

Assessing the Impact of Augusto Boal's "Proactive Performance": An Embodied Approach for Cultivating Prosocial Responses to Sexual Assault

José I. Rodríguez, Marc D. Rich, Rachel Hastings & Jennifer L. Page

Although performance studies practitioners remain committed to body-centered pedagogy and sociopolitical issues such as racism, homophobia, and sexism, there is little empirical evidence to suggest the efficacy of this work. This essay presents a comparative assessment of a sexual assault intervention model influenced by Augusto Boal's work to a more traditional, didactic lecture and a standard control condition in the college classroom. After discussing various interactive and proactive performance models, quantitative evidence is introduced to suggest the efficacy of the intervention model.

Keywords: Proactive Performance; Sexual Assault; Augusto Boal; Performance Efficacy; Embodied Instruction

Tim, Obi, and JaCarri are engaged in a light-hearted conversation at Tim's apartment. The discussion becomes more animated as the alcohol begins to flow more freely. Obi asks Tim why his girlfriend, Susan, is still out at 2:00 a.m. Tim initially brushes the questions off, but Obi is relentless, challenging Tim to "be a man" and take control of

José I. Rodríguez is an Associate Professor and Marc D. Rich is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Rachel Hastings is a doctoral student in the Department of Speech Communication at Southern Illinois University. Jennifer L. Page is an instructor in the Department of Speech Communication at Santiago Canyon College. A version of this essay was presented on the Top Paper Panel for the Communication and Instruction Division at the 2006 Western States Communication Association conference in Palm Springs, CA. The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Kahalia Kelly, Tiffany Winston, Celine León Rodríguez, and the performers in the interACT troupe. We also thank Michael Bowman, Linda Park-Fuller, Trudy Hernandez, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. Correspondence to: José I. Rodríguez, Department of Communication Studies, California State University, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., MHB-717, Long Beach, CA 90840-2407; Tel: (562) 985-7954; E-mail: jir@csulb.edu.

the relationship. Obi suggests that Tim's girlfriend is out drinking and fooling around with another guy. Although JaCarri makes concerted attempts to intervene, Tim and Obi ultimately shut him down. Tim is worked into a frenzy, stating, "I can't wait until she gets home—I will show her who is in charge," just as Susan, Tiffany, and Alisha enter the apartment. When Susan approaches Tim, he berates her with questions about where she has been and why she is wearing a revealing outfit. The intensity of his monologue builds until he yells at everyone to leave his apartment. Once they depart, Tim suddenly grabs Susan's arm and exclaims, "This will never happen again."

This scene is part of a sexual assault intervention program utilized by interACT, a performance troupe in existence since 2000. In recent years, the impact of sexual assault and trauma on college campuses has gained greater attention from researchers. According to Simon, "Sexual assault on college campuses is now at near epidemic proportions" (289). Date or acquaintance rape is especially prevalent among college students "because they live in communities where many factors related to date or acquaintance rape, such as age, alcohol use, and rape-tolerant behavioral norms, converge" (Holcomb et al. 159). In a frequently-cited study, published over a decade ago, Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski found that 27% of college women experience rape or attempted rape, 25% of college men are involved in some form of sexual aggression, and 8% of men raped or attempted to rape a woman since the age of 14 (168–69). In addition to the serious physical and psychological impact that rape has on college students, "many women who are assaulted drop out of school" (Bohmer and Parrot 1).

The majority of sexual assault intervention models used on college campuses are didactic, and consistent with passive learning models. Didactic approaches may be efficacious to the degree that they raise consciousness and potentially change attitudes about rape myths. However, they are not aligned with more embodied pedagogical techniques that are a central component of performance studies. As noted by Stucky and Wimmer, "One characteristic of performance studies pedagogy is its emphasis on embodiment. . . . A substantial development in performance studies pedagogy has been a consistent attention to enactment, to experiential learning in the classroom" ("Introduction" 3). Furthermore, didactic modes of instruction perpetuate an educational climate where students are passive learners. According to bell hooks, "Trained in the philosophical context of western metaphysical dualism, many of us have accepted the notion that there is a split between the body and the mind. Believing this, individuals enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body" (191).

Freire refers to the didactic teaching method as "banking education" because "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. . . . [this] negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry" (53). The performance paradigm, which stands in contrast to disembodied pedagogical techniques, "entails a shift of emphasis from product to process [that . . .] decenters, destabilizes, undermines, and deconstructs any view of a 'finished world' that is given to us for passive consumption" (Conquergood 38, 40). In contrast to didactic models, this study focuses on a

performance intervention that fosters a "proactive" audience stance. According to Pelias and VanOosting, there is a continuum from inactive to proactive audience responses: "At the far end of the continuum, audience might be identified as 'proactive.' Given this maximum participation, status of performer is conferred on all participants" (227). Proactive performances that invite audience members to take agency in their own learning are consistent with the aims of performance studies pedagogy—dialogic exchanges, experiential learning, and emphasis on the body. To date, only one study has been conducted on the efficacy of this performative stance (Rich and Rodríguez). In this initial study, the authors found that the interACT performance was more effective than a standard control condition at inducing a willingness to comfort potentially distressed sexual assault survivors.

The current study builds on these initial findings by comparing the interACT performance to a didactic lecture on sexual assault as well as a standard control condition, and measuring the empirical predictors of comforting (perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern). The purpose of this study, then, is to assess the efficacy of a proactive intervention when compared to a didactic model using theoretically relevant, prosocial outcomes.

Considering our discipline's emphasis on sociopolitical performance and critical performative pedagogy (see Pineau), the question of efficacy is worth considering. Similarly, Park-Fuller argues, "To neglect our research obligations to measure the efficacy we claim is folly" ("Audiencing" 291). Does proactive performance foster the change we seek to facilitate? Is proactive performance an efficacious pedagogical tool? In our efforts to create a performance that could address sexual assault, we developed a production influenced by the philosophy of performance activist Augusto Boal. In the first section, we provide a context for interactive and proactive performance and discuss Boal's influence on performance studies and theatre. Second, we describe our proactive scene. Third, we introduce the methods used to assess the impact of the intervention and discuss the results.

Interactive/Proactive Performance

The audience participation model developed by Pelias and VanOosting is useful for considering interactive and proactive performances (226). As we have already discussed, proactive performances enable the greatest audience participation. During interactive performances "both performers and audience are seen as coproducers, each contributing to the artistic event" (227). Although the performance models we choose to discuss all have interactive and proactive potential, we argue that on a continuum from least to most democratic, the most participatory and dialogic performances are proactive because everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the unfolding of the dramatic event.¹ Proactive performances are marked by their heightened level of audience involvement. Moving from least interactive to most proactive, we discuss Trigger Scripting, Drama Therapy, Playback Theatre, Psychodrama and Sociodrama, and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). We recognize that other models such as performance art and flash mobs warrant discussion; however, in

this study we are interested in genres that are most suited to considerations of problem posing/solving.

Trigger Scripting, which has roots in performance studies pedagogy and communication studies, is a technique where “literature is chosen, scripted, and performed with the audience in mind in order to create a specific change. In some forms of trigger scripting, a discussion immediately follows the performance so that certain issues are highlighted” (Rassulo and Hecht 41). Trigger Scripting has been used to promote discussion around issues such as date rape (Mann, Hecht, and Valentine), stepfamilies (Rassulo and Hecht), and Anglo-Hispanic land use (Valentine and Valentine). Researchers have found that Trigger Scripts promote “attitude modification and insight” (Rassulo and Hecht 53), provide a “practical and positive instructional method” (Mann, Hecht, and Valentine 271), and facilitate communication, “sparking immediate interest and thereby validating the technique” (Valentine and Valentine 305). In a study on Trigger Scripting and date rape, Mann, Hecht, and Valentine learned that the most effective pedagogical strategy was trigger scripting combined with a discussion element (276). Although Trigger Scripting engages audiences following a performance, they are cast as spectators during the actual performance of the scenes, and therefore do not influence the performance as it unfolds to the same extent as other models discussed below. In addition, they do not take an active role in the selection of the texts that are performed. Hence, this performance mode is best thought of as interactive.

Drama Therapy is the umbrella term for any number of performance techniques that are used in therapeutic contexts. Drama therapists are “concerned with the creative development of the whole person, physically, mentally and emotionally, through the drama process” (Jennings 58). Using elements of Moreno’s work as well as plays, games, dance, and improvisation, clients use their bodies to engage psychosocial issues that are of personal concern in a critical manner (Jennings 58). According to Courtney, Drama Therapy “is inclusive of all types of dramatic activity which aim to make people ‘better.’ Drama Therapy includes all types of spontaneous drama which is a ‘helping’ of others, and within two broad types of activity: drama as a therapeutic method in clinical situations [and] drama as a generalized therapy in non-clinical situations” (8). Drama Therapy stands in contrast to more traditional, less embodied forms of therapy where the therapist primarily uses a cognitive approach (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy). Depending on context, Drama Therapy may utilize stories not directly connected to participants. Furthermore, drama therapists are positioned as authority figures who control the direction of the scene. Drama therapists may be focused on the final product of the performance rather than the processual nature of discovery.

Playback Theatre, developed by Jonathan Fox, “is an original form of theatrical improvisation in which people tell real events from their lives, then watch them enacted on the spot” (Salas 6–7). Although Playback can be used in therapeutic settings and has links to Moreno’s work, it is most frequently used as a communal form of theatre and storytelling. In Playback Theatre, audience members are asked to share first-person narratives with a Conductor. The Conductor asks a series of

questions to help tease out the threads of the story and prepare the Playback ensemble for an improvised version of the story. According to Salas, "Finding the interwoven meanings of the teller's experience and rendering them in story form is the heart of the Playback Theatre process" (29).

Once the storyteller has shared her/his narrative, the Conductor asks the ensemble, which may consist of five to ten performers and in some cases a musician, to play back the story in an improvisational mode. Playback democratizes the theatrical space because audience members are free to share any type of story they wish to tell, and the performers are in service of the teller. In Playback Theatre, "Everyone is invited to participate. Furthermore, the actors speak to the audience as individuals . . . audience members speak from their seats; audience members communicate with each other. Anyone can speak up" (Fox, *Acts* 46). Although audience members are cast in a proactive role and shape the performance, the scene is re-enacted by Playback-trained actors rather than audience members. Hence, audience members are perhaps best viewed as playwrights rather than active agents in the unfolding drama. At the conclusion of the improvisation, the storyteller is asked if the played-back story was consistent with his or her original rendering. If not, the conductor poses additional questions and the ensemble creates an additional improvisation.

Jacob Moreno, the creator of Psychodrama and Sociodrama, was perhaps the first modern practitioner of participatory performance. By his own account, Moreno created psychodrama in 1921. Moreno stood on stage in front of a thousand people and asked himself, "If I could only turn the spectators into actors, the actors of their own collective drama, that is the dramatic social conflicts in which they were actually involved, then my boldness would be redeemed and the session could start" (*Psychodrama* 1). At the core of Moreno's work was the notion of the spontaneously creative self. Whereas Moreno's audiences resisted improvisational theatre, he discovered that in therapeutic contexts the "imperfections and incongruities" were "expected and warmly welcomed." Although Moreno was primarily interested in therapeutic settings, his desire to eliminate the fourth wall still resonates for sociopolitical performance today: "The meaning of the spontaneity player is therefore to eliminate audiences. . . . He cannot bear to have anyone around him reduced to the status of spectator" (Moreno, *Theatre* 5, 7, 32).

Although a variety of techniques may be used during a psychodrama session, there is typically some form of verbal or nonverbal warm-up, the sharing of a story or specific issue concerning the client, the re-enactment of a scene, and a series of interventions that may include techniques such as role reversals or empty chair monologues. Psychodrama may be used with an individual or a couple experiencing relationship problems. When psychodrama techniques are used with larger, homogenous groups, it is referred to as Sociodrama. Sociodrama "deals with problems in which the collective aspect of the problem is put in the foreground, the individual's private relation is put in the background" (Moreno, *Spontaneity* 112). Moreno notes that this form of theatre "is based upon the tacit assumption that the group formed by the audience is already organized by the social and cultural roles which in some degree all the carriers of the culture share. . . . It is the group as a whole

which has to be put upon the stage to work out its problem” (Fox *Essential* 18). By breaking down the fourth wall and creating an active role for patients, Psychodrama provided a radical departure from more traditional therapeutic and theatrical conventions and has perhaps the strongest link to the most proactive performance stance of Boal.

Whereas Psychodrama, Drama Therapy, and Playback Theatre come from a therapeutic tradition, and Trigger Scripting has pedagogical roots, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was developed to facilitate sociopolitical change. Boal’s work can be thought of as a theatrical counterpart to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, “Influenced by Paulo Friere’s dialogic philosophy of education, Boal’s vision is embodied in dramatic techniques that activate passive spectators to become spect-actors—engaged participants rehearsing strategies for personal and social change” (“Introduction” 1). Boal is most interested in using theatre as a tool for liberation. A quote from the introduction of Boal’s first book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, helps illustrate this point: “[T]he barrier between actors and spectators is destroyed: all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformations of society” (x).

Boal’s techniques have radicalized the notion of audience-based performance, and perhaps best exemplify Pelias and VanOosting’s notion of proactive performance. Although Moreno and Fox can both be credited for helping to dissolve the fourth wall and democratize the theatrical space, only Boal’s work is so closely linked to structural oppression and audience action. Boal wants the theatre to be placed in the hands of people. In fact, even the Joker (Boal’s term for the group leader) can be replaced if the audience does not believe that she or he is being an effective facilitator.² In Psychodrama and Drama Therapy, the focus is frequently on the individual, and the result may be catharsis. With Boal’s techniques, even the more psychosocially oriented Rainbow of Desire techniques, the goal is social change and liberation. Boal’s work was originally designed as a “rehearsal for revolution,” and even today, Boal is more interested in creating disequilibrium than catharsis. According to Boal, the main objective of TO is

to change the people— “spectators,” passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action . . . the spectator delegates no power to the character either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change—in short, trains himself for real action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action! (*Theatre* 122)

Currently, the TO arsenal contains techniques such as Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, and Legislative Theatre. Boal’s techniques are used throughout the world in educational, communal, and therapeutic contexts. Boal, now in his seventies, still travels around the world demonstrating old methods and developing new ones. As Boal’s techniques have spread from the poorest areas of Brazil to an international stage, how have they been adapted for specific contexts? Green poses the question, “How are practitioners, captivated by Boal’s ideas

and committed to some form of social change, adapting the techniques of Boal's 'arsenal' for use in their own communities and contexts?" (48).

In *Playing Boal*, editors Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz discuss the cross-cultural impact of Boal's work and the possibilities and difficulties that arise when these techniques are taken out of the original context where they were developed. Researchers in performance studies, theatre, and other disciplines also have documented the use of TO in different settings. For example, working with privileged college students, McConachie concludes that "modest progressive work centered on the goals and strategies of Boal can occur in academic settings if one can negotiate the immense gap between Boal's Marxist assumptions about oppression and the [privileged] students' lack of experience of oppressive situations" (247). Boal's proactive work is also evident in Jones's performance of *sista docta*, a one-person show focusing on the experiences of African-American women in the academy (61). Jones incorporated Boal's techniques because "I was putting so much of myself on the line while the audience . . . did not have to commit much at all" (61). Working with health-care students and faculty, Brown and Gillespie found "Boal's Forum Theatre provides creative opportunities for students and teachers to invent health-care texts for strengthening the expression of moral courage in today's health-care environment. Students and teachers mutually engage in imaginative moral strategies to prepare to respond to demoralizing workplace conditions" (117). Bowman writes about the pedagogical implications of using Boal's less known "Joker System" with traditional plays, a system that "prizes extemporaneity and improvisation—'joking around' with a text and its possibilities" (147).

Boal's techniques also have been documented with new police recruits (Telesco), and in prison where TO can "bring humanity into a heartless atmosphere, as it enables a sense of collaboration and shared stakes among the participants" (Mitchell 55). In 1990, *The Drama Review* focused on Boal's work, and in a 2001 essay in *Theatre*, Kushner asked a number of artist-scholars to address the question, "How do you make social change?" Paterson (66), Fung (68), and Alexander (81) all discuss the influence of Boal's philosophy on their own work. Similarly, in *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theater and Cultural Politics* (the sequel to *Playing Boal*, also edited by Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz), scholars enumerate Boal's influence on contemporary sociopolitical theater. Despite Boal's profound impact on performance studies and theatre, as evidenced by the popularity of his own books, as well as numerous essays written about his techniques and philosophy, there has been little discussion of his work in this journal. In an attempt to fill this void, we created a proactive scene based on Boal's techniques and measured its efficacy.

interACT's Proactive Scene

interACT was developed in response to what the authors saw as a need to address sexual assault on campus and in the community. During a five-year period, students attended weekly rehearsals, completed readings on sexual assault, kept journals, and worked with a clinical psychologist specializing in sexual trauma. This psychologist

visited rehearsals, helped educate the cast about the typical scenarios of acquaintance rape, and attended a number of performances.³ To date, the scene has been performed over 150 times in college classroom settings, housing projects, after-school programs for girls, juvenile detention facilities, and as a training module for counselors who work with battered and sexually assaulted women. The majority of these performances have taken place with college students.

The interACT scene begins with the scenario described at the beginning of this essay. The consumption of alcohol is included in the scene because it is frequently an element of sexual assault. As Bohmer and Parrot explain, “the more intoxicated a man is, the greater the likelihood that he will ignore a woman’s protests or be unable to interpret her words or actions as she intended them” (19–20). The second scene begins the next day at Tiffany’s home with Susan explaining to Tiffany and Alisha that Tim “forced himself” on her. The friends respond in a manner consistent with research on sexual assault. The survivor is “usually blamed by her peers and her support system” (32). Alisha condemns Susan for staying out so late and not calling Tim and questions whether or not Tim is capable of rape. Tiffany is outraged that Susan did not call her after the assault, notes that she has always thought that Tim was a jerk, and attempts to “solve” the problem by demanding that Susan go to the hospital and call the police immediately.

Following the short scenes (approximately ten minutes), the Joker comes on stage. The Joker role, according to Jackson, “is not that of facilitator, the joker is a ‘difficultator,’ undermining easy judgments, reinforcing our grasp of the complexity of a situation, but not letting that complexity get in the way of action or frighten us into submission or inactivity” (xx). The Joker describes the terms “protagonist” and “antagonist” and asks the audience to identify each character as one or the other. Frequently, there is dissent among the audience. We have worked hard to create multidimensional characters, reflecting what Pineau calls “the fluid, ongoing, often contradictory features of human experience. [Performance] acknowledges that identities are always multiple, overlapping ensembles of real and possible selves” (“Teaching” 24). Tim may be perceived as a protagonist who is being manipulated by Obi, or Tiffany may be viewed as a protagonist because she is being “helpful” by demanding that Susan call the police. Some audience members claim that Obi is a protagonist because he is being a good friend to Tim. Rather than being concerned that the audience is not “getting it,” we use their responses to help inform later improvisations. Audience members usually agree that Susan is a protagonist, and the Joker invites the audience to learn more about this character.

During the next scene, Susan is the only character on stage. The Joker explains the notion of *residual antagonists*, or negative voices in the protagonist’s head. Whereas Boal usually refers to these voices as *cops-in-the-head*, similar themes have been noted in other disciplines. In Psychodrama, auxiliary egos “allow for the protagonist’s inner psychic world to be externalized, explored and changed” (Holmes 130) and in communication studies Hamilton uses the term “Voicing” to explain how “[t]he conscience represents the internalization of social rules. For those who have their

conscience channeled through an inner voice, appropriate social behavior is praised and inappropriate social behavior is criticized" (154).

The Joker then asks the audience to provide examples of these voices. Once an example is provided, the audience member is invited on stage to create a representative image of the voice. For example, if an audience member states that a residual antagonist would say, "This whole thing is your fault," she or he would create an image onstage that represents this statement, such as frowning and pointing at the protagonist. Once eight to ten such images are created, the Joker asks audience members to create a constellation of images around the protagonist. The Joker explains that if a specific residual antagonist is strong in Susan's head, the audience member should place her/himself close to the protagonist; if it is weaker, the audience member should locate her/his image farther away. Once the constellation of images is created, the Joker asks the residual antagonists to state their lines softly and repeatedly. The voices get progressively louder, while the protagonist stands in place, trying to absorb all of them. This scene is usually quite powerful, as the audience watches the protagonist bombarded by multiple negative images and voices. The residual antagonists leave the stage and are asked to remember their individual lines.

A traditional Forum Theatre is run after the constellation of images. As we have suggested elsewhere, the goal of Forum "is not to arrive at the 'perfect solution' but, rather, to generate a set of assertive communication strategies that potentially can be utilized in real-life situations" (Rich and Rodríguez). In a Forum, a scene in which a protagonist is oppressed is run in its entirety. The scene is then started again, this time with audience members having an opportunity to replace the protagonist and attempt to alter the outcome of the scene. According to Rich, Johnson, and Olsen, "The critical moment in Boal's work is . . . when an audience member identifies with the protagonist on stage and is compelled to stop the scene and attempt to overcome the oppression." Campbell used the Forum model and concluded, "Here was a method that went on to empower the groups we worked with to take over the action . . . and not tell but show a possible resolution of the conflict . . . unlike the monologue of conventional theatre, a dialogue could instantly be taken up between young people" (56). During the Forum we created for the sexual assault performance, the scene in Tim's apartment with his two friends is replayed first, followed by the scene in Tiffany's home where Susan states that Tim "forced himself" on her. In the first scene, audience members are invited to replace JaCarri's character (the third friend who attempts to intervene) in an attempt to disrupt the violence that ensues. For example, an audience member might try to change the topic to a different issue in order to calm Tim down or assertively state that Susan is a trustworthy person who respects Tim and their relationship. In the second scene, Susan (the protagonist) is replaced and audience members try to get a different reaction from her friends. Although we play the original scenes along sex lines in order to illuminate performances of gender, male and female audience members are invited to take either role during the Forum. Because the Forum is a rehearsal for real life situations, we are most interested in generating interventions and posing questions, not

supplying simplistic answers. Forum Theatre, according to Boal, tries to “achieve a good debate [rather] than a good solution” (*Games* 230).

The Forum section of the show typically produces the most boisterous responses from audience members. Frequently a strategy that seems perfect from the safe confines of the audience becomes quite difficult to enact once the spect-actor meets resistance onstage. Since many of the interACT performers have worked together for years, they are skilled at creating compelling improvisations. As Jackson explains, the Forum is “great fun, giving rise to many different forms of hilarity—laughter of recognition at the tricks of the oppressors, laughter at the ingenuity of spect-actors’ ruses, triumphant laughter at the defeat of the oppression” (xxii).

Our final scene departs from Boal’s work and is more closely linked to Drama Therapy. Because current intervention programs focus solely on preventing date rape, we wanted to utilize a scene that took place after an assault, where audience members could role-play a compassionate friend. Landy describes the use of role-play in Drama Therapy: “The actor projects his thoughts, feelings and behaviors onto another, then enacts them in the guise of the other, as if he were the other” (96–97). We believe it is important for audience members to leave the performance better prepared to talk to a friend who survives sexual assault. Because most of our performances are presented to college students and teens, we believe that it is a useful pedagogical strategy to invite audience members to assume the role of an empathic or compassionate friend. According to Warshaw, “The reactions of the people around her [survivor] and the support she receives soon after the assault may be critical to the woman’s survival and recovery” (181). These communication skills may be particularly important because “[v]ery few female victims of rape, 3.2 percent, or attempted rape, 2.3 percent, report their victimization to the police or campus security. However, two-thirds of rape victims disclosed their experience to a friend” (Brown 5). Hence, we want to present a scene where audience members can rehearse comforting communication strategies.

When the Joker asks the audience members what they think the protagonist might need from her friends, they usually respond by stating that she needs support, friendship, and someone who will listen to her. Typically, two members of the audience will agree to go on stage and be the protagonist’s friends, and a few scenes are developed according to the lines that were initially used by the residual antagonists. For example, since a residual antagonist said, “This is all your fault,” the first scene would begin with Susan stating to her friends, “This is all my fault.” The audience members who act as friends in this scene are neither specially trained to respond to Susan, nor are they peer troupe members planted in the audience to ensure that we get the desired responses. The friends, with coaching from the audience, if necessary, do their best to console Susan. Susan, however, makes it increasingly difficult for the spect-actors to be comforting. Again, we are not looking for easy solutions in this performance. During the final scene, audience members are provided with an opportunity to witness a spect-actor demonstrate effective and ineffective communication strategies with a survivor of sexual assault. According to Frazier, Valtinson, and Candell, “Theories of behavior change suggest that modeling appropriate behaviors is an effective way both to change specific behaviors and to

alter attitudes that underlie behavioral responses" (154). Following the performance, the authors pass out information sheets to the audience that include rape statistics and crisis phone numbers.

Having performed this scene numerous times on and off campus, we felt from audience response that we were making a positive impact as evidenced by their active participation and willingness to discuss about sexual assault. By utilizing a questionnaire designed to measure the effects of the performance, we hoped to learn more about the value of our scene and, thus, the potential efficacy of proactive performance methods.

Theoretical Rationale for Study and Research Hypotheses

Although the effects of performance and vicarious experience on subsequent behavior have been documented empirically (see Bandura "Health," *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*, and *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*), to date no study of proactive, sexual assault interventions has examined the role of these factors in helping create specific beliefs about one's ability (i.e., self-efficacy) to prevent rape or help a survivor in the aftermath of sexual assault. The creation of these specific beliefs is important for understanding and measuring the efficacy of the proactive interACT scenes. For instance, even relatively minor, successful actions that induce people to believe that they have what it takes to be effective can facilitate further achievement. Research shows that perceived self-efficacy can enhance behavioral effectiveness beyond a person's present level of performance, and help individuals succeed in novel situations as well as activities (see Bandura et al.; Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*; and Williams, Kinney, and Falbo). Consistent with this research evidence, we argue that the interACT scenes induce audience members to believe that they can affect change by either enacting (performance experience) or viewing (vicarious experience) behavior that may prevent rape or help a sexual assault victim. In particular, during a proactive interACT performance, audience members are induced to believe in their ability to: (1) understand the plight of sexual assault survivors (perspective taking); (2) connect with the feelings of distress that occur in sexual assault episodes (emotional contagion); (3) show concern for the welfare of sexual assault survivors (empathic concern); and (4) comfort someone who has been assaulted sexually. To examine these effects, the concept of perceived self-efficacy may be most useful.

According to Bandura, "perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (*Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* 3). Two of the most important sources of perceived self-efficacy are *performance experience* and *vicarious experience*. Performance experience refers to the ability to control one's behavior as a direct result of one's efforts and actions in the world. Vicarious experience refers to the ability to control one's behavior as a consequence of the observations one makes about the actions of others as well as the results of those actions.

interACT provides audience members with both performance and vicarious experience during the enactment of the scripted and improvisational scenes. For example, audience members are presented with performance experiences by inviting them to come on stage and enact a variety of behaviors such as: taking the role of the victim, taking the role of a helpful friend, attempting to change a situation so that an assault is thwarted, creating frozen images that personify potentially antagonistic voices in the victim's mind, and creating prosocial, verbal responses to comfort someone in the aftermath of sexual assault. Audience members who watch the performance of this behavior are simultaneously presented with vicarious experiences because they watch their peers onstage enacting empathic and comforting behavior intended to facilitate change during the sexual assault scenes. Given these features of performance and vicarious experience that involve empathic and comforting actions in the interACT scenes, in the current investigation we examined respondents' perceived self-efficacy in terms of their reported ability to engage in perspective taking, empathic concern, emotional contagion, and comforting.

Empathic and Comforting Communication

Researchers have demonstrated that empathy is a valued, prosocial behavior that facilitates altruistic and helpful responses in a variety of social situations (see Batson et al. for a review). Batson et al. define empathy as "an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else" (486). According to Davis (115), there are three dimensions of empathy: perspective taking (adopting the viewpoint of another); emotional contagion or fantasy (feeling emotions that are parallel to those of another person); and empathic concern (a concern for the welfare of another). These dimensions of empathy have been linked to comforting communication in a variety of contexts (see Miller, Birkholt et al.; Miller, Stiff, and Ellis; Omdahl and O'Donnell; and Stiff et al.). Communication scholars have also examined the relationship between empathy and comforting by investigating the verbal messages that individuals construct to assist distressed others (see Burleson "Emotional Support", "The Experience", "Age", "Social Cognition"; Burleson and Samter; and Samter and Burleson). According to Stiff et al., comforting occurs when individuals respond with helpful communication behavior, such as listening or "saying the right thing," in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of an emotionally distressed other (210).

Stiff et al. explained the production of comforting messages using two theoretical perspectives. The Altruistic Model argues that other-oriented or selfless motivations to comfort distressed others originate from a desire to improve the condition or state of the distressed individual. In contrast, the Egoistic Model claims that the motivation to comfort distressed others arises from self-centered or solipsistic predispositions, such that people comfort distressed others not out of concern for the other person's welfare but, instead, for the purpose of meeting their own ego needs as helpers. Although we are not interested in the motivation to comfort *per se*, we find these explanations helpful in understanding the role of comforting in the distressing

aftermath of sexual assault. For example, Rich and Rodríguez showed that audience members in the interACT condition reported greater willingness to comfort than those in a control group. The authors argued that the interACT scenes facilitate comforting because audience members come to understand the plight of sexual assault survivors and are induced to report a willingness to comfort out of concern for the welfare of these distressed others.

Building on this evidence and subsequent reasoning, we argue that the interACT scenes provide audience members with both performance and vicarious experiences of the negativity, confusion, aggression, insensitive comments, and physical violence that are likely to occur in sexual assault episodes. Furthermore, the interACT scenes provide audience members with performance and vicarious experiences of effective, empathic, and comforting responses that may be enacted during potential sexual assault episodes. These experiences are likely to induce audience members to adopt beliefs about their ability to engage in perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern in these specific situations. Conversely, we argue that individuals who are not exposed to the interACT scenes are not as likely to adopt beliefs about their ability to engage in perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern in situations that involve sexual assault. According to Stiff et al., these three factors (perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern) are likely predictors of comforting. Following this reasoning, two hypotheses were posed:

- H1: Audience members in the interACT condition are more likely than those in the didactic lecture group or the control group to report greater perceived ability to engage in perspective taking, emotional contagion, empathic concern, and comforting.
- H2: Audience members' perceived ability to engage in perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern predict their perceived ability to comfort.

Method

Participants

Five hundred sixty-one participants from three sections of the same general education, mass lecture course in communication studies at a large urban US university were assigned as groups. These three intact sections (a 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., and 12:30 p.m. section) of students were assigned to participate in one of the three conditions, with a comparable number of participants in each condition ($n = 186\text{--}188$). Students participated in the study during a regular class period. There were 185 males, 374 females, and 2 who declined to state their sex; 370 freshmen, 114 sophomores, 56 juniors, 16 seniors, 1 graduate student, and 4 who declined to state their class standing. Participants ranged in age from 17–43, with an average age of 19.06 years. There were 247 Euro-Americans, 151 Asian-Americans, 118 Latinas/os, 34 African-Americans, 6 others, and 5 who declined to state their ethnicity. Participation was voluntary and no incentive or reward was offered.

Design and Procedures

This study employed a posttest-only, control group design, with an experimental condition (the interACT scene), a didactic lecture on sexual assault, and a control condition (a lecture/demonstration). These types of control conditions are consistent with the vast majority of control groups employed in the research on sexual assault (see Black et al.; Borden, Karr, and Caldwell-Colbert; Frazier, Valtinson, and Candell; Holcomb et al.; and Lanier et al.).

In the experimental condition, participants first were told that the researchers were interested in “getting your opinions and reactions to a peer education demonstration,” and then were exposed to the proactive performance by interACT. Following the performance, as in all conditions, participants completed the same posttest measures (perspective taking, emotional contagion, empathic concern, and comforting). In the same way, the purpose of the study was explained before all participants were dismissed. To control for potential time effects and to be aligned with the parameters of existing sexual assault interventions, all of the conditions were 50 minutes in length. This element is important—for comparative purposes—because the average rape intervention program is 30 to 120 minutes in length and has content features that are consistent with the interACT as well as didactic lecture interventions used in this study (see Schuster).

In the didactic lecture condition, participants listened to a standard lecture on sexual assault. The lecture was created originally for an established psychology course on gender that was taught regularly on campus. This didactic material included information about: rape myths and facts, rape statistics, domestic abuse, definitions of rape, as well as campus and national resources. A veteran member of interACT—who also performed in the interACT condition—was chosen to deliver this lecture to control for possible presenter effects. Following this lecture, participants were told that the researchers were interested in “getting your opinions and reactions to the lecture.”

In the control condition, participants listened to a lecture and demonstration on how to use an instructional web site created by the publishers of the course text. The lecture demonstrated (via a live online hook-up) how to use this web site to access practice examinations, chapter outlines, and other study aides. Following this presentation, participants were told that the researchers were interested in “getting your opinions and reactions to the demonstration,” as well as their evaluation of other relevant campus issues (e.g., sexual assault).

Measurement

Audience members completed measures of perspective taking, emotional contagion, empathic concern, and perceived ability to comfort. To assess the dimensionality of the measures, a principal components factor analysis was performed using Varimax rotation and Maximum Likelihood Extraction. Three criteria were used to evaluate the factor structure of each instrument: (1) eigenvalues had to exceed 1.0, (2) the

scree test had to show that any additional factor was making a reasonable improvement in the variance accounted for, and (3) an indicator for a given factor had to have a primary factor loading of .50 or higher (Burgoon and Hale 23; Coombs and Holladay 487–88). This procedure showed that the measurement model for each instrument (the number of items or indicators per instrument) varied. Specifically, the analyses resulted in the retention of three items on the following instruments, which had four to five original items: emotional contagion and comforting. The perspective taking and empathic concern instruments remained intact with seven and four items respectively. In all cases, participants responded to the items using a five-point Likert scale (1 = "disagree strongly", 5 = "agree strongly"), with higher scores reflecting more of the variable assessed. Coefficient alpha was used to estimate reliability.

Perspective taking

The perspective taking instrument contained seven items: (a) "I can understand a person's point of view after being sexually assaulted"; (b) "I can understand what a person feels like after being sexually assaulted"; (c) "I can understand what happens to a person after being sexually assaulted"; (d) "I can understand how confused a person can feel after being assaulted sexually"; (e) "I can understand how a person needs to be treated after being assaulted sexually"; (f) "I can understand how to talk to a person after being assaulted sexually"; and (g) "I can understand how to listen to a person who has been assaulted sexually." These items loaded onto a single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 5.05, accounting for 72% of the variance. The scree test also suggested that a single factor solution should be retained. These items had factor loadings ranging from .78 to .87, with a reliability of .94. Support for the validity of this measure is available from Rodríguez, Rich, et al.

Emotional contagion

The emotional contagion measure had three items: (a) "I can feel what a person feels after being sexually assaulted"; (b) "I can feel the confusion that a person feels after being assaulted sexually"; and (c) "I can feel the pain that a person feels after being assaulted sexually." These items loaded onto a single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 2.48, accounting for 62% of the variance. The scree test also suggested that a single factor solution should be retained. These items had factor loadings ranging from .81 to .93, with a reliability of .89. Support for the validity of this measure is available from Rodríguez, Rich, et al.

Empathic concern

Empathic concern was measured with four items: (a) "I can experience concern for the welfare of a person who has been sexually assaulted"; (b) "I can experience concern for the feelings of a person who has been sexually assaulted"; (c) "I can

experience concerned for what happens to a person after being sexually assaulted”; and (d) “I can experience concern for how people treat a person who has been sexually assaulted.” These items loaded onto a single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 3.47, accounting for 87% of the variance. The scree test also suggested that a single factor solution should be retained. These items had factor loadings ranging from .86 to .96, with a reliability of .95. Support for the validity of this measure is available from Rodríguez, Rich, et al.

Comforting

Participants’ perceived ability to comfort someone who had been sexually assaulted was measured using three items: (a) “I can comfort a person who has been sexually assaulted”; (b) “I could comfort someone who has been sexually assaulted”; and (c) “I know that I can comfort someone who has been sexually assaulted.” These items loaded onto a single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 2.45, accounting for 81% of the variance. The scree test also suggested that a single factor solution should be retained. These items had factor loadings ranging from .84 to .86, with a reliability of .89. Support for the validity of this measure is available from Rich and Rodríguez as well as Rodríguez, Rich, et al.

Relationships among the measures were assessed two ways. First, the relationship between variables high in theoretical relevance (convergent validity) was assessed: perspective taking and comforting ($r = .64$, $p < .001$), empathic concern and comforting ($r = .61$, $p < .001$) as well as emotional contagion and comforting ($r = .53$, $p < .001$). Second, the relationship between variables with low theoretical relevance (discriminant validity) was assessed: perspective taking and affective learning ($r = .19$, $p < .001$), empathic concern and affective learning ($r = .16$, $p < .001$), emotional contagion and affective learning ($r = .22$, $p < .001$), as well as comforting and affective learning ($r = .17$, $p < .001$).⁴

Results

Analysis of Variance

An ANOVA analysis demonstrated that audience members in the interACT condition ($M = 20.02$, $SD = 4.21$) reported higher levels of perspective taking than those in the lecture group ($M = 18.00$, $SD = 3.97$) and the control group ($M = 14.65$, $SD = 5.03$), [$F(556) = 69.64$, $p < .001$, eta-square = .20]; post-hoc tests confirmed that each mean was significantly different from each other mean (Tukey HSD, $p < .001$).

Individuals in the interACT condition ($M = 10.37$, $SD = 3.19$) reported more emotional contagion than those in the lecture group ($M = 8.43$, $SD = 3.40$) and control group ($M = 7.55$, $SD = 3.17$), [$F(553) = 36.18$, $p < .001$, eta-square = .12]; post-hoc tests confirmed that each mean was significantly different from each other mean (Tukey HSD, $p < .05$).

Respondents in the interACT condition ($M = 18.10$, $SD = 2.61$) also reported greater empathic concern than those in the lecture group ($M = 16.96$, $SD = 3.11$) and control group ($M = 13.74$, $SD = 4.26$), [$F(554) = 81.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .23$]; post-hoc tests confirmed that each mean was significantly different from each other mean (Tukey HSD, $p < .01$).

Lastly, individuals in the interACT condition ($M = 11.96$, $SD = 2.37$) reported higher perceived ability to comfort than those in the lecture group ($M = 10.60$, $SD = 2.54$) and control group ($M = 8.89$, $SD = 2.77$), [$F(553) = 66.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$]; post-hoc tests confirmed that each mean was significantly different from each other mean (Tukey HSD, $p < .001$). Results of these four tests provided support for the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was tested using multiple regression, in which perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern were the independent variables, and ability to comfort was the dependent variable. Results showed that the predictor variables impacted audience members' perceived ability to comfort [$R = .66$, $F(3, 184) = 45.38$, $p < .001$]. The effect for perspective taking was significant and substantial [the standardized regression coefficient, $B = .21$, $t(184) = 2.58$, $p < .05$]. Similarly, the effect for emotional contagion was significant and substantial [the standardized regression coefficient, $B = .15$, $t(184) = 1.99$, $p < .05$]. The effect for empathic concern was significant and most substantial of all [the standardized regression coefficient, $B = .45$, $t(184) = 7.07$, $p < .001$].

Discussion

In this study, we examined theoretically relevant outcomes associated with the interACT performance about sexual assault. The results showed that the participants exposed to this performance, in comparison to a sexual assault lecture and a control group, reported greater perceived self-efficacy in: perspective taking, emotional contagion, empathic concern, and comforting behavior toward potential sexually assault survivors. In addition, results illustrated that perspective taking, emotional contagion, and empathic concern impact audience members' perceived ability to comfort. These results have important implications for the efficacy of proactive performance in the college classroom. Most importantly, the significant and substantial outcomes connected with the interACT scene demonstrate empirically the effectiveness of this performative intervention.

The interACT proactive performance scene may be aptly suited to help audience members see and experience the significant consequences of sexual assault by presenting an embodied, interactive human drama in the college classroom. The embodied nature of this process provides performance experience as well as vicarious experience. The richness of this embodied experience is both novel and unexpected because students, especially in educational contexts, are accustomed to more didactic presentations, such as lectures. In our view, the novelty of praxis demonstrated by the performance not only punctuates the perceived importance of sexual assault interventions, but also casts the performative and ultimately transformational

elements of Boal's proactive stance on centerstage where they belong. For us, these performance-centered features are central to embodied instruction and social change.

The transformational elements of the interACT performance may be explained, at least partially, in terms of the relationship between empathy and comforting. Specifically, Stiff et al. showed that when individuals understand (engage in perspective taking) and care about the welfare of another person (demonstrate empathic concern), they are more likely to comfort that person. This result was explained using the Altruistic Model, with other-oriented motivation as a key predictor of comforting behavior. In contrast, individuals are less likely to comfort another when they experience emotional responses similar to the distressed other (emotional contagion), a result that was explained using the Egoistic Model, with self-centered motivation being the key predictor of low level or ineffective comforting behavior. Given these two explanations, as well as the strong relationship between empathic concern and comforting in the current study, we argue that altruistic motivation is inducing audience members to report perceived ability to comfort in response to the interACT scripted scenes.

This theoretical explanation is important for several reasons. First, we are learning that the interACT scenes seem to generate empathic concern on the part of audience members, and this process predicts perceived ability to comfort in potential sexual assault episodes. Consistent with previous research, this altruistic explanation suggests that people are more likely to comfort when they feel concern for the welfare (empathic concern) of the sexual assault victim, and not as much when they feel emotions parallel (emotional contagion) to the distressed other (see Miller, Birkholt, et al.; Miller, Stiff, and Ellis; Omdahl and O'Donnell; and Stiff et al.). This consistency in meaning with previous empirical research gives us confidence in the effects that we observe in the present study.

Equally important, this study is the second attempt to document the efficacy of proactive performance, and perceived ability to comfort was induced effectively, once again, using the interACT scenes. This preliminary confirmation of the relationship between the interACT scenes and empathic, comforting responses in potential sexual episodes also gives us further confidence in the results we observe. By continuing to confirm and map these processes in future research, we may discover that some intervention models do not facilitate empathic concern and, consequently, suffer in terms of efficacy. These interventions then could be reshaped to account for the role of empathic concern in facilitating prosocial behaviors, such as comforting, in the aftermath of sexual assault on college campuses. These types of adjustments based on research evidence would yield a well-informed model of performance-based, instructional interventions regarding sexual assault.

This study also has important implications with regard to perceived self-efficacy and the assessment of performance-based sexual assault interventions that are linked empirically to potential behavior (i.e., comforting). For instance, we did not measure the impact of the interACT scripted scenes on general audience attitudes toward sexual assault or rape as some studies do (see Gilbert, Heesacker, and Gannon; Heppner et al. "The Differential," "Examining"). Instead, we assessed perceived

responsive self-efficacy or the self-reported belief in one's ability to respond with empathy and comforting toward a sexual assault survivor. This shift from the measurement of general attitudes to more specific self-efficacy beliefs is significant because self-efficacy beliefs are linked to behavioral intentions as well as overt action (see Bandura, "Health," *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*, and *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*). Like most studies on this topic, however, we did not measure actual behavior or behavior change. Even if we attempted to measure behavior in the present study, we do not know what a person would do during an actual sexual assault scenario.

With regard to the current study, the self-efficacy beliefs that we measured are indicators of specific prosocial responses (i.e., empathic concern, perspective taking) that are linked theoretically and empirically to actual communication behavior (i.e., saying the "right thing" to comfort someone; see Miller, Bikholt, et al.; Miller, Stiff, and Ellis; Omdahl and O'Donnell; and Stiff et al.). This focus on specific, communication-based outcomes is important because we are measuring whether or not audience members were effectively enrolled as agents of change and induced to believe that they were capable of being empathic as well as comforting through their performative or vicarious participation in the intervention. In this way, we are moving away from the mere assessment of negative or positive attitudes toward rape myths, and moving toward the development of concrete beliefs in one's ability to make things better, to make a positive change, to be empathic, to comfort. Thus, we are slowly moving from thought to action, or—at the very least—intention. This movement toward action is at the core of Boal's work. The work, as he puts it, is rehearsal for life not rehearsal for thought. Our study, then, is the first to document the empirical foundations of how this performative stance is initiated in the body (i.e., empathy) and manifests as possible communicative action in the world (i.e., comforting). From our perspective, these empirical outcomes of performance-centered interventions are also central for understanding embodied instruction and social change.

bell hooks notes that "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (12). Performance studies practitioners, with their commitment to issues of embodied learning, are well suited to exploit this space. The highly participatory performance techniques of Augusto Boal—as showcased in the interACT scenes—promote an environment where students are invited literally to take the stage and change the outcome of potentially devastating episodes involving sexual assault.

Notes

- [1] We recognize that continua can potentially perpetuate binary thinking, promote positivism, and create horizontal hierarchies. It is not our intent in this essay to argue that our model is the only or necessarily best way of organizing these paradigms. Furthermore, we are not implying that Boal's work represents the most efficacious way to facilitate social change.

Rather, we suggest that Boal's work facilitates the most embodied engagement among participants.

- [2] Rich, Johnson, and Olson explain the Joker role thus: "More of a problematizer than a facilitator, this figure uses subversive tactics to highlight connections between the personal and the political, the local and the structural." According to Schutzman, "The Joker is the facilitator of the workshop in which the techniques are tried. S/he is responsible for maximizing the benefits of the techniques for the participants, selecting which techniques would best serve the stories being offered up by the group, creating an atmosphere that encourages participation in stories/anti-models that are emotionally provocative, and improvising through the array of unpredictable interventions, re-actions, ideas, and feelings that arise willy-nilly."
- [3] When we perform for high school students, the clinical psychologist attends the performance and facilitates discussion at the conclusion of the show. For college audiences and community groups, the psychologist joins the troupe as her schedule permits. When we perform for a group like a battered woman's shelter, we ensure that in-house therapists attend the performance. For the purposes of this study, the psychologist did not attend the performances because we did not want to confound the effects we were measuring.
- [4] According to Thorndike, "*Convergent validity* would be indicated by relatively high correlations among those measures designed to assess a common construct. *Discriminant validity* would be indicated by much lower correlations between those measures and ones designed to measure some other construct" (189). Based on this perspective, the empathy indicators should be highly correlated with the other prosocial construct in our study (i.e., comforting). Conversely, a measure of affective learning was included in the study to provide a test of discriminant validity for the empathy and comforting instruments. Consistent with Thorndike's perspective, the quantitative association between affective learning and empathy as well as affective learning and comforting should be small (i.e., $r < .30$) because the affective learning measure is designed to measure another construct (see Christophel; Gorham; and Rodríguez, Plax, and Kearney). According to Rodríguez, Plax, and Kearney, "Affective learning has been conceptualized as a process involving the acquisition or modification and maintenance of positive or negative attitudes toward the subject or teacher" (295). To measure affective learning, participants reported the degree to which they liked the demonstration with regard to three items: (a) "I liked the demonstration"; (b) "The demonstration was pleasing"; and (c) "I enjoyed the demonstration." These items loaded onto a single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 2.76, accounting for 69% of the variance. The scree test also suggested that a single factor solution should be retained. These items had factor loadings ranging from .87 to .97, with a reliability of .94.

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