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*Feeling Lonely Together: The Roles of Empathy and Distance in Emotional Responses to Theatre*

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## ABSTRACT

Transcending the qualitative nature of most theatrical research, this quantitative field study empirically assessed how spectators' empathic tendencies and their positioning within a theater relate to their emotional responses to a theatrical piece. Participants ( $n = 160$ ) attended a performance of an original one-act play, *Lonely Together*, seated in one of three distance conditions: close to, mid-range, or far from the stage. Following the performance, data on subjects' emotional responses to the play and general empathic tendencies were collected via their completion of a digital survey including the Evaluation of Theater Visit Measure (Boerner & Jobst, 2013) and the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (Reniers et al., 2011). Two main effects were hypothesized: (1) a positive association between reported trait empathy and emotional response such that subjects who are more empathetic would report stronger emotional responses to the performance as compared to those who are less empathetic, regardless of seat location, and (2) a negative causal relationship between distance and emotional response such that subjects seated closer to the stage would report stronger emotional responses to the performance as compared to those seated further from the stage, regardless of trait empathy. Hypothesis 1 was supported; reported trait empathy was correlated to reported emotional response to the play ( $r = .293, p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 2 was not supported; no significant differences in emotional response across distance conditions were found ( $p = .056$ ). Exploratory analyses revealed the relevance of identifying with the theatrical content in experiencing a strong emotional response to the play ( $r = .610, p < .001$ ). This study is the first of its kind to empirically support the oft-postulated role of empathy in theatrical spectating and serves as a basis for future research exploring the features underpinning subjective reactions to theatre.

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## Introduction

“Performance matters, and cognitive studies can help show how and why this is so” (2006, p. xii). Such are the words of Bruce McConachie—theatre theorist, historian, and researcher who in the last two decades has defined and occupied the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of cognitive science and theatre arts. Bonnie Eckard, another lead scholar in this up-and-coming field upholds that while “it is important not to reduce all phenomena to physical facts and scientific methods as the only means of accessing truth, ...cognitive research...can provide scientific confirmation, verify[ing] what intuitively we already know” (2008, p.14). On the heels of a global pandemic that rendered live performance impossible for many months, and in a society where arts funding is persistently in peril (Deb, 2017; McGlone, 2020; Mosle, 2012; Rabin & Hedberg, 2011), validating theatre through a variety of means is more pertinent now than ever.

Despite their acknowledged value, scientific explorations of theatre are rare. Moreover, the small pool of scientific data on theatre that does exist comes primarily from qualitative research focused on gathering spectators’ opinions and behavioral responses without numerical data or any manipulation of variables. While these studies provide a glimpse into the underlying principles governing theatre and its impacts in a general sense, they are limited in their scope, unable to suggest causation between factors. There is therefore a need for quantitative experimental research centered on theatre. The present study was designed in direct response to this need and represents the first study of its kind, jointly considering the impacts of context-general factors—trait empathy—and context-specific factors—positioning within a theater—on

emotional responses to live theatre. To contextualize the expected functions of these factors in a theatrical realm, the following sections will elucidate how these concepts of interest—empathy and distance—have been conceptualized and studied previously.

### **Empathy in Theatre**

Despite becoming a topic of considerable discussion and investigation in the sciences, the concept of empathy has its basis in the arts (Kou et al., 2019). First introduced in 1909 by psychologist Edward Titchener, “empathy” was born from a translation of the German “Einfühlung,” which referred to an aesthetic experience of interacting with art by “feeling into” it (Stueber, 2016). The concept of empathy has since been refined by the sciences, coming to be understood as the ability to psychologically identify and/or vicariously experience the emotions of another (Reniers et al., 2011). Recent research from affective and social neuroscience has teased apart this definition, further clarifying empathy as a multidimensional construct comprised of a cognitive component (the perspective taking ability referenced in the first part of the previous definition), an emotional component (the emotional sharing ability discussed in the latter part of the previous definition), and a motivational component relating to the prosocial impulse to care for another (Decety & Jackson, 2004; Decety & Svetlova, 2012). This expanded definition has yielded the respective distinctions of cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and empathic concern. It is suggested that together, these components comprise what is meant generally by “empathy.” Further research into this multipronged ability (Coplan, 2004) has revealed empathy to be a distinct evolutionary feature that developed to support survival by enabling species to identify and respond appropriately to significant social events (Decety &



Cowell, 2014), and grew to present as a relatively stable personality trait that varies across individuals (Leiberg & Anders, 2006; Mangione et al., 2002).

Even after scientific scrutiny and definitional adjustment, the concept of empathy continues to be strongly tied to the arts. For example, there exists today an overwhelming academic and colloquial acceptance of empathy as a central feature in the spectating of theatrical events (McConachie, 2013; Mitschke, 2021), with “empathy” referring primarily to affective empathy and seemingly secondarily to cognitive empathy. In fact, the concept of emoting with actors on stage has been a central point of theoretical consideration since scholarly discussions of theatre first began. Aristotle’s theory of tragic *katharsis*, introduced in *Poetics* (1449b24-28) set the framework for these explorations. While seriously debated in its pure definition (Halliwell, 1992), the most accepted translation of *katharsis* (catharsis) is ‘purgation’ (Turri, 2015), such that witnessing actors in the throes of emotional bouts yields emotional benefits for spectators as they emote along with the fictional characters and purge their own pent-up emotions. In the ongoing debate regarding Aristotle’s perspective and the nuanced functions of this proposed mechanism, some scholars have turned to Freudian psychoanalytical concepts such as abreaction (“the acknowledgement and subsequent release of a previously repressed emotion via reliving the experience that produced the original emotion” (Breuer and Freud, 1995; Lexico Dictionaries, n.d.)) to explain how emotions are elicited, experienced, and appropriately resolved in the process of witnessing theatre (Meisiek, 2004).

Though differing in their exact interpretation of the underlying principles at play, most theatrical scholars and artists alike have agreed fundamentally with Aristotle, accepting the natural role of empathy in theatrical spectating. This connection between empathy and theatre is in fact so inherent and customary that the aims of one radical theatre artist, Bertolt Brecht, to

sever the connection through the employment of the alienation effect in his plays (in which audience members were presented with rough, jolting, perplex content to keep them consistently aware of the false, fabricated nature of the theatre) remains a source of distinct discussion and debate nearly 100 years later (Brecht & Willett, 2013; Steer, 1968). While “the question of how, or indeed whether, a theatre that promotes detached contemplation rather than emotional involvement works is still open” (Levy, 1997, p. 73), the question of the function and efficacy of an empathy-engaging theatre is one that has been consistently experientially evidenced and theoretically explored.

Despite the expansive timeline and extensive breadth of theoretical work relating empathy and theatre, empirical exploration of this relationship remains extremely limited. There have been some notable recent additions to the small pool of experimental data on theatre, though they center around the converse relationship—considering not how empathy influences theatrical experiences, but how theatrical experiences can influence empathy. This recent research has suggested that attending a live theatrical production can increase audience members’ empathy for groups depicted in the play, change their opinions about presented socio-political issues, and lead to increases in charitable donations to causes both related and unrelated to the play (Rathje et al., 2021). However, in line with Narrative Transportation Theory (Green & Brock, 2000; Van Laer et al., 2013) and corroborating research demonstrating that increased emotional and cognitive engagement with a narrative indeed yields stronger narrative-related shifts in attitude and beliefs (Mazzocco et al., 2010), as well as theatrical scholar Stefan Meisiek’s theoretical assertion that “some form of emotional arousal during [a] play initiates the desired cognitive processes” (Meisiek, 2004, pp. 799-800), Rathje et al. found that theatrically-induced empathy and prosocial action was positively correlated with how transported

(emotionally invested) theatregoers were. Thus, if we wish to continue understanding and mining the prosocial impacts of theatre, it is important to uncover the mediating factors in varied emotional responses to theatre.

### **Effects of Distance on Emotion**

This present research proposes that in addition to empathy, one of these other mediating factors of emotional response could be the physical location from which an audience member is watching a production. Among theatregoers, the conversation of prime seating is a common one; many online articles and forums outline the pros and cons of different seating sections, aiming to guide ticket-buyers toward the best seat (Caggiano, 2019; Hanson, 2021; Thomas, 2018). A robust online grassroots database, *A View from My Seat*, has even been established with this goal in mind, existing as a public platform on which audience members can post photos of the view of the stage from their particular seat, hoping to further inform ticket buyers about the optimal location to sit in any theatre (*A View from My Seat*, n.d.). Though a common theme of advice on these sources is that sitting closer yields a more engaging experience, there are discrepancies in the opinions presented, and no data on which to base these claims.

Though not relating to theatre, or even to live stimuli, previous research using naturalistic mediated stimuli has indeed highlighted that physical distance impacts emotional responses. In one such study by Detenber and Reeves (1996), subjects were presented with pleasant, unpleasant, arousing, and unarousing images from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; Lang et al., 1988) which were manipulated to appear as either small or large (representing far or close distances, respectively) and moving or still. The large versions of the

images were found to be more arousing than their small counterparts, in both their still and moving iterations, suggesting that the arousal capacity (emotional intensity) of a stimulus is at least in part dependent upon its perceived distance from the viewer. Specifically, this study outlined a negative relationship between distance and emotional response such that the smaller the distance between the stimuli and the perceiver, the stronger the elicited emotional response.

This same relationship was depicted in research by Mühlberger et al. (2008) in which positive and negative image stimuli were simulated to appear as either approaching toward or receding from participants. The negative, approaching stimuli were found to be the most arousing, further indicating that decreased perceived distance from stimuli yields increased arousal by those stimuli, as well as suggesting that negative stimuli are the most reactionary and therefore the most effective for use in depicting this concept. This relationship has been further bolstered by studies observing physiological emotional responses, which have found that larger (closer) images induce higher skin conductance in addition to increased self-reported arousal rating (Codispoti & De Cesarei, 2007; De Cesarei & Codispoti, 2010; Reeves et al., 1999). It has been suggested that this relationship between distance and emotion can be understood as the result of different visual angles: a measure of distance between an object and a viewer identified by the size that the image is projected onto the retina of the viewer. In this measurement construct, closer objects yield larger visual angles. Indeed, research by Gall and Latoschik (2020) that focused on visual angle modulation provided evidence that a larger visual angle (representing closer stimuli) increased emotional arousal.

This same negative relationship between distance and emotion has been found to prevail even when spatial distance is defined more abstractly. In one study by Williams and Bargh (2008), distance was defined irrespective of the self as participants plotted a set of coordinates on

a Cartesian-plane representing one of three levels of a distance condition (close, intermediate, or far). Participants from the different distance conditions were found to report significantly different levels of bond strength with their siblings, parents, and hometown, with participants primed with far distance reporting weaker bonds compared to participants primed with closeness. Additionally, in an abstracted replication of the previously-discussed Mühlberger et al. (2008) study, it was found that the negative relationship between distance and emotional response extends past perception into imagination; imagining negative emotional scenes moving toward participants yielded stronger reported negative affect and higher arousal in participants, while negative emotional scenes moving away yielded weaker reported negative affect and lower arousal in participants, compared to negative scenes that were not imagined to move (Davis et al., 2011).

Similarly, in a study by Takasawa et al. (2019), increased imagined distance was found to attenuate negative emotional responses; participants in a distance condition who read a negative scenario and imagined they were at a library more than 60 miles from their home experienced less emotional reactivity than participants in a near condition who read the scenario and imagined being at their home. In instances such as these where emotional response differs along abstractly defined spatial distance, justification has come in the form of Construal-Level Theory (CLT): a social psychological theory concerned with the relationship between psychological distance (defined by spatial, temporal, social, or hypothetical distance) and the extent to which one thinks in concrete or abstract terms (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Though Trope and Liberman in the explanation of their theory highlight nuances in CLT regarding affect, speculating that emotions with varying degrees of abstractness could be impacted by increased psychological distance to different extents, they provide succinct support for the relationship depicted across

studies when they proclaim: “It is commonly assumed that psychological distance from an object diminishes the intensity of affective responses to that object. People typically react more strongly to events that are closer to them in time and space” (p. 26).

Despite this strong set of evidence that matters of spatial distance can significantly influence emotional judgments, specifically along a negative relationship, these impacts have yet to be extended to live stimuli. How might true physical distance (not just simulated or imagined distance) from an eliciting event impact how strongly one responds to it? Are the anecdotal claims on theatre forums about prime seating rooted in something deeper, something that can be empirically observed?

### **Present Research**

It is this aim to push past colloquial assumptions into empirical investigation of mediating factors in varied emotional responses to theatre that has driven this research. By responding to noted gaps in the literature, this study aims to advance the hybrid field of cognitive science and theatre studies, ultimately bolstering efforts to harness the power of theatre. Specifically, this research aims to quantify the function of empathy in a theatrical context while extending the causal relationship between spatial distance and emotion into consideration of live stimuli through a unique experimental design with high ecological validity. Two main effects are hypothesized: (1) a positive association between reported trait empathy and emotional response such that subjects who are more empathetic would report stronger emotional responses to the performance as compared to those who are less empathetic, regardless of seat location, and (2) a negative causal relationship between distance and emotional response such that subjects seated

closer to the stage would report stronger emotional responses to the performance as compared to those seated further from the stage, regardless of trait empathy.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a between-subjects design with two independent variables—one continuous (trait empathy), and one categorical (seated distance from stage)—and one dependent variable (emotional response to the play).

### **Procedures**

#### **Theatrical Stimulus Development**

To be able to gather unconfounded dependent variable data about emotional responses to live theatre, it was determined that the theatrical performance that participants would view in this study should be a novel piece of theatre that no one would have previous knowledge of or predetermined perspectives on. Thus, an original one-act play, *Lonely Together*, was written for the purposes of this study. Considering that negative stimuli were found in previous research to be the most reactionary and therefore the best for use in studies such as this aimed at gauging emotional response (Mühlberger et al., 2008; discussed above), this play was developed to include content that was affectively negative. Furthermore, considering the objective of assessing empathic emotional responses, the play was designed to center characters' plights and personal emotional journeys, providing ample opportunity for empathy elicitation. Operationalizing these aims, *Lonely Together* tells the story of strangers Sophie and Layla who find themselves stuck together when their plane has to make an emergency landing in the middle of Ohio due to a



massive blizzard. As the two young women ride out the storm in a shoddy motel and negotiate the nuances of vulnerability, they uncover a surprising connection. To learn more about the play's content and themes, see Appendix E: *Lonely Together* Script and the accompanying link to a recording of the performance.

### **Recruitment and Condition Assignment**

Beginning in November, Penn State students, faculty, staff, and community members were made aware of the performance of *Lonely Together* and the accompanying research through Listserv emails (within the School of Theatre, Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Architecture, College of Liberal Arts, Penn State Rock Ethics Institute, Student Engagement Network, Penn State Performing Arts Council, and Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity), in-class announcements in introductory theatre courses (THEA100: The Art of the Theatre, THEA106: Theatre Foundations, and THEA101N: Performance and Society), physical flyers posted at local theatrical venues and in on-campus residential commons, social media posts (on School of Theatre, Department of Psychology, College of Arts and Architecture, and personal student accounts), online articles (published by *Penn State News* and *Onward State*), personal invitations (emailed to professors of women's studies courses and additional community members), and word of mouth (see Appendix D for select recruitment tools). All recruitment and marketing communications included the flyer with a QR code linking to the ticket reservation form. Anyone who navigated to this ticket reservation page was immediately prompted with an implied consent form, and once providing their consent by proceeding past this page, were able to select their preferred performance date of either December 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup>. Following their

submission of this form, each respondent was sent a virtual ticket for the performance on their chosen date. Each ticket had a randomly assigned seat number for that performance, which fell into one of the three pre-determined seat distance conditions: (1) close to, (2) mid-range from, or (3) far from the stage (see Appendix A for a seat distance condition map). Each distance condition consisted of three sequential rows each with 12 or 13 seats, yielding three distance conditions comprised of 37-39 individual seats.

### **Performance and Data Collection**

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, (whichever date they reserved a ticket for), the participants arrived at the Penn State Downtown Theatre Center for the performance of *Lonely Together*. They presented their virtual ticket at the door and were individually seated by an usher in the assigned seat listed on their ticket. At this time, they were also handed a playbill for the show, which included a scannable QR code on the back cover that navigated to the post-show survey. Once everyone was seated, the 40-minute performance began.

Following the performance curtain call, a pre-recorded announcement was played over the theater's sound system instructing audiences to take out their phones and scan the QR code on the back of their playbill which would direct them to a short, anonymous online survey. Attendees quietly filled out this approximately 10-minute survey and excused themselves from the theater upon its completion as instructed by the announcement, showing their final survey completion page to an usher on the way out.

## Materials

The post-show survey that participants filled out was developed specifically for this study but drew upon previously validated measures. It began with a prompt for attendees to fill out their theater seat number and three general demographic questions (age, gender, and sexual orientation (deemed relevant given the significant presence of queer content in the play)). After these introductory questions was a batch of prompts from the Evaluation of Theater Visit Measure (Boerner & Jobst, 2013; see Appendix B): a measure for rating various details about one's experience attending the theatre that day. In its original and complete form, this is a 129-item questionnaire to be answered using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) that assesses the following constructs as they relate to a visit to the theater: General Evaluation of the Theater, Visitor's Expectations, Artistic Quality, Visitor's Cognitive Response, Visitor's Emotional Response, Visitor's Conative Response, Other Visitor's Perceived Behavior, Servicescape, and Overall Evaluation of Theater Visit. Large portions of the original measure were not applicable to this study (assessing features of a theatrical visit that were non-existent in this research design, such as gathering opinions about the perception of the theatre company, prior interaction with reviews of the show, stylistic elements in the play, etc.). Additionally, the length of the original measure was thought to be prohibitive for this research given that the post-show survey included other components, and the priority of avoiding participant fatigue particularly since the survey followed a 40-minute performance. For this study, therefore, a truncated version of this measure was utilized that included 25-items: 14 distractor items from various constructs (Artistic Quality, Visitor's Cognitive Response, Visitor's Conative Response, and Other Visitor's Perceived Behavior) that were still deemed appropriate to the circumstances of this study and thus would not give rise to either confusion or suspicion in

participants, and 11 items (questions #13-23) directly addressing emotional reaction to the play (questions from the original Visitor's Emotional Response construct). Responses to these 11 emotional response questions comprised the dependent variable in this study.

The final section of the survey was the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (Reniers et al., 2011; see Appendix C) which assessed context-general trait empathy along two separate cognitive and affective dimensions. This measure is comprised of 31 items—19 measuring cognitive empathy and 12 measuring affective empathy. However, three of these items (#2, #11, #29 on the original measure) refer specifically to empathic responses to plays or movies and were thus omitted for the purposes of this study as they represent demand characteristics and were judged to potentially disrupt internal validity by clueing participants into the research hypothesis. Thus, participants completed a 28-item version of the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale with the response options (1) “strongly disagree,” (2) “slightly disagree,” (3) “slightly agree,” and (4) “strongly agree,” that forced participants to choose, as there was no neutral response option.

## **Participants**

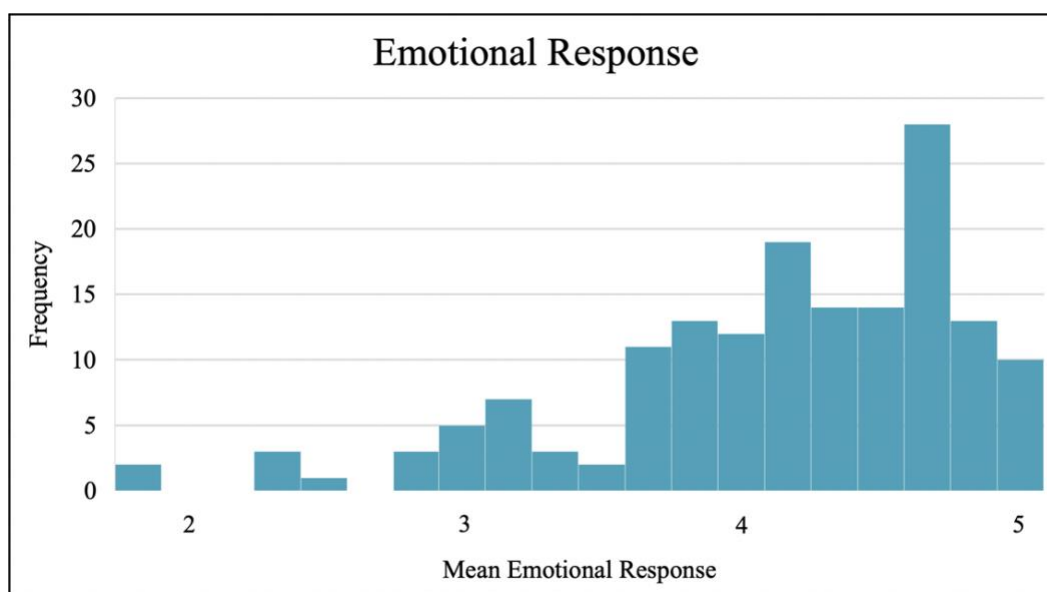
This study relied on 231 people who reserved tickets to attend a performance of *Lonely Together*. Of these 231 people, 175 attended one of the three performances of the play and engaged with the post-show survey. From this group of survey respondents, 15 were excluded from analysis—4 people who were observed moving to a different open seat after being shown to their assigned seat by the usher and thus were not fully compliant with their random conditional assignment, and 11 people who proceeded through to the end of the survey before

leaving the theatre but left some questions unanswered. These exclusions yielded a subject pool of 160 participants (91 Female, 54 Male, 8 Non-Binary/Third Gender, 2 Gender Fluid, 2 Questioning/Unknown, 1 Other, 1 Prefer Not to Say,  $M_{age} = 31.03$ ,  $SD = 16.312$ ), with 60 people in the close condition, 55 in the mid-range condition, and 45 in the far condition.

## Results

Responses to questions 13-23 from the Evaluation of Theater Visit Measure (Boerner & Jobst, 2013; see Appendix B) were averaged to reveal participants' emotional response mean scores ( $\alpha = .869$ ,  $M = 4.026$  (out of 5),  $SD = .712$ ). Most participants reported high emotional responses to the play, save for two outliers who had mean emotional response scores below 2 (see Figure 1). A one-way ANOVA assessing emotional response by date of performance attended ( $F(2, 157) = 2.285$ ,  $p = .105$ ) verified that there were not significant differences between the three performances that impacted audience members' emotional responses.

**Figure 1 - Emotional Response Frequencies**

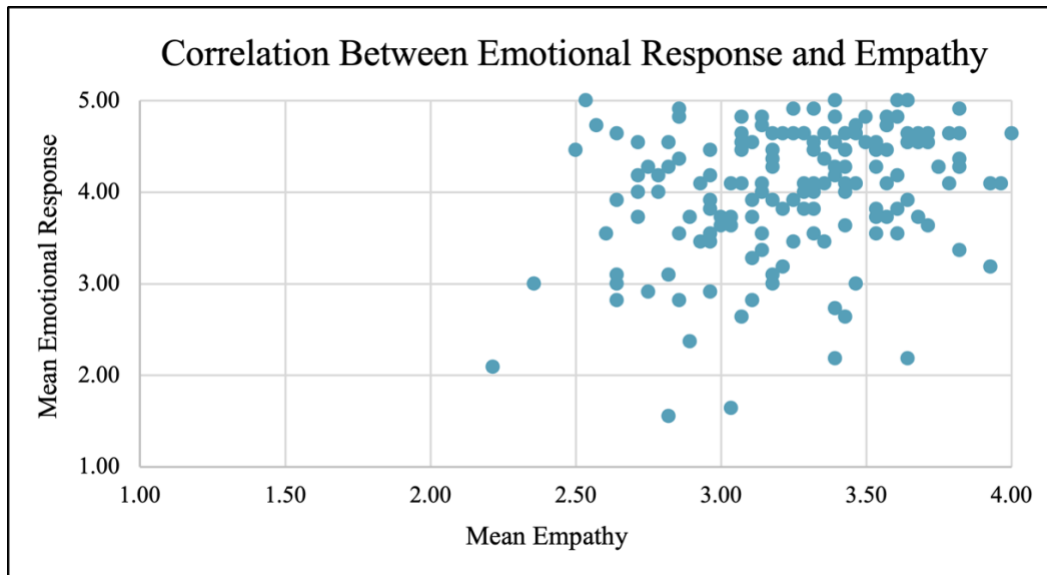


### Empathy and Emotional Response

Data from the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (Reniers et al., 2011; see Appendix C) were averaged to reveal participants' reported trait empathy mean scores ( $\alpha = .874$ ,  $M = 3.254$  (out of 4),  $SD = .361$ ). To test hypothesis 1, a correlational analysis

between empathy score and emotional response was run ( $r = .293, p < .001$ ), revealing a small to moderate positive correlation following our predictions (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2 - Correlation Between Emotional Response and Empathy**

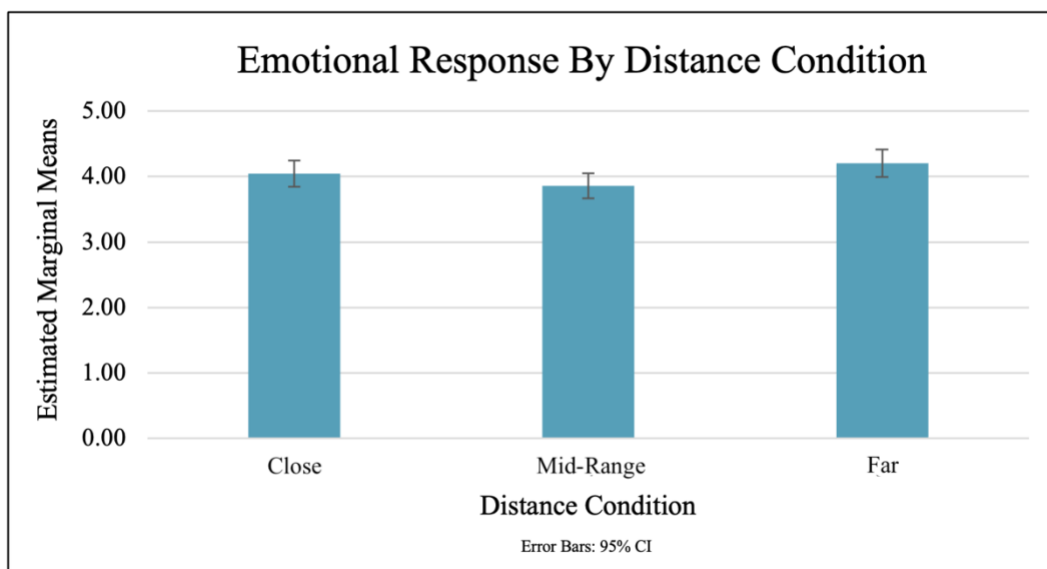


Further exploratory analyses distinguished between the cognitive and affective empathy subscales, which were positively correlated ( $r = .386, p < .001$ ). A one-way ANOVA considering the responses from the 19 cognitive empathy items ( $\alpha = .872$ ; see Appendix C) verified that cognitive empathy did not vary as a function of seating condition ( $F(2, 157) = 2.303, p = .103$ ). A correlational analysis between cognitive empathy and emotional response revealed a small positive correlation ( $r = .184, p < .001$ ). A one-way ANOVA considering the responses from the 9 affective empathy items ( $\alpha = .769$ ) revealed that affective empathy did differ across distance conditions, with trait affective empathy presenting as higher in the far distance condition participants ( $F(2, 157) = 5.046, p = .008$ ). A correlational analysis between affective empathy and emotional response revealed a positive correlation nearly twice as strong as that observed between cognitive empathy and emotional response ( $r = .357, p < .001$ ).

### Impact of Distance on Emotional Response

To test hypothesis 2, that subjects seated closer to the stage would report stronger emotional responses regardless of their reported trait empathy, a one-way ANOVA of emotional response by distance condition was run ( $F(2, 157) = 2.936, p = .056$ ). Our hypothesis 2 was not supported, as no significant differences between distance conditions were found (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3 - Emotional Response by Distance Condition**



### Interaction Between Empathy and Distance

To further assess the hypothesized relationships between empathy, distance, and emotional response, a multiple regression analysis was run ( $F(5, 154) = 4.029, R^2 = .116$ ). For this test, the effects coding structure was such that for e1, distance condition close = 1, mid-range = 0, far = -1 and for e2, distance condition close = 0, mid-range = 1, far = -1, enabling us to consider two specific contrasts: close vs. far, and mid-range vs. far. This test verified the strong positive relationship between trait empathy and how strongly participants emotionally responded



to the play ( $p = .001$ ; see Table 1). This analysis also verified the lack of significant relationship between distance condition and emotional response reported in the ANOVA above ( $p = 0.836$  for e1,  $p = 0.114$  for e2), clarifying that even when accounting for empathy, the distance condition did not have a significant impact on emotional response. Predicated by a one-way ANOVA verifying that distance condition did not impact trait empathy ( $F(2, 157) = 2.232, p = .111$ ), distance was tested as a moderator. This analysis revealed no interaction between distance condition assignment and empathy in predicting emotional response, further supporting our hypothesis 1 that people with high trait empathy would experience stronger emotional responses to the play regardless of their seat location. In sum, the lack of main effect of distance on emotional response was not in turn moderated or changed by whether people were high in trait empathy.

**Table 1 - Regression Analysis: Relationships Between Empathy & Distance and Emotion**

	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
e1	-0.016	0.075	-0.207	0.836	-0.164	0.133
e2	-0.123	0.077	-1.591	0.114	-0.275	0.03
EmpathyCentered	0.52	0.156	3.34	0.001	0.212	0.828
e1xEmpathy	-0.17	0.216	-0.788	0.432	-0.598	0.257
e2xEmpathy	0.207	0.206	1.002	0.318	-0.201	0.614

Exploratory regression analyses considered the empathy subscales. Since affective empathy was itself impacted by distance condition, it could not be treated as a moderator of distance condition on the emotional response outcome. The potential of cognitive empathy as a moderator, however, was assessed; trait cognitive empathy did not moderate the effect of distance condition on emotional response ( $t = -1.274, p = .205$  for the close vs. far comparison;  $t = 1.236, p = .218$  for the mid-range vs. far comparison).

### Exploratory Analysis – Content Relation and Emotional Response

Additional exploratory analyses were conducted to further contextualize the relationship found between empathy and emotional response. Since the content of the play deals significantly with queerness, a one-way ANOVA of emotional response by sexual identity (as either queer ( $n = 59$ ,  $M = 4.191$ ,  $SD = .648$ ) or not queer ( $n = 100$ ,  $M = 3.942$ ,  $SD = .725$ )) was run, revealing that people with lived experience in queerness were significantly more emotionally respondent to the piece than non-queer people ( $F(1, 157) = 4.737$ ,  $p = .031$ ). To continue to explore how personally relating to the play was a harbinger of increased emotional response, participants' content relation was calculated ( $\alpha = .762$ ,  $M = 3.928$  (out of 5),  $SD = .910$ ). These composite content relation scores were determined by averaging responses to four relevant questions from The Evaluation of A Theatre Visit Measure (Boerner & Jobst, 2013; #4: "The play deals with a relevant and/or interesting topic," #5(reverse scored): "The topic of this play is of no use to me," #11: "What I saw onstage today reminded me of my own life," and #12: "This play touched me because I recognized parts of myself"). A correlational analysis between content relation and emotional response was run, revealing a moderately strong correlation ( $r = .610$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Discussion

*Lonely Together* generally elicited strong emotional responses from audience members, with the strength of emotional response varying across different levels of trait empathy, but not varying across physical distance conditions. Spectators who reported higher general empathic tendencies exhibited stronger emotional responses to the play as compared to those reporting weaker empathy, regardless of where in the theater they were seated. Affective empathy skills, as compared to cognitive empathy skills, appear to be particularly important in the context of emotionally responding to theatre. It is possible that this stronger correlation between affective empathy and emotional response is simply the byproduct of both affective empathy and emotional response being related to emotional capacities, and thus the measures would naturally be expected to be more correlated. Alternatively, this result could be interpreted as truly suggesting that affective empathy specifically enables spectators to internalize fictional circumstances and characters' emotions in a play, yielding stronger resulting personal experiences of those emotions.

This the first known study of its kind to empirically test the positive relationship between empathy and emotional engagement with theatre. While this study was not designed to suggest causation in this relationship, existing points of cognitive and theatrical theory can help us speculate about the underlying mechanisms at play. We may wish to consider the perception-action model of empathy (PAM), which emphasizes the automatic motor behavior central to empathy (Preston & de Waal, 2002). Alternatively, we could consider biologist and philosopher Evan Thompson's model which suggests that empathy begins with a 'sensorimotor coupling' phase and is followed by an 'imaginary transposition' phase, through which one is able to

experience the emotions of another and make interpretations about their intentions which ultimately spur further processing and emoting (Thompson, 2007).

Regardless of which model's terminology is adopted, it has been suggested that these automatic mental abilities may be the result of mirror neurons: neurons found primarily in non-human animals but assumed to also exist in humans' premotor cortex and inferior parietal cortex that fire when a person performs an action *and* when they observe another person performing that action (Kilner & Lemon, 2013; McConachie, 2013; Preston, 2007). These neurons have been highlighted as potentially instrumental in emotional attunement, communication, imitation, and understanding action and intention (Iacoboni, 2009), and cognitive psychologist and theatrical theorist Bonnie Eckard (2009) has even gone so far as to directly claim that "mirror neurons provide a direct internal experience...for spectators, [allowing them] to replicate the emotions of a performer's physical state without experiencing the physical state directly" (p. 3). While speculation of and research into the involvement of the mirror neuron system generally, and in relation to theatre specifically, has grown substantially in the last few years since the system was discovered, it is still in its early stages. Significant further research would be needed to verify this potential role of mirror neuron activity mediating emotional responses to theatre, though even at its presently conceptual level, it is certainly a potentially viable explanation for the positive relationship between empathy and emotional response that this present research exposed.

The lack of noted relationship between distance and emotional response in this study also points to a need for further research. It is indeed possible that the previously found relationships between distance and emotional response with the use of mediated stimuli do not generalize to live stimuli such as theatre. In fact, mirror neuron research could help us contextualize this

finding, as well. Previous research has demonstrated that mirror neuron system firing is more prevalent and more intense in response to the live body versus the flat image (Hari et al., 1998; Jarvelainen et al., 2001; Wohlschläger, 2002). It is possible then, that emotional responses were simply higher across all participants to an extent that significant variation based on distance was not notable. Though emotional response scores did not exhibit a skewed distribution, there was indeed clustering at the top-end of the scale, leaving little room for movement spurred by the effects of an intervention.

An imbalance in the cells (60 in the close condition, 55 in the mid-range condition, 45 in the far condition) may also have contributed to the lack of significant distance condition effects. Since potential participants received their tickets in advance, and thus knew their seat before attending, it is worth acknowledging this differential attrition. Were people assigned to closer seats more motivated to attend, while people given seats further back more inclined to skip the event? Could this mean that the participants with further seats who did attend were those who were more motivated to be at the performance in the first place, suggesting they were perhaps more apt to be emotionally invested? The potential impacts of self-selection should aim to be minimized in further replications.

Likely the strongest explanation for the lack of noted effect between distance and emotional response is the nature of the physical space in which this research was conducted. This intimate, 152-seat theater is architecturally simple, with each row of seats placed directly behind the one in front of it, at just a slightly increased elevation (see Appendix A). While this theater was chosen as the location for this research based on its simple design and thus lack of potential confounding factors, it is true that the difference between distance conditions was not tremendous. Additionally, there was a degree of variability in distance within conditions given

that each condition was comprised of three rows of seats. Replications of this study in theatre-spaces ranging in size, shape, and design yielding more dramatic conditional differences and utilizing more homogenous conditional groupings should be conducted before discounting the potential for spatial differences to impact emotional responses to theatre.

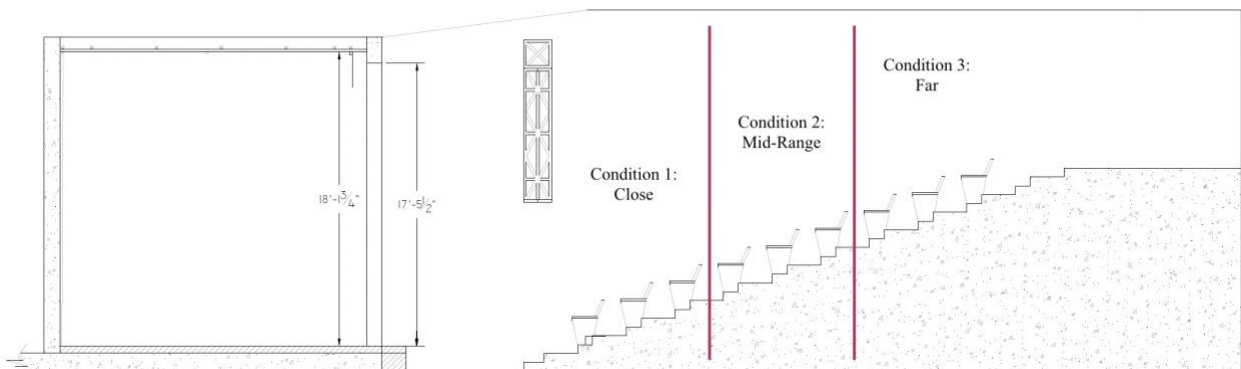
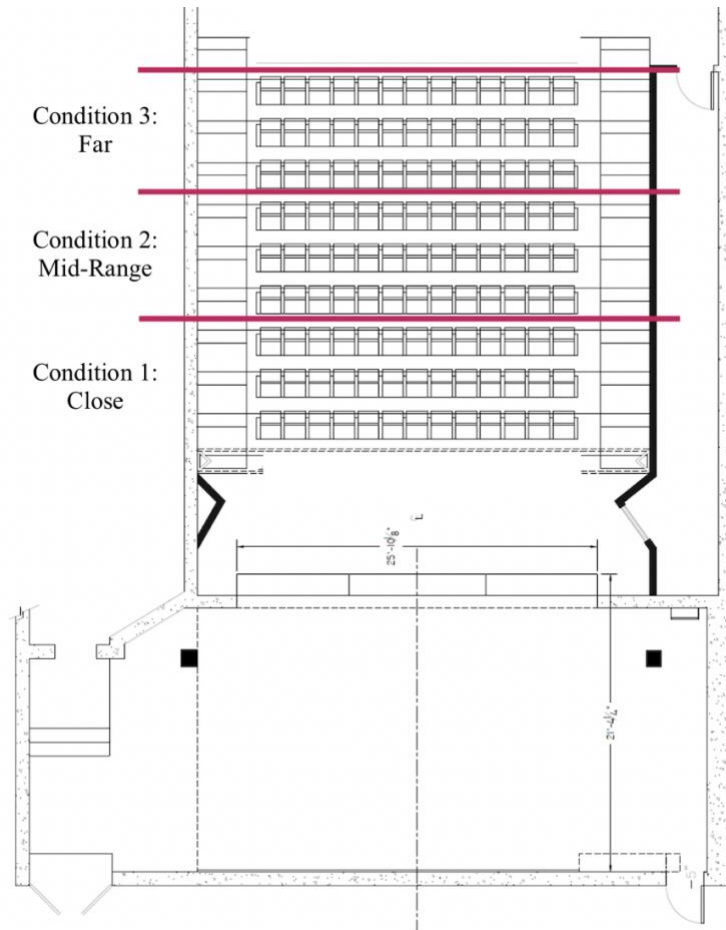
A particularly surprising finding was that affective empathy differed across distance conditions, presenting more strongly in the far condition. This could be the result of a random assignment failure, such that some of the spectators highest in trait affective empathy happened to be assigned to seats comprising the far distance condition. An alternative explanation is prosocial self-selection; the people who were high in affective empathy may have been the ones who were more likely to attend the performance despite being assigned in advance to 'worse' seats. It is also possible that being seated at an increased distance impacted how people chose to answer the trait affective empathy items. Though there was not a significant difference in emotional responses found between distance conditions, results were very near to statistically significant, with the far distance condition experiencing the strongest emotional responses. Since the correlational analyses revealed affective empathy to be the stronger predictor of emotional responses, these results can be understood as supporting one another. One interpretation of these findings could be that sitting at a further distance from the action required audience members to afford additional attention in order to remain as engaged as participants who were naturally apt to be more consumed with the action on stage by virtue of the proximity making it easier for them to, for example, clearly hear the actor's dialogue or see their facial expressions (Bogdanova et al., 2022; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). This additional attention and intentional investment could have yielded increased perceptions of personal emotional response and general affective empathy skills.

Exploratory analyses yielded interesting findings about other factors that impact theatrical responses—specifically one’s degree of personal relation to the content of the play. The strong correlation between personal connection to the play’s material and emotional response can again, as one interpretation, be understood through a lens of mirror neuron function, as there is preliminary empirical evidence that mirror neuron responses increase in presence and intensity in instances in which the spectator is familiar with the action they are witnessing (Calvo-Merino, 2005; Greenfield, 2000). Findings from this present study could even be taken as conceptual evidence in further favor of this claim by demonstrating that personal relevance is indeed a harbinger of strong emotional responses (that may be underpinned by strong mirror neuron activity).

As a rare quantitative experimental design relating cognitive psychology, social psychology, and theatre arts, this study can bolster the aims of the interdisciplinary niche as well as both fields individually. By quantitatively confirming the positive relationship between empathy and emotional responses to theatre and spotlighting additional potentially impactful factors such as physical distance and personal connection to the content, this study has set the stage for future theatrical research.

# Appendix A

## Seat Distance Condition Map





## Appendix B

### Emotional Response Measure

1. Evaluation of Theater Visit Measure (Boerner & Jobst, 2013), truncated for the purposes of this study from a 129-item measure into a 25-item version. “(E)” denotes questions measuring emotional response that comprised the dependent variable; these distinctions were not included on the survey given to participants but are included here for clarity.

Below are a series of statements relating to your experience in the theatre today. Read each statement and indicate how much you agree or disagree with the item by ticking the appropriate box. Answer quickly and honestly.		5	4	3	2	1
		Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I liked the play very much.					
2.	I think the play was very weak.					
3.	The play convinced me because of its great language.					
4.	The play deals with a relevant and/or interesting topic.					
5.	The topic of this play is of no use to me.					
6.	I had the feeling of fully understanding the message of the director.					
7.	I could not fully understand everything in this production.					
8.	I had no difficulties in following the plot.					
9.	Overall, the production made sense to me.					
10.	For my taste, the production was dull and superficial.					
11.	What I saw onstage today reminded me of my own life.					
12.	This play touched me because I recognized parts of myself.					
13.	Today’s performance moved and touched me. (E)					

14.	During the performance I was constantly very anxious to see what would happen next. (E)					
15.	Overall, this performance left me pretty cold. (E)					
16.	The performance caused me to forget everything around me. (E)					
17.	During the performance, I felt with the characters. (E)					
18.	I watched the characters' destiny with great excitement. (E)					
19.	I could understand the characters' feelings very well. (E)					
20.	During the performance, I suffered with the characters. (E)					
21.	I could identify with one (or more) character(s) very well. (E)					
22.	I had no difficulties putting myself in the position of one (or more) character(s). (E)					
23.	During some periods I thought about how I would handle a similar situation myself. (E)					
24.	The pictures of this performance will stay in my mind.					
25.	During the performance I hardly noticed the other people in the audience.					

## Appendix C

### Trait Empathy Measure


1. Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (Reniers et al., 2011), adjusted for the purposes of this study through the removal of three questions (#2, #11, #29 on the original measure, not included below) that refer specifically to empathic responses to plays or movies and thus were deemed to represent demand characteristics. “(C)” and “(A)” denote cognitive and affective empathy, respectively; these distinctions were not included on the survey given to participants but are included here for clarity.

People differ in the way they feel in different situations. Below you are presented with a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. Read each characteristic and indicate how much you agree or disagree with the item by ticking the appropriate box. Answer quickly and honestly.		4	3	2	1
		Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the ‘other guy’s’ point of view. (C)				
2.	I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (C)				
3.	I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (C)				
4.	When I am upset at someone, I usually try to ‘put myself in his shoes’ for a while. (C)				
5.	Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I was in their place. (C)				
6.	I often get emotionally involved with my friends’ problems. (A)				
7.	I am inclined to get nervous when others around me seem to be nervous. (A)				
8.	People I am with have a strong influence on my mood. (A)				
9.	It affects me very much when one of my friends seems upset. (A)				
10.	I get very upset when I see someone cry. (A)				

11.	I am happy when I am with a cheerful group and sad when the others are glum. (A)				
12.	It worries me when others are worrying and panicky. (A)				
13.	I can easily tell if someone else wants to enter a conversation. (C)				
14.	I can pick up quickly if someone says one thing but means another. (C)				
15.	It is hard for me to see why some things upset people so much. (A)				
16.	I find it easy to put myself in somebody else's shoes. (C)				
17.	I am good at predicting how someone will feel. (C)				
18.	I am quick to spot when someone in a group is feeling awkward or uncomfortable. (C)				
19.	Other people tell me I am good at understanding how they are feeling and what they are thinking. (C)				
20.	I can easily tell if someone else is interested or bored with what I am saying. (C)				
21.	Friends talk to me about their problems as they say that I am very understanding. (A)				
22.	I can sense if I am intruding, even if the other person does not tell me. (C)				
23.	I can easily work out what another person might want to talk about. (C)				
24.	I can tell if someone is masking their true emotion. (C)				
25.	I am good at predicting what someone will do. (C)				
26.	I can usually appreciate the other person's viewpoint, even if I do not agree with it. (C)				
27.	I always try to consider the other fellow's feelings before I do something. (C)				
28.	Before I do something, I try to consider how my friends will react to it. (C)				

## Appendix D

### Select Recruitment Tools




Dec. 10th, 11th @7:30 & 12th @2:00  
at the Penn State Downtown Theatre

**LONELY  
TOGETHER**

A One-Act Play Written & Directed By  
*Melody Munitz*

Tickets are free but must be reserved in advance.  
**Scan the QR code to get your tickets now!**

This performance is part of a student research project.  
Audience members will be asked to fill out a short survey  
after the show. All responses will be anonymous.



[Click here](#) for an *Onward State* article advertising *Lonely Together*.

[Click here](#) for a *Penn State News* articles featuring *Lonely Together*.

## **Appendix E**

### ***Lonely Together Script***

[Click here](#) for a recording of the live performance or proceed to the following page for the script.

# Lonely Together

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A One-Act Play  
by  
Melody Munitz

[melodymunitz@gmail.com](mailto:melodymunitz@gmail.com)  
Penn State University  
University Park, PA 16802

Cast of Characters

Sophie: Female, 19.

Layla: Female, 23.

Scene

An airplane landing at Lorain County Regional Airport,  
and the parking lot and a room at the “Motel 6 Cleveland West” in Lorain, Ohio.

Time

The late afternoon and night of Thursday, January 6<sup>th</sup>.



Scene 1

*SETTING: Lights up on two connected airplane seats.*

*AT RISE: In these seats sit SOPHIE (SR, in the window seat) who sleeps with her head resting on the shoulder of LAYLA (SL in the adjacent aisle seat), who sits awake beside her. LAYLA writes in a journal balanced on her lap, careful not to move too much and disrupt her sleeping neighbor. We hear “hornylovesickmess” by girl in red playing as LAYLA listens to it in her headphones. After a few moments, we hear the voice of a FLIGHT ATTENDANT over the airplane speakers. LAYLA stops writing, takes out one AirPods and listens.)*

**FLIGHT ATTENDANT** *(off, pre-recorded)*

Good afternoon. If I could please have your attention regarding a shift in our flight plans. Due to an incoming blizzard, we will be making an immediate emergency landing at the Lorain County Regional Airport in Lorain, Ohio. At this time, all seatbelts should be fastened, and all tray tables stowed. Flight attendants please prepare boarding doors for arrival.

*Some turbulence is felt as the plane begins its rapid descent. SOPHIE, shaken by the turbulence, wakes up slowly at first, and then is jolted into reality.*

**SOPHIE** *(lifting herself off LAYLA's shoulder)*

Oh, gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean/to fall asleep on you like that.

**LAYLA**

It's alright.

**SOPHIE**

I get bad air sickness when I fly so I took some pills, but they made me pretty drowsy, so I guess I just/—

**LAYLA**

No worries. It's fine.

*(A beat. SOPHIE smiles and begins to situate herself and the book that had fallen to the side on her lap as she slept.)*

Do you do that a lot?

**SOPHIE**

No, I don't fall asleep on strangers often. I'm/—

**LAYLA**

No, no. I mean take anti-nausea pills.

**SOPHIE**

Oh, no.

**LAYLA**

I actually brought some for this flight too but I didn't end up taking them. I haven't ever before and I was kinda afraid they might make me feel worse.

**SOPHIE**

Mm, that's fair. This was only my second time taking them.

*(Reaching down to grab her backpack from beneath the seat in front of her and putting her things away)*

I don't fly a lot. I really don't like flying, actually, mostly because of the airsickness. I'd rather have just driven and skipped the whole thing but Boston to California and now back was quite a bit too long for a car ride.

**LAYLA**

Are you from Boston? My mom grew up in Somerville, just across the river.

**SOPHIE**

Oh, nice. I didn't grow up there, no, I just go to school there.

**LAYLA**

Are you in college?

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, I'm a sophomore.

**LAYLA**

Nice. I got worried some way through the flight that you might be in high school.

**SOPHIE**

No, I'm 19. I just have a baby-face.

**LAYLA**

Mm. I'm only 23 and I swear I'm getting wrinkles.

*After a moment, strong turbulence is felt as the plane begins its descent.*

**SOPHIE**

Woah, are we already landing?

*(looking out the window.)*

This doesn't look like New York.

**LAYLA**

Oh shit I guess you were still asleep. They just made an announcement—there's a blizzard blowing in so we have to make an emergency landing somewhere in Ohio? I think we'll just have to land here for a bit and wait it out and then they'll get us back on-board and on the way to New York once the weather clears up.

**SOPHIE**

Oh.

**LAYLA**

Yeah. Sorry, I didn't realize you hadn't heard.

**SOPHIE**

No, no, thank you for telling me.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, of course.

*Strong turbulence is felt as the plane initiates its landing. SOPHIE braces herself and closes her eyes.*

**SOPHIE**

Oh gosh I hate this part.

**LAYLA**

Keep your eyes open if you can, it won't feel as bad.

**SOPHIE**

Really? I feel like that's worse.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, just pick something ahead of you and focus on that. I promise it helps.

*SOPHIE opens her eyes and stares ahead of her. The plane touches down and the turbulence is over.*

**SOPHIE**

Wow, that actually helped. Thank you.

**LAYLA**

For sure.

*LAYLA smiles. She looks at her phone while SOPHIE grabs hers out of the pocket of her*

*coat on her lap. She dials and lifts her phone to her ear. She waits for it to start ringing but it won't connect to the service. She looks at it and waits some more. The call won't go through.*

**SOPHIE**

Do you have service? My phone won't connect.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, I have a few bars.

**SOPHIE**

Is there any chance I could borrow your phone? I need to call my mom but my service won't click back on.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, sure.

*LAYLA hands SOPHIE her phone who dials. It connects and rings all the way through. SOPHIE waits. No answer. SOPHIE hangs up and hands LAYLA back the phone. She sighs.*

**SOPHIE**

Thanks anyway.

**LAYLA**

No problem. If your phone still won't connect and you wanna try again later just let me know. We'll probably just be sitting around the airport for a while.

**SOPHIE**

Thank you, I really appreciate it.

**LAYLA**

Of course. I'm Layla, by the way.

**SOPHIE**

I'm Sophie.

*The girls catch eyes and smile.*

*End of scene.*

Scene 2

*SETTING: Under the overhang of a parking space at the Motel 6, just off the highway in Lorain, Ohio. 5:30p.m. The sun is setting. Snow falls thick outside. The parking lot is empty of cars as everyone has arrived by shuttle. Across the parking lot sits a small pizza shop with foggy windows.*

*AT RISE: SOPHIE waits with her and LAYLA's bags: her backpack on, LAYLA's tote on her shoulder, her duffle bag on the ground, and LAYLA's suitcase. SOPHIE dials her phone and holds it to her ear. Waits for it to ring: no response. Just then, LAYLA enters and catches SOPHIE, looking defeated, hanging up her phone.*

**LAYLA**

Still no answer?

**SOPHIE**

No. I tried the house and her cell, but she didn't pick up either.

**LAYLA**

I'm sorry. Maybe you can try again in a little bit?

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, I will. So, did you get the rooms?

**LAYLA**

Kinda. They only had one room left.

**SOPHIE**

Of course they did. On brand for the day. So you grabbed it?

**LAYLA**

Yeah.

**SOPHIE**

Alright. Well, here are your bags.

*(beginning to undrape the bags from around herself)*

I'll just see if I can call an Uber to bring me to another hotel nearby or something.

**LAYLA**

It's already snowing pretty badly. I don't think they would've made us spend the night here if it wasn't a big storm. I doubt there are taxi services running.

**LAYLA** (*Cont.*)

I'm sorry but I'm not sure there's another/choice.

**SOPHIE**

Well, I'll just uh, let me call my mom again, maybe she knows/—

**LAYLA**

I mean... you're welcome to—we can just change into pajamas in the bathroom. It doesn't have to be weird, or anything.

**SOPHIE**

Huh?

**LAYLA**

It doesn't have to be weird. It's like camp.

**SOPHIE**

Oh! You mean I can stay with you?

**LAYLA**

Yeah.

**SOPHIE**

Oh. Wow. Thank you. I can Venmo you for the reservation/—

**LAYLA**

Don't worry about it. It's no big deal.

*(feigning seriousness)*

“Desperate times...”

*(dropping the bit)*

It was like 40 bucks. The room is just around over there. 128. They only gave me one key but I doubt we'll be heading out into the blizzard any time soon, so it should be fine.

*The girls share a smile then walk down a few feet, looking for their room. When they reach it, LAYLA opens the door and heads in, followed by SOPHIE who shuts the door behind her. LAYLA flips on a light switch by the door—lights up on a dingy motel bedroom. The room is tacky and cheap but not unclean. One bed with starched sheets, a chair with heinous upholstery and a side-table adorned with scratches and other marks of wear fill the small rectangular space. The air inside is semi-warm but painfully dry. The low incessant hum of the heater radiates from the corner of the room. Thin walls on either side fail to mask the muffled conversations from the adjacent rooms, reminding the girls that they are separated, yet not alone. They stand motionless, just in front of the door, inside the room.*

**LAYLA** *(after a moment)*

Well, it's got a roof.

**SOPHIE**

And one bed.

**LAYLA**

I didn't think to even ask. As soon as the woman said they had a room open I just jumped on it.

**SOPHIE**

No, of course. It's fine. We'll figure it out.

*LAYLA smiles, puts her bags down against the wall, and moves to the bed. She sits on the side of it. SOPHIE moves to the chair and places her bags down beside her before taking a seat. An awkward pause ensues.*

**SOPHIE**

Do you have a computer with you? We could watch a movie to pass the time?

**LAYLA**

I've got my Mac but it's dead. My luck this past week has been about the same as it's been today—I left the charger back at my old place.

**SOPHIE**

Oh, I'm sorry, that's annoying.

**LAYLA**

Yeah. I'm glad I at least grabbed the computer on the way out. I'll just order a new cord when I get to New York.

**SOPHIE**

Are you going to New York for vacation?

**LAYLA**

No, God no. No, I just had to go somewhere and there were a lot of flights from San Francisco to New York and I figured I could find some place to stay there since there's always people coming and going, so I just went with it.

**SOPHIE**

Oh, cool. I admire your spontaneity.

**LAYLA**

Thanks. Not exactly my choice, though. My girlfriend broke up with me on Sunday. She gave me three days to get out, and I was feeling broken and kinda spiteful, so I wanted to really go for good.

**SOPHIE**

You're gay? Oh my gosh, sorry that really came out wrong. I'm sorry. I mean, I'm sorry about your girlfriend. Your ex-girlfriend. Your, ah, sorry.

*(She lets out a nervous laugh.)*

I'm really screwing this up. Sorry.

**LAYLA** *(laughing at her odd behavior)*

You're fine. But yeah, uh, ex-girlfriend for sure. It was a pretty final thing. Grace. Her name's Grace.

**SOPHIE**

Well I'm sorry about you and Grace. I'm sure she's missing you already.

**LAYLA** *(surprised but flattered)*

Thanks.

*(A beat.)*

So, what are you headed to New York for?

**SOPHIE**

New York's just a stopping point for me. Flights were cheaper to New York than to Boston. I just have a small layover and then I'm headed back to BU. I start spring semester on Monday.

**LAYLA**

Nice. You said you're a sophomore, right?

**SOPHIE**

Yeah.

**LAYLA**

Do you like it?

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, it's great. It's a really cool environment. It's been kinda tough settling on what I want to get out of it—I'm still undecided—but the classes I've taken have been awesome so far.

**LAYLA**

Which ones?



**SOPHIE**

Well in the fall I took this women's studies course about female writers through history—that class was amazing.

**LAYLA**

Did you read any Dickinson?

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, we did! Her poems are incredible.

**LAYLA** (*quoting Dickinson*)

"I'm Nobody! Who are you? Are you – Nobody – too?"

**SOPHIE**

"Then there's a pair of us!"

**LAYLA**

"Don't tell! they'd advertise - you know!"

**SOPHIE**

That's one of my favorites. How'd you know?

**LAYLA**

You've got good taste. Who else did you read?

**SOPHIE**

Oh a bunch: Shelley, Austen, Brontë... So many books I've heard of but never read. The professor was awesome, though, she never made anyone feel dumb for not knowing a reference or a book, even if it's a masterpiece we definitely should have already known. She was really great. She had this bag she always carried that said "smash the patriarchy." The whole thing felt very college.

**LAYLA**

That's classic. I had this one professor in college who I swear like once a week wore this "Feminism is my second favorite 'F' word" t-shirt. I still can't believe she never got in trouble.

*(The girls share a laugh.)*

College is amazing. And honestly about the undecided thing, try not to put too much pressure on yourself. Just keep taking classes that look interesting and you'll figure it out. I changed my major three times and I turned out alright.

*(A beat.)*

Well looking at me today maybe that seems sorta questionable. It's, uh—it's been a rough week—but, I am. I'm alright.

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, I mean I think your sweatpants are... art-chic.

**LAYLA**

Hey, these are my favorite pants!

**SOPHIE**

Sorry. I was just messing around.

**LAYLA**

Nah, I know, you're all good. Actually, I got these pants my sophomore year of college.

**SOPHIE**

Ooh, very nice.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, there was this awesome thrift store across the street from the coffee shop Grace worked at. I used to get all dressed up to order a latte and then chicken out and just go shopping instead. I was so nervous around her. It's stupid.

*(A beat.)*

So, what were you up to in California?

**SOPHIE**

Uh... I was, um, seeing my dad.

**LAYLA**

Nice.

**SOPHIE**

Yeah.

*(A beat.)*

Well, actually, no, it wasn't. I guess I don't need to lie to you, you said it yourself: you're... 'nobody,' a stranger.

**LAYLA**

Mm, then there's a pair of us. If you want to talk about it, I'm happy to listen. I actually entered college as a psych major so I've got a year of intro psych courses under my belt. I'm practically a professional!

**SOPHIE**

Ha-ha.

**LAYLA**

But for real. If you need to vent, I'm all ears.

**SOPHIE**

Thanks.

*(A beat. Sophie seriously considers this choice to be vulnerable.)*

Um... well... so I went to California to spend New Year's with my dad. My parents divorced when I was 7 and I actually haven't seen him since then, so when I turned 18 last November, I decided that as a legal adult I had the right to see my dad even if my mom didn't want me to. I was gonna go for the holidays last year, but my dad said he couldn't be ready to see me on such short notice and postponed until this year. I didn't really know what he meant by that, but it makes a lot of sense now.

*(under her breath)*

Kinda wish it didn't.

**LAYLA**

Mm. Family stuff can be tough.

**SOPHIE**

Are your parents divorced?

**LAYLA**

No, they're together.

**SOPHIE**

Nice.

**LAYLA**

Honestly, I don't think they should be, though. I feel like they used to love each other?, I think, when I was young. Or maybe I was just naïve so I saw what I wanted to see. But I don't see how they could anymore after all the fights they've had. I mean my dad sleeps in my room every night. He renovated it and moved in there permanently a few years ago. It's that bad.

**SOPHIE**

I'm sorry to hear that.

**LAYLA**

It is what it is. The weirdest part, though, is that I think they're staying together for me?

**LAYLA** *(Cont.)*

Like I need to see them ‘succeeding’ at this whole marriage thing for me to not lose hope in love or whatever. But it’s not like that at all. I know love exists—I’ve felt it... I don’t need their crumbling marriage to show me that two people can care for each other... Sorry, now I’m making you my therapist.

**SOPHIE**

No, you’re okay. It’s actually kinda nice to hear that. I hope that doesn’t sound weird. I just mean that makes sense. I was so young when my parents divorced I didn’t even know what love was, not really. I mean at 7, what is love? just something you say when you turn out the lights and shut the door—like a prelude to goodnight, I don’t know. By the time I started thinking about what it really is I didn’t have any example anymore. It’s weird.

**LAYLA**

Mm. Have you ever told your parents that?

**SOPHIE**

No! No. We don’t talk like that. We don’t... talk. Not really.

**LAYLA** *(trying to make a joke)*

Well I guess it’s pretty hard to talk if your mom doesn’t answer your calls.

**SOPHIE** *(defensive—this hits a nerve)*

It’s not usually like that. I, um—I’m gonna go try her again actually.

*Sophie quickly grabs her coat from beside her, puts it on, and hurries out the door.*

**LAYLA**

Okay.

*(LAYLA sits for a moment taking in the room. She gets up and moves to the ‘mirror’ and wipes away fallen mascara under her eyes. SOPHIE re-enters, upset.)*

Any luck?

**SOPHIE**

No.

**LAYLA**

Is the storm hitting Boston too? Maybe her service is down.

**SOPHIE**

No, my mom’s in North Carolina. Definitely not snowing there.

**LAYLA**

Oh.

**SOPHIE**

Yeah.

**LAYLA**

Did you leave a voicemail?

**SOPHIE**

No.

*(An awkward beat.)*

Did you tell Grace what happened with the flight?

**LAYLA**

No. No, we're not talking. She doesn't know I'm going to New York, so...

**SOPHIE**

Oh.

**LAYLA**

Yeah.

**SOPHIE**

Is that on purpose?

**LAYLA**

Well it's not an accident.

*(A beat.)*

Sorry.

**SOPHIE**

It's fine.

**LAYLA**

She knows I moved out—I mean she was the one who told me I had to. But she's mad because I left most of my stuff there. I think she thinks I'm keeping it there so I have some excuse to go back. But I'm not. Or I don't know, maybe I am, on some level. But mostly it was just out of spite. I didn't want her to be able to get rid of me so easily.

**SOPHIE**

Was she trying to get rid of you?

**LAYLA**

She was trying to write over me.

**SOPHIE**

Oh.

**LAYLA**

She's been seeing someone else. I didn't know. For two months.

**SOPHIE**

Oh. I'm so sorry Layla.

**LAYLA**

Yeah. Me too. It all just feels undermined now. I don't know.

*(A beat.)*

Have you ever been cheated on?

**SOPHIE**

No.

**LAYLA**

Lucky.

**SOPHIE**

...My dad cheated on my mom though. With my mom's boss. It was a mess. That's why they got divorced. I mean I was too young to understand it obviously, but that's what I've been told.

**LAYLA**

Oh shit. I'm sorry, I didn't know. I wouldn't have asked you that.

**SOPHIE**

No, it's okay. You couldn't have known. My best friends don't even know actually...

**LAYLA**

Mm, big secret.

**SOPHIE**

It's complicated. My mom didn't want anyone knowing, which I get. I mean neither did my dad.

**SOPHIE** *(Cont.)*

So I was sort of sworn to secrecy.

**LAYLA**

Well your secret's safe with me.

**SOPHIE**

Thanks.

*(A beat.)*

It's funny. I feel weirdly fine with you knowing.

**LAYLA**

I'm glad.

**SOPHIE**

Me too. It feels kinda amazing saying things and not worrying too much about what someone will think of you because of them.

**LAYLA**

Mm. I really used to care what people thought about me. Before I was out, especially. I was always second-guessing everything I said and every gesture and look and just pretty paranoid I was gonna reveal myself as something I didn't know how to be okay with being yet.

**SOPHIE**

You mean being gay.

**LAYLA** *(chuckling at her bluntness)*

Yeah.

**SOPHIE** *(eager)*

Well what changed? What made you okay with it?

**LAYLA**

Mm, someone's curious.

**SOPHIE**

No! I just—Forget it.

**LAYLA**

I was just teasing. Sorry. Honestly it was Grace that changed things. She was out and she was just so comfortable in herself. When I met her I was, stunned. Even more when we started dating.

**LAYLA** *(Cont.)*

Eventually I just realized my happiness in being myself was more important than other people maybe feeling uncomfortable.

**SOPHIE**

Wow. I wish everyone could be that comfortable.

**LAYLA**

Me too. It's a process. It literally took me coming out to my parents twice in dreams before I could do it in real life.

*(remembering some certain dreams)*

My dreams taught me a lot of things.

**SOPHIE**

Dreams are just dreams, though.

**LAYLA**

True. I just mean my subconscious told me a lot of things my conscious mind wasn't ready for yet. And that really helped.

**SOPHIE**

Not everyone's dreams are like that, though.

**LAYLA** *(nonchalantly)*

Yeah, maybe not.

**SOPHIE**

I just have random dreams.

**LAYLA**

Sure.

**SOPHIE**

Really.

**LAYLA**

I believe you.

**SOPHIE**

Okay.



**LAYLA**

Okay. Sorry, I didn't mean to upset you

**SOPHIE**

I'm not upset.

**LAYLA**

You just seem a little defensive.

**SOPHIE**

I'm not defensive!

*(A beat.)*

Okay, fine, I am. It's just... it's just weird because... I had this dream on the plane, when I was asleep on you on the plane... and I was mortified. About waking up on your shoulder. But that wasn't until like second 3. Seconds 1 and 2 were me mortified by what I did in my dream. Well not what I did, because I didn't do anything—I didn't do it!—but what he said I was going to do. And me thinking for two seconds that I had done it. Because when I woke up, it was kinda almost like I had because of how you were there and how I was there. And then in second 3 I remembered that I didn't do anything. And then the plane landed.

**LAYLA**

Oh.

**SOPHIE** *(embarrassed by her explosion and oversharing)*

This has just been a really weird day. A really weird week.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, I feel that. This week has basically been one weird nightmare.

**SOPHIE**

Yes! Or like some terrible Twilight Zone episode. It's all just bizarre. Like my dad was being so weird about Marc. Like acting like just casual friends or something? But Marc totally didn't get it at all which made the whole thing ten times worse. I mean yeah it was fucking bizarre seeing my dad with a husband, like don't you think you'd maybe wanna mention that to your adult daughter before seeing her for the first time since she was wearing pigtails and you were kissing her mother? I mean, shit—

*(A beat. She realizes all she just let topple out. She panics and gets up quickly.)*

Shit. I mean—sorry. I—I'm, I'm gonna go get some air. Or I'm gonna call my mom, or, um—

*SOPHIE leaves and shuts the door. LAYLA sits, taking in everything that just happened. After a moment she realizes SOPHIE didn't put her jacket on and is standing outside in a blizzard. She grabs*

*SOPHIE's jacket and moves to the door. She hesitates before opening it. She presses her ear up against the cheap, thin door, trying to overhear any conversation on the other end. It's sensitive—if a bit suspicious. She stands there. The stage is silent and still, heavy with suspension. After a minute or so, the door opens from the outside and LAYLA jumps back.*

**LAYLA**

I was just coming to bring you your coat.

**SOPHIE**

Thanks.

**LAYLA**

Are you okay?

**SOPHIE** *(shaken, cold with fear)*

She won't pick up.

**LAYLA**

Could you text her, maybe?

**SOPHIE**

I have. Four times since we landed. No reply.

**LAYLA**

Does she have read receipts?

**SOPHIE**

No. But I know she's seeing them.

**LAYLA** *(carefully, gently)*

So you think she's choosing to ignore/you?

**SOPHIE**

I know she is.

*(An awkward beat. Then, as if reasoning out loud to herself)*

What does it matter—I already played my cards.

*(A beat.)*

My mom's pissed at me because I told her about Marc and she thinks somehow I've known this whole time? Like it's been me and my dad's little secret for 10 years? It doesn't even make any sense. My dad and I don't talk. How would I have known? And why would he have told me?

**LAYLA**

I'm sorry, Sophie. That's—a lot.

**SOPHIE**

I shouldn't have said anything to her. I didn't even mean to. Well, that's not true. I did, I guess. I don't know, it was just too much to hold in. I don't know what happens now, though. I...

**LAYLA**

It's gonna be okay, okay? I promise. It's gonna be alright. We're gonna ride out the storm tonight and then we're gonna get to New York and you're gonna go back to school and have some distance from your mom and your dad and everything and it'll be one step at a time. And until then I'm gonna make sure you're safe here, okay?

**SOPHIE**

Okay. Thank you. Thanks. Sorry, I—

*The telephone in the hotel room rings. The girls are caught off guard as they hadn't even registered that there is a phone in the room. LAYLA swings around on the bed to the other side and picks it up.*

**LAYLA**

Hello?

*(She listens while the front desk receptionist talks to her and then responds)*

Okay. Thanks. We'll—

*(The receptionist on the other end of the line hangs up.)*

Hello?

*(She takes the phone away from her ear and puts it back in its cradle.)*

Okay...

**SOPHIE**

What was that about?

**LAYLA**

It was the woman from the front desk. She wanted to make sure we know that the pizza place across the lot is open until 9.

**SOPHIE**

Oh. I hadn't even thought about how we'd get food.

**LAYLA**

Me neither. I'm glad that's here. I wonder when it's open.

**SOPHIE**

You said until 9, right?

**LAYLA**

Yeah, no, I mean like how often during the week. I don't get the sense there are a lot of people here generally.

**SOPHIE**

Oh. I don't know. I don't really understand where we are.

**LAYLA** *(joking)*

I'm like 90% sure we're in Lorain, Ohio?

**SOPHIE**

I got that part. I just don't really know where that is. Like what we're near.

*LAYLA takes out her phone and looks at her maps app.*

**LAYLA**

It looks like we're west of Cleveland?

**SOPHIE**

I wonder if it always feels this desolate.

**LAYLA**

Yeah, I don't know. I know the snow changes things, but still, I can't imagine this being my usual.

*(joking, imagining)*

"Oh, hey, honey, for dinner tonight, wanna drive 25 minutes to that pizza place in the parking lot of the Motel 6?"

*(laughs)*

I mean I guess it could work for someone. I mean it must; the place exists so someone has to keep it open. I just couldn't be that person.

**SOPHIE**

Rural life not for you?

**LAYLA**

Definitely not. I'm a city girl. I don't like all the open space... just all the nothingness. I want crowds and noise, and things to see, you know? Otherwise it's just so, lonely.

**SOPHIE**

How long did you live in San Francisco?

**LAYLA**

Six years. Four years of college and then two since then.

**SOPHIE**

Did you like it there?

**LAYLA**

It was amazing. I wouldn't be who I am if it weren't for San Francisco. But I soaked it up. It's good I'm leaving. That I left. The whole city is kinda stained for me at the moment. I've just explored so much of it, and so much of it with Grace, that when I think of all my favorite places and even the places I hated and the in-between places, like places you are but never really are, like gas stations and drive-throughs, I just feel like she's right there next to me. And that hurts. So yeah. I'm excited to start fresh in a new city.

**SOPHIE**

That's awesome. Not the Grace part—but the fresh start part. Good for you.

**LAYLA**

Thanks.

*(A beat.)*

Are you hungry?

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, are you?

**LAYLA**

Yeah. What do you say we get a taste for small-town dining?

**SOPHIE** *(laughs)*

Sounds good.

*The girls grab their coats and begin to re-bundle. They grab their phones and wallets and put them in the pockets of their jackets.*

**LAYLA**

Ah, do you happen to have any cash? I don't have a good feeling about them taking credit cards.

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, I've got some.

**LAYLA**

Oh, amazing. I can Venmo you back.

**SOPHIE**

Don't worry about it. "Desperate times..." or something like that, right?

*The girls move to the door. LAYLA opens it and is taken aback by the snowy breeze that blows in but holds it open for SOPHIE regardless.*

**LAYLA**

After you.

**SOPHIE**

Thank you.

*SOPHIE exits through the door, putting her hood up, followed by LAYLA.*

*End of scene.*

### Scene 3

*SETTING: The same hotel room.*

*AT RISE: The girls re-enter the room laughing, SOPHIE followed by LAYLA.*

**LAYLA** *(joking)*

Yeah, you know I actually don't think I have to go to New York after all. That was undeniably the world's best pizza so New York basically has nothing to offer me anymore.

*LAYLA plops herself down on the bed. SOPHIE follows suit, sitting down on the bed at an intentionally casual distance from LAYLA.*

**SOPHIE**

You're ridiculous.

**LAYLA**

Maybe.

**SOPHIE**

You're funny. You're a funny person

**LAYLA** (*goofing around*)

Really? Is that so?

**SOPHIE**

I think so. I don't know a lot of people like you.

**LAYLA**

Mm, sounds like you've been spending time with the wrong people.

**SOPHIE**

Maybe so. I guess I should have been in San Fran this whole time.

**LAYLA**

Well, I don't know. I wouldn't say everyone in California is as cool as I am. I think you found yourself an especially cool Cali girl.

**SOPHIE**

And humble, too.

**LAYLA**

Oh yeah. Absolutely.

**SOPHIE**

Your confidence. Honestly, it's amazing.

**LAYLA**

Hey, c'mon now, you've gotta keep me humble.

**SOPHIE**

Oof, you've got the wrong girl for that job.

**LAYLA**

You're sweet, Soph.

**SOPHIE**

Seriously though, how do you get that? I don't have that. At all.

**LAYLA**

It just takes time. You'll find yours.

**SOPHIE**

Is 19 years not enough to figure out how to be comfortable in your own skin? I don't know... I guess I just thought I'd go to college and everything would finally click. It's stupid...

**LAYLA**

No, it's not stupid. See that's part of it. You can't undercut yourself like that if you wanna—

**SOPHIE**

I don't know, it's just been harder than I thought.

**LAYLA**

That's fair.

**SOPHIE**

I just didn't think it was gonna be this hard. I didn't think I'd have to, try to... also, on top of all the rest of it...

**LAYLA**

Sure.

**SOPHIE**

It's just like on top of everything else? Really? I just didn't think I'd have to deal with this.

**LAYLA**

I'm sorry, Soph. Family stuff is so...

**SOPHIE**

It's not supposed to be genetic, is it?

**LAYLA** (*suddenly realizing she isn't talking about her parents*)

Oh. Um...?

**SOPHIE**

Like what my dad...what he said, like in the dream! What he said that I...I don't wanna be like that.



**SOPHIE** (*Cont.*)

Or, well, I do? Or maybe. Or, I don't know. I don't know! Because if I am, I haven't been, so I don't know if I really would—

**LAYLA**

You never actually told me the dream, Sophie. You've just kept saying these... cute little, vague... I don't know. I mean... I think maybe I can guess wh/at—

**SOPHIE**

Actually?

**LAYLA**

Uh, I mean...

**SOPHIE**

Yeah, guess. Go ahead.

**LAYLA**

Out/loud?

**SOPHIE** (*eager*)

Yeah.

**LAYLA**

Um... well... it sounds kinda like... like to me, it seems sorta like you're talking about—and maybe I'm just like projecting here but—Are you sure you want me to say it? We don't have to talk about this if you/

**SOPHIE** (*steadfast*)

No. Say it. You can say it. Say whatever. I wanna hear it.

**LAYLA**

Okay. Um... It kinda sounds to me like maybe you think you're gay? Or might be? Or bi? Or, I don't know, it sounds like maybe you aren't sure. And that's fine! That's so incredibly fine.

*As LAYLA has been saying this, SOPHIE has closed her eyes. She is listening intently and is clearly very impacted by hearing this out loud for the first time. LAYLA sits still, watching SOPHIE, waiting for her reaction. After a moment of silence, SOPHIE opens her eyes but keeps her gaze down away from LAYLA's.*

**SOPHIE**

What if I—

**LAYLA**

And hey, I could be totally wrong, also. That was just a/

**SOPHIE** (*eager*)

No—no. I mean, what if I... what if I asked... if... I just, I just need to know if... I don't know, could I...?

**LAYLA** (*understanding what she means*)

Like, if?

*She gently points between the two of them.*

**SOPHIE** (*serious, eager*)

Yeah.

**LAYLA** (*almost laughing but kindly*)

I mean, I wouldn't say n—

*SOPHIE leans in and kisses LAYLA boldly. SOPHIE pulls back, looking at LAYLA and taking in the gravity of what she has just done. She smiles and leans in for another kiss. After a few moments, LAYLA pulls away and kindly takes off SOPHIE's large winter parka but keeps on her own smaller jacket. The girls, holding their faces close, stare at each other for a moment. SOPHIE brushes LAYLA's hair away from her face, marveling at every step of the action. SOPHIE kisses LAYLA again. Suddenly, we hear a cell phone ring. SOPHIE pulls away, thinking it is her mom finally calling her back. LAYLA, however, feels the vibration of her phone in her pocket. As SOPHIE grabs her coat, trying to get her own phone, LAYLA grabs hers from her pocket. She sees the caller ID on the screen, quickly gets up off the bed and heads to the door.*

**LAYLA** (*with surprise and joy and maybe also confusion and trepidation*)

Grace?

*LAYLA opens the door and steps out of the room. SOPHIE, now frozen on the bed, stares in the direction of the door. After a moment, her gaze falls. With her in this shaken, contemplative state, the lights fade.*

*End of play.*

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# ACADEMIC VITA

## MELODY MUNITZ

THEATRE ARTIST & RESEARCHER

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**EDUCATION** Penn State University, Schreyer Honors College May 2022  
B.F.A. Musical Theatre with Honors, B.A. Psychology with Honors  
Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, Dean's List

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### ACTIVITIES

#### RESEARCH/SCIENTIFIC INVOLVEMENT

- Researcher - Penn State, Department of Psychology, *Empathy and Moral Psychology Lab* 2021-2022
  - Undergraduate Researcher self-conducting interdisciplinary theatre/science research observing the impact of empathy on spectator emotional response
- Researcher - University of Chicago, Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, *STAGE Lab* 2021-2022
  - Collaborator on the creation of two new theatre projects about, inspired by, and utilizing science and technology, & leading the 'Future of Theatre' research initiative
- Research Assistant - Penn State, Smeal College of Business, *Intentional Inclusivity Lab* 2021-2022
  - Undergraduate Research Assistant with studies relating to the perception and effectiveness of various leadership behaviors exhibited by different genders
- Undergraduate TA - Psych260: Neural Basis of Human Behavior 2021
- Published Contributor - *Prompt: A Journal of Theatre Theory, Practice, and Teaching* 2021
- Researcher - University of Exeter, *The Eye's Mind* 2015-2018
  - Self-conducted neuroscience research on newly-recognized condition Aphantasia

#### COMMUNITY/CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

- Director, Co-Founder, Graphic Designer - Penn State Arts for Health 2020-2022
  - Emphasizing the power of the arts in communal and personal well-being
  - Presenter at National Organization of Arts in Health (NOAH) 2020 Conference
- Vice President - Phi Beta Kappa Lambda Chapter 2021-2022
- Campaign Voice - Penn State 'We Are Here' National TV Commercial 2020
- Soles4Souls Volunteer Tristate Organizer - Collected >83,000 pairs of shoes for needy 2013-2020
- Student Ambassador - College of Arts and Architecture 2018-2022
- College Representative - Penn State Center for Performing Arts Student Council 2021-2022
- Musical Theatre Representative - School of Theatre Student Advisory Board 2018-2022
- Class of '22 Representative - Musical Theatre Student Committee 2018-2022
- Undergraduate Representative - School of Theatre Season Planning Committee 2020-2022
- Founding Member - School of Theatre Student Diversity Committee 2020-2022
- Founding Member - Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schreyer 2020-2022
- Company Member - Penn State's Full Ammo Improv Troupe 2020-2022
- Content Creator - College of Liberal Arts' Filippelli Institute for e-Education and Outreach 2019
- Moderator - Student Programming Association Lecture Series 2020
- Entertainer - President Barron's Football Tailgate Events 2021
- Entertainer - President Barron's Holiday Celebration 2021
- Entertainer - Student Programming Association 'Lights Up' Concert on HUB Lawn 2021
- Entertainer - Movin' On Spotlight Series Concert 2020
- Entertainer - Penn State White-Out Football Game Half-Time Show 2018

## ARTISITC/THEATRICAL INVOLVEMENT

- Study Abroad - Schreyer Honors College Maymester Theatre Study Tour in England/Ireland 2019
- Performing Company Member - Collab24 Devised Theatre Festival 2021
- Performing Company Member - Dramatists Guild 'End of Play' Festival 2021
- Performing Company Member - The 24-Hour Plays: Nationals Summer Season 2020
- Performing Company Member - New York Musical Festival Student Leadership Program 2019
- Intern - Off-Broadway's Keen Company (Theatre Management, Production, and Casting) 2019
- Intern - Hershey Medical Center, Arts in Health Certification Program 2021
- Published Contributor - BroadwayBeat News, over 2,400 reads of first published article 2020
- Featured Artist - ReachFort Inc. Theatre Company 2020-2021
- Featured Artist - 'Live, Love, Laugh' Theatre Podcast (Apple Podcasts, Audible, etc.) 2021

## ORIGINAL PLAYS

- *Lonely Together* (One-Act)
  - Self-directed production at the Penn State Downtown Theatre Center 2021
  - Featured in *Penn State News, Onward State*
- *Quit While I'm Ahead* (Full-Length)
  - Workshop & upcoming production by the Penn State School of Theatre 2022
- *On the Line* (Short Radio Play)
  - Produced by the *Penn State Radio Players* 2020
  - Available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Soundcloud, YouTube
  - Featured in *Penn State News, Onward State*
- *Back* (10-Minute Play)
  - Produced as part of the Penn State School of Theatre 24-Hour Play Festival 2021
- *With a Side of Hypocrisy* (Short Play)
  - Produced as part of the Penn State School of Theatre Short Play Festival 2021
- *No Going Back* (Short Play)
  - Published on the *Quarantine Playwriting Bake-Off* competition website 2020
- *Broke(n) and Free* (10-Minute Play) 2022
- *Armadillo Soup* (10-Minute Play) 2022
- *Record, A Play* (10-Minute Play) 2022

## AWARDS & HONORS

- Department of Psychology Student Marshal 2022
- College of Arts and Architecture Creative Achievement Award 2022
- Student Engagement Excellence Award 2022
- The Evan Pugh Scholar Senior Award 2022
- Robert Reifsneider Community Service Award 2021
- Artuso Internship Excellence Scholarship 2021
- Student Engagement Network Grant 2021
- The Evan Pugh Scholar Junior Award 2021
- President's Freshman Award for Academic Excellence 2019
- Schreyer Honors College Academic Excellence Grant 2018-2022
- Schreyer Honors College Internship Grant 2021-2022
- Wyllis Leonhard Music and Dance Scholarship 2018-2022
- Musical Theatre Excellence Scholarship 2018-2022

## PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE

### OFF-BROADWAY/NYC THEATRE

<i>A Little Princess</i> (US Premiere)	Flower Seller	Signature Theater/d. Laura Luc
<i>Head and Heart</i> (Premiere)	Melody	Signature Theater/NYMF
<i>30 Million</i> (Premiere)	Dee-Dee	Theatre Row/Keen Company
<i>Firebirds</i> (Staged Reading)	Melanie	Theatre Row/Keen Company
<i>Dream Street</i> (US Premiere)	Stephanie	Pearl Theater/d. Laura Luc
<i>The Space In Between</i> (Premiere)	Moon	24-Hour Plays/d. Mark Armstrong
<i>Curtains, The Musical</i>	Jenny Harmon	New York Live Arts/CMTF
<i>Flight of the Lawnchair Man</i>	Sylvia	New York Live Arts/CMTF

### REGIONAL THEATRE

<i>Brigadoon</i>	Fiona	Penn State/d. Jen Delac
<i>A Chorus Line</i>	Maggie	Penn State/d. John Simpkins
<i>The Wild Party</i>	Dolores	Penn State/d. Ali Morooney
<i>A Little Night Music</i>	Mrs. Segstrom	Penn State/d. Phillip Fazio
<i>The Lucky Boy</i> (Premiere)	Marie	Penn State/d. John Simpkins
<i>Hands on a Hardbody</i>	Swing	Penn State/d. John Simpkins
<i>Moving Forward</i>	Soloist	Penn State/d. Michele Dunleavy
<i>Take A Walk In My Shoes</i>	Performer	Penn State/d. Jen Delac
<i>Into the Woods</i>	Cinderella	Rider University/d. Luis Villabon
<i>The Fantasticks</i>	Luisa	Embark/d. Katie Schmidt Feder
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	Belle	Hendrick Hudson Players
<i>The 25th Annual...Spelling Bee</i>	Olive	Hendrick Hudson High School
<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	Ariel	Cortlandt Arts/d. Carol Arrucci
<i>The Wizard of Oz</i>	Dorothy	Antonia Arts Productions

### CONCERTS

Sting's Rainforest Benefit	Vocals w/Sting, Bruce Springsteen	Carnegie Hall/Gil Goldstein
U.N. Ambassador's Ball	Vocals w/Steven Tyler	Metropolitan Club
Women in the World Summit	Performer w/Meryl Streep	Lincoln Center
Golden Hat Benefit	Vocals w/Sierra Boggess	Carnegie Hall/Tim Janis
Daisy Jopling's 'Awakening'	Performer	Lincoln Center
An American Christmas Carol	Vocals w/Matthew Morrison	Carnegie Hall/Tim Janis
Actor's Fund Gala	Performer w/Morgan Freeman	NY Marriot Marquis Ballroom
100-Year Association Gala	Performer w/Brian Stokes Mitchell	Sardi's Times Square
John's Hopkins 100-Year Gala	Performer w/Bono	Hammerstein Ballroom
Lyrics for Life Benefit	Performer	Symphony Space
Sing for Hope Gala	Performer	Liberty Plaza
Make It All Better	Phoebe	Gilbert Lewis Bailey II
Me and My Friends Killing Nazis	Hannie	Alex Sage Oyen, Lauren Marcus

### TV/FILM/COMMERCIAL

Penn State 'We Are Here' Commercial	Lead Vocal	ABC
Late Show w/ Stephen Colbert	Vocals with Jain	CBS
The Today Show	Featured Guest	NBC
Anderson	Featured Guest	ANE & Warner Brothers Prod.
Cook-In with Sara Moulton	Lead	NBC, Al Roker Productions