. Although, for a really long time I felt really confident about it sometimes [forgetting lines] just happens. It made me feel a lot of shame because it should be something that should be second nature to me and yet I am about to perform this in front of a lot of people soon.”

This notion of feeling shame or embarrassment when an actor is unable to recall a line help to illustrate how important memory is to an actor.

*The Debate About Techniques*

Unlike the findings in Noice's interviews of professional actors, the actors interviewed in this study did not show an outstanding preference for one specific technique of memorization (1992). All of the participants said they would use a variety of methods to some extent. Some participants claimed to have one primary technique and would occasionally use another if the text was difficult while others said the method they used depended on the type of lines they needed to learn. Additionally, some participants noted that they usually used multiple techniques for every show.

Despite these variations, the most common response was that people relied on understanding the meaning and the motivation of a scene to memorize a line. Five of the ten people interviewed reported they use this technique to memorize text. One participant described their memorization as the following: "I would say that I memorize semantically. Usually, if I mess up on my lines, it's because I am saying what they mean because I memorize the meaning." This trend is supported by the
findings in previous research on an actor's ability to memorize text (Noice, 1991). Three people also stated that they would reread the whole script multiple times while learning their lines. Though this is technically rote learning, this response could be giving the actor a better comprehension of the story as a whole, thus, increasing their understanding of the meaning and context of the lines as well.

The next most common technique people reported using to memorize lines was learning the lines in the rehearsal process. Three of the participants said that they did not usually need to practice lines outside of the rehearsal rooms so did not regularly use other techniques. It is difficult to connect this technique with any particular psychological mechanism because it is dependent on the type of work that the actors and directors are doing in the rehearsal room. If the actor is delving into the meaning and motivation behind the text during rehearsal, this would be an example of gist learning for the actors. If the actor is learning the lines solely from running them over and over again in the rehearsal room that would support the use of rote learning. Based off my own experience in theater, I suspect that it likely a mixture of the two types of learning techniques. It would be unusual for a director not to lead the actors through any type analysis of the scenes and an actor will often be asked to practice the scene many times in the rehearsal room before the show.

Three out of the ten people interviewed said that they liked to move in some way while they are learning their lines. One participant reported that they were once told to walk around while rehearsing the lines and found that doing so was effective for them to learn the lines and so has adopted the technique. Another participant talked about how they would like to recite their lines while doing simple tasks like
cleaning a room or cooking which they said allowed them to practice recalling the lines while doing other things. A previous scientific study found that pairing line learning with movement increased recall ability compared to only using verbal analysis (Noice & Noice, 2001). However, the movement used in this study was related to the lines of the script while the movement the participants described were not. A different study found that walking on a treadmill or performing other very light physical activity during the encoding of foreign-language vocabulary words increased the recall in comparison to encoding while at rest (Schmidt-Kassow et al., 2014). This finding could help to explain why some of the participants found that doing mild physical activity helped them learn their lines.

Two people said that they like to write the first letter of every line while they are trying to learn sections of text. Both of them said they use this specifically to memorize lines in Shakespearean plays. This technique was not one I had ever heard of, but upon further research, it does seem to be a technique that some professional actors report using (Metz, 2014; New York Film Academy, 2017). It has long been shown that the first letter of a word is the most effective for cueing a word in comparison to the middle or end letters (Horowitz, White, & Atwood, 1968). Therefore, it is possible that if the actors have already learned the lines as individual units, writing down the first letters to use as a cue sheet could aid with recall or function as a mnemonic device.

The rest of the techniques fall into the category of rote learning since they are all different variations of reading or listening to the lines on repeat without purposefully analyzing the words. These techniques included using flashcards,
listening to recordings of their lines, rehearsing lines to self, running lines with another person, or using a line learner application on their phone. Each of these responses had only one to two people giving these answers. I did not expect so many actors to use this type of memorization, but I have developed two possible reasons why this could be the case. The first is that since the subjects used in these interviews are student actors, they likely have not had much experience in a professional theater setting as a professional actor would have had. It is possible that they would have been exposed to more meaning-based techniques if they had been working in a professional theater rather than children's or high school theater, as many of the actors interviewed reported to have been their experience. The second proposal I have for why people who have worked in at least three years of theater use rote learning while professional actors will use techniques which promote deeper learning is that they are unknowingly analyzing the text while using these techniques. While exposing themselves to the recordings or running lines, the interviewed actors might be thinking about the meanings and motivation behind the words. However, I cannot support either of these theories based on reports from these interviews.

It is also worth noting that using a line learning app, running lines, rereading lines, and listen to recordings of the lines were all techniques that some participants reported to dislike. One participant interviewed in this study made the following statement about why they did not like listening to a recording of herself saying the lines: "It promotes repetition. You aren't actually internalizing what you are saying, and you can fall into more patterns that way". This response suggests that some of the
people interviewed had found that techniques that are focused primarily on repetition do not work as well as those that promoted deeper learning.

All but two people interviewed in this investigation stated that they preferred rehearsing their lines out loud over repeating them in their head. Of the two people who said that they did not specifically prefer rehearsing lines out loud, one said they had never noticed a difference. The other said that they would usually repeat lines in their heads because that allowed them to rehearse in public without drawing attention to themselves. Studies have found that rehearsing words you are trying to learn vocally is significantly more effective that rehearsing words sub-vocally, as long as they are phonologically familiar (Kaushanskaya & Yoo, 2011).

The findings from different psychological studies support a majority of the techniques preferred by interviewed actors. These findings are a great example of how actors may have a deep understanding of memory even if they are not necessarily studying it in a scientific setting. Most of the people interviewed said that they settled on the techniques they currently use through trial and error which, in some ways, is the bases of all science.

*Shakespeare and Other Challenges*

Difficulty memorizing Shakespearean texts was the most common response that the participants gave when recalling a moment in which they had had a particularly tricky time learning lines. Since Shakespeare wrote his plays around four hundred years ago, many of the words and sayings he used do not have the same meaning today (Crystal & Crystal, 2018). Many of the participants who said that they found Shakespeare challenging stated that they would try to understand the meaning
of the lines or even write modern English translations of the lines to aid with their learning. This response suggests that people have trouble learning lines when they do not understand the meaning of what they are saying. One participant described learning Shakespeare in comparison to modern text: "If your character thinks similar to you that you are able to get the words from the context of what you're doing. With Shakespeare, there is a bit of translation that needs to be done, ".

Two participants said that they remember having a hard time learning dialogue which contains many speech fragments rather than complete sentences. Participants described these types of lines as hyper-realistic speech, including "ums and hms" or having scripted mistakes or restarts. It is possible that one of the reasons they found this difficult is that filler words like these do not have any meaning and are something that most people use in everyday life without noticing that they are saying them. Additionally, scripts written in this style are relatively uncommon in theater so the actors needing to memorize these lines might have a harder time since they are more experienced learning perfect speech.

The last two types of speech that the interviewees described as being difficult were quick dialogue and repetitive lines. It is possible that the actors find these types of lines difficult for similar reasons since they both require a large number of different cue lines. One study focused on retrieval-induced forgetting found that recalling one item would significantly increase the rate of forgetting of similar things (Anderson, Bjork, & Bjork, 1994). This result could suggest that when actors have trouble recalling the short and often similar lines found in quick dialogue, they are experiencing retrieval-induced forgetting from the early lines in the dialogue.
The Art of Forgetting

All but one of the actors interviewed could remember a time when they forgot a line on stage. When working in a medium that relies so heavily on human memory, it is not surprising that it will sometime fail. In many of the acting classes I have taken, it was not a question of if you would forget a line but what you should do when that happens. Terms like "mind freeze" were often used to describe the moment when the participant could not remember their next line. Many of the actors interviewed described feeling panic until they can continue the scene by someone else hinting at their forgotten line or skipping forward to a later line they could recall, for example.

The most common reason that people gave for why they believed they had forgotten the lines is that they had not rehearsed them enough. This reason is the most logical explanation for why someone forgot their line, but I do not believe it depicts the full picture for most people. For example, multiple participants who gave this answer said that a time that they forgot a line was while reciting a Shakespearean monologue for a competition in high school. In a Shakespeare competition, the student is tasked with memorizing a speech from a Shakespearean play by themselves to recite in a standalone performance. If a young actor is required to learn a monologue out of context and without the aid of directors and fellow castmates, the issues of not understanding the meanings of the lines in a Shakespearean play addressed earlier could be compounded. Similarly, another participant believed they forgot their lines because they did not understand the scene they were in and could not use the story arc or the motivation to cue the lines. This belief is supported by a
previous study which found that a lack of context for information significantly hindered recall (Bransford & Johnson, 1972).

The next most common response for why an actor thought they forgot a line was that they were very nervous or expressing overwhelming emotions. High cognitive test anxiety has been shown to diminish recall performance in both external pressure and no pressure testing situation (Cassady, 2004). Therefore, it would not be surprising that people who are experiencing anxiety on stage would run into similar issues. This fact could relate to why multiple people remember forgetting their lines while performing in theater competition because they are in a more situation stressful. However, taking a test and reciting lines are not directly similar situations so more research would need to be done to understand the impact of nervousness or strong emotions in theater.

The last two reasons that people cited for why they believed they had forgotten their lines was that they were exhausted or not paying attention in the scene and missed their cue line. I think these situations are less about a failure in memory and more likely caused by a lack of focus.

*A Simple Gesture*

When asked how they memorized gestures or blocking for a scene, four out of the ten actors interviewed said that they would use the motivation or reasoning from the script to help remember. Three participants stated that they usually learned the motions in the rehearsal room and another three participants said that they would write the necessary blocking in their script both of which could help them to learn the words and the motions together and thus increase the relationship between them.
These responses are very similar to the finding of Noice’s study referenced at the start of this chapter (2001).

Two participants said that they would visualize movement in their heads and one said that they would sometimes draw out a diagram of the stage and trace out their movements for the scenes. A study on gymnasts between 8-11 years old found that the children who scored higher in visual imageries showed significantly better memory for gymnastic sequences than those who scored lower (Ille & Cadopi, 1999). It is possible that there is a similar trend for actors using visual imagery to memorize motions, but more research would need to be done in this area to come to any more definite conclusions.

Speech or Music

I went into these interviews predicting that everyone interviewed would find learning music easier than learning speech. This hypothesis was based off my own experience learning text and songs and the findings from previous research (Calvert & Tart, 1993; Wallace, 1994). However, I was surprised to see that only seven participants said the music was easier while the rest believed that memorizing spoken lines was easier. There were a variety of reasons that people cited for why they thought one was easier than the other.

The most common reason that the interviewed participants came up with for why they believed that learning the words to a song was easier than learning text was that they could use the melody and harmony to help recall the words. This finding is in line with the results of Calvert and Tart's study looking at the effect of School House Rock reference earlier in this paper (Calvert & Tart, 1993). The actors
interviewed who gave this response seemed to understand that the presence of a melody was able to aid in their learning and recall ability. Similarly, one participant questioned said that they found the musical motifs in shows helpful in learning music because there are often common trends in both the melody and the content of the music in musicals. This extra information could be increasing the available cues for recall.

Participants also reported listening to the recording of the songs they need to learn either to learn the words or for enjoyment. One participant told a story about when they were in *In the Heights*, they had already memorized all of the words from the songs before being cast because they loved the music. Even though listening to a recording of spoken lines was generally found to be a disliked technique it seems that listening to recordings of songs works well for actors. Which, in retrospect, should not be surprising because most people know the words to their favorite song even if they did not make an active effort to learn it. Similarly, one participant said they often memorize the words while they practice learning the notes and rhythms for the song through repetition.

Each participant gave a different reason for why they found learning spoken text easier than music. One participant said that they did not believe they had a strong understanding of the technical aspects of music which caused them to need to practice more. The next participant noted that music was harder to memorize because there were more aspects to remember like the notes, words, and rhythms. The last participant said that they would be distracted by the music which would cause them to forget the words. All of these reasons rely on the fact that there are technically more
parts to think about when singing a song than when speaking text. However, these actors did not find that the aspects of melody were helpful in recall like some of the other actors did.

*What Does It All Mean?*

The most obvious conclusion from the interviews conducted with the ten actors is that memory is a significant factor in an actor's life. In their interview, one actor described their relationship to memory as the following:

"I think in theater the memory and memorization should come more from it being a story that is happening. Every time you do it you are not memorizing something that has already happened, but you are reciting something that is happening in the moment. I think that one of the hardest things in theater is taking that leap”

This person is commenting on the unusual situation in theater in which actors are required to memorize a collection of lines, sometimes pages worth, but when they recall the lines on stage, they must make it look like they are saying the words for the first time every time. They are trying to make rehearsed movements and gesture seem natural and spontaneous. The first step they take to do this is to learn the words, songs, or lines as if it were second nature.

A common phrase used when describing learning lines was that the participants wanted to get the words "in their body." When asked for further explanation of what that meant one participant said the following:

"It has to just become part of you and just like second nature, so you know what comes next. You know it in your heart. It's not just in your head, and you are not pushing to pull it out of your mind. You can concentrate on your performance and being in the moment”.
I am not sure how to quantify this idea in the psychological setting, but they seem to be describing reaching a point in memorization where it is not effortful to recall. In the future, an examination of what it means for a person to memorize text so thoroughly that it is "in their body" could offer a unique insight into memory.

Through the responses in these interviews, it became clear that when memorizing movement or lines, even college actors rely on the meaning and motivation behind them. Besides that, the participants interviewed primarily reported using memorization techniques that are supported with findings from psychological research. The results from these interviews support my theory that the actors have an essential relationship with memory and their understanding of this relationship can provide valuable information to the psychological community. However, this is just an initial investigation, and none of the findings here are definitive. They are, nevertheless, still an essential exploration of a topic which the psychological community has largely ignored. In the future, there is a lot of work that can and should be done on the use of memory in theater as a way to increase the understanding of memory as a whole.
Chapter 3: Memory Behind the Curtain

An Interview-Based Investigation of Designer and Directors Use of Memory

Introduction

Though psychologists have done little research on the relationship between actors and memory, there is even less research into the relationship between designers and director and memory. Because there is little previous research on this topic most of this discussion is designed to be a guide for future research. I was inspired to investigate this connection when an advisor for a show I was designing asked me what I wanted the audience to remember from what I had done. She said that we as designers could not expect the audience to remember everything so we should choose a few things that we want to be memorable. Since then, I have been interested in the question of how designers and directors deal with memory. I do not think this relationship is as immediately apparent as the relationship between actors and memory, but I trust it will be equally as enlightening.

Some researchers have examined the presence of specialized memory and perception of art found in visual artists. One study found that an artistically trained participant spent significantly less time looking at familiar objects and more time looking at structural features of a painting in comparison to participants with no artistic training (Vogt & Magnussen, 2007). They also found that the trained artist correctly remembered a significantly higher number of pictorial features than their untrained counterparts (Vogt & Magnussen, 2007). It is possible that, like the visual
artist, experienced designers and directors have a significantly different way of working with memory in theater.

To examine this question, I conducted a series of interview questions for college designers and directors about their use and experiences of memory in theater. I have chosen to combine the categories of design and direction in theater because the two are usually interconnected. Directors and designers work together to create what is seen and heard on stage. Most of the questions focused on what the designer or directors believe to be their use of memory when they are involved with a show. I also asked the participants if and how they try to affect the attention or memory of the audience when creating a theatrical production. Understanding and modeling human visual attention is a relevant topic in the psychological community because there is still a great deal unknown about the subject. The next section of interview questions asked the designers and directors to talk about their experiences watching other theatrical works. Specifically, I asked them about shows they had seen which they found particularly memorable and ones that they believed to be easily forgettable. Finally, the designers and directors were asked to explain how they portray a time, location, or context. Their responses should reveal the uses of memory in theater design and direction.

The next step is to compare their testimonies with what is known about memory based on psychological research to understand similarities and differences. This comparison hopes to expose the relationship between the psychological understanding of memory and the perception of memory in an artistic realm. I am specifically talking to student directors and designers because I believe there are
fundamental differences in directing and designing for student theater as opposed to professional theater. Most, if not all theater students want people to come to see their show and for the audience to like it. However, unlike professional theater, which relies on the financial support of the audience to continue, much of student theater is not monetarily tied to the success of the show. I believe that this gives designers and director working in student theater more freedom to examine what they believe to be meaningful or worthwhile rather than what they think will be profitable. So even though student directors and designers generally have less experience than professional directors and designers, I believe they have a different perspective which allows them to respond to the question of how they employ memory in theater.

Through these interviews, I aim to look into the relationship between memory and the technical creation of theater. I believe that both designers and directors will be able to find examples of their use of memory in their craft, even if it is not something they have thought about before. I also aim to show that people with experience in the design or direction of theater have a unique perspective of the use of memory in theater which will enlighten our understanding of memory as a whole.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited by fliers and Facebook posts on Wesleyan student Facebook pages. Participants were not paid or given class credit for their participation. The participants were 10 undergraduate students (7 female, 1 male, and 2 nonbinary; mean age = 19.5 [SD = 1.08]). The Wesleyan Psychology Ethics Committee approved the study and recruitment method.
Participants self-identified as a designer or director. Some participants had experience in acting as well, but they chose the group they believed most closely aligned with their expertise. All participants needed to have at least three years of experience in directing or design to be included in the study.

*Interviews*

This study followed the same structure of the previous study. After the interview, participants filled out a questionnaire giving information on their demographics, number of years of experience in theater, and the estimated number of participated shows. Those with experience in design were asked to list all of the design fields in which they had experience.

*Data Analysis*

Responses from the interviews were organized into different categories for each topic question. The researcher developed the categories after all of the interviews were conducted which were based on the responses given. The researcher determined which category the responses fell into based on the content of the answer. One person could have responded in multiple categories for the same question.

Excel was used to run statistical analysis on the results of the demographic forms to calculate the averages and standard deviations.

*Results*

Based off of the self-reported data from the participants, the average number of years they have participated in theater was 8.75 years [SD = 2.78]. The average number of shows they have participated in is 18.44 [SD = 6.91].
See Appendix 2 and 3 for participant responses.

Discussion

One of the first things I noticed during the interviews that most of the participants had never thought profoundly about many of the interview questions. However, after a moment of consideration, nearly all of them were able to come up with relevant answers. For example, all but one of the participants believed they used memory in their work in theater. The one person who did not say yes said they were unsure because it was not a topic that they had considered before.

Memory in Creation

The most common response interviewed participants gave for their belief of the use of memory in theater was that they utilized memory from their own lives. One additional participant with experience in directing noted that they would often use emotional memories to aid in the portrayal of that emotion on stage. One participant explained their experience of using autobiographical memory as the following:

"I think the artist draws on their personal experience a lot. And when we read a script or interpret a script, we interpret it for ourselves, and we place our own feelings and histories onto the script. The parts that we remember the most are typically the ones that connect most with us because of things that have happened to use, or we have done in the past."

This quote is an excellent example of the trend of designers and directors reporting to use memories from their life both in the work they do in a show and in choosing plays. Most of the participants interviewed are involved primarily in theater outside of work or academic commitment, so are free to choose projects that excite them.
The next most common response was that designers and directors used memories of previously seen theatrical shows. A couple of participants who gave this response said that often the memories of what they had seen other designers or directors do were what inspired them since they were still trying to hone their craft. This response is one of the insights specifically connected to college-age designers and directors since they have had enough experience that they are not novices, but are not quite masters either. Often studies looking at the impact of experience in different fields will only focus on beginners and masters and ignore the people who fall in between those skill levels.

All of the previous responses fall into the category of using episodic memory in the design and direction of theater. It is difficult to quantify these findings in the psychological setting because the use of autobiographical memory is very subjective. There has also been little to no psychological research on the use of episodic memories in design of any kind. However, the architecture community has proposed a model based on the use of knowledge and memory-based reason. One paper describes the model as matching previously seen designs with desired new ideas: "The designer matches the situation to prototypes and conceptual schema. In the matching process, the retrieval of similar designs and relevant precedents is according to the level of specificity of the index which is matched. The search for matching in memory is selective and focused on the relevant examples" (Oxman, 1990). Though this is not a psychological study offering support to this finding, it does show how scholars in other fields believe in the use of memory in design.
Three out of ten of the participants interviewed stated that they needed to use memory to recall a list of tasks they need to do for a show. Two of the three were participants who had had experience in stage managing in which their primary job is to ensure things are going smoothly. They often are responsible for scheduling rehearsals, meeting deadlines, and communicating between actors, designers, and the directors. Because of the role they have taken, it makes sense that they would give examples of task recall rather than the creative use of memory.

Finally, one participant said that they used collective memory when directing theatrical shows. Specifically, they said the following:

"I think that collective memory is heavily tied into theater directing and design but particularly directing because you are so focused on telling a story or how your directions and your actors' choices can drive a story forward. I think all of those choices and interpretations of a story are influenced by this idea of collective memory or generational memory. Specifically, the stories that I am drawn to deal a lot with race and trauma which are heavily engaged with the concept of collective memory and what it means to be interacting within a story or a character that you feel connected to in a personal way and I think that's where memory really ties in."

Although only one person gave this type of answer, I think it highlights the nuanced and vital relationship between theatrical design and direction and theater. This participant has thought about the idea of collective memory in relation to the stories they are telling. As was stated in a previous chapter, studies have shown there is a significant difference in the types of personal memory in some different cultures (Qi Wang & Ross, 2005). Additionally, the topic of collective memory has only recently entered the realm of psychological study (Hirst & Manier, 2008). This participant
shows an understanding of the difference in memory between cultures and the sociological idea that some cultures share memories or trauma.

*Pay Attention Please*

When asked how they influence attention, four out of the ten people said that one way was by controlling the audience’s positioning. The classic orientation in theater is for the audience to be looking straight onto a proscenium stage where all of the action is directly in front of them, boxed in by three walls. These participants said that they would often break from the traditional orientation to influence the attention of the audience. One participant talked about a show they had worked on where the audience was in two isles facing each other with the stage in the middle. They said they wanted to draw attention to the idea of being a voyeur because the audience was forced to look at people who were also watching the action. This technique is not something I had previously considered as being a way to draw attention to specific aspects of a show.

Additionally, one participant said that they would try to do something unexpected and three others said they would use bright or dramatic lighting to draw the attention of the audience to specific aspects of a show. I would argue that changing the orientation of the audience and these lighting techniques function under a similar principle because they are all breaking expectation. When an audience goes to see a theatrical show, they have a particular set of expectations for the experience based on their schema of theater (Cherry, 2019). Therefore, when a play breaks from what is expected, possibly by changing the seating arrangement, the audience is surprised. For lighting, if there is a sudden change from the colors or brightness
which the audience has come to suspect, it can be surprising. Researchers have long shown that unexpected stimuli will often draw attention, even if it is not entirely clear why (Horstmann, 2015). Even though the participants gave different descriptions for the techniques, I would argue that all the ones referenced here involve doing something unexpected. Additionally, these techniques are backed by some psychological research, even if the participants were unaware of the connection.

Two of the interviewed participants said that they would use the staging of the actors on stage to control attention. One of these participants said that they would use different locations or heights to draw attention to a specific actor or group of actors. Though there have been some studies that have shown that repeated location in the visual field can increase attention, there has been nothing to indicate that specific locations draw more attention than others (Saalmann, Pigarev, & Vidyasagar, 2007).

Some of the participants interviewed said that they would use technical elements like costumes, colors of set and costumes, or balancing all of these factors to draw attention. These answers are based on the specific tools that the designers and directors typically use. One participant said that they would also use connected elements within the designs on stage in an attempt to draw attention to the themes of the show itself. Many of the participants talked about how sometimes they will try to make the technical elements all balance out and then at other times they will make one or two things pop out to draw attention to them. A participant described their use of technical elements to attract attention:
“When you are dissecting art or art history, you have line focus or the way that all of the formal elements are used to create images that are interesting. However, with people, you have so many more elements like sound or costumes or whatever, that are also drawing attention. So, to me, directing is a big game of balance.”

The techniques of drawing attention by changing the audience and actor location and unexpected elements were examples of top-down visual processing since they use previously known information to influence the perception. The other methods referenced are more related to bottom-up processing since they rely on image-based perceptions. It is telling that the participants stated that they use methods that utilize both of these processing modes since psychological researchers generally agree that people use both top-down and bottom-up processing for visual attention and perception (Borji, Sihite, & Itti, 2014).

Only one person said that they did not try to influence the attention of the audience when directing or designing. However, the interviewees described a wide array of explanations for how they achieved focused attention. Since it is difficult to study attention in complex situations, it is not surprising that there are no cognitive models to describe the attentional mechanisms for a circumstance like watching a play. Despite these difficulties, many of the techniques described by the interviewed participants aligned with findings from previous studies into attention. In the future, I would argue that looking at the attentional direction in an artistic field like theater will provide valuable insight into understanding the topic as a whole.
Don’t Forget Me

I had anticipated that many of the participants interviewed would have tried to influence what is memorable about their work in theater, but only four said that they had. Three participants said that they had actively attempted not to control what is memorable and the last three said that they were unsure if they had since it was not something they had thought about before. For those who said they try to influence what is memorable to an audience, there was a large variety of answers. Two people said that they try to leave the audience with a specific emotion. Researchers have shown that highly arousing stimuli are more likely to be remembered long-term than minimally arousing stimuli (Bradley, Greenwald, Petry, & Lang, 1992). So, in theory, the idea of causing the audience to experience a highly arousing emotion could strengthen the memory for the show overall.

One participant said that they would try to do something unexpected and another said they try to make something notably different. These techniques are similar to the ones that some participants reported to use to draw attention. McDaniel and his colleges theorized that "distinct" items are more likely to be recalled at a later date than indistinct items partially due to the fact that they draw more attention and are therefore better encoded (1995). It is telling that the techniques reported for the questions about attention were also used to influence memory, so some of the people interviewed are making a connection that drawing attention is inherently going to affect the memory of a show. Similarly, some participants said that they would try to influence an audience's memory by focusing on something they think is important. These participants reasoned that if
they worked hard in one part of the design, the audience would notice the extra work and remember that aspect. This answer is utilizing the understanding that increased attention will usually impact a person's memory, but it is unclear if the increased attention of the designer will impact the attention of the audience.

The last technique a participant reported was that they would work to make a hyper-realistic show which they believed would be more memorable. At first, I thought this answer was related more to preference since the participant said that they preferred shows that were about everyday life rather than a highly theatrical show. However, upon further thought, I realized that previous knowledge and understanding context could increase memory, as was described in the discussion of actor memorization techniques. Therefore, it is possible that people will remember a play in which they have had personal experience with the story better than ones in which they have not. However, this is almost the opposite reasoning from those doing something unexpected.

The three people who said that they did not try to influence what the audience would remember argued that it was either not their place to interfere with other people's memories or that if they attempted to do this, they would be disappointed when they failed. Some participants reported enjoying the subjective aspects found in theater that caused people to remember different things based on their personal experiences and beliefs. The concept of the private ownership of memory is an ethical quandary that I was surprised to find directors and designers considering. Even if they are not directly trying to influence the memory of the
audience, a majority of the participants interviewed are thinking about how others will remember their work.

One to Remember and One to Forget

Besides asking participants about their work, I was also interested in what they found memorable or forgettable about theatrical shows they had seen. I noticed that across participants, many of the things that were reported to make a show memorable were also said to be lacking in the shows they found unmemorable. Half of the participants said that they remembered a show because it did something surprising or that they had never seen before. Conversely, two participants noted that they found a show unmemorable because it was predictable and did not do anything new. This answer had been a significant theme in the responses of what makes a moment memorable in theater. It is possible that this technique was so widely used in this group of participants because they saw a show that was memorable for them because of something surprising, thus encouraging them to start using that as a technique in their work.

Three people said that they remember a show well because it either worked very well or very poorly. Additionally, two participants reported that they recalled shows where all the technical aspects came together. On the other hand, when there were few technical elements on stage or the elements did not connect, one participant found the show easily forgettable. A show can be memorable to anyone if something particularly spectacular goes wrong because the audience is surprised by being pulled out of the plot of the play. However, it is possible that the previous knowledge that experienced directors and designers have about the amount of
work that goes into have a technically perfect show could cause a particularly well-done show to be more memorable for an expert than for a layman. In the future, a study could be done to investigate if experienced directors and designer remember a theatrical production better than in novices.

Two participants said that they found a show particularly memorable because the show elicited an emotional reaction. Additionally, one person said they found a show memorable because they had a personal connection to the story of the show which could increase the emotional responses to the plot. It is from these two answers that I conclude that being emotionally engaged in a show has a significant impact on how memorable it is for experienced theater makers. The most common response for why the participants found a show forgettable was that it was disengaging. It is also worth noting that two participants had said that leaving an audience with a specific emotion was how they tried to influence the memory of viewers for their show.

The other answers given for why a show was found memorable were based on either preference, like enjoying realistic shows, or on a higher understanding of theater than a person would have if they had not worked "behind the scenes" of a theatrical production in the past. These answers again prompt the question if having experience in theater impacts a person's memory of theatrical productions.

Finally, the last two reasons that people reported for why they found a show they saw unmemorable was that their either did not understand the plot of the show and that the show lacked a connection to institutional memory. The first reason relates to the findings in the interviews of actors that understanding the plot
and context were important in memorization of text (Noice, 1991). Unsurprisingly, it seems as though this could also be the case for remembering the show as a whole. The last response a participant gave about a play they forgot was of one their high school had done. According to the participant, the show was such an unpleasant process that no one who had worked on the show was involved in theater at their high school again, so it lost its institutional memory in the theater community there almost immediately. This explanation could support the idea brought up earlier by a participant that there is a collective memory within theater communities. Since no one who had worked on the show was in the community anymore, there was no one to work to keep the memory alive therefore the participant was quick to forget the show.

*The Power of Context Clues*

The last question I asked the designers or directors was about the techniques they use to portray time, location, or context on stage. I described context as a time in someone's life like adolescence or moments surrounding significant historical events. Participants tended to answer for which situations they had had the most experience portraying on stage; therefore, I separated the responses into three categories: time, location, and context. Of all of the questions asked in this interview, the answers given to this question were most affected by the type of jobs the participant had worked in theater in the past.

When trying to portray a specified period on stage, three participants said that they would research the era to try to make their designs as close to what they would have looked like if they were from that time. Specifically, three participants
said they would use costumes and one person would use furniture designed to look like the items found by researching an era. The audience is then expected to use their previous knowledge of how a space or people would have looked or dressed like in different periods. Sometimes, this knowledge will come from the memories of living through those times and sometimes they will come from seeing other depictions of the time.

Two participants also said that they would rely on the speech in the script to portray time. In some cases, that would be an explicit reference to a significant event or date that would tell the audience when the show was set. In other cases, the type of language the characters used would suggest the era of the play. It is easy to pick up that the kind of language spoken in Shakespearean plays, for example, are not modern since it sounds so different from the way people talk now. However, even the presence of dated terms like "groovy," "radical," or "make whoopee" can cue to the audience to the era of the play. Similar to the techniques mentioned before, the use of speech to portray time relies on the expectation that the audience will have some previous knowledge of the era.

When asked how they portrayed locations, the interviewees gave three different answers. The first answer was from one participant said that they would use an autobiographical memory of a similar place. Even though seven people said that they used their memories when directing or designing, they were the only person to say that they would use memories from their lives when portraying location. Another participant claimed that they used the furniture to portray a place. This response makes sense in a theatrical setting because, especially in
college productions, set designers often want to describe multiple locations but do not have the resources to build full rooms on stage. Therefore, furniture can be used to represent different rooms without walls and can quickly move on and off stage. The audience is expected to know that the presence of a bed suggests the scene is set in a bedroom because it is functioning as a cue for the location. Additionally, the presence of a bed with a four-poster canopy suggests a very different setting than a twin-size bed with Hello Kitty sheets to the audience even if they are both bedrooms. Finally, one participant said they were a fan of minimalistic designs on stage and preferred to use subtle aspects of the design to suggest a location. Again, all of these techniques rely on the memory of the audience of different places so that they understand what the designers and directors intend to represent.

The most extensive array of answers participants gave was in response to how they portrayed context. One person said that they would try to talk to a person who had experienced that context or situation. They said in doing so they were able to use the other person's memories and experience to inform the portrayal of a context. Another participant said that they would decide what items on stage had the most emotional value in a particular context and put them to the front of the scene. A third participant reported that they would represent a context by creating a highly stylized scene on stage rather than something realistic. They believed that when a scene is stylized, it allows the audience to connect it to their memory of experiencing an event in that context because it is so abstract they can interpret it as they want. Though these techniques do so in different ways, they all rely on
someone having a memory of the context and being able to connect their memory to what they see on stage.

A participant said that, as a sound designer, they would use music to enhance the emotions in the context. A previous study found that when researchers paired affective pictures with music of the same emotion, subjects rated an increased emotional experience and showed increased activation in brain structures that are involved with emotion processing compared to subjects who only saw the affective pictures. The researchers suggested that this could indicate that just seeing the affective picture was evoking a cognitive mode of emotion perception, and the addition of the music was evoking strong emotional feelings and experiences (Baumgartner, Lutz, Schmidt, & Jäncke, 2006). Based on this research, which was inspired by the use of music in emotional scenes in movies, it is likely that the use of emotional music is enhancing the emotional effect of a scene in theater.

**Conclusion**

Through these interviews, I have shown that though there is a lot that is still unknown about the use of memory in theater, there are trends in responses that raise questions for future research. Memory was clearly shown to be an essential aspect of theatrical design and direction through the answers given by the participants interviewed. In the future, researchers should study the specialization of memory by those experienced in theater, the use of personal memory, and surprise in theater design and direction. Additionally, research could be done on
attentional focus on stage. Answers to these questions focused in theater could enlighten our understanding of memory in everyday life.
Chapter 4: The Play is Memory

A Review of Presence of Memory in Theater

Though it might not be immediately apparent, many plays deal with memory. In some cases, the use of memory is overt as when a character reenacts or reminisces about previous events. In other cases, memory is a subtle theme in the show which shapes the actions of the characters. In this chapter, I will delve into a small collection of plays to examine their use of memory. All of the plays used in this chapter are shows that I have previously encountered while working in theater. The selected works, while not an exhaustive list of all the plays which utilize memory, are a sample of different examples of the use of memory in theater.

The Glass Menagerie

Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie is one of the most well-known examples of a memory play, a term which refers to a theatrical work that is told by a narrator reliving their memories (Bradford, 2019). The story follows the inner turmoil of a mother and her two adult children, Tom and Laura. Tom narrates The Glass Menagerie through a collection of memories he has of living with his mother and sister. Tom address the audience directly in the opening and closing scenes of the play, and for the rest of the show, he plays himself in the reenactment of his memories (Williams, 1999). In the opening monologue, Tom, dressed as a merchant sailor, introduces the audience to the play and the characters. In that monologue he addresses the use of memory in the play:
“The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings,” (Williams, 1999, p. 5).

Tom is pointing out to the audience that what they are watching is a representation of memory and is therefore subject to be warped by time, emotions, and myriad other elements. This point is further emphasized by the stage directions which call for a scrim (a thin diaphanous screen used in theater) to fall in front of the living room to give the room a hazy look. The scrim is only raised during Tom's opening and closing monologues. The script also calls for a screen above the set where different phrases related to the ongoing scene are projected (Williams, 1999). The screen and the scrim help to remind the audience throughout the show that everything happening onstage is a representation of the memories in Tom's head.

The reliving of the memory is not the only presence of memory in *The Glass Menagerie*. The memories of their pasts shape many of the members of the family. The most obvious example is the absent father of the family. In the opening monologue, Tom introduces his father as "a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel" (Williams, 1999, p. 5). The photo of the father is watching over everything that is happening on stage which functions as a visual representation of how his memory is affecting the family. Throughout the play, Tom's mother Amanda is afraid that Tom will be like his father and leave them. The memory of her husband leaving has caused Amanda to smother and nag Tom because some of his traits remind her of her husband. At the end of the play, Tom addresses the audience again after he has left his family and "…followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what
was lost in space," thus fulfilling his mother's fears (Williams, 1999, p. 97).

However, in this last monologue, it becomes clear that it is not the memory of his father which is haunting Tom but the memory of Laura and the guilt for leaving her behind. He feels as though the memory of his sister is chasing him wherever he goes and cannot lose her because the memory is attached to him (Williams, 1999).

Amanda is not only shaped by the memory of her husband but by the memory of her youth as a popular and wealthy debutant in Blue Mountain. Amanda remembers what it was like to live a life of luxury so is often more upset about the family’s tight finances than her children because they have never known life a different way (Williams, 1999). Additionally, Amanda is continuously reminiscing about all the young men who courted her in her youth and is desperate to relive those memories with her daughter Laura. However, Laura is desperately shy, so she does not have many gentleman callers. When Tom brings his friend, Jim, for dinner Amanda transforms herself back into the young southern debutant of her memories. In this scene, Amanda seems more focused on winning Jim's favor rather than setting him up with Laura which furthers the idea that she is trying to relive the memories of her youth (Williams, 1999).

Jim, like Amanda, is trying to relive the memories of his glory days when he comes over for dinner. Tom tells the audience that Jim had been a "hero" in high school but as an adult had fallen significantly short of people's expectations (Williams, 1999). Being fawned over by Amanda and Laura reminds Jim of what it was like to be the beloved hero. This could be why he played into the fantasy for so long before telling them that he was engaged to someone else (Williams, 1999).
The Glass Menagerie is a play that is steeped in memory. It is clear that Williams' wanted the audience to realize that not only "The play is memory," but the character's memories shape every action in the play (Williams, 1999).

**How I Learned to Drive**

Paula Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive* is a play about a woman known as Lil’ Bit, who was sexually abused by her uncle throughout her youth. *How I Learned to Drive* also falls into the memory play category but, unlike Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, Lil' Bit narrates throughout the entire play. The story is told through a series of memories of moments from her adolescence. The plot of the story jumps non-linearly through time including commentary by Lil' Bit as an adult (Vogel, 1997). The two main characters, Lil' Bit and Uncle Peck, are each played by one actor, but the rest of the characters in the show are played by three actors who function as a "Greek Chorus." The members of the Greek Chorus will often go from playing an elderly character to a teen in a matter of seconds. In some scenes, one chorus member will be playing multiple roles at once (Vogel, 1997). It is through these memories that Lil’ Bit tells her story and comes to terms with the trauma she has experienced.

Throughout *How I Learn to Drive*, the memories that Lil' Bit is reliving are often warped and changed. One memory, sometimes sparked by a connection between ideas, will melt into the next even if they happened years apart. For example, Lil' Bit's family had broken out into an argument causing her to yell out asking for the memory to stop. In response, the once-fighting family breaks into song which then changes into the song playing on the radio in the next memory (Vogel, 1997). The
audience can tell how the memory of Lil' Bit hearing a song on the radio with Uncle Peck was cued by her focusing on the song in the previous memory. At other times, it is unclear what, if anything, triggered Lil' Bit to recall the next memory. However, all of the memories are about Uncle Peck in some way, even if none of the characters in the memory say his name. In one scene, Lil' Bit is being told by her mother and grandmother that the only thing that men want is sex and she should not give in to a man's desires (Vogel, 1997). Though Uncle Peck is never directly addressed in this scene, it is clear to the audience that this memory affected the way Lil’ Bit thought about him.

In *How I Learned to Drive*, Vogel creates vignettes that have clearly been influenced by time and emotion when Lil’ Bit is reliving them. For example, in the scene where Lil’ Bit tells Uncle Peck they cannot be together anymore, two of the Greek Chorus members stand next to them and name things that she likes about him (Vogel, 1997). Vogel shows that even though the relationship was abusive, Lil’ Bit still had feelings for him and those feelings have changed the memory. Additionally, the scenes are often absurd. At one point Lil' Bit is at a middle school dance when she goes on a tangent that she fears there is a radio signal in her chest that calls men to her. In this scene, Lil’ Bit, the male characters on stage, and the audience can hear a beeping noise emitting from her thus bringing her fear to life in the memory (Vogel, 1997). By highlighting the parts of the memories that are obviously not an exact reenactment of what happens, Vogel reminds the audience that what they are watching is prone to distortion. It is evident in this play that the memories are not exact representations of how the events had happened in Lil' Bit's youth. One of the
first memories in the play is introduced by Lil' Bit as "1969. A typical family dinner" (Vogel, 1997, p. 13). The scene begins as Lil' Bit gets into a fight with her grandfather as she says, "This is how it always starts" (Vogel, 1997, p. 13). This scene, unlike some of the other memories, appears to be more of an amalgamation of her family dinners rather than one specific event.

One of the only memories that Lil’ Bit revisits from her adulthood is when she has sex with a teenager while in her twenties. After, she says that she thinks of her Uncle Peck and seems to understand him a little bit more (Vogel, 1997). Near the end of the play, Lil’ Bit addresses her memory of Uncle Peck:

“Now that I’m old enough, there are some questions I would have liked to have asked him. Who did it to you, Uncle Peck? How old were you? Were you eleven?” (Vogel, 1997, p. 55). Though the plot never addressed it, Lil' Bit assumes that her uncle also experienced abuse as a child. This assumption suggests to the audience that the memory of experiencing abuse shaped Lil' Bit and Uncle Peck into becoming perpetrators of abuse themselves.

Memory is a significant part of How I Learned to Drive as Lil' Bit seems to be stuck as an adult reliving the traumas of her youth. Vogel shows the audience an example of the portrayal of memory with artistic license. The creative license she takes could help portray the feelings and sensations of experiencing these memories which would otherwise be difficult or impossible to do on stage.

Hamlet

Few plays in the theatrical western canon are better known than William Shakespeare's Hamlet. I, like many people, read Hamlet in a high school English
class. Hamlet tells the story of the Danish Prince Hamlet, whose father has just died and whose uncle Claudius has just married his mother. In the opening scene in the play, a group of guards is visited by the ghost of the dead King Hamlet dressed in his armor. Later in the show, the guards bring the titular Hamlet to where they saw the spirit. When the ghost appears before Hamlet, it tells him that he had been killed by his brother Claudius and wishes for Hamlet to seek revenge for his death. This visit from the ghost of King Hamlet motivates Prince Hamlet throughout the rest of the play (Shakespeare, 1996).

Unlike the memory plays mentioned previously, the use of memory in Hamlet is more metaphorical rather than literal. The ghost has been discussed by scholars in the literary and theater community as being a representation of the memory of the King by Prince Hamlet’s and the guards (Hammersmith, 1978). It bears noting that the character name for the ghost of King Hamlet in the script is “GHOST” rather than King Hamlet (Shakespeare, 1996). It is possible that Shakespeare never intended this character actually to be the ghost of King Hamlet but to be a representation of him, like our memories of a departed person. No matter what the ghost is intended to be, its appearance causes a flood of memories of the King to those who see it. The last line of the ghost says to Prince Hamlet is "Remember me" (Shakespeare, 1996, p. I.v.89). In response, Hamlet goes into the following monologue:

“Remember thee? / Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe. Remember thee? / Yea, from the table of my memory / I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past / That youth and observation copied there, / And thy commandment all alone shall
live / Within the book and volume of my brain, / Unmixed with baser matter,”
After seeing the ghost of King Hamlet, the memories of his father consume Hamlet.
These memories influence almost all of the decisions that he makes during the rest of
the play which leads to his, and almost everyone else's, death.

At the beginning of the play, Hamlet accuses his mother and uncle of
forgetting his father too quickly and moving on while he is still mourning his death.
After the arrival of the ghost, Hamlet aims to revive the memory of his father in all of
the characters in the play. When a visiting group of players comes to the castle to
perform, Hamlet asks them to act out a mime show that is designed to remind
Claudius of killing his brother. Claudius becomes upset and leaves, presumably
because Hamlet’s plan has worked (Shakespeare, 1996). Hamlet shows how powerful
memories can be and how the memory of events can affect a person long after the
matter is over.

The other embodiment of a memory in Hamlet comes from one of the most
famous lines in the show. Hamlet had just escaped his death in England as he stands
in a graveyard and finds a skull on the ground. He realizes that the skull is that of a
fool from his father’s court causing him to exclaim: “Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him,
Horatio,” (Shakespeare, 1996, p. V.i.174). There are many differences between
Shakespeare's representation of the memory of King Hamlet and Yorick. Unlike the
ghost of King Hamlet, the skull of Yorick is undoubtedly real, but it lacks the details
and features of the ghost of the King. King Hamlet is dressed in his military garb,
looking regal and strong, while Yorick is a featureless skull pulled from a grave
(Shakespeare, 1996). It is possible that the love and admiration that Prince Hamlet feels towards his father have influenced his memory of him. Thus, he sees his ghost as a literal hero. Thought Hamlet also claims to have cared for Yorick, he might not feel the same sense of worship he feels to his father, so the memory is literally bare bones.

Throughout *Hamlet*, there is a battle between remembering and forgetting. Hamlet wants to preserve and avenge the memory of his father and while Claudius would rather forget that this brother ever existed. These previous memories and suspicions come together in the play to create the living memory of the ghost. Most people do not see their memories turn into the specters of people they have lost, but here we have a theatrical way of representing someone dealing with loss. *Hamlet* abstractly portrays memory, and it is a motivating factor during the entire play. The memory of those lost metaphorically and physically haunt the living and influence the events in the story. Since memory can be accurately depicted by an author who would not have known what the word psychology meant, it suggests that there is validity in the layman's perspective and understanding of memory.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was Tom Stoppard’s 1960s absurdist response to *Hamlet*. The play follows the two minor characters from *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as they struggle through the world of *Hamlet* with faulty memories and illogical world rules. Though *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is set inside *Hamlet*, most of the plot of *Hamlet* happens off-stage with the
occasional partial scene on stage to inform the audience of where they are in the play (Stoppard, 1967).

The play begins with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tossing a coin and betting on which side it will land. However, the coin falls on heads ninety-two times in a row in favor of Rosencrantz (Stoppard, 1967). Beyond this statistical anomaly, the pair are continually plagued by forgetting who they are and what they are doing. During the coin-toss game, the two main characters have the following exchange:

“**Guil:** What’s the first thing you remember?

**Ros:** Oh, let's see… The first thing that comes into my head, you mean?

**Guil:** No – the first thing you remember.

**Ros:** Ah. *(Pause.)* No, it’s no good, it’s gone. It was a long time ago.

**Guil:** *(patient but edged):* You don’t get my meaning. What is the first thing after all the things you’ve forgotten?

**Ros:** Oh I see. *(Pause.)* I’ve forgotten the question,” (Stoppard, 1967, p. 16).

Exchanges like this are frequent in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and are often a source of comedy in a play set in one of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies. There is often this idea in the play that the memories are only able to be held while they are actively being used, as soon as Rosencrantz or Guildenstern are distracted from a thought, they lose the memory.

Besides Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's inability to recall events, they also seem to be forgetting who they are. Exchanges like the following are extremely common in the show:

“**Ros:** My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz.

**GUIL** confers briefly with him.
(Without embarrassment.) I’m sorry – his name’s Guildenstern, and I’m Rosencrantz,” (Stoppard, 1967, p. 22).

Many of the other characters and even the audience also becomes confused about who is who as the two begin to meld into two halves of one person. In this play, it is clear that memory is an integral part of self because as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lose their memories, they lose an understanding of who they are.

As the play goes on, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet the troop of players on their way to visit the King and Queen (Stoppard, 1967). The players offer to perform for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern so they can practice:

“Why, we grow rusty and you catch us at the very point of decadence – by this time tomorrow we might have forgotten everything we ever knew. That’s a thought, isn’t it? (He laughs generously.) We’d be back where we started – improvising,” (Stoppard, 1967, p. 22).

Even the characters free from the limbo-like state of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are relying on what appears to be working memory. Besides this, Stoppard is also using this meta-comment to point out the use of memory in theater. The characters are actors, who are worried about forgetting their lines, played by actors who likely went through weeks or months of rehearsal so they could recite these lines without forgetting. Throughout the story, the Player character will often hint that he is aware they are all in a play which usually further confuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The meta element of referencing the play during the play draws the audience's attention to the acts of memorization which they often suspend during a performance.
Finally, this is a play that relies on the audience’s memory of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Though, a person could likely watch *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* without having seen *Hamlet* and understand parts of the show, many of the points that Stoppard is trying to make are in subtle reference to *Hamlet*. For example, the name of the show comes from the line near the end of *Hamlet* when almost all of the main characters have died, and the Ambassador of England enters the stage and declares "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead" (Shakespeare, 1996, p. V.ii.411). If the audience remembers that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die in *Hamlet*, the audience is led to wonder if they have been dead for the whole play. Similarly, many of the conversations between the Player and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not as meaningful if the audience is not aware that by the end of the play Hamlet will trick Rosencrantz and Guildenstern thus ensuring their death. The audience is also expected to know that Claudius murdered his brother and Hamlet may or may not be pretending to be insane.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is written around the shared knowledge that memory is vital in everyday life. Stoppard highlights this point not only by showing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with significantly damaged memory but by forcing the audience to acknowledge the use of memory in the understanding of theater.

*A Fences*

August Wilson’s play *Fences* follows the story of Troy Maxson, a black man in Pennsylvania working as a trash collector in 1957, and his family. The utilization of memory in this play is the most abstract of all plays analyzed in this chapter. The
memories of personal and racial oppression haunt Troy his entire adult life. Troy's father was a sharecropper, and he grew up watching his father have to give everything he had to his white boss thus working only a step above slavery. He had also played on an all-Black baseball team in his youth but was never allowed to join the major leagues because of the color of his skin (Wilson, 1986).

In *Fences*, Troy's children have not experienced the same amount of oppression as Troy. This difference of experience leads them to have different views of the world which often leads to conflict between them. For example, Troy's youngest son, Cory, who plays on the football team is offered a scholarship to play football at college. Troy refuses to sign the permission form to let his son take the scholarship because he remembers how he was discriminated against when he played baseball. Cory is upset because he doesn’t believe what happened to his father will happen to him (Wilson, 1986). The play is set just before the 1960s civil rights movement, so the opportunities for a black man in America were very different for Troy as a young man than for Cory. Troy's memory of oppression has shaped what he believes to be essential and possible for his children, even if they disagree.

Throughout the play, Troy is grappling with the question of what it means to be a good father. His memories of his father were of a man who was "evil" but would not leave his kids because he was responsible for them. Troy says in the play that he hated his father and strives to be a better father to his own children (Wilson, 1986). However, Troy's definition of what a good father derives from his memory of his father. It is different than what his children believe a good father should be which often leads to tension between them. Cory wants his father to show affection and love.
towards him, while Troy thinks that his primary responsibility as a father is to make sure Cory is physically but not emotionally cared for (Wilson, 1986).

Near the end of the play, Cory and his father have a huge fight which leads to Troy kicking Cory out of the house. In the last scene, Cory returns eight years later for Troy's funeral. He comes home and tells his mother that he is not going to the funeral because he feels as though he has spent his whole life being haunted by his father's shadow:

“The whole time I was growing up… living in his house… Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere. It weighed on you and sunk into your flesh. It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn’t tell which one was you anymore,” (Wilson, 1986, p. 96).

Cory, like Troy, is being shaped by his memories of his father. He hopes that if he does not go to his father's funeral, he will be able to escape from the shadows of the memory of his father. However, his mother tells him that not going to his father's funeral will not help him and that he needs to hold on to the good things he remembers about Troy and learn from the bad (Wilson, 1986).

Though the use of memory in *Fences* is not immediately apparent, Wilson shows in this play that a person’s memories shape who they are. Both Troy and Cory derive their understanding of the world from their memories and experiences. Beyond our personal memories, *Fences* suggests that cultural memory and the memories of those who have died can shape a person.

**Discussion**

Through these five plays, I show that memory is pervasive throughout theater. From the representation of memories to memory as a plot device, it is clearly an
essential part of theater and one that can be easily overlooked. While studying memory through theater is not a common technique in psychology, I am not the first person to examine this relationship. Some scholars have argued that memory and theatre have been connected since the dawn of western theater (Favorini, 2007). In Greek mythology, the Muses, goddesses of arts and science (including theater), are the daughters of Mnemosyne who is the goddess of memory. The Greeks, who are attributed to be the founders of western theater, show that theater is derived from memory. In Attilio Favorini's paper about the use of memory in theater, he stated: "Theatre and memory overlap, interweave, and commingle with one another like the planes in a drawing by M. C. Escher," (2007). Though each play might demonstrate its relationship with memory differently, the connection is clear. In the next chapter, I will examine how this relationship between memory and theater relates to the psychological understanding of memory.
Chapter 5: Is It All Just an Act?

Psychological Analysis of the Portrayal of Memory in Theater

The previous chapter described the presence and function of memory in theatrical plays. This chapter will examine how the previously defined examples of memory in theater relate to the psychological understandings of memory. Even though theater is not a scientific medium, it is still useful in explaining or portraying how memory functions in real life. Some people have argued that the presence of memory in theater has increased with the dawn of psychology as a scientific study (Favorini, 2007). I contend that memory, unlike some other psychological topics, is something that people have been knowingly experiencing since before the formal creation of either theater or psychology. Therefore, it should not be surprising that playwrights have focused on memory long before psychologist studied it in a scientific setting. However, it is possible that exactly how writers used memory in theater changed after the advent of modern psychology.

From the plays analyzed in the last chapter, I described two distinct categories of plays in terms of the function of memory. The first category I have called Reliving the Memory. Examples of memories in this category were moments in plays when characters were recalling a memory in a scene or physically reenacting that memory on stage. These plays provide easy examples of the function of memory in plays. The other category, which I call The Influence of Memory, is when the memories of the character are affecting their motivations and decisions. In almost all of the plays discussed in the previous chapter, there were different examples for each category in
each of the plays. By separating the uses of memory into these categories, I will be able to examine trends in the plays that will aid in our understanding of memory as a whole.

**Reliving the Memory**

*The Memory Plays*

In this category, the first and most obvious examples are those from the memory plays. Both *The Glass Menagerie* and *How I Learned to Drive* rely heavily on the characters recalling and reenacting their memories. Outside of theater, people do not literally relive the memories upon which their actions depend. Even so, these plays demonstrate the experience of an autobiographical episodic memory.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the set directions written in *The Glass Menagerie* call for a scrim in front of the stage and a projection screen (Williams, 1999). These devices are meant to show the audience that the scenes on stage have been altered in some way. It has demonstrated in psychological research that memories are imprecise and not as reliable as the person might believe them to be. Of particular interest in this case, one factor that researchers have shown to significantly influence a person's memory is "misleading post-event information" (Belli, Lindsay, Gales, & McCarthy, 1994; E. Loftus & J. Palmer, 1974; McCloskey & Zaragoza, 1985). This misleading information can be as simple as changing the word “smashed” with “hit” when asking about the speed of a car crash (E. Loftus & J. Palmer, 1974). Since misleading information fills a person's life, one can expect that many of their autobiographical memories are being influenced by such information. However, it is often difficult to explain this phenomenon to someone because the
memories can often feel so vivid or important that people believe they could never forget them. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams creates scenes that might sound and feel real to the audience but are in fact misleading, incomplete, or imprecise, as evidenced by the scrim. The techniques in this play could be used to help describe the post-event influences on memory in a convincing way.

*How I Learned to Drive* portrays memories more abstractly than *The Glass Menagerie*. The memories in *How I Learned to Drive* are non-sequential and change more rapidly than those shown in *The Glass Menagerie*. *How I Learned to Drive* also focuses on the portrayal of traumatic memories which are remembered and recalled differently than non-traumatic memories. A study on the memory of childhood sexual assault found that although memory for assault tended to be accurate over long periods, omission errors were higher for victims of frequent abuse. Similarly, those involved in frequent incest would often try to downplay the memories (Alexander et al., 2005). Since Lil’ Bit’s abuse started at age eleven, continued until she was eighteen, and was committed by a family member, Vogel’s representation of her memories not being exactly as the events happened is not unrealistic (Alexander et al., 2005; Vogel, 1997).

The fluid nature and occasional obtrusiveness of the memories in *How I Learned to Drive* suggest to the audience that Lil’ Bit is not in control of the order in which memories will surface. It often feels like one aspect of the memory is triggering the remembering of the next memory reenacted on stage. Lil’ Bit’s mental health as an adult is never directly addressed in the show, except for a clear case of alcohol abuse, but she does seem to show some signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.
which can affect her memories (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Vogel, 1997). Unlike other memories, researchers believe that traumatic memories are often triggered by reminders causing the person experiencing them to experience an extremely vivid memory (Van Der Kolk, Burbridge, & Suzuki, 1997). One cannot accurately diagnose a fictional character with a psychological disorder; however, the memories that Lil’ Bit is experiencing seem to be representing how people experience traumatic memories.

Neither *How I Learned to Drive* or *The Glass Menagerie* attempts to convince the audience that their portrayals of a character's memories are exact representation from the events in the character's lives. However, there is an essential difference between the depictions of memories between the two plays. *The Glass Menagerie* is showing the memories of emotional moments in Tom’s life as being hazy while *How I Learned to Drive* depicts clear memories surrounding Lil' Bit's childhood abuse which include absurd elements. The difference between the portrayal of memories in these two plays demonstrate the known differences between non-traumatic and traumatic memories. It would be a stretch to argue that either of these plays is a perfect example of the psychological understanding of memory. However, they both succeed in artistic portrayals of classical elements of memory as described in modern psychology.

*To Remember or Not to Remember*

Shakespeare depicts the characters in *Hamlet* as being metaphorically and physically haunted by the memories of the dead. In the play, Hamlet's subtle suspicions of his uncle are confirmed after he is visited by the ghost who tells him
that his uncle killed his father (Shakespeare, 1996). The theory proposed by some theater scholars is that the spirit in *Hamlet* is actually an embodiment of Hamlet's memories (Hammersmith, 1978). In a psychological interpretation, the ghost could be considered a collection of nondeclarative memories that Hamlet had of his father primed by his suspicion of his uncle marrying his mother and taking his throne so quickly after his father's death (Squire & Dede, 2015). This assertion is not to argue that people actually see the floating figure of a person they lost in everyday life, but it is possible that people are better able to understand the memory concepts as represented through the figurative description of a ghost.

Hamlet was grieving the recent death of his father throughout the play (Shakespeare, 1996). Studies done on people who are experiencing complex grief have found they are more likely to recall loss-related memories in comparison to their non-complex counterparts (Maccallum & Bryant, 2010). Though complex grief was not a disorder recognized when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* and Hamlet does not meet the time requirement for a complex grief diagnosis, he does share some similarities to the symptoms described. Hamlet is focused on the loss-related goal of avenging the death of his father and is experiencing an apparition which could be formed from the overgeneralized memory of his father (Maccallum & Bryant, 2010; Shakespeare, 1996). Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* long before the dawn of psychology yet he was able to represent a phenomenon like complex grief even though psychologists would not name it for almost 400 years.

While *Hamlet* focuses on memories of the past, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* examines memory loss. The title characters of *Rosencrantz and
*Guildenstern Are Dead* are often shown to have an extremely short memory for events (Stoppard, 1967). It is reminiscent of the famous case of H. M. who suddenly lost all ability to form new memories after a brain surgery. He was reported to be able to understand new explicit information while it was in his working memory but could not create any new short or long term memories and would forget as soon as he was distracted from the information at hand (Corkin, 2002). H.M. became famous in the psychological community after a researcher published an article about him in 1957, almost ten years before *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. It is possible the symptoms of this famous case of amnesia inspired Stoppard, but even if he was not, he was able to portray some aspects of working memory and amnesia in the play. However, unlike H.M., Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to be missing significant chunks of long-term memory as well and are able to create some short-term memories.

In both *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the playwrights can create dramatic representations of some aspects of memory on stage. As might be expected, these are not perfect models of memory, but they support the idea that theater can be used to illustrate nuanced topics in psychology.

**The Influence of Memory**

The other main category that the examples of memory in theater fell into were moments in the plays when a character's memories of past events had shaped the decisions, beliefs, or actions of that character. These examples are often subtler use of memory in theater, but they are essential for understanding how people who do not study memory believe it affects a person's actions. All of the examples found in these
plays were of characters being influenced by upsetting or traumatic memories from the past.

In *How I Learned to Drive*, Lil' Bit and Uncle Peck are both shown to be a victim and perpetrator of sexual abuse which suggests that Vogel is supporting the idea of a "cycle of abuse" (Glasser et al., 2001; Vogel, 1997). The cycle of abuse is the theory that people who experienced abuse as children are at an increased risk of perpetrating abuse on to children as adults. One study found that out of a sample of 843 subjects, 21% of the population had reported being victims of sexual abuse. Fifty-nine percent of the reported victims were also perpetrators whereas only 24% of reported non-victims were perpetrators suggesting that people who experienced abuse are more likely to become perpetrators. However, when separated by gender, these trends were only found for male subjects therefore would not explain Lil’ Bit’s actions (Glasser et al., 2001). These findings partially support the idea that both characters who had lived through abuse were more likely to become abusers. It is possible Vogel is suggesting that the traumatic memory of the abuse has shaped both Lil' Bit and Uncle Peck into becoming perpetrators of abuse.

In *Fences*, the racism and oppression Troy has experienced in his life affect him throughout the play (Wilson, 1986). Racism against African Americans has been present in America for longer than it has been a country. Many researchers have suggested that discrimination and oppression can lead to pervasive psychological problems for a person (David, 2014). In addition, the idea of collective memory is not a new topic for other social sciences, but it has only recently been introduced into the psychological realm. Supporters of this theory suggest that people of the same
culture can share some memories of particularly powerful events (Hirst & Manier, 2008). Wilson’s portrayal of Troy and his children in *Fences* seems to support the idea that the shared memory of oppression has had a significant impact on African-American lives and psyches.

Wilson depicts Troy's memories of racism as torturing him throughout the play. One explicit example is when Troy tells the story of when he claims to have met the devil. Troy tells his friend that when he first moved into his house, he could not afford to buy furniture because no one would give him credit. He says the devil, a white man dressed in an expensive outfit, came to the door and offered to sell him furniture with no credit but he was required to pay ten dollars interest every month or else "it'll be hell to pay" (Wilson, 1986). In this story, Troy is personifying the devil as the white people who furthered oppression by keeping African-Americans in debt with inescapable interest rates. Additionally, the play suggests that Troy's father was a sharecropper or worked in a similar field that caused him to be continually in debt to the white landowner and legally unable to leave (History.com Editors, 2018; Wilson, 1986). One study found that a person’s personality at the time of recall can influence the reconstruction and interpretations of their memories (Ross & Conway, 1986). Wilson could be showing how Troy's memory of white people holding his father in post-Civil War slavery and his distrust of white people shaped how he viewed the white man who came and offered him furniture with no credit but high interest. As Hirst and Manier assert in their paper, the collective memory of a culture will impact how they portray those memories which in turn will affect the collective memory (2008). The displayed impacts that collective and personal memories have
on the characters in plays can be related to the understanding of the long-term effect of memory.

**What Have We Learned**

In the previous chapter, the plays examined show memory as a pervasive theme throughout theater. The current section shows how the portrayal of memory by playwrights with presumably no background in psychology, none the less demonstrate nuanced theories of memory defined by psychology. It would be fallacious to argue that every example of the presence of memory in the plays analyzed in this section were perfect representations of the current understanding of human memory in psychology. However, in every case examined there was some element supported by the psychological research on memory. The findings from these studies were able to give further explanation and context to some parts of the play. Also, these examples were able to convey some of the findings from psychological studies, which could be difficult to illustrate in other ways, on stage.

The goal of this section is not to completely reduce the nuanced topic of theater down through psychology or vice versa. It has previously been argued that theater and psychology could work together to develop a better understanding of everyday life. In his work, Scheibe asserts that both theater and psychology are attempting to understand everyday life so therefore “can be viewed as complementary approaches to truth and understanding – at the same conceptual level, with frequent borrowings back and forth,” (2000). By connecting these two topics, researchers can help move the psychological study of memory out the sterile lab and into the real world where it matters.
The work done here is one of only a few examinations into the relationship between the memory in theater and information known about memory from scientific research. I was only able to choose a handful of plays to analyze out of the immense number of plays which would have qualified. Nevertheless, the findings of this chapter support the merit of further investigation of these two topics as possibly having a beneficial relationship in the furthering of both fields. In the future, the examination of a more extensive collection of plays, especially of those outside the Western world, would offer an increased understanding of how psychology and theater can create new insight to memory in everyday life.
Chapter 6: The Final Curtain

The Use of Theater and Psychology to Understand Memory in Everyday Life

In this work, I have examined the use of theater and psychology as perspectives to better our knowledge of memory in everyday life. Both fields of study are focused on understanding and portraying the human experience. Scheibe has previously proposed the use of the perspectives theater as a way to enhance psychology focused on everyday life (2000). These twin perspectives are utilized here to focus specifically on the topic of memory. By narrowing the focus to only memory, I was free to not only examine the presence of memory in plays but to see how theater makers think about memory.

In the interviews with college-age actors, directors, and designers, it became apparent that memory is integral to the creation of theater. Actors generally reported relying on the meanings behind what they needed to memorize through a variety of techniques. Directors and designers gave an assortment of ways they believed they used memory in theater but most agreed that it was an essential part of their work. Findings from previous psychological research supported a majority of the techniques or theories reported by the interviewees. By comparing the findings from studies with the reported experiences of someone without psychological background, it became evident that conclusions drawn from studies can help explain the function of memory in everyday life.
It became clear that the topic of memory is pervasive throughout theater through the analysis of depictions of memory in plays. Though the playwrights often used different styles or choices in how they were depicting a topic that happens inside someone’s head on stage, they all had some elements that were supported by psychological research. Short and long-term memory, collective memory, recall, and misleading post-information were just some of the examples of memory found in the plays. None of the portrayals were perfect examples of the psychological understanding of memory, but they were all able to depict to the audience what it felt like to experience these memories.

Playwrights, actors, directors, and designers all showed a nuanced understanding of memory as it related to their field. \textit{How I Learned to Drive} depicted the recall and effect of traumatic childhood memories. Actors seemed to implicitly understand the importance of meaning in memorization. Even Shakespeare depicted memories sprung from grief long before psychology was studied in any formal way. It is possible that since theater is so focused on reenacting the human experience, people with experience working in theater have a deeper understanding of everyday life.

I am not the first person to propose this kind of collaboration between psychology and theater (Scheibe, 2000, 2017). The findings from the current investigation support the combination of these topics specifically for understanding memory in everyday life. However, this study presents a new methodology for studying topics like memory. The study of the everyday life could benefit from the combination of classic psychological research methods such as interviews with
analysis of theatrical work. The formal research provides universality and scientific merit to the finding and the use of theater gives context. It could be argued that the two approaches are merely two different ways of trying to comprehend everyday life. Psychology takes the scientific approach while theater looks at everyday life through an artistic lens. When the two are combined, we gain a more holistic view of a topic like memory. In the future, theater could be used as a valuable asset in both understanding the experience of memory and explaining findings from psychological studies about memory.

Through these two approaches to examine the function of memory in theater, it has become apparent that theater and psychology can aid one another in developing an understanding of memory in everyday life. The findings from this initial investigation support the validity of the growing movement of using theater in psychology. Many topics still need to be investigated to understand better how psychology and theater work together in memory. Future research might include studying attentional focus in theater, examining the use of memory in theater from non-western cultures, and the use of emotional memory in direction and design. The work here will hopefully open the doors for a large body of future research and a new methodology for studying human experience in everyday life.
## Appendix 1

Table 1 - Collected results from interviews with actors. The left column is the topics based on the interview questions. To the right of each topic is the categories of answers the participants gave. At the end of each category is the number of people whose response was included in that category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Understand meaning or objective of text - 5</th>
<th>Learn in rehearsal room - 4</th>
<th>Rehearse with movement - 3</th>
<th>Reread script - 3</th>
<th>Use Flashcards - 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disliked Techniques</td>
<td>Listen to line recordings - 2</td>
<td>Memorize first letter of lines - 1</td>
<td>Rehearse to self - 1</td>
<td>Running lines - 1</td>
<td>Line learning app - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Out Loud or In Head</td>
<td>Out loud - 8</td>
<td>No preference - 1</td>
<td>In head - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to Learn Lines</td>
<td>Shakespeare/ Older Text - 4</td>
<td>Speech fragments - 2</td>
<td>Fast short dialogue - 1</td>
<td>Repetitive lines - 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembers Forgetting Lines</td>
<td>Yes - 9</td>
<td>No - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Forgetting Lines</td>
<td>Not enough rehearsal - 5</td>
<td>Nerves or overwhelming emotions - 4</td>
<td>Tired - 1</td>
<td>Not paying attention - 1</td>
<td>Did not understand scene - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorizing Blocking</td>
<td>Use motivation or reason for movement - 4</td>
<td>Writes down blocking - 3</td>
<td>Learns in rehearsal - 3</td>
<td>Visualize movement in head - 2</td>
<td>Draw out movements - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to Memorize</td>
<td>Music - 7</td>
<td>Text - 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Music is Easier</td>
<td>Use melody and harmony - 3</td>
<td>Listen to song recording - 2</td>
<td>Learns words while practicing song - 1</td>
<td>Motif of music in show - 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Lines are Easier</td>
<td>Does not understand music - 1</td>
<td>More things to remember - 1</td>
<td>Distracted by the music - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room for Improvement</td>
<td>Yes - 10</td>
<td>No - 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Table 2: Collected results from interviews with directors and designers. The left column is the topics based on the interview questions. To the right of each topic is the number of people whose answers were included in that category.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Believe in Use of Memory in Work</strong></td>
<td>Yes – 9</td>
<td>No – 0</td>
<td>Unsure – 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Is Memory Used?</strong></td>
<td>Memories of things from everyday life – 7</td>
<td>Memory of other theatrical show – 3</td>
<td>Memory for tasks that need to be done – 3</td>
<td>Memory of experiencing emotions – 1</td>
<td>Collective memory – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Techniques to Draw Audience Attention</strong></td>
<td>Audience placement relative to the stage – 4</td>
<td>Bright or dramatic lighting – 3</td>
<td>Balancing technical elements – 2</td>
<td>Staging of actors – 2</td>
<td>Colors on stage – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempt to Influence What is Memorable</strong></td>
<td>Yes – 4</td>
<td>No – 3</td>
<td>Unsure – 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Do You Influence What is Memorable</strong></td>
<td>Try to leave audience with an emotion – 2</td>
<td>Make a show realistic – 1</td>
<td>Focus on something they think is important – 1</td>
<td>Does something unexpected – 1</td>
<td>Make notable things different – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why Did You Find a Show Memorable</strong></td>
<td>Did something surprising – 5</td>
<td>Show worked very well or very poorly – 3</td>
<td>Elicited emotional reaction – 2</td>
<td>All technical aspects came together – 2</td>
<td>Juxtaposition of images on stage – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why Did You Find a Show Unmemorable</strong></td>
<td>Disengaging – 4</td>
<td>Elements not connected – 3</td>
<td>Did not understand the plot – 2</td>
<td>Did not do anything new – 2</td>
<td>No institutional memory – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Techniques to Portray Time</strong></td>
<td>Costumes – 3</td>
<td>Research – 3</td>
<td>Speech in script – 2</td>
<td>Furniture – 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Techniques to Portray Location</strong></td>
<td>Personal memory of similar location – 1</td>
<td>Furniture – 1</td>
<td>Subtle use of set design – 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Techniques to Portray Context</strong></td>
<td>Using things of value in context – 1</td>
<td>Overt stylization – 1</td>
<td>Talking to someone with experience – 1</td>
<td>Music to portray emotion – 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NUMBER REPORTED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COSTUME DESIGN</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIRECTING</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIGHT DESIGN</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRODUCTION DESIGN</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROP DESIGN</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SET DESIGN</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUND DESIGN</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Number of participants with experience in each design field based off of responses given in demographics form.
References


doi:10.1080/09658210701811912

https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/sharecropping


