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Raising the Stakes: The Impact of Emotional Investment on Learning Stage Combat

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**Raising the Stakes:
The Impact of Emotional Investment on Learning Stage Combat**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Theatre

Jordan College of the Arts

and

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Sarah Ireen Tam

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Introduction

One of the most fascinating and complicated aspects of live theatre is the portrayal of violence onstage. A successful fight demands a high level of physical and technical proficiency, as well as each actor's investment in their characters and the scene. Stage combat is the method of choreographing and performing violent action while preserving both the actors' physical safety and their investment in their characters.

When portraying characters that are experiencing a level of emotion high enough to push them to fight, there is a danger for the actor of being overwhelmed by the character's emotions and losing control. The actor must appear to be experiencing these intense emotions, but they must not actually experience them, or they will not be performing the fight scene safely. Suddeth reflects that "The excuse that 'I have to *feel* it' is only that - an excuse for poor technique. I have seen too many partners hurt by actors who 'felt' it. Control is key!" (175). The impact on an actor of finding the motivation necessary for intensely violent scenes merits close inspection. Actors should never feel at risk of getting injured during a stage fight. If the emotions of a fight scene impede actors' ability to safely perform their fight choreography, it may create an unsafe environment for the fight. Therefore, a paradox is created. In "The Compromise Theory of Stage Combat", Huston describes this paradox: "The combatant keeps his actor's instinct [for spontaneity] on a short leash, because a fight scene compromises between the opposites of spontaneity and calculation" (26). In order to facilitate effective acting, actors must invest themselves emotionally and intellectually in their character and the given circumstances of the play, while at the same time staying mentally distant enough from the situation to perform their fight choreography safely. How can a stage actor apply their acting training to fight scenes in order to appear invested in the situation as their character while still staying safe and in control?

One aspect that I believe influences the navigation of this paradox is the level of emotional

stakes in a scene. The level of emotional stakes in a fight scene is how much a character stands to lose in a fight or how much risk they are taking. The different levels of stakes are present in a large range of fighting styles, from slapstick to bar brawls to domestic violence or death. Through research and directing a stage combat showcase of my own with actors who are new to stage combat, I will investigate how the level of stakes in a fight scene affects how well the actor performs the fight choreography. Because the level of emotion in scenes with low stakes is not as intense as it would be in scenes with higher stakes, I expect that the actors will have an easier time performing the choreography and inhabiting their characters in scenes with lower stakes.

Violence in Theatre

Violence in theatre is a reflection of human nature. As Kreng observes, the portrayal of violence has been a part of humanity's culture for millennia (2). In prehistoric times, violence served as a teaching tool. The ancient Greeks then dramatized violence to elicit emotional catharsis, while the ancient Romans used violence as entertainment and a demonstration of political power. The Elizabethan theatre used violence to entertain the audience and further the story. Violence in Restoration plays commented on social issues. From the 19th century through contemporary times, violence illustrated the tension between people on a more personal scale. Vandenbroucke quotes Edward Bond in his explanation for the overall cause of violence throughout history: "[Violence] occurs in situations of injustice. It is caused not only by physical threats, but even more significantly by threats to human dignity" (Bond qtd. in Vandenbroucke). Violence is present in society and in theatre when one party feels wronged and, consciously or reflexively, takes action.

Although violence is part of humanity, staging imitations of it is complex. Potter is critical of people who create violent media content because he believes they are irresponsible about how they use it: "Are the people in the creative community really being creative, or are they relying on violence merely because it is easy?" (154). Potter argues that these incidences of violence lack artistic

necessity and fail to reveal truths about the human condition. If theatre is to avoid criticism for gratuitous violence, it must prove its legitimate place on the stage. Suddeth declares that “Any fight scene must be organic to the rest of the production. It must also reflect human society as a whole. Most playwrights don’t write combat scenes for the blood and guts effects, but to further the plot and comment on the human condition” (21). A playwright’s decision to use violence in their script is a deliberate choice that invites layers of analysis and critical thinking about the relationship between humans and violence.

The process of analyzing violence in theatre begins with the director’s interpretation of the fight scene. The director decides what point the violence illustrates and how it will best further the plot. For example, I recently saw the Guthrie Theater’s production of *King Lear*, in which Regan stabbed out one of Gloucester’s eyes with her high heel. The moment was extremely visceral and disturbing, and clearly underlined the seriousness of the situation and what was at risk for Gloucester. However, in the previous moments of the scene, Cornwall used a stir stick to poke out Gloucester’s other eye and then dropped it in his own cocktail glass. The audience’s reaction to Cornwall’s part of the fight was laughter, while there was much more tension in the room for Regan’s part of the fight. These two different ways of poking out Gloucester’s eyes illustrate the various effects that the same basic action can have. Because violence forces change in the characters and the world of the play, the director must have a clear idea of what they want to achieve with the violence and how to accomplish it.

The violence is also interpreted by the designers, whose interpretations help set the tone of the violence, whether it is realistic, fantastic, or stylized. A realistic style of violence strives to make the violence appear as though it is actually happening. Fantastic violence includes more weapons that are no longer familiar in the contemporary world, such as broadswords or rapiers. This violence may be realistic for its time or setting, or could occur in unrealistic circumstances, such as the fights

that take place in the world of Dungeons and Dragons in Qui Nguyen's *She Kills Monsters*. Stylized violence is portrayed with an unrealistic element, such as slow motion or dance (the fights in *West Side Story*). The design choices will affect how the audience relates to the violence being presented to them. The audience may be more uncomfortable with realistic violence because it is the closest to what they could potentially experience in real life. Fantastic violence may invest them in the story more because of the magnetic nature of weapons, as well as being the most romanticized style of violence. Stylized violence may be the most acceptable to the audience because there is a comfortable distance between the audience and the reality of the violence.

Finally, actors make personal choices about how to motivate the violent action as their characters so that the action appears justified. Girard explains that violence is a highly charged action to portray onstage: "Violent actions change the situation, the aggressor, the victim and the audience's perception of all three. After an act of violence, no relationship is quite the same again" (439). Introducing violence into a situation reveals new aspects of the character to the actor as well as to the audience. The characters may lose trust in each other, prove the gravity of a situation, or release sides they didn't know they had: "There are very few other situations that bring an entire spectrum of emotions to the surface like that of mortal combat" (Girard 435). Moments of violence are frequently essential climaxes of character development and therefore could not be replaced by any other type of action. These volatile emotions are also important for the actor to treat carefully; the actors must not lose trust in each other or become overwhelmed by these emotions, even if the characters do.

Because violence is such an important aspect of theatre when used in a way that asks the audience to reflect on its presence, producing violence successfully and safely is extremely important. Boughn observes that unsafe violence detracts from the benefits of including violence: "If an actor's knees go *kerthunk* onstage, the audience will not hear a word of his brilliant

Shakespearean soliloquy. Instead they'll wince and moan. Then they'll wonder if he's okay for the rest of the scene or until he gets up, whichever comes first. Maybe not even then" (59). Badly done stage violence is not only cringeworthy, it distracts the audience from the important interpretation being presented.

Learning Stage Combat

When learning stage combat, the consideration of actor safety is foremost in the teaching process. Safety provides a foundation for the two aspects of learning stage combat: physical and psychological/emotional. Technical training emphasizes a vocabulary of movements, physical control, precision, timing, and use of weapons. Stage combat has its own unique movement style focused on how to make fight moves appear as though they are connecting with others' bodies or weapons with great force. In reality, the energy of the move is redirected to keep everyone safe. There is generally no protective equipment worn, and the actors perform the fight live in "real" time, so preventative measures must be taken to minimize mistakes. Stage combat training differs from martial arts or other sport dueling, although these movement styles can be an aid to a student of stage combat. An actor trained in martial arts, for example, has a good understanding of their own body and how they can adjust it to achieve the desired move or effect in a choreographed fight. However, actors must be careful to use physical discipline training to support their fight moves without appearing more proficient in fighting than their character would.

The first aspect of combat training is technical: accurately performing the fight vocabulary, which is made up of strikes, blocks, kicks, falls, etc. Several stage combat instructional texts recommend learning the techniques without any stylization or characterization, in order to be able to color them later on for specific fights and characters. Regardless of the style of a fight or the way an actor must change their physicality for their character, having a strong basis and understanding of technique is extremely important. An actor must be able to absorb the moves into their muscle

memory so that they can focus on pursuing their acting objectives during the fight.

The second aspect of learning stage combat is addressing the psychological/emotional side, including the character objective, the actor's inner life, and specific intentions for fight scenes. Suddeth explains that "Actors must understand that when playing a dramatic scene that involves a fight, sure and sudden death could await at any moment. [...] Performers often get lost in the technique of the fight rather than its horrifying potential ending" (38). Actors in a fight scene build on their technical foundation of choreographed moves in order to inhabit characters who may be fighting to the death. If the actors are considering why they are fighting and how they should be fighting while they are learning the choreography, the fight becomes a natural extension of their characters and the action of the play. Cheatham gives one idea for how to accomplish this effect through careful rehearsal: "in order to create a truthful inner life, we slow the fight (to 1/4 speed) and create as many detailed thoughts as possible" (16). By creating an inner story for themselves, actors should be able to truthfully live through their character's situation and appear to believe that they are in mortal danger onstage. It is an accepted notion in theatre that genuine emotion or inspiration is an inconsistent source of acting and cannot be relied on to be repeated many times in performance. Stanislavski makes this clear: "Unfortunately [feelings are] not tractable nor willing to take orders. Since you cannot begin your work, unless your feelings happen to function of their own accord it is necessary for you to have recourse to some other master" (244). One effective technique that actors can use to reliably create their inner life is through focusing on pursuing concrete character objectives. Instead of trying to feel every emotion that their characters feel, actors must give themselves achievable goals to truthfully strive for every performance. For example, rather than trying to feel sad, an actor may try to convince their scene partner of the depth of a personal loss. The actor is focused on completing an action that depends on their partner, rather than attempting to achieve an emotional state of being. Bruder et al. state that "Acting then is dealing truthfully with

the other actors onstage in order to pursue a specific goal” (8). When looked at this way, a show can be repeated every performance with the actors still truthfully attempting to achieve their goals in relation to their scene partners.

In fight scenes, the different tactics actors use to pursue their objective take the form of fight moves. Duval comments that if actors link character objectives to combat tactics, the fight illustrates the action: “Ultimately, perfectly placed parries and perfectly targeted attacks alone do not create a good fight. The specificity of the acted choices within every moment within a fight, using the techniques required for safety and effectiveness, is the ultimate goal” (2). Instead of cutting the scene off from their character’s objectives, the actor can use the character’s desires to strengthen the fight. For example, a character may say, “I don’t want to start a fight,” when they really do. The actor’s overall objective for the scene may then be to win the fight before their opponent has the chance to fight back. They may throw a kick suddenly to their opponent’s head, hoping to catch them off guard. Focusing on achieving the character’s objectives creates a more interesting, safer fight overall. The actor is clearheaded and focused, and the character appears emotionally connected. If an actor focuses too much on trying to induce the emotion present in their character in the fight scene, they may become emotionally overwhelmed and lose control of the fight. Therefore, connection to character objective is just as important as learning the fight moves themselves. With focus placed on truthful portrayal of a conflict between characters, the actors will be able to facilitate the integration of fight choreography with the rest of the script and the purpose of the violence on stage.

The Actor’s Paradox

There is an inherent paradox for the actors performing a fight scene. Actors cannot allow themselves to be overcome by the intense emotions present in fight scenes, but they must still appear fully invested as their characters. Huston’s paradox sets up this contradiction, but I question

whether actors really must keep their actors' instincts reigned in (Huston 26), in other words avoid surrendering themselves to the circumstances of the scene. An actor doesn't need to sacrifice their acting instincts in order to perform a fight safely; instead, they must find a way to use their instincts to aid their performance of the fight. An actor's instinct is important in order to connect with their partner and respond truthfully to the scene in the moment. Stage combat is a balancing act; it must be truthful while being a show, and also be presented in a way that preserves the actors' safety and instinct.

While stage combat presents a difficult paradox to the actor, it is not without solutions for how to work around it. Hobbs sums up the two things that must happen while an actor is involved in stage combat: "On the one hand, *characters* are seen to be performing on a highly charged emotional level. On the other, the *actors* have to be working mentally on a conscious level of coolness, with complete body relaxation and control, so that their acted aggression can be performed with conviction, and at the same time in absolute safety" (119). The key to Hobbs's thoughts is his comment about "acted aggression." The aggression in a fight scene must not stem from the actor's aggression; it must stem from the character's objectives and goals. While the audience expects to see a high level of emotion, Bruder et al. explain that "The actor doesn't need to remind the audience of what the circumstances are, so all that is left for him to do is to illustrate that part of the scene not taken care of by the lines – the physical act of carrying out the essential action of the scene" (22). All that the actors need to convey can be contained within the lines in the scene, as well as the physical pursuit of a character objective.

So how does an actor navigate the paradox safely while working with the intention behind the fight? They must not let the circumstances of the scene rouse their personal emotions in a dangerous way. Girard warns that an actor must overcome any natural instincts that are sparked in a stage fight: "Whether involved in armed or unarmed stage combat, you need to overcome your

primal instincts and violent reflex actions. You need to slowly develop a new set of conditioned responses” (4). When another person is approaching you with a visible intent to harm, even if that intent is fabricated and not malicious, it is quite likely that your physiological response will be triggered by the perceived threat. This instinctive reaction can be dangerous when it arises in a situation where the actor knows they are safe but does not feel safe.

The need to quell the natural, instinctive response to a perceived threat is particularly prevalent in relation to certain views of acting. Depending on the school of acting, an actor may feel strongly, personally connected to their character (such as in method acting). As Sievers states, the distance between the actor and the character is lessened, and the actor identifies heavily with the character: “No matter how extreme a ‘character part’ he is playing, an actor puts a good part of himself into every role he plays” (210). Sievers claims that through the process of playing a character, actors are playing a part of themselves. This is one solution to the actor’s paradox of being themselves and their characters at the same time; if part of the character reflects who the actor is, they are closer to being one person rather than trying to be two. While this is a view of acting held by many actors, it does not lend itself well to performing characters in a fight scene. If an actor allows themselves to be too absorbed into their character, they risk losing sight of their task of keeping their partner safe and become overwhelmed by the emotion of the scene. Suddeth provides a chilling reminder of what may happen if an actor becomes too entrenched in the emotional life of their character:

Unfortunately, this technique, while popular and effective in many situations, is particularly dangerous during a fight scene. The actor playing Edmund cannot *really* want to kill Edgar, or he might – and the curtain will ring down to the wailing of ambulances.

Fight scenes must be *acted* and must be consistent performance after

performance. The scene must not be subject to variations of mood or emotional recall, but must be the same – always. Only in this way will the fight remain safe throughout the run of a production. (175)

Suddeth's claims highlight the need for safety above all else, as well as one aspect of the actor's paradox: control. He brings attention to the concept that in order to keep everyone safe, the actors must act their characters, not become them. The overall need for safety brings this issue of the actor's paradox to the forefront of the stage combat field. Through learning to navigate this paradox successfully, an actor will both improve their acting work and participate in safe fight scenes.

Levels of Stakes

Stage combat covers a wide range of violent action on stage, from a simple push between two friends to a mass battle scene to the death. The action's place on the spectrum can influence what choreography a fight director uses, the manner in which the actors perform the fight, and the audience's response.

The determining factors of where a violent action lands on the spectrum are mainly what the character risks by fighting and what they stand to lose or gain by the outcome of the fight. This is referred to as the stakes of the fight. Different types of stage combat will have different levels of intensity. In a low stakes scene, the character will lose something that doesn't have tremendous value, such as bragging rights or a small amount of money. In a medium stakes scene, a character may lose something that has strong personal importance, such as a friendship or a job. In a high stakes scene, the character may be in danger of losing something as valuable as their own life.

Each combat scene, regardless of the level of stakes, requires actor investment and intention, careful selection of fight choreography, and attention to safety. If an actor is not invested in a fight because the violent action is at the light end of the spectrum, Cheatham observes that the dynamic will fall flat: "Even if the argument is trivial – arguing over the last piece of pizza, say – if it comes to

blows, then the personal investment must be huge. Any kind of fighting could mean putting one's life on the line. The climactic placement of onstage violence demands this level of risk taking" (24). For an argument to come to violent action, all characters involved must have a personal stake in the outcome of the argument.

The choreography of the fight is largely dictated by the level of stakes and the action of the scene. For example, the stakes are not high in an average bar fight; therefore the fight is short and highly based on one character asserting dominance; the largest thing at stake is the characters' pride. These moves involved are likely to be "sloppy" punches, and it is likely that there are only a few moves. In a fight with medium stakes, the characters may attempt riskier moves because they have more to lose. These moves may target more sensitive areas like the face or groin, or be in longer combinations. They can afford to try harder to wound their opponent because they will feel more passionately about winning. In a high stakes scene, the characters will strike quickly and with little or no mercy because they stand to lose everything if they lose the fight. These moves may include choking or grappling. How the level of stakes affects the specific fight choreography is unique to each scene or play, and the characters involved in the fight must be taken into account.

The level of stakes also influences the manner in which the characters fight in addition to the actual moves they are performing. Suddeth reminds actors that "It's clear that a character who has just lost a hand at poker will fight with less intensity than one who stands to lose a kingdom. Motivation is the key to how all characters fight" (158). If a character is in danger of losing their life, they will fight with more passion and desperation than a character who is risking nothing. An actor must be able to convey the difference in levels of motivation in the different characters they portray while still working safely and in strong connection to their fighting partner or partners.

Directing and Fight Directing

Two of the main positions in a production that have an influence on the fight scenes are the

director and the fight director/choreographer. Directors determine what message they want to convey to the audience and do their best to guide their collaborators (actors, designers, production team, et. al.) towards making that message as clear as possible, as well as synthesizing the work of the collective. Fight directors work with the fight scenes, as well as the props, costume, and set designers (in order to ensure that the design elements are safe for the fight). Their primary job is to choreograph and teach the fights to the actors. They also ensure that the choreography fits the director's vision for the show and that the actors know their fight scenes.

The director serves as the liaison between the audience and the actors, as Sievers describes: "The director in one sense may be said to direct not the play itself but the attention of the audience to the play, compelling the spectators to look where he wants them to and anticipating their emotional responses" (103). The director considers how the audience will react to the production and whether that reaction is the desired result. This can be done by highlighting themes in the script or the production design. When violence is present in a show, it is the director's job to interpret how it fits into the overall message of the production, and what effect they would like the violence to have: intellectual, emotional, or physical/visceral. For example, *Titus Andronicus* is a play about the lengths people will go to for revenge. A director may choose to highlight the intellectual effect of the violence by asking for choreography with longer pauses in it to allow the audience time to anticipate the violent action. Directors may also focus on the emotional effect by asking the actors to linger on the aftermath of the fights to emphasize what the characters have lost. A visceral or physical effect may be achieved by using a lot of blood and extending the length of the fight scenes.

The director's choices are made from a basis of their understanding of the characters, the characters' relationships, and each of the character's objectives. In terms of fight scenes, this may mean the director helps the actor decide whether or not their character has any physical differences from the actor themselves. Directors may also help the actors find objectives to pursue in the fight

scene. This helps give the actors the level of engagement they must have to appear invested in the fight without being overcome by emotion.

Fight directors must choreograph and teach a fight sequence to the actors, as well as help the actors with their character development and acting beats throughout a fight scene. In order to facilitate their teaching and choreographing, fight directors must pay close attention to what choreography will work for each actor.

The fight director's challenges include limited rehearsal time, working with inexperienced actors, maintaining a positive rehearsal atmosphere, and being flexible with choreography. Due to the limited time most fight directors have to work on general fight principles or fine detail work, Steinberg states that they must provide a basic framework for the actors to work from: "Our goal as teachers is to give our students a command of the dialect of violence and empower them with the tools they need to live and breathe as a character inside it" (16). If actors are taught how to utilize the violence safely and remain open to connecting with their character and their partner, the fight's dynamics will grow throughout the production.

In addition to teaching the actors the fight choreography itself, fight directors help the actors develop intentions or motivations to integrate their characters' objectives with their choreography. For example, two characters may be arguing over a wallet that one has taken from the other. The owner of the wallet tells the other character to give it back, to which the thief responds "What're you going to do about it?" The fight director would read this as a confident response from a character who is ready and looking for trouble. The fight may begin with the owner of the wallet attempting to hit the thief. The thief ducks because he was taunting the owner in the first place and anticipated the attempted punch. The fight director uses the characters' motivations and intentions to help shape the choreography and vice versa; the actors use the guidance from the fight director to develop their inner lives in the fight.

Fight directors must also be ready to adapt the choreography to fit the actor's ability or comfort level. This will lower the risk of injury and ease the actor's integration of the fight scene with their character development: "Particularly in scenes of strong emotion, the right movements may stimulate the actor to reach a depth of emotional intensity, and wrong movements may inhibit him and get in his way" (Sievers 153). If an actor is worrying too much about uncomfortable movements in a fight scene, they will not be able to focus on playing their objective and connecting with their partner. This distraction may lead to injuries or unmotivated movements that are not connected to the character's goal in the scene. With comfortable fight moves, the actors will also be more connected and in tune with the fight scene. A fight director's job is to teach a fight to actors in such a way that they can use the tools of acting to motivate the fight for their characters and create a safe, meaningful experience onstage with their partner.

Research Question

When potentially dangerous moves are combined with the heightened intensity of a violent scene, the emotions of both actors and their characters can be impacted. It is not a stretch to see how any range of fight scenes provide an opportunity for actors to portray complicated and emotional characters: "If we look at a sampling of characters who fight, male and female, modern and historic, we will immediately see that the emotions we are dealing with are strong, consuming, and volatile" (Suddeth xviii). With the risk of an actor becoming overwhelmed by emotion, it is necessary to understand how to safely navigate the complex paradox of being a controlled actor while playing a highly emotional, intense character. Because the stakes and the emotions involved in fight scenes can vary greatly from play to play, it is also necessary to understand how different types of fight scenes will affect actors' ability to learn and perform those fight scenes. I believe that the lower the stakes a fight scene has, the less risk there will be of the loss of emotional control. Will the actors in a low stakes fight scene be able to successfully perform fight choreography while remaining

invested in their characters more easily than actors in a high stakes fight scene will?

Project Methodology

There is not currently any scholarship on the relationship of the level of stakes of a fight scene to the actor's ability to learn and perform the scene; therefore, conducting my own research was necessary to test my theory. In order to obtain the information I needed, I produced a stage combat showcase. I chose three scenes from different plays that have varying levels of emotional stakes (low, medium, and high). Throughout the rehearsal process, I surveyed each of the actors at the end of every rehearsal with questions about their personal perceptions of their safety, stage combat technique, and emotional investment in their character. This model allowed me to track over time how the learning process of actors with a low level of stage combat experience would be affected by the level of emotional stakes in their scenes.

When choosing scenes for the showcase, I considered five primary aspects: the presence of a pre-existing fight, genre of the scene, scene content, practical considerations, and the context of the scene. My first criterion was that a fight existed already written into the scene, ensuring that the action of the fight was an extension of the logical growth of the characters' intentions and emotions throughout the play.

A second aspect to consider was the level of stakes in the scene. The levels of stakes needed to have enough variation to merit comparison. I evaluated the stakes of each scene that I read and grouped them relative to each other into three categories. After evaluating each scene for genre, practical considerations, and context, I selected one scene for each level of stakes from among them. At the lowest level of stakes, there would be scenes that involved petty disagreements or situations of coincidence that credibly led to a fight. In the middle section of stakes, there would be serious situations that the characters are invested in, such as lovers' quarrels. Finally, there was the highest category of stakes, which involved scenes of murderous or excessively violent intent.

A third major consideration was the genre and style of the scene. For the purposes of my research, all of the scenes needed to fit into the same genre. Therefore, I used only scenes from contemporary plays, as opposed to classical. Classical plays lend themselves to fights with weapons more readily, and I only choreographed unarmed fights. They would also present an added obstacle for the actors in terms of complex language that would detract from the focus on the fight choreography. I determined to use only scenes with realistic action; this would help the actors to better identify with their characters.

As a fourth consideration, I looked at practical parameters. I searched for scenes with a small cast, as I knew I would be casting an ensemble of two to six actors. Finally, I took into consideration how much sense the scene would make out of context to the audience. While I did not automatically discard a scene if it did not contain stand-alone dramatic action, I searched for scenes that would not overly confuse the audience.

The low stakes scene I chose was from *The Lonesome West* by Martin McDonagh. There is a fight written in for the two brothers, Coleman and Valene, who are fighting over money. The brothers fight frequently, they are quickly broken up by the priest, and there are no lasting repercussions of the fight. The play is also contemporary and realistic. There are only three characters, of which only two fight. Therefore, the scene fit all of my criteria.

The medium stakes scene I selected was from *Private Lives* by Noel Coward. A fight is written into the script during an argument between Amanda and Elyot. The fight is sparked by Elyot breaking a record player and Amanda retaliating violently. The fight progresses to reveal that Amanda and Elyot do not like each other, even though they left their respective spouses to be together. The scene has a medium level of stakes because they are fighting over their relationship, which is serious because of what they gave up to be together. While the play was written in 1930, the situation is contemporary and the language isn't too dated. The play is a farce, but because the

characters take their circumstances seriously, it fit my requirement that the action be realistic. The scene also can be played with only two people. Therefore, this scene also fit all of my criteria.

For the high stakes scene, I chose a section of *True West* by Sam Shepard. There is a scene with a fight between two brothers, Austin and Lee, where one believes he has killed the other. The reappearance of Lee has caused Austin's life to fall apart. When Lee decides to leave Austin behind in the wreck his life has become, Austin attacks him. Because Austin has lost almost everything at this point in the play, his desperation and anger justify the attempted murder of his brother. This also indicates that the scene has high stakes. The scene has two fighting characters and one non-fighting character, and is contemporary and written in a realistic style. The scene from *True West* best fit my scene criteria for the high stakes category.

While planning auditions, I chose a format that would allow me to judge whether or not the auditioners could tell a story through physical movement, without the aid of dialogue or context. My audition was open to all Butler students whether or not they had previous experience with stage combat. A performer with previous experience would be better able to delve more deeply into work on the character and the scene because they would not have to spend as much time working on basic stage combat moves, but I was choosing from a limited casting pool. Therefore, I looked for indications that each person auditioning would be able to learn quickly and have an aptitude for the work rather than existing skill.

After warm-ups, I taught the auditioners a slap, roundhouse punch, and roundhouse kick. The actors then paired off to create a five-move fight sequence that told a specific story. The actors came up with their characters, why they were fighting, and a sequence of moves that conveyed this. Through the choices the actors made, I could predict if they would be able to learn how to apply character to stage fights and pick up the choreography quickly. I was looking for an ensemble of four to six people, and I had five actors audition. I cast all five; in each of their auditions, I saw a

potential to learn. All of the performers had experience with acting, whether it was from previous productions or acting classes. A majority of the actors would need to be taught all of the fight choreography; some of the actors had performed fight choreography in shows before. The acting theories and stage combat texts I used throughout the process were likely written for actors with a higher level of experience; I was working with students who had not had time to acquire all of the acting and combat skills that a professional actor would have. This may have affected the rehearsal process and results, because we had to spend more time going over explanations and how to achieve the desired result, rather than executing it from the first try.

One of the first aspects of stage combat that I focused on in rehearsals was partner connection. Believability and safety rely on actors' mutual understanding, trust, and connection onstage. As Huston argues, "Combat is the climax of a relationship, a moment in which potential energy becomes kinetic; but without the relationship, and without the matrix that supports it, combat has no value" (13). In order to foster this partner connection, as well as begin to introduce the actors to the physical demands of stage combat, the first rehearsal of the showcase included partner work and trust building. In that time, we performed exercises based around the concepts of trust, coordination, and weight sharing.

To begin building trust, one exercise we did was a practice in giving and taking weight. Unarmed combat requires fighters to frequently be in close proximity or contact. Weight sharing exercises prepare partners to work in physical contact: "The more opportunities performers have to partner with each other, no matter what the exercise, the more deftly they will be able to respond to each other's energy when engaged in training, rehearsal, or performance" (Najarian 77).

An exercise we did that worked with coordination required the actors to jog around, make eye contact, jump in the air together, hit each other's open hands, and then keep running. This exercise helps the actors get used to the process required to complete a stage combat move. They

establish the correct distance, make eye contact, and then perform the move in sync.

The actors worked on another exercise to help them develop a sense of what physical conflict is like. Actors stand facing each other about a foot apart with both of their palms touching their partner's palms. The partners then try to get each other off balance by giving or releasing tension or force through their hands. This exercise helps the actors think in terms of offensive and defensive movement: "Games allow the actor to make connections, both physical and conceptual, between executing choreography and bringing that choreography to life in performance" (Najarian 95). This exercise also helps them practice the sharing of weight and connection with their partner.

Throughout these exercises, I asked the actors to switch partners regularly. This helped them learn to adapt quickly to working with new people and to the differences between partners. I also encouraged a sense of unity by working on the same basic techniques with everyone before they split into scene partners. We reviewed the skills taught at auditions in the first rehearsal in order to be able to move ahead more quickly with the choreography later. I also taught several new moves that built on the basics the actors already knew, such as jabs and body knaps (a knap is the sound of a hit that an actor makes on themselves or their partner). Taking a day of rehearsal to work on the basics of stage combat technique, partner connection, and safety made sure that everyone could draw on the same basic vocabulary during later rehearsals.

When choreographing fight scenes, it's useful both practically and conceptually to divide the fight into phrases. A phrase is a short section of a fight that has a clear intention or goal. Krenig states that because a fight has to tell a story, phrases can help keep the story clear by giving it structure: "A fight scene is a story within a story, and as such the fight scene itself typically has a three-act structure of its own [...] The three acts comprise a justified beginning, a conflicting middle, and a satisfying ending" (xxiii). Distinct phrases are easier for the actors to remember and also provide a convenient point of reference while rehearsing. Conceptually, dividing the fights into

phrases helps the actors to pinpoint their characters' different intentions and methods of fulfilling them throughout the fight. Where to divide the phrases was informed by the demands of the text as well as the characters' development throughout the scene. In my case, the decision was often led by convenience in accordance with the existing stage directions. Because of how the scenes are constructed, the logical places of division then generally match up with the more integral aspects of the scene, such as switches in tactics or character growth. This was the case in both the *True West* scene and the *Private Lives* scene. The fights in these scenes are interspersed with the dialogue, so there is more of an underlying structure to build the fight and the phrases on (see Appendix C).

In the *True West* scene, the first phrase occurs during Austin's realization that Lee is going to leave without him. Austin is desperately trying to take back control, so the first phrase reflects that in his attempts to subdue Lee in a stranglehold. During the second phrase, Lee is fighting for his life. He tries to play along with Austin and distract him in order to get away. The second phrase is short and sharp to reflect Lee's lack of control in both the fight and the scene. In the final scene, Lee realizes that Austin can kill him, so he fights even more viciously. However, Austin has realized that he has complete control over Lee and will stop at nothing to get what he wants. The fight choreography reflects this in Austin's position on top of Lee and his unrelenting stranglehold.

The *Private Lives* scene begins with a small disagreement over the radio that blows up into a fight about Amanda and Elyot's relationship. The first phrase shows Amanda hitting Elyot with the radio; there's no way out of the situation for the characters after that except to fight. The second phrase begins when Amanda tries to leave, but Elyot wants to finish their argument. This is reflected in moves such as restraining holds, as well as active movement towards the door. In the third and final phrase, Amanda realizes that she must overpower Elyot to get away. She takes control by slapping him repeatedly and then running away while he is incapacitated and surprised.

In the *Lonesome West* scene, the fight is not broken up by dialogue, so I gave each phrase a

physical goal rather than an emotional intention. Because the brothers are fighting about who's right, they struggle for physical dominance. The first phrase's goal is for Coleman to get Valene to the ground. In the second phrase, Valene drags Coleman down with him. Coleman refuses to let Valene get up because Coleman is currently in control, so Valene evens the playing field by kicking Coleman to the ground with him. The third phrase is a brawl on the ground, with each brother trying to get the upper hand. This is reflected in quick, back and forth strikes and grappling. Regardless of whether the fight happens all at once or is broken up throughout the scene, the phrases help the actors to develop through the fight and attempt different tactics to achieve their characters' goals.

During the planning process of the showcase, I considered choreographing one fight routine and applying it to all three scenes. They would then have the same three phrases, but arranged around the dialogue to fit the requirements of the scene. While this method would streamline the rehearsal process, I decided that it would benefit my research more to choreograph three separate routines tailored to the scenes they take place in. Aside from the increased opportunity to grow my choreographing experience, this allowed the fights to be more organic in the context of the individual scenes and characters. Fight choreography for the stage cannot be one-size-fits-all and still serve the production to its best ability. I proved the necessity of distinguishing between styles for myself when I considered the characters in each of the scenes. A high society lady, Amanda from *Private Lives*, would not fight in a similar way to two country brothers, Coleman and Valene from *The Lonesome West*. Each scene required a unique set of moves and style of executing those moves. The brothers in *The Lonesome West* fought in a messy, brawl-type style. Their choreography includes many sweeping punches and kicks and moves such as elbows to the face and groin kicks that are calculated to hurt a lot. These sort of moves were in keeping with who the brothers were. They probably aren't trained in fighting, but they've almost certainly fought each other before.

The fighting style in *Private Lives* was much different. Amanda and Elyot are part of a high

society, and they're likely not trained or experienced in fighting. Therefore many of their moves are more instinctive, like slaps and basic punches. Because the scene is a comedy, there are moments such as eight successive slaps that highlight the ridiculousness of the situation. Their fighting style includes primarily slaps, grappling, and moves such as twist falls and hair pulls.

Finally, the fighting style in *True West* reflects the desperation of the brothers through its extended chokeholds and short phrases. Much of the dialogue is conducted while Lee is in a chokehold, which helps highlight Austin's intent to do whatever it takes to have control. Austin is the main aggressor of the fight because his intention dictates Lee's goal: to stay alive. The short phrases convey this further by emphasizing what little control Lee has in the situation.

As part of the rehearsal process, I asked the actors to fill out a survey (Appendix A) at the end of each rehearsal. The same survey was given to all of the actors and didn't change over the course of the production period. The questions were all multiple choice and covered three main categories: safety, stage combat technique, and emotional investment in the scene. These questions allowed me to track the actors' perceptions of their learning processes. By asking the actors to reflect critically on their progress, I tracked the relationship between emotional investment in a scene to how safe the actor feels and how safe they felt they made their partner feel, as well as how that relationship changes over time.

Before analyzing the survey results, I expected to find that the actors had an easier time being emotionally invested in the lower stakes scenes than in the higher stakes scenes while still feeling safe and keeping their partners safe. This result would manifest in a high rating for both the safety and emotional investment questions on the survey. The scenes with lower stakes do not incorporate issues that are as sensitive as those in the high stakes scenes. For example, the murder in cold blood of one character's brother in the *True West* scene is a much more emotionally intense scene than the argument over money in the scene from *The Lonesome West*. My assumption was that

this would make it harder for the actors to become emotionally invested while retaining the integrity of the technique. Because the lower stakes scene, which depicts a rivalry between brothers, is more emotionally available to the actors in reference to their life experiences, I believed that it would be easier for them to stay in control of their emotions during the fight. If the actors who perform the lower stakes scenes score their safety and emotional investment highly, the results of the showcase will coincide with my prediction.

When planning my rehearsals and how I would approach the project, I had to make a choice to focus primarily on the fights themselves. While spending a majority of the rehearsal time on the fights was necessary to keep the actors safe and encourage a high performance quality, this meant that less time was devoted to developing the scenes and characters themselves. This was a necessary sacrifice due to the amount of rehearsal time available.

After the initial rehearsals with all of the actors to work on ensemble trust and basic technique, rehearsals were split into three sections, one for each scene. The first several weeks of rehearsals were devoted to teaching the actors the choreography and how the fight fit in their particular scene. I had an assistant choreographer who I would pre-choreograph the fights with before rehearsal. Then, after warm-ups, I would teach the actors one phrase of the fight at a time. Sometimes the choreography would not work out between the actors as I expected, so I was prepared to change it. Uncomfortable choreography cannot succeed, no matter how much the actors practice it: “One must always be on the lookout to change quickly moves and sequences which are not readily being assimilated, for if an actor’s left with a routine, part of a routine or even a move with which he feels uncomfortable, he will never perform with real intent and assurance” (Hobbs 24). If the actor is too concerned with the technical points of the choreography, they cannot perform the scene well. After I had taught one phrase to the actors, we would take time to review the phrase and perfect it. I asked the actors to perform the fight phrase many times in a row, giving

them corrections either after or during the run of the phrase. The more times the actors correctly performed the phrase, the more the phrase became integrated into their muscle memory, leaving their minds freer to work through emotional investment and keeping their partner safe. This process was then repeated for each phrase. Generally, I taught one phrase in a rehearsal, then worked on only that phrase for the next rehearsal. In the final week of rehearsals, the actors ran the full fights within their scenes as I gave corrections and notes on their acting and choreography.

For the final presentation of the scenes in the showcase, I arranged the scenes in ascending order of emotional stakes, from low to medium to high. This made the most logical sense to aid both the actors and the audience with conceptualizing the show. The actors collectively had a point to build to and the audience had time to acclimate to the portrayal of violence. The build of tension was reflected in one night's audience, as they commented and reacted vocally until the end of the final scene. In the tensest moment of the showcase, the climax of the high stakes scene, the audience fell completely silent. They were able to meet the energy in the room because they'd built up to it alongside the actors.

Results of Project

The results of the survey that the actors took (Appendix B) did not follow the pattern I had expected. The actors rated themselves highly on level of safety they provided for their partners and their partners provided for them from the beginning, rather than rising over time. The first category dealt with how the actors felt that they performed the fight choreography; in other words, whether or not they performed the moves with the correct technique. Every actor rated themselves at the same or a higher level at the end of the rehearsal process than at the beginning. Logically, this trend makes sense; the actors should have improved over time as they became more familiar with the choreography and practiced the moves repeatedly. The actors that rated themselves the same at the end as they did at the beginning started with a high rating; they had no higher to go on the scale.

The second question asked the actors to rate themselves on how emotionally present they felt in their scenes. This can be interpreted as how connected they felt to their characters and their scene partners. This category, for some actors, was fairly inconsistent and erratic, with major dips on various days. These dips are most likely an instance of the actor being tired or stressed on that day, since they were isolated occurrences. However, every actor rated themselves higher at the end of the rehearsal process than they did at the beginning. This indicates that, over time, the actors were able to connect more strongly with their characters and the circumstances they were living in as those characters. This result also corresponds with a logical interpretation of the rehearsal process. As the actors spend more time inhabiting and studying their characters, they are expected to form a stronger connection to the scene overall.

The third question asked the actors to quantify how safe they felt during their scenes. A vast majority of the responses were fours and fives out of a five-point scale, with only one instance of a lower score. I expected more variation in the scores as most of the actors were beginners with little or no experience. However, the high scores in this category indicate that the actors moved slowly and thought through their choreography carefully as they fought. This is expected of any actor learning stage combat and shows that the actors took their work seriously. They also had trust as an ensemble. In terms of the levels of stakes of their scenes, this shows that the actors felt safe regardless of which scenes they were participating in. However, my focus on safety as the director potentially outweighed the focus on other aspects of the project. The responses to the survey in general may have been different if I had focused more equally on the character's emotional life and the technical choreography.

The fourth question asked the actors to rate the level of safety they felt they provided for their partner during the scene. These responses bounced back and forth for the most part between fours and fives on a five-point scale. This is another possible indicator that the level of stakes did

not affect the ability of the actors to remain emotionally involved while still performing the choreography well. The level of safety that the actors felt they provided and that was provided for them held the same level throughout the rehearsal process, even as the level of involvement in the emotional aspect of the scenes increased. One factor that may have influenced this trend in responses is that in each of the scenes the actors performed in the showcase, the participants in the fight were equally violent. There wasn't an instance of one character being the sole aggressor and the other character being only a victim. If that were the case, it may have been harder for the actor playing the victim to feel safe, given the nature of the violence in the scene.

The fifth category is a measure of how much the actors felt that their personal emotions (as opposed to their characters' emotions) impeded their work on the scene. Several actors answered that their personal emotions did not impede their scenes in any way at any point in the rehearsal process. The rest of the responses were a mixture of threes and fours on a four-point scale, with a score of four indicating that personal emotion did not impede the scene at all. I observed that if the actors were particularly tired or stressed, their attitudes during rehearsal may have been less focused. However, when they were fighting, they set aside their personal lives to focus on the scene. This indicates that approaching work on a fight scene with a professional attitude is a factor in safety. Again, considered with the knowledge that investment in the emotion of the scene increased over time, this indicates that there was no correlation between the level of stakes in a scene and whether or not personal emotions make an impact on the actors' performances.

The final question on the survey asked the actors to determine how much they felt their performance had improved from the previous rehearsal. Many of the actors felt that they consistently improved significantly each rehearsal. Many of the scores were in the four or five range on a five-point scale, where five indicated that they felt their scene had vastly improved. This indicates that regardless of the level of stakes in the scenes they were working on, the actors were

able to progress quickly and safely. I believe that the actors rated themselves higher than I would have on speed of improvement; I would have rated them at a medium to low rate of progress. However, this is because I believe they progressed very quickly at the beginning and were then functioning on a level that didn't allow room for a lot of progress every day. I also had the most experience with stage combat and may have been more aware of the room for improvement. It was easier for me to observe the fights more objectively because I was not directly involved in them.

In order to further interpret the survey results, I compared the responses to question five (the level of personal emotional impediment the actors felt) to the responses to question four (the level of safety the actors felt they provided for their partners). Below is a plot of each day's responses from each person (Figure 1). There is one point for each person's response on each day. Many of the response pairs were the same for different people or different days, so there are multiple points on certain locations on the graph, indicated by the number next to the point.

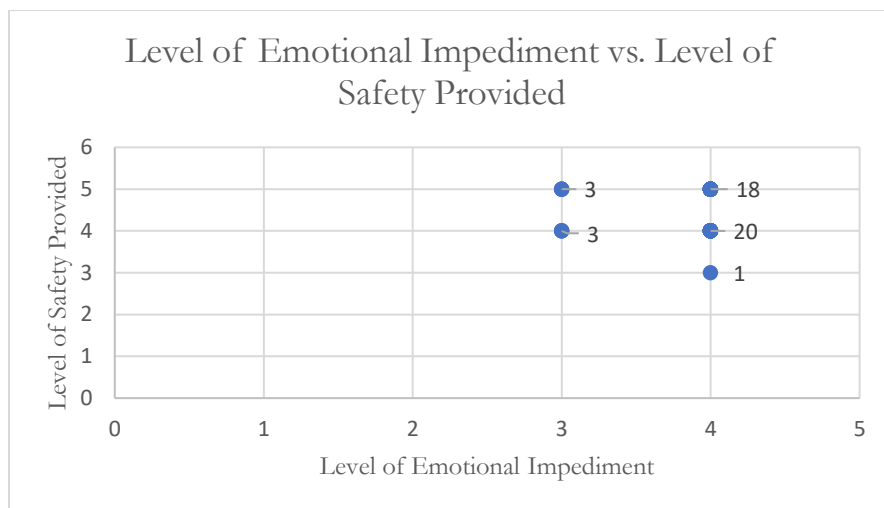


Figure 1

When the data is considered, it is clear that more often than not, the actors' personal emotions did not have a strong correlation with the level of safety they felt they provided on any given day. The actors provided a middle-to-high level of safety for their partners regardless of how much they felt their personal emotions affected the scene.

Another correlation that is useful to visualize is between question two (the level of emotional presence the actor felt in the scene) and question four (the level of safety the actors felt they provided their partners). Below is a graph of each actor's responses for all the days combined (Figure 2). The number next to each point indicates how many answers fell on each point.

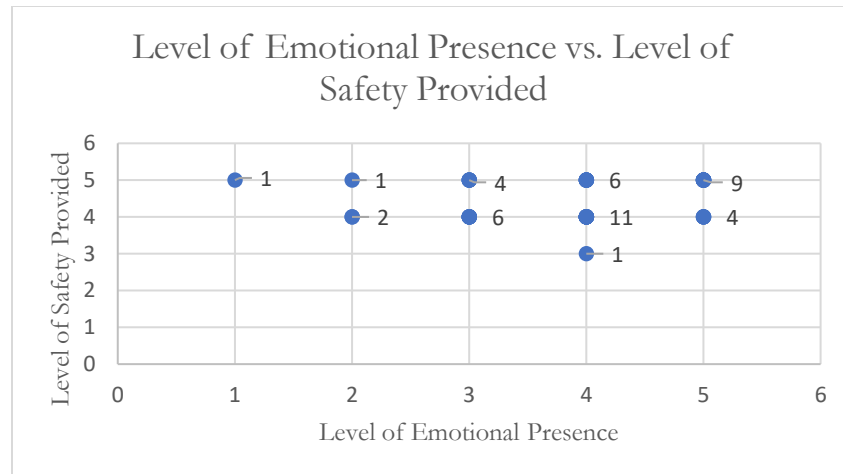


Figure 2

It is evident from the graph that the distribution of the scores of the level of safety the actors felt they provided to their partners is fairly equal across the range of scores from the level of emotional presence the actors felt. This indicates that the actors provided a consistent level of safety throughout the rehearsal process that was, for the most part, unaffected by how emotionally invested they felt they were on any given day. This supports the idea that the level of stakes of a show does not affect the actor's ability to provide safety to their partner.

The culmination of the practical research was two performances of the stage combat showcase. The audience reactions were very different each night. At the first performance, the audience was very quiet the entire time. There weren't as many people at this performance as there were the second night, and I think they weren't sure how to react to the violence. The actors were affected by the lack of energy in the room; their energy was lower because they had no feedback from the audience. If an actor senses that the audience is invested in them and believes in their

ability to execute the fight well, it may have a bolstering effect on their choreography skills. The relationship works in the opposite direction as well; in order to believe the scene and be invested in the characters, the audience must first believe that the actors are being safe and are not actually getting hurt. This effect was apparent in the second night's audience. From the vocalizations of their reactions, they were clearly invested in the stakes of the fight. On the same night, the actors had higher energy and performed their fight choreography admirably. Their moves were more clearly executed and their dialogue was not rushed, which allowed the audience to understand better what was happening. The actors were more in tune with each other; the fights flowed more smoothly and didn't feel disjointed or awkward. Whether the audience influenced the actors first or vice versa is unclear. I believe that further research would reveal that this performance dynamic can have a positive effect on the actor's execution both of their acting work and their fight choreography.

The results from the data collected indicate that the level of stakes in a fight scene don't affect the actor's ability to both perform the fight well and stay emotionally present as their character. There was not a strong correlation between level of personal emotions impeding the actors' performance and the level of safety they felt they provided for their partners. There also was no correlation between the level of emotional investment the actors had in the scenes and the level of safety they felt they provided. Based on the answers to the individual questions and the lack of correlation between these significant categories, the level of stakes is not significant in an actor's stage combat learning process.

However, there were major limitations to the experiment as I conducted it. Due to the requirements of a senior theatre project in the Butler Theatre department, I was only able to rehearse for thirty-six hours. This means that I wasn't able to spend as much time on integrating fight choreography with character as would be available in an average professional production. I had to sacrifice spending time working on the script and delving into character development to ensure

that the actors were comfortable and confident in their fight choreography. The fact that the performance was a showcase, with individual scenes from different plays, also may have had an impact. I couldn't spend time with the actors on working in the context of the entire play; we focused solely on the scenes we performed in the showcase. If I could do the experiment again, I would like to extend the rehearsal process in order to have time to develop all aspects of the production equally. I would also like to stretch the experiment over the course of several productions, so that the full shows could be performed. This would ensure that the actors were fully immersed in the emotional lives of their characters and that they understood the stakes each character had in the fight scene or scenes. It would also be beneficial to have a larger pool of actors to work with; this would increase the possibility of statistically significant results. With the small pool of actors and the short rehearsal time, development was difficult to track. An additional way to improve the research would be to give a wider range of responses for the survey. A ten point scale would allow the survey to be a more sensitive tool. While these limitations do exist, I believe that valuable knowledge can be gained from the results of the experiment as it was conducted.

Conclusions

Acting theory is moving away from the induction of an emotional state as the primary way to portray a character. Theatre practitioners now, including Melissa Bruder, Stanislavski, and Chekhov, share theories that give a concrete path to a repeatable performance that does not rely on emotion. This new way of looking at acting still does not account for what may happen if pursuing an objective leads an actor to experience an intense emotion, particularly within a fight scene. However, based on my research, I believe that the level of emotional intensity present in the character does not affect the interaction of acting and stage combat. Through the surveys I conducted, I found that there was little variation across the board of the level of emotional involvement and level of safety the actors provided for each other. This lack of significant variation leads me to believe that the

actors felt safe regardless of which scene they were participating in. This indicates that even with beginning actor combatants, any fight scene can be performed without a high risk of losing control, as long as safety and partner connection are a primary emphasis in training. Stage combat, like acting, is a technique that can be learned in order to aid a truthful portrayal of a violent scene.

Given the limitations of the research, this result on its own cannot be conclusive. The short rehearsal period limited the actors' exploration of their characters' objectives, weakened their emotional connections, and diminished the impact of high stakes. However, I think the results are still valid. I believe that further research would support my findings; all stage combat texts that I consulted emphasized that anyone working with a stage fight should pay close attention to safety, regardless of the emotional intensity of the script material. A deeper understanding of the effects of intense emotions on fight scenes will improve both quality and safety of stage combat training; more research is essential in helping stage combat practitioners reach their ultimate goal of absolute safety.

Appendix A

Actor Survey

Circle the answer that best applies.

How did your fighting technique feel today?

- No mistakes
- A few mistakes
- Could be better
- Some major mistakes
- Needs a lot of work

How present did you feel in the emotional aspect of the scene?

- Completely invested
- Mostly invested
- So-so
- Somewhat distracted
- Not emotionally involved at all

How safe did you feel during the scene?

- Completely
- Mostly
- Somewhat
- Not much
- Not at all

What level of safety do you feel like you provided for your partner?

- Complete
- High
- Medium
- Low
- None

Did your personal emotions impede your scene in any way?

- Very much
- A good amount
- Only a small bit
- Not at all

How much do you feel that your scene has improved between now and the last rehearsal?

- Vastly improved
- A good deal improved
- Somewhat improved
- A little improved
- Not improved at all

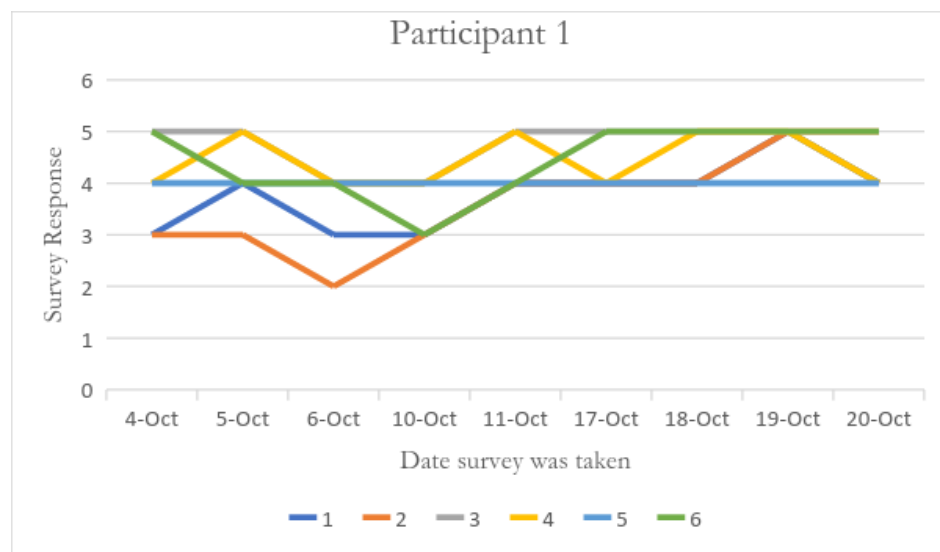
Do you have anything else to share about your experience in rehearsal/performance today?

Appendix B Survey Results

The colored lines on the graphs correspond to the six questions the actors responded to at each rehearsal.

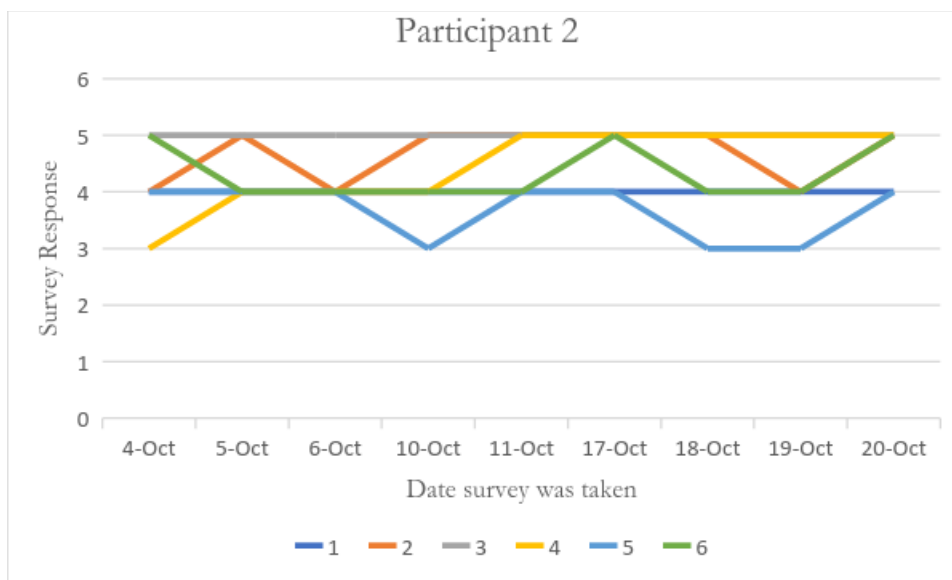
Participant 1 Data

Question	Fight technique	Emotional presence	Personal safety	Safety provided for partner	Personal emotional impediment	Improvement in scene
4-Oct	3	3	5	4	4	5
5-Oct	4	3	5	5	4	4
6-Oct	3	2	4	4	4	4
10-Oct	3	3	4	4	4	3
11-Oct	4	4	5	5	4	4
17-Oct	4	4	5	4	4	5
18-Oct	4	4	5	5	4	5
19-Oct	5	5	5	5	4	5
20-Oct	4	5	4	4	4	5



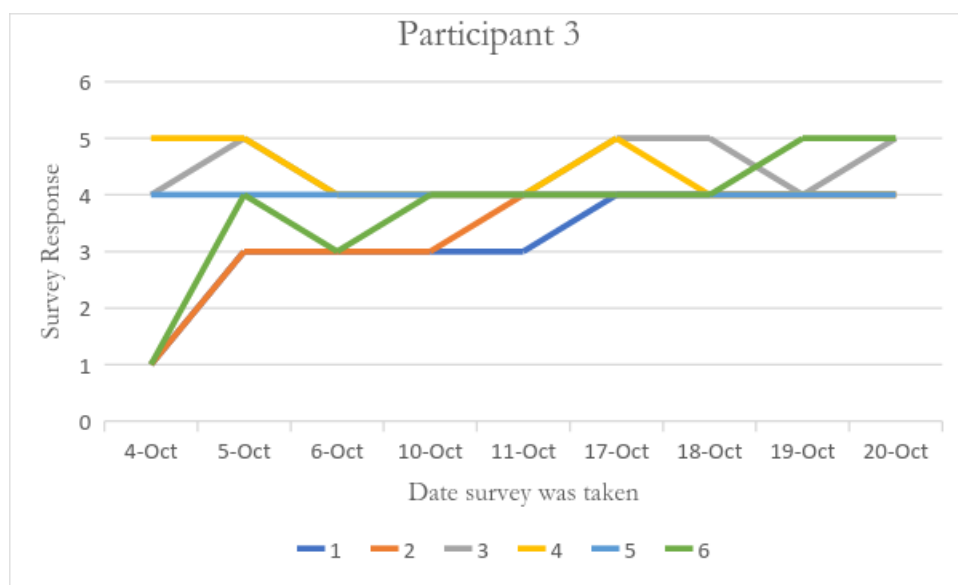
Participant 2 Data

Questions	Fight technique	Emotional presence	Personal safety	Safety provided for partner	Personal emotional impediment	Improvement in scene
4-Oct	4	4	5	3	4	5
5-Oct	4	5	5	4	4	4
6-Oct	4	4	5	4	4	4
10-Oct	4	5	5	4	3	4
11-Oct	4	5	5	5	4	4
17-Oct	4	5	5	5	4	5
18-Oct	4	5	5	5	3	4
19-Oct	4	4	5	5	3	4
20-Oct	4	5	5	5	4	5



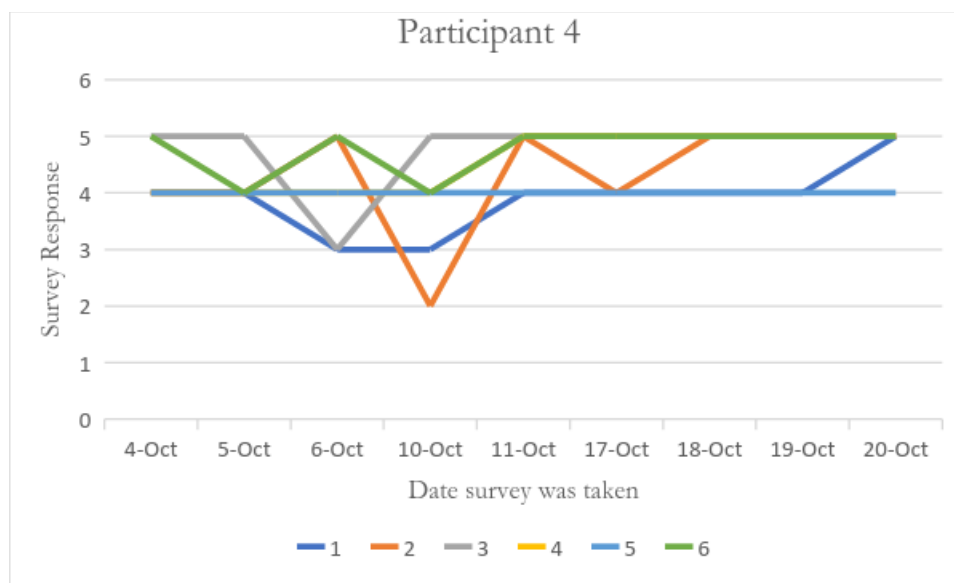
Participant 3 Data

Questions	Fight technique	Emotional presence	Personal safety	Safety provided for partner	Personal emotional impediment	Improvement in scene
4-Oct	1	1	4	5	4	1
5-Oct	3	3	5	5	4	4
6-Oct	3	3	4	4	4	3
10-Oct	3	3	4	4	4	4
11-Oct	3	4	4	4	4	4
17-Oct	4	4	5	5	4	4
18-Oct	4	4	5	4	4	4
19-Oct	4	4	4	4	4	5
20-Oct	4	4	5	4	4	5



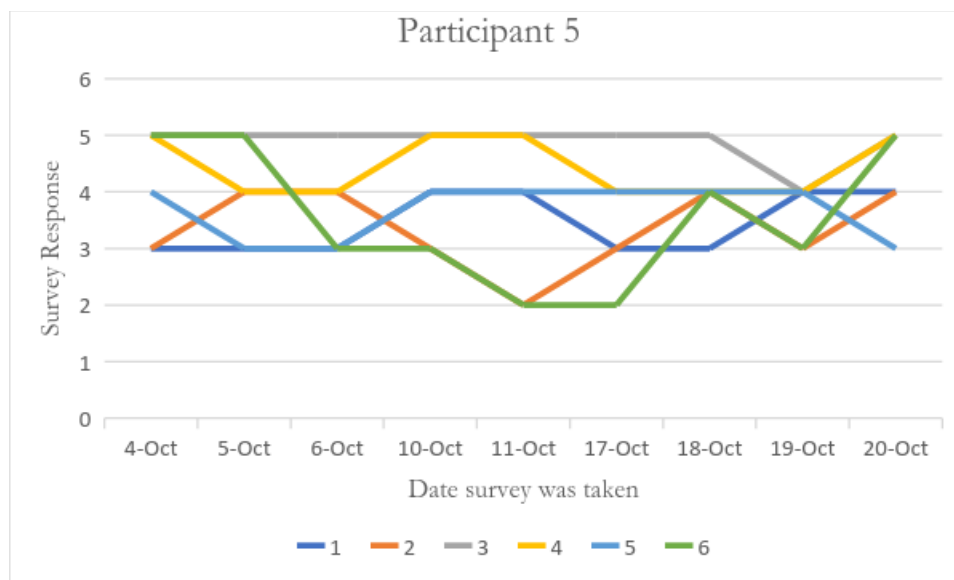
Participant 4 Data

Questions	Fight technique	Emotional presence	Personal safety	Safety provided for partner	Personal emotional impediment	Improvement in scene
4-Oct	4	4	5	4	4	5
5-Oct	4	4	5	4	4	4
6-Oct	3	5	3	4	4	5
10-Oct	3	2	5	4	4	4
11-Oct	4	5	5	5	4	5
17-Oct	4	4	5	5	4	5
18-Oct	4	5	5	5	4	5
19-Oct	4	5	5	5	4	5
20-Oct	5	5	5	5	4	5



Participant 5 Data

Questions	Fight technique	Emotional presence	Personal safety	Safety provided for partner	Personal emotional impediment	Improvement in scene
4-Oct	3	3	5	5	4	5
5-Oct	3	4	5	4	3	5
6-Oct	3	4	5	4	3	3
10-Oct	4	3	5	5	4	3
11-Oct	4	2	5	5	4	2
17-Oct	3	3	5	4	4	2
18-Oct	3	4	5	4	4	4
19-Oct	4	3	4	4	4	3
20-Oct	4	4	5	5	3	5



Appendix C

Showcase Scenes

All stage directions (in italics) are from the published production notes.

Character objectives are in red. Combat choreography is in green.

The Lonesome West

Martin McDonagh

Scene Two

Valene takes his poteen out of his biscuit tin to check if any is missing. Coleman puts the magazine aside, takes his glasses off and sits at the table.

Valene: convince Coleman to own up.

Coleman: convince Valene that he's innocent.

Valene: You've been at this.

Coleman: I haven't at all been at that.

Valene: It seems very... reduced.

Coleman: Reduced me arse. I wouldn't be at yours if you shoved a fecking...

Valene (*sipping it, uncertain*): You've topped it up with water.

Coleman: Be believing what you wish. I never touched your poteen.

Valene: Where would you get money for... Me house insurance?! Oh you fecker...!

Valene desperately finds and examines his insurance book.

Coleman: I paid in your house insurance.

Valene: This isn't Duffy's signature.

Coleman: It is Duffy's signature. Doesn't it say 'Duffy'?

Valene: You paid it?

Coleman: Aye.

Valene: Why?

Coleman: mock Valene for being stingy.

Coleman: Oh to do you a favour, after all the favours you've done me over the years. Oh aye.

Valene: It's easy enough to check.

Coleman: It *is* easy enough to check, and check ahead, ya feck. Check until you're blue in the face.

Confused, Valene puts the book away.

Coleman: bait Valene about a girl he likes

Valene: assert equality with Coleman about experience with girls.

Coleman: It's not only money can buy you booze. No. Sex appeal it is too.

Valene: Sex appeal? You? Your sex appeal wouldn't buy the phlegm off a dead frog.

Coleman: You have your own opinion and you're well entitled to it. Girleen's of the opposite opinion.

Valene: Girleen? Me arse.

Coleman: Is true.

Valene: Eh?

Coleman: I said let me have a bottle on tick and I'll be giving you a big kiss, now. She said 'If you

let me be touching you below, sure you can have a bottle for nothing.' The deal was struck then and there.

Valene: Girleen wouldn't touch you below if you bought her a pony, let alone giving poteen away on top of it.

Coleman: I can only be telling the God's honest truth, and how else would I be getting poteen for free?

Valene (*unsure*): Me arse. (*Pause.*) Eh? (*Pause.*) Girleen's pretty. (*Pause.*) Girleen's awful pretty. (*Pause.*) Why would Girleen be touching you below?

Coleman: Mature men it is Girleen likes.

Valene: I don't believe you at all.

Coleman: Don't so.

Valene: get information from Coleman.

Coleman: make a fool of Valene.

Valene (*pause*): What did it feel like?

Coleman: What did what feel like?

Valene: The touching below.

Coleman: Em, nice enough now.

Valene (*unsure*): I don't believe you at all. (*Pause.*) No, I don't believe you at all.

Coleman opens and starts eating a packet of Valene's crisps.

Coleman: incite Valene to fight.

Valene: defend what's rightly his.

Valene: Girleen wouldn't be touching you below. Never in the world would Girleen be touching y- (*Stunned.*) Who said you could go eating me crisps?!

Coleman: Nobody said.

Valene: In front of me?!

Coleman: I decided of me own accord.

Valene: You'll be paying me seventeen pee of your own accord so! And right now you'll be paying me!

Coleman: Right now, is it?

Valene: It is!

Coleman: The money you have stashed?

Valene: And if you don't pay up it's a batter I'll be giving you.

Coleman: A batter from you? I'd be as scared of a batter from a lemon.

Valene: Seventeen pee I'm saying!

Pause. Coleman slowly takes a coin out of his pocket and, without looking at it, slams it down on the table. Valene looks at the coin.

Valene: That's ten.

Coleman looks at the coin, takes out another one and slams that down also.

Coleman: You can keep the change.

Valene: I can keep the change, can I?

He pockets the coins, takes out three pee, opens one of Coleman's hands and places the money in it.

Valene: I'm in no need of charity.

He turns away. Still sitting, Coleman throws the coins hard at the back of Valene's head.

Justified beginning of the fight

Valene: Ya fecker ya!! Come on so!

Coleman jumps up, knocking his chair over.

Coleman: Come on so, is it?

Valene: Pegging good money at me?!

Coleman: It is. And be picking that money up now, for your oul piggy-bank, ya little virgin fecking gayboy ya...

The two grapple, fall to the floor and roll around scuffling. Welsh enters through the front door, slightly drunk.

Conflicted middle of the fight

Phrase 1 (see Appendix D)

Coleman and Valene: struggle to prove that each is the dominant brother.

Phrase 2

Coleman: solidify status as winner.

Valene: bring Coleman down to his level.

Phrase 3

Coleman: regain control from phrase 1.

Valene: exploit his advantage of surprise to win.

Welsh: Hey ye's two! Ye's two! (*Pause. Loudly.*) Ye's two!

Coleman (*irritated*): Wha?

Welsh: Tom Hanlon's just killed himself.

Valene: Eh?

Welsh: Tom Hanlon's just killed himself.

Conclusion of the fight

Valene (*pause*): Let go o' me neck, you.

Coleman: Let go o' me arm so.

The two slowly let go of each other and stand up, as Welsh sits at the table, stunned.

Private Lives

Noel Coward

Amanda gets up, and turns the gramophone on.

Elyot: show Amanda who's in charge of the situation.

Amanda: follow her own desires.

Elyot: You'd better turn that off, I think.

Amanda [*coldly*]: Why?

Elyot: It's very late and it will annoy the people upstairs.

Amanda: There aren't any people upstairs. It's a photographer's studio.

Elyot: There are people downstairs, I suppose?

Amanda: They're away in Tunis.

Elyot: This is no time of the year for Tunis.

He turns the gramophone off.

Amanda: prove to Elyot that she won't be bossed around.

Amanda [*icily*]: Turn it on again, please.

Elyot: I'll do no such thing.

Amanda: Very well, if you insist on being boorish and idiotic.

She gets up and turns it on again.

Elyot: Turn it off. It's driving me mad.

Amanda: You're far too temperamental. Try to control yourself.

Elyot: Turn it off.

Amanda: I won't.

Justified beginning of the fight

Elyot rushes at the gramophone. Amanda tries to ward him off. They struggle silently for a moment, then the needle screeches across the record.

Amanda: There now, you've ruined the record.

Amanda: place the blame on Elyot for things going wrong.

She takes it off and scrutinizes it.

Elyot: Good job, too.

Amanda: Disagreeable pig.

Elyot: repair the damage being done to their relationship.

Elyot [*suddenly stricken with remorse*]: Amanda darling – Sollocks.

Amanda [*furiously*]: Sollocks yourself.

Amanda: convey her anger and frustration to Elyot.

Amanda hits Elyot with the radio.

She breaks the record over his head.

Elyot [*staggering*]: You spiteful little beast.

Elyot: prove that he can't be pushed around.

Elyot slaps Amanda.

He slaps her face. She screams loudly and hurls herself sobbing with rage on to the sofa, with her face buried in the cushions.

Amanda: make Elyot feel guilty for hitting her.

Elyot: get Amanda to forgive him.

Amanda [*wailing*]: Oh, oh, oh –

Elyot: I'm sorry, I didn't mean it – I'm sorry, darling, I swear I didn't mean it.

Amanda: Go away, go away, I hate you.

Elyot kneels on the sofa and tries to pull her round to look at him.

Elyot: Amanda – listen – listen –

Amanda backhands Elyot across the face.

Amanda: get Elyot to leave her in peace.

Amanda [*turning suddenly, and fetching him a welt across the face*]: Listen indeed; I'm sick and tired of listening to you, you damned sadistic bully.

Elyot [*with great grandeur*]: Thank you.

Elyot: prove to Amanda that he doesn't need her.

Amanda: regain control of the situation.

He stalks towards the door, in stately silence. Amanda throws a cushion at him, which misses him and knocks down a lamp and a vase on the side table. Elyot laughs falsely.

Elyot: A pretty display I must say.

Amanda [*wildly*]: Stop laughing like that.

Elyot [*continuing*]: Very amusing indeed.

Amanda [*losing control*]: Stop – stop – stop –

Amanda: get Elyot to take her seriously.

Elyot: belittle Amanda.

Conflicted middle of the fight

Amanda tries to hit Elyot and he easily blocks her punches. He restrains her from behind, holding both of her wrists.

She rushes at him, he grabs her hands and they sway about the room, until he manages to twist her round by the arms so that she faces him, closely, quivering with fury.

Amanda: I hate you – do you hear? You're conceited, and overbearing, and utterly impossible!

Elyot [*shouting her down*]: You're a vile-tempered, loose-living, wicked little beast, and I never want to see you again so long as I live.

He flings her away from him, she staggers, and falls against a chair. They stand gasping at one another in silence for a moment.

Elyot spins Amanda away from him and punches her across the face. She falls to the ground.

Amanda [*very quietly*]: This is the end, do you understand? The end, finally and forever.

Amanda: prove that she is serious about leaving.

Elyot: prove to Amanda that he controls her.

She goes to the door, which opens on to the landing, and wrenches it open. He rushes after her and clutches her wrist.

Amanda tries to push past Elyot, and he shoves her away.

Elyot: You're not going like this.

Amanda: Oh, yes I am.

Elyot: You're not.

Amanda: I am; let go of me –

He pulls her away from the door, and once more they struggle. This time a standard lamp crashes to the ground.

Amanda, breathlessly, as they fight:

She tries to leave again and he grabs her around the waist. They struggle for control.

Amanda: You're a cruel fiend, and I hate and loathe you; thank God I've realized in time what you're really like; marry you again, never, never, never... I'd rather die in torment –

Elyot [*at the same time*]: Shut up; shut up. I wouldn't marry you again if you came crawling to me on your bended knees, you're a mean, evil-minded, little vampire – I hope to God I never set eyes on you again as long as I live –

Amanda: *show Elyot once and for all who's the boss.*

Amanda elbows Elyot in the stomach. When she tries to leave, he grabs her hair and drags her back into the room. She elbows him in the face and then slaps him eight times in a row.

At this point in the proceedings they trip over a piece of carpet, and fall on to the floor, rolling over and over in paroxysms of rage. Victor and Sibyl enter quietly, through the open door, and stand staring at them in horror. Finally Amanda breaks free and half gets up, Elyot grabs her leg, and she falls against a table, knocking it completely over.

Amanda [*screaming*]: Beast; brute; swine; cad; beast; beast; brute; devil –

Elyot: *try a last-ditch attempt to stop Amanda.*

Elyot swings at Amanda, but she ducks and runs out the door.

Conclusion of the fight

She rushes back at Elyot who is just rising to his feet, and gives him a stinging blow, which knocks him over again.

She rushes blindly off left, and slams the door, at the same moment that he jumps up and rushes off right, also slamming the door. Victor and Sibyl advance apprehensively into the room, and sink on to the sofa –

True West

Sam Shepard

Lee: get away from the family and escape to the desert.

Lee: I'm gonna' just borrow some a' your antiques, Mom. You don't mind do ya'? Just a few plates and things. Silverware.

Lee starts going through all the cupboards in kitchen, pulling out plates and stacking them on counter as Mom and Austin watch.

Mom: You don't have any utensils on the desert?

Lee: Nah, I'm fresh out.

Austin: figure out if Lee is abandoning him.

Austin: *(To Lee.)* What're you doing?

Mom: Well some of those are very old. Bone China.

Lee: I'm tired of eatin' outa' my bare hands, ya' know. It's not civilized.

Austin: *(To Lee.)* What're you doing? We made a deal!

Mom: Couldn't you borrow the plastic ones instead? I have plenty of plastic ones.

Lee: *(As he stacks plates.)* It's not the same. Plastic's not the same at all. What I need is somethin' authentic. Somethin' to keep me in touch. It's easy to get outa' touch out there. Don't worry, I'll get 'em back to ya'.

Austin rushes up to Lee, grabs him by shoulders.

Austin: talk Lee out of leaving.

Austin: grabs Lee's shoulder and jerks him around to face him. Lee pulls his shoulder away.

Mom: keep the boys from ruining her house further.

Austin: You can't just drop the whole thing, Lee!

Lee turns, pushes Austin in the chest knocking him backwards into the alcove, Mom watches numbly, Lee returns to collecting the plates, silverware, etc.

Mom: You boys shouldn't fight in the house. Go outside and fight.

Lee: I'm not fightin'. I'm leavin'.

Mom: There's been enough damage done already.

Lee: convince Mom and Austin to leave him alone and let him go.

Austin: Justified beginning of the fight

Lee: *(His back to Austin and Mom, stacking dishes on counter.)* I'm clearin' outa' here once and for all. All this town does is drive a man insane. Look what it's done to Austin there. I'm not lettin' that happen to me. Sell myself down the river. No sir. I'd rather be a hundred miles from nowhere than let that happen to me.

Austin: prove to Lee that he can't leave him behind.

Austin: kicks Lee's leg in, making him fall to his knees. He puts Lee in a stranglehold from behind.

During this Austin has picked up the ripped-out phone from the floor and wrapped the cord tightly around both his hands. He lunges at Lee whose back is still to him, wraps the cord around Lee's neck, plants a foot in Lee's back, and pulls back on the cord, tightening it. Lee chokes desperately, can't speak and can't reach Austin with his arms.

Austin keeps applying pressure on Lee's back with his foot, bending him into the sink. Mom watches.

Austin: *(Tightening cord)* You're not goin' anywhere! You're not takin' anything with you. You're not

takin' my car! You're not takin' the dishes! You're not takin' anything! You're stayin' right here!

Mom: You'll have to stop fighting in the house. There's plenty of room outside to fight. You've got the whole outdoors to fight in.

Lee: get away from Austin before Austin hurts him too much.

Conflicted middle of the fight

Lee elbows Austin in the side and twists his arm behind his back. He knees Austin in the stomach. Austin punches him twice, and then shoves him across the stage. Austin hits Lee across the face, then kicks him to the ground. Austin sits on top of Lee and begins choking him again.

Lee tries to tear himself away. He crashes across the stage like an enraged bull dragging Austin with him. He snorts and bellows, but Austin hangs on and manages to keep clear of Lee's attempts to grab him. They crash into the table, to the floor. Lee is face down, thrashing wildly and choking. Austin pulls the cord tighter, stands with one foot planted on Lee's back and the cord stretched taut.

Austin: remove any chance Lee has of getting away.

Lee: stay alive.

Mom: keep Austin from killing Lee.

Austin: *(Holding cord)* Gimme back my keys, Lee! Take the keys out! Take 'em out!

Lee desperately tries to dig in his pockets, searching for the car keys. Mom moves closer.

Mom: *(Calmly to Austin)* You're not killing him are you?

Austin: I don't know. I don't know if I'm killing him. I'm stopping him. That's all. I'm just stopping him.

Lee thrashes but Austin is relentless.

Mom: You oughta' let him breathe a little bit.

Austin: Throw the keys out, Lee!

Lee: get Austin to focus his attention elsewhere.

Austin: get Mom to help him keep Lee there.

Lee finally gets keys out and throws them on floor but out of Austin's reach. Austin keeps pressure on cord, pulling Lee's neck back. Lee gets one hand to the cord but can't relieve the pressure.

Austin: Reach me those keys would ya', Mom.

Mom: *(Not moving)* Why are you doing this to him?

Austin: Reach me the keys!

Mom: Not until you stop choking him.

Austin: I can't stop choking him! He'll kill me if I stop choking him!

Mom: He won't kill you. He's your brother.

Austin: Just get me the keys would ya'!

Pause. Mom picks keys up off floor, hands them to Austin.

Austin: *(To Mom)* Thanks.

Mom: Will you let him go now?

Austin: keep Lee from retaliating.

Austin: I don't know. He's not gonna' let me get outa' here.

Mom: Well you can't kill him.

Austin: I can kill him! I can easily kill him. Right now. Right here. All I gotta' do is just tighten up.

See?

Austin tightens his grip on Lee's throat.

He tightens cord; Lee thrashes wildly. Austin releases pressure a little, maintaining control.

Austin: Ya' see that?

Mom: That's a savage thing to do.

Austin: Yeah well don't tell me I can't kill him because I can. I can just twist. I can just keep twisting.

Austin twists the cord tighter. Lee weakens, his breathing changes to a short rasp.

Mom: Austin!

Lee shoves Austin off of him and punches him across the face. He stands up to get away, but Austin sweeps his foot out from under him and Lee falls to the floor again. Lee tries to crawl away but Austin pulls him back into a chokehold.

Austin relieves pressure. Lee breathes easier, but Austin keeps him under control.

Austin: prove that he is in absolute control.

Austin: *(Eyes on Lee, holding cord)* I'm goin' to the desert. There's nothing stopping me. I'm going by myself to the desert.

Mom moving toward her luggage.

Mom: get away from the destruction of her life.

Mom: Well, I'm going to go check into a motel. I can't stand this anymore.

Austin: preserve the illusion of his family.

Austin: Don't go yet!

Mom pauses.

Mom: I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless.

Austin: I'll get everything fixed up for you, Mom. I promise. Just stay for a while.

Mom: *(Picking up luggage)* You're going to the desert.

Austin: Just wait!

Lee wrenches Austin's arm away and attacks Austin. Austin regains control and returns once more to the chokehold.

Lee thrashes; Austin subdues him. Mom watches, holding luggage. Pause.

Mom: It was the worst feeling being up there. In Alaska. Staring out a window. I never felt so desperate before. That's why when I saw that article on Picasso I thought –

Austin: Stay here, Mom. This is where you live.

She looks around the stage.

Mom: I don't recognize it at all.

She exits with luggage. Austin makes a move toward her, but Lee starts to struggle, and Austin subdues him again with cord. Pause.

Austin: get away without Lee coming after him.

Lee: trick Austin into letting him go.

Austin: *(Holding cord)* Lee? I'll make ya' a deal. You let me get outa' here. Just let me get to my car. All right, Lee? Gimme a little headstart and I'll turn you loose. Just gimme a little headstart. All right?

Lee makes no response. Austin slowly releases tension cord; still nothing from Lee.

Austin: Lee?

Lee is motionless. Austin very slowly begins to stand, still keeping a tenuous hold on the cord and his eyes riveted to Lee for any sign of movement. Austin slowly drops the cord and stands. He stares down at Lee who appears to be dead.

Austin: *(whispers)* Lee?

Austin lets Lee go, stands up, and turns away. Lee, who pretended to be dead, gets up and faces Austin.

Conclusion of the fight

Pause. Austin considers, looks toward exit, back to Lee, then makes a small movement as if to leave. Instantly Lee is on his feet and moves toward exit, blocking Austin's escape. They square off to each other, keeping a distance between them. Pause. A single coyote heard in the distance, lights fade softly into moonlight. The figures of the brothers now appear to be caught in a vast desert-like landscape. They are very still but watchful for the next move, lights go slowly to black as the after-image of the brothers pulses in the dark. Coyote fades.

Appendix D
Fight Choreography Notation
The Lonesome West Fight

Coleman	Valene
Phrase 1	Phrase 1
Ducks	Right roundhouse
Right jab to face	Knap
Right jab to face	Dodge left
Knap on thigh	Right elbow to back of head
React	Push SL
Kick with left leg	Knap and fall to floor
Phrase 2	Phrase 2
	Start getting up
Contact kick to stomach	
	Contact stomach punch from floor
Knap	Right roundhouse punch
Push to floor	
Groin kick	
Take leg and turn over on floor	
Knap and fall backward	Kick in the face
Phrase 3	Phrase 3
Start getting up	Start getting up
Left roundhouse punch	Knap
Knap	Right elbow to face
Right roundhouse kick to face (from floor)	Knap
Start crawling away on stomach	Climb on top
Roll twice	Roll twice
Chokehold from behind	Struggle

Private Lives Fight

Elyot	Amanda
Phrase 1	Phrase 1
Rushes US	Stops him by putting hands on shoulders
Puts hands on shoulders	
Struggle	Struggle
Kicks radio over	Pushes to SL
Approaches to DSL of Amanda	Picks up radio
Knap	Hits across face with radio (left to right)
Move to SL	
Right slap	Knap on left leg
Follow and kneel	Run to couch
Knap	Left backhand
Phrase 2	Phrase 2
Block with right arm	Right roundhouse punch
Block with left arm	Left roundhouse punch
Twist arms down	
Pull toward (struggling)	Pull away (struggling)
Spin in to say line	
Spin her out	
Right cross punch	Knap
	Twist fall
Phrase 3	Phrase 3
Grab wrist	Push past Elyot
Push back, away from door	
Grab around waist	Move toward the door
Struggle	Struggle
React	Left elbow to stomach
Knap	Right slap
	Move toward the door
Grab hair from behind	
Knap	Left elbow to face
Knap 8 times total	Alternating slap front hand, backhand 8 times total
Left roundhouse punch	Duck under and run for door

True West Fight

Austin	Lee
Phrase 1	Phrase 1
	Begin DSL at table
Grabs right shoulder	Turns and pushes Austin away
Left contact kick to Lee's right leg	Fall to knees
Stranglehold with arm from behind	Struggle
React	Left elbow to Austin's side
React	Grab wrist and twist under arm while standing up
React	Left knee to stomach
Contact right punch to Lee's back 2 times	React
Push side (towards SR)	
Right roundhouse punch	Knap
Right kick to left side of Lee's head	Knap and fall sideways to ground
Stranglehold with hands	Struggle
Phrase 2	Phrase 2
Looks away to Mom, SR	Pushes Austin off
Knap	Right cross
	Stand up
Foot sweep from ground	Fall and crawl away DSR
Grab shoulder and pull back to a stranglehold in a kneeling position (support Lee's back with knees)	
Phrase 3	Phrase 3
	Break stranglehold and twist arm
Knap	Right roundhouse punch
Fall back	Left stomach kick
Return to stranglehold with hands	Struggle

Appendix E

Interview with Geoffrey Alm

Brackets indicate where the transcription is uncertain due to recording issues.

SARAH: Do you have any specific methods or training exercises that you use to help the actors you work with feel safe and be safe when they're learning and working on the choreography?

MR. ALM: Yeah, definitely, I do, it's based on the way that I teach each technique. It's teaching from the point of view that this is not real, this is choreography, this is a technique that goes into it. In a way it's just targeting, distance, all that kind of stuff to keep it safe. We start out from the beginning. I teach eight weapon styles in the SAFD, I'm certified in them. For each one, and there are real, different variations, but as far as the technique and the safety goes that I taught the actors, it's pretty much the same thing.

SARAH: Have you ever worked with an actor who lost control during a fight? Emotionally or physically, they became too invested in their character?

MR. ALM: I think early on in my career, I might have encountered that once or twice, but it's very rare, and one of the things that a fight director does is that they are assessing the actors at all moments. So way before they would get into a position that they were so involved that they were becoming unsafe, I would have seen the danger signs.

SARAH: So it's more of a preventative thing than really having it happen? It's just to watch for the warning signs?

MR. ALM: Well definitely. When you're working with somebody, you just have to assess their ability and the way that they're learning the choreography and the way that they're working with their partner and all of that. So definitely, if I start to see that, I stop it early. Just because the one thing that I'm always trying to get across to the actors is that this is not method acting, this is not something that you have to feel to do. You do the technique, the audience does all the emotional [life]. That's how we're doing it, so that you can repeat that as many times as you need to, as many performances as you have, and be safe every time. I guess you don't have to connect to it energetically, but you have to connect to it in a way that you won't lose track of your character's stakes.

SARAH: Right.

MR. ALM: And it doesn't make it look better, by the way. Actually, it makes it look worse, and the audience does perceive "Uh-oh, this actor's in trouble."

SARAH: So how do you help the actors, keeping that in mind that they can't get carried away with their emotions how do you help them to mesh their character with good, strong technique?

MR. ALM: Well, I think that as we're learning the fight, we're talking about it. We're talking about it all the time. There's no set way of doing it, because everybody learns differently, but certainly you just have to be flexible and you have to approach them in a way that they're going to understand what you're saying. We learn it slow. I'm sure you've read this before, but ideally for every minute of stage fighting on stage, there should be twenty to thirty hours of rehearsal go into that finish. So if that's the case and actually we apply it, then any [...] a plan. You never lose track of the fact of who you are onstage. It's not just a character, but who you are, and what you're doing with your part, it makes it hard to get somebody into what you described. Real fighting is instinctual, it's based on

panic, it's based on circumstances that are changing just like that, and not about a positive motive. But beyond that, I don't really have to talk about that from the beginning. It's very clear, you know, you all learned. And most of the time, actors will show you pretty quickly sometimes when they have to take parts. [Well then I have to get rid of something with every other character, the way that their character fights based on theme, on planning fights.] And the fight director helps where [...] is at, and they find points of inaction that are not based on the reality. Does that make any sense? You know, the reality is this thing that we create as the director and fight director, this is what we create. It's what we want the audience to see.

SARAH: Okay, so within the reality of the play, what is the best thing a fight choreographer can do to make the fight seem believable for the audience?

MR. ALM: Well, I think they have to serve the story and have to serve the director's vision. So it's a cooperative - and the actor's standpoint too. They have feedback on what they believe about their characters. And if that character doesn't believe the play, I talk to the director about whether he or she has a clear idea about what she thinks a fight would be, right? You know, whether she'd like if she'd go. The actors are part of the discussion, so it's really a [collect]. I like to know that as we go - as opposed to coming in about as a younger choreographer, I would [...] it all the time. That kind of takes away the chance to collaborate. [Looking at the basics, it makes a fine B-reel, how they're studied, and then working on whatever he hates.] If you have a sword fight, maybe just a little moment of violence. [Why are you limping? Your script has whatever he's after.] It just depends on what the act's for.

SARAH: So do you always approach the process of choreographing the same, regardless of what kind of project it is, or do you have different sort of methods that you use for different genres of play or weapon styles?

MR. ALM: [...] weapon styles, it's going to be based on what they have. If you take Shakespeare, say for example, people could get in all sorts of different conflicts, so finding out what other things like is it going to be a small sword fight? If it's in the 20th or 21st century, is it part of something that flies? Is it steel swords? Is it some [...]? It's going to be dependent on the production design, but you have to be flexible and you have to be able to take each production as it is and not come in with a set idea about it. So once I get the information and continue to talk and we start to build it together, then it becomes something that is going to be in that world. One of my teachers once said to me that end responsibility above all else is to make the actor prepared. So you can't let your choreography have people looking who's [...] it. So if there's somebody in with a lot of experience, you actually have more options. If they understand that we've got somebody at lower experience, I'm not going to get down - you see, because it's not about the choreography, it's about [let's take the odds above the evens]. When you're quiet all the time, you beat yourself. So simple things work really well if they're done properly.

SARAH: That's what I'm trying to do with my project. Simple things.

MR. ALM: -- project. One thing is that lots of things are very simple. Of course there's a - you know - simple [attachments]. Sometimes that's, you know, in [...] it's the action that's telling the story and not the words, so we're not talking much anymore. Back, okay, back-and-two! And people really they understand, it's really clear about those kinds of things. By [...] and forcing your gaze, the

hunger needs to tell a story. But it's like watching a Jackie Chan or Michelle Yeoh movie, you can't even see them when they're moving so fast - it's like, "Huh?" I mean, "Oh yeah, they're filming out of nowhere, alright," like, "No, try to follow it." So just know that they start with your eyes and what they can do, their job is to make sure that they look great. Try understanding that if enough gets fixed, he can own that type of stuff. That's why it's so hard what some good actors to do.

SARAH: Okay, well that is all of my questions. You've given me some really good things to think about.

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Anderson argues against the claims of some scholars that the primary goal of stage fights is to be historically and martially accurate. He cites examples from the contrary, and argues that the theatricality of the fight is more important than its accuracy.

Callahan, John M. "Because It's There." *The Fight Master*. 3.3 (July 1980): 17-23. Web.

This article documents Callahan's personal views about why stage combat is necessary, both as an aspect of performance and as a teaching topic. He believes that violence is necessary on stage because it is present in real life, and that portraying it in the theatre produces a cathartic effect. By making sure that actors are properly taught to perform stage combat, they can conduct this cathartic process safely and in a way that serves their art.

Callahan, John M. "Some Methods of Weaponless Stage Combat." *The Fight Master*. 3.4 (October 1980): 3-6. Web.

Callahan lists the reasons and arguments in favor of needing a more commonplace study of stage combat. He demonstrates the many different styles and forms that require violence onstage, whether realistic or otherwise.

Cheatham, Jamie. "Acting the Fight: A Series of Exercises." *The Fight Master*. 14.1 (Spring-Summer 1996). 15-19. Web.

Cheatham gives a list of exercises useful for actors after they have learned the technical choreography of a fight. He utilizes working at quarter speed to help train the actor's mind and inner monologue in order to give the fight more depth and meaning.

Cheatham, Jamie. "Acting the Violence II." *The Fight Master*. 25.2 (Fall-Winter 2002). 24-28. Web.

Cheatham continues to give exercises to help the actor add depth to the fight. He focuses on ways for the actor to mentally frame the fight and his/her relationship to his/her fighting partner. Whether this is through differences in intention (good guy vs bad guy) or apparent difference in fighting skills, the purpose is to connect the partners strongly and instill a sense of danger and a need to win into the scene.

Huston, Hollis. "Combat as Actor Training Part I: Applications of Force." *The Fight Master*. 5.3 (July 1982). 9-13. Web.

Huston gives a series of exercises that are designed to aid the actors in finding a strong ensemble in their fight. The goal is to initiate and respond to action in sync and to give life to the space the actors work in.

Huston, Hollis. "The Compromise Theory of Stage Combat." *The Fight Master*. 4.2 (April 1981): 26-28. Web.

Huston presents the idea that acting is not based on belief, but on seeming to believe. Therefore, stage combat is not something entirely different from acting, but merely a specialized type of acting: the appearance of violence action.

Levitt, Aimee, and Christopher Piatt. "At Profiles Theatre the Drama - and Abuse - Is Real." *Chicago Reader*. Chicago Reader, 8 June 2016. Web. 20 Feb. 2017.

Levitt and Piatt tell the story of an actor at Profiles Theatre in Chicago who grew abusive in his works in the theatre. They detail the allegations by those who worked with him and how these allegations led to the creation of *Not in Our House*, an organization dedicated to protecting those who work in theatre from workplace abuse.

Mahne, Theodore P. "Actor's Theatre 'Extremities' a Disturbing, Dramatic Look at Rape, Revenge." *NOLA.com*. The Times-Picayune, 27 Apr. 2010. Web. 11 Mar. 2017.

Mahne reviews the Actor's Theatre of New Orleans's production of William Mastrosimone's *Extremities*. He critiques the playwright but supports the strong work of the cast, discussing how they interpret Mastrosimone's look at the weakness of the justice system in cases of female rape.

Margolies, Dany. "Fight right: action speaks louder than words. That's why, with stage or screen combat, it's safety first." *Back Stage West* 14 Aug. 2003: 10+. *Business Insights: Global*. Web. 2 Mar. 2016.

Margolies provides a practical guide for actors beginning their stage combat training. He covers how to find a good teacher and basic safety practices for an inexperienced actor called upon to perform a fight.

Noble, Adam. "Sex and Violence: Practical Approaches for Dealing with Extreme Stage Physicality." *The Fight Master*. 33.1 (Spring 2011). 14-18. Web.

Noble gives a framework specifically for students working on scenes of extreme physicality, particularly violence and sexual situations, on their own without a director always present. He voices his concerns for students who throw themselves in without any guidance, so he outlines a way of working that will help students create a truthful, strong scene that both scene partners are comfortable with.

Schiffman, Jean. "The Passion Of The Fight." *Back Stage West* 12.31 (2005): 10-11. *International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance with Full Text*. Web. 2 Mar. 2016.

Schiffman interviews several different fight choreographers about their experience and how they work with violence onstage. Their answers range from treating scenes of violence as regular scenes with advanced props to coming at the fight from the angle of all drama being

conflict. Schiffman also comments on the increased need for fight directors and actors who can perform combat scenes well.

Steinberg, Zev. "The Three Things You Need to 'Act the Fight.'" *The Fight Master*. 36.2 (Fall 2014). 14-20. Web.

Steinberg points out what he sees as the mistake of teaching fighting technique and acting as two separate entities; instead, he gives a framework for incorporating the two throughout the training process. He posits that if an actor combatant is reminded to focus on engaged breath, vocal presence, and focused intention, the audience will always be invested in the story of the scene, as opposed to the technique that is occurring.

"That's the Way to Do It! A History of Punch and Judy." *Victoria and Albert Museum*. Victoria and Albert Museum, 16 Sept. 2013. Web. 11 Mar. 2017.

This article details the development and history of the Punch and Judy puppet shows particularly popular in Britain. It follows their evolution from the Italian Commedia dell'arte through the centuries to their current popularity at the British seaside.

"They, Too, Enjoyed Watching Violence And Death." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 06 July 2001. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

This article discusses the evolution of gladiator fights in ancient Rome. It covers why they existed, what they meant, and the variations in types of fights.

Turner, Tom. "Technique and Impulse in Stage Combat." *The Fight Master*. 26.1 (Spring-Summer 2003). 18-21. Web.

Turner describes the process of teaching and learning a fight, focusing on the steps that a fight choreographer may take combatants through to learn the technique. Turner also discusses how the actors' impulses can be introduced in a safe manner.

Vandenbroucke, Russell. "Striking Distance: The Violence We See, and Don't See, Onstage." *American Theatre*. Theatre Communications Group, 30 Sept. 2015. Web. 04 Mar. 2017.

Vandenbroucke discusses the difference between direct, cultural, and structural violence. He gives examples from theatre history to prove that violence extends to many more elements than striking someone onstage.

Watson, Samuel G. "The Non-Fight Fight: A Modern Trend in Stage Fighting?" *The Fight Master* 2.1 (January 1979): 25-28. Web.

Watson muses on the new trend of a "non-fight fight," or a fight that includes more realistic choreography allowing for imperfect moves. Until this point, fights had been well-choreographed bouts of masterful weapon work, but now choreography is starting to allow for how fights would be in reality. Watson emphasizes that this new trend does not mean

that actors can be less-trained; on the contrary, the same level of technique is necessary for a “non-fight fight.”

Books

Bogart, Anne. *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Bogart muses on what contributes to the art of directing. She draws from her personal life and experience with theatre to discuss seven aspects of directing that expand to apply to theatre in general.

Boughn, Jenn. *Stage Combat Fisticuffs, Stunts, and Swordplay for Theater and Film*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc, 2010. Web.

Boughn provides a practical introductory guide to the technical aspects of stage combat choreography. She details warmups and training games for working with actors, as well as laying out basic drills and choreography for a variety of weapons and fighting styles.

Bruder, Melissa, et al. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. New York: Vintage Books, 1986. Print.

Bruder et al. offers a practical technique for actors to live truthfully onstage without believing that they have to become their characters. She presents a process that begins with a specific style of analysis for the text of a play and details how to implement the analysis, as well as how to incorporate the particular style of working in any theatre situation.

Chekhov, Michael. *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953. Print.

Chekhov provides a practical handbook for actors. His technique is honed by experience with the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavski. His writings are generally accepted as an authoritative text on acting in Western theatre.

DuVal, Christopher. *Stage Combat Arts: An Integrated Approach to Acting, Voice, and Text Work*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016. Print.

DuVal addresses the art of stage combat through the approach of voice and acting work. He works to integrate the actors' movement, vocal technique, and acting skills in order to present a well-rounded fight scene. Included are many practical exercises for establishing a foundation of skills for the actor and director to work from.

Girard, Dale. *Actors on Guard: A Practical Guide for the Use of the Rapier and Dagger for Stage and Screen*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 1-8, 425-467. Print.

Girard details the steps to learning and performing a stage fight. He focuses on creating objectives for the character to accomplish, as well as having an extensive understanding of the circumstances of the scene, both those that are given as well as those the actors create for themselves. Girard also details practical information about the process of performing a fight onstage, such as an actor's union rights.

Hobbs, William. *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*. London: A&C Black, 1995. Print.

Hobbs addresses the history and technique of stage fighting, particularly sword play. He relates many personal stories and examples in order to demonstrate to the reader what one should look for when putting together a fight and working with actors.

Hobbs, William. *Stage Fight: Swords, Firearms, Fisticuffs, and Slapstick*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1967. Print.

Hobbs addresses the history and technique of stage fighting, with a particular focus on swordplay. Much of this material is repeated in Hobbs's *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*. Its section on slapstick includes what audiences find funny in fight scenes.

Kreng, John. *Fight Choreography: The Art of Non-Verbal Dialogue*. Boston: Thomson Course Technology, 2008. Web.

Kreng details how to create as well as critique an effective fight scene for a film. He also covers the history of violence in film and provides an extensive comparison of fight directing for film in the West and the East. Kreng provides a step by step method for a beginner to begin considering how to become a fight choreographer for film.

Najarian, Robert. *The Art of Unarmed Stage Combat*. New York: Focal Press, 2016. Print.

Najarian discusses how best to create an unarmed fight, including how to help the actors perform safely and how to act the fight. He provides plenty of practical descriptions of technique as well as exercises to warm the actors up, help them build trust, and help them become more effective at integrating acting skills into fight sequences.

Potter, W. James. *On Media Violence*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999. 1-96, 121-163. Print.

Potter provides a detailed portrait of the status of research on what effect media violence has on those who see it, as well as the effectiveness of the research methods being utilized. Potter synthesizes many studies done on the topic of media violence to provide an analysis of what is currently known about the subject, as well as giving guidance for how he believes it is best to proceed.

Sievers, W. David. *Directing for the Theatre*. 2nd ed. Dubuque: WM. C. Brown, 1965. 16-295. Print.

Sievers gives a practical handbook for a beginning director approaching a show, specifically in terms of educational theatre. Each step of the process of directing is covered, from play selection to evaluation of the directing process after the production closes. The steps are covered thoroughly, with special consideration placed on how to work with actors to encourage a high quality of work, as well as how to encourage actors who may not have a lot of experience in the theatre.

Signorielli, Nancy. *Violence in the Media: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005. 1-74. Web.

Signorielli provides an accessible compilation of current research findings on the relationship between media violence and society. She presents a history of how society in general reacts to media, then goes on to details the results of the studies that have been conducted on how violent media affects people. She approaches the issue with a mindset of how parents can protect their children from negative effects as a result of experiencing violent media.

Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 1964. Print.

Stanislavski's text is a classic acting book in the world of Western theatre. He relates how to achieve good acting through the trials of an imagined acting ensemble.

Suddeth, J. Allen. *Fight Directing for the Theatre*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996. Print.

Suddeth focuses on the practical side of choreographing fights. He discusses how to begin researching a fight, as well as how to integrate a fight into a production as a whole. Suddeth also covers the more technical aspects of serving as a fight director, including weapon care and upkeep, dealing with stage blood, and how to work safely with theatrical firearms.

Interviews

Alm, Geoffrey. Personal interview. 8 October 2016.

Mr. Alm is a fight master with the Society of American Fight Directors.

Brimmer, J. David. Personal interview. 4 November 2016.

Mr. Brimmer is a fight master with the Society of American Fight Directors, as well as serving as the society's president.

Plays

Coward, Noel. *Three Plays : Blithe Spirit, Hay Fever, Private Lives*. 1st Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1999. Print.

This is a collection of Noel Coward plays. I used a scene from *Private Lives* as the medium stakes scene in my showcase.

McDonagh, Martin. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Other Plays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998. Print.

This is a collection of Martin McDonagh plays. I used a scene from *The Lonesome West* as the low stakes scene in my showcase.

Shepard, Sam, and Joseph Chaikin. *Seven Plays*. New York: Dial Press, 2005. Print.

This is a collection of Sam Shepard plays. I used a scene from *True West* as the high stakes scene in my showcase.

Performances

King Lear. Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis, MN. 8 Mar. 2017. Performance.

This was a performance of Shakespeare's *King Lear* that involved several scenes of violence.