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The Psychology of Performance: A Growing Art

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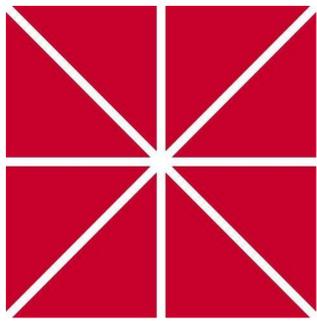
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The Psychology of Performance: A Growing Art

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"The sensitivity of the artist may equal the knowledge of the scientist. Both have the same object, nature, and perhaps in time it will be possible for them to link together in a great and marvelous force which at present is hard to imagine."
Anton Chekhov

The Premise

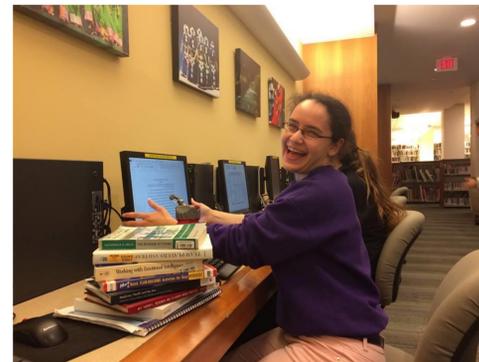
Chekhov saw the importance of a greater collaboration between the sciences and performing arts. Personally I see the two subjects very much combined already. They both center on the human species and benefit from its many intricacies. Psychology, being a relatively young field, strives to organize its increasing understanding of life as we know it by fitting itself into subgenres such as cognitive, sensory, neuro, and motivational. Theatre, on the other hand, has been working with all of these topics for centuries. Therefore, I assert that drama already studies psychology and does so quite well. Why then in order to study both fields at Chapman University do I find myself in different buildings with different professors? If theatre is years ahead of psychology, we majors certainly don't appreciate it, nor do we use it for our benefit. However, this year I will cross those borders. I will create an all College of Performing Arts organization that focuses on the applications of art therapy. Using an allocated hour or so of meeting time every two weeks I and other students will as a group discuss our various school stressors and headaches, apply performance psychology methods to alleviate them, and in doing so improve our own standards of college student living.



The Method

I will first research and then apply the therapeutic topic for each meeting. For example, the first gathering will probably center on "Play Therapy." As stated by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "It is a happy talent to know how to play" (Barnes, 56). Sigmund Freud was the first to put play to practice. By studying the behavior of a child in his 1909 case *Little Hans*, Freud was able to assist the child with his emotional disturbance (Brooke & Barnes, 2006). I hope this type of free play can do the same for college students, if not for emotional disturbance, but to simply de-stress. I intend our first club meeting to consist all of play-doh and exercises in play therapy. Subsequent meetings will also touch on music therapy and drama therapy. Despite having different approaches to art and performance therapy, all meetings will mirror each other in their beginning "check-in" and following implementation of the day's activity.

In addition to this active approach considering the blending of psychology and the arts, I will use my literary resources. Works such as those containing the quotations used above as well as art therapy case studies have already proven essential to my understanding of how to conduct my meetings. I also hope to interview and discuss with the student participants their group experiences and would absolutely love to hear if their time in the group at all benefitted their art. I have lived and worked with many of these performers for three years now, I see that they struggle in these competitive artistic industries as I do, and I want to help. Confiding in one person is good but group therapy can be drastically more meaningful.



The Hope

I anticipate students will be pleasantly surprised with their progress towards both an understanding of the healing qualities of group discussion as well as group art therapy. If indeed particular members of the group take the risk to share their own inner struggles I anticipate others will heavily relate. After all, many of us follow the same class schedules and go through similar day to day troubles. Sometimes we just need the invitation to accept just how much we belong. I hope to illuminate this, while at the same time highlighting the benefits of time spent therapeutically. It is the hope that this meeting style will be replicated for future generations of students here at Chapman University.

Why don't we all join together to experience and nurture this growing collaboration? Why don't we all join together to support this growing art?



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Art therapy has been a part of the human experience for centuries...

As humans, we naturally seek outlets to explore ourselves and our universe. This is perhaps just what I strove to do when I decided to become a performance major. Over the last three years I have learned so much about the history and practice of performance, some of which I was able to add to this project without the need for books or peer-reviewed journal articles. I can hardly remember nor can I imagine how differently I viewed such subjects before my experiences here at Chapman University.



However, college learning extends beyond the classroom. Through my discussions with classmates and personal observations, I see recurring issues of self-doubt and self-confidence. Who can blame us? The constant energy and emotion we students put into our craft daily is enough to make you wish weekends lasted forever. But now that this phase of my life is almost up, these discussions and observations I have had fuel my need and inspiration to better the college experience of future performance majors. I believe I can do so through art therapy.



Just as Anna Freud brought play therapy to children, Maud Ilsen brought music therapy to World War I veterans, and Constantin Stanislavski brought drama therapy to actors, I too can bring art therapy to students. I can expose them to the convergence of medicine and art, and in doing so, strengthen their craft and their own knowledge of themselves. I see this project not as a hip, new idea, but rather as a reflection of a time of growing art. Therefore, by implementing this program I am not adding another extracurricular to anyone's schedule, I am reinforcing that schedule. This is not extraneous, this is not out of the box, this is just the way we are headed.