

## Act Out Acts Out

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As [Skrappy's](#) has gone through upheaval finding a new place, the Act Out program adjusted to this turbulence by spilling into the larger community while Skrappy's new building is renovated. This sometimes-difficult process has given us a chance with the help of Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Program, to analyze Act Out as a prevention tool.

This spring our new program coordinator introduced Act Out film/theater to a Tucson Charter School. As part of the course we screened two Act Out films for the students. The majority of the students had already taken the Sexual Violence Prevention and Education given by the Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault ([SACASA](#)) earlier in the term. Consequently, by the time we started working with the class, the students had already been inaugurated into the world of sexual violence prevention and education.

The students responded critically to the films on an overwhelmingly aesthetic basis (the way things looked) not ideological or ethical. What is interesting about this is that sexual violence has been objectified to the extent that the information on its prevention is challenged only on its effectiveness. Their criticism was given as specialists (as there as yet no experts) on sexual violence prevention, given what they previously learned with SACASA (research and learning element of preproduction in Act Out).

We think it significant that the students treat the information (concerning sexual violence prevention) they receive as an object – This suggests that it is given some legitimacy and that it can be encompassed for analysis. In this particular case, we suspect that their inclination to accept this new information as valid was accelerated by the web of 'authoritative structures' supporting the information (Our Family/Act Out, Charter School, SACASA, [Skrappy's](#)). The students found themselves at the axis of the network of influences, the meeting of communities, where they became cohorts in the prevention effort.

Also, this legitimating process is, we believe, advanced by exposure to preexisting films on sexual violence prevention (Act Out). Yet, since the students are actively involved in the production of another generation of SV films/plays (external artifacts) their reception of these sources of knowledge, and the (previous) films derived from it, is not blind or passive, it is driven by creative inquiry. This conglomeration of information, the web of authoritative structures (where the students find themselves) resembles a [learning community](#) in the sense that the students are called into it as researchers and aesthetic analysts as well as learners. In turn, the sources of sexual violence prevention information are used as trusted archives housed at various nodes throughout the learning community network.

Again, we return to the prospect of 'objectification'. Acknowledging, the troubling history of the word in feminist theory and its use in isolating victims as causing their own violability, the term needs to be *troubled*, redirected and resignified. And given the daunting nature of the subject matter for young

people, objectification of the subject is critical. As we suggested earlier, objectification is a way of holding, holding away, owning, housing. This is not simply a terminal act of ‘putting away’ but also of ‘making accessible’ in archive.<sup>1</sup> In terms of filmmaking and theater, the information can be housed and retrieved at will by the learners/creators who can attend to the task of information management, phrasing and presentation.

If aesthetic production is bound by rules (or parameters) of efficacy (in this case effective sexual violence prevention narrative), then it necessitates the use and or creation of language. The ordered, fact-based understanding of the subject leads to an appreciation of the potency of language, then to symbol manipulation (creating language) and then to narrativization – begins the move of subject matter outward onto a substrate (the world), away from the self.<sup>2</sup> Through presentation the narrative speaks, even without words, the performer speaks, the sequence of images speaks - Performing language is communication (expression). In terms of sexual violence prevention narratives in Act Out, we define ‘expression’ (the common term used to describe artistic externalization) as uttering, voicing, pronouncement, declaration, articulation, assertion, dissemination, circulation, and **communication**. ‘Expression’ as a sort of phrasing, assertive communication – a move *toward* the world, *into* the world is differentiated from ‘expression’ of how one feels - an account of how one is affected *by* the world.

Looking at the seemingly minor occurrence of the charter school students employing aesthetic criticism to the previous Act Out films as move to objectify, we can see how it applies to performance. We expect that they will find that being in the world, on this stage is not to be at its mercy – that, in effect, they can use presence (of self), presentation as a tool.<sup>3</sup> We should emphasize that performance is a fabrication/fictionalization of the subject, more readily available for manipulation in a way that enacted memory is not. It can be disassembled, reconstructed, rehearsed - increasing the ‘actor’s’ power over it. So, performance can be objectified to the degree that it can be framed against and away from reality. Students can explore the concept of performance as an assertion of presence and less as an attempt at catharsis or ~~abreaction~~. As a group the students’ performances ‘throw out’ unmarked depictions that they can walk away from.<sup>4</sup> (A protective factor: the weight of the content is made to reside away from the actor/student [the self], which should decrease vulnerability to it.) If we think of performance as fabrication, we can de-emphasize the importance of embodiment in ‘acting’ and broaden its scope to simply ‘doing.’ Yet, ‘doing’ is no minor act if we think of behavior as also “causing the environment”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida, J. (1996). Archive fever: A Freudian impression. (Prenowitz, E., Trans.). Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, M. & Riviere, J. (1964). Love, hate and reparation. New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Goffman, E. (1961). The presentation of self in everyday life. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Asylums. Garden City, NY. 1961

<sup>4</sup> Kristeva, J. (1982). Powers of horror: An essay on abjection. (Roudiez, L. S., Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.