

Fully Realized Theatre:
An Exploration of Dissociation and Its Sociopolitical, American Catalysts

(Student Name)

Middle Tennessee State University

Undergraduate Research Experience and Creative Activity

Gold-Level Grant Proposal

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Claudia Barnett

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Introduction

Dissociation riddles our twenty-first century American society, contributing to immense levels of memory and identity loss as well as distanced external manifestations. Even more alarming is how infrequently it is discussed or analyzed; I would argue this is the result of widespread misinformation and, consequently, a lack of care or attention. Because the average non-psychologist likely views dissociative disorders synonymous with simply zoning out, there truly feels like no urgency to this topic for many.

At its scientific core, dissociation is the act of two or more mental processes operating simultaneously without any form of integration. This functioning is responsible for neurological phenomena such as automatic handwriting and the ability to see oneself performing tasks amidst daydreaming (*Hypnosis, Dissociation, and Absorption*, 40). While it is convenient to view the acquisition of these abilities as a superheroic asset, significant adverse effects potentially stem from this functioning, including spontaneous mood shifts and derealization. The *American Journal of Psychiatry* further details these experiences:

Dissociative symptoms in mental disorders are of high clinical relevance. They have been linked to maladaptive functioning and symptom severity in some disorders, such as executive functioning in borderline personality disorder, neuropsychological performance in depression, number of binge episodes in eating disorders, alexithymia in panic disorders, and anxiety and depression in OCD. (*The American Journal of Psychiatry*)

These inauspicious effects are experienced by seven percent of the American population (“Dissociation and Dissociative Disorders”). To say this concept holds national relevance would be an understatement.

A major component of my mission as an artist is to advocate for those who do not have a voice. Given this staggering statistic regarding relevancy and its lack of widespread awareness, I see this cluster of the affected population as a group worthy of advocacy.

Background

My primary method of artistic advocacy manifests itself in the form of theatre arts and, more specifically, playwriting. My devotion to telling meaningful stories through theatre has been supported by the URECA Grant committee in past semesters and has aided in my development as an artist and a prospective graduate Playwriting student. In the Spring of 2023, I received a URECA Grant to write a new play and collaborate with a group of students as part of a team to produce a marathon of new play staged readings. Through this project, I created a new work called *Falling*, which interrogated the intricacies of trauma response in youth and explored various other topics, such as sexual assault and poetry. This piece – my first full-length play – incorporated professional Nashville actors as well as MTSU students and will prove to be an invaluable asset to the furtherance of my post-graduate endeavors. In the Summer of 2023, I had the privilege of taking my studies to the next step. A small group of MTSU Theatre & Dance students traveled to New York City on a URECA Team Grant to help develop a new play written by Dipti Bramhandkar in collaboration with The Farm Theatre. Throughout this process, my peers and I received insight into the dramaturgical process. As a passionate and driven senior in the midst of graduate school applications, I seek to take my experiences to the next step; it is time for me to write and fully stage my own play.

Methods

Integral to the development of a new, fully-staged play is process. In the professional realm, a playwright writes the play and, if he or she is fortunate, has the opportunity to sit in the rehearsal room. This is my goal should I receive URECA support. This play of mine, which I have affectionately assigned the working title of *Dollar General Play*, will be written this Fall semester and receive a series of readings and workshopping processes throughout the Fall and the Spring. Danielle Roos, Northwestern Directing MFA and professional theatre artist whose most recent directing credits include MTSU's production of *Cabaret* and *The Busie Body*, has eagerly volunteered to serve as dramaturg and director for the production of my play. Once writing is complete, she will cast the play in the early Spring and begin rehearsals. It is at this point in the process, my role will transfer from active writer to producer.

As part of this process, Danielle and I will meet with Dr. Barnett's ENGL 3665 Playwriting course in the Spring to discuss our experience as collaborators on this project as well as passionate new play creators. Dr. Barnett and I are currently working on a proposal to pay Danielle \$800 from the Virginia Peck Trust Fund for her efforts in this collaboration.

I have already reserved the Deborah K Anderson Studio Theatre for evening performances of my play on April 13 and April 15, 2024, with the entire week leading up to those evenings also reserved for in-space rehearsals. For a detailed breakdown of the proposed timeline, please refer to the end of this document.

Preliminary Play Synopsis

Quarter Disorder, a stale, familiar variety store, cements itself to the streets of Blanketville, IL. As the world around gives into change, the Q.D. stands tall with pride. At a

row of checkout aisles, Will spends his days greeting customers and checking boxes. When a new employee arrives, the monotonous suddenly becomes a jarring game of survival. A thrilling comedy, *Dollar General Play* interrogates American sociopolitical tendencies and the adverse dissociative effects that stem from them.

Questions To Explore

1. What occurs when a folie á deux manifests?
2. How does mass hysteria stem from American politics?
3. What intrinsically American factors contribute to our tendencies towards dissociation?
4. Can one intentionally dissociate?
5. What is the relationship between sociopolitical blindness, ignorance, and dissociation?
6. How does the relationship between mental health (and the openness - or lack thereof - to discuss it) and heavily-slanted politics manifest?
7. What does it truly mean to be present?

Expenses

Along with advocacy, a large component of my artistic mission is ensuring that artists are being compensated appropriately for their work. Because the goal of this project is to mimic a professional new play development process, I have a commitment to ensuring that, as producer, my artists are fairly compensated. For a breakdown of the proposed allocation of my supplies fee to my student collaborators, please refer to the end of this document.

Collaboration With Mentor

The success of this endeavor is largely contingent on the involvement of my faculty mentor, Dr. Claudia Barnett. Last Spring, the development of *Falling* was aided by the conversations we had together and her insight and knowledge as a playwright who has served as the writer in many collaborations similar to the one I am pursuing.

On this project, I will meet with Dr. Barnett at a biweekly minimum to discuss progress, development, and problem solve. Because I am still rather new to the world of professional playwriting, I require her guidance to help facilitate revision notes and realize this production to its fullest potential. With both her and URECA Grant support, this project – which will benefit me both currently and in my post-graduate studies – can be seamlessly brought to fruition, and the misinformation that erases knowledge of dissociation can itself be erased.

References

- “Dissociation and Dissociative Disorders.” *Mental Health America*,
mhanational.org/conditions/dissociation-and-dissociative-disorders#:~:text=7%25%
20of%20the%20population%20may,go%20undiagnosed%20for%20many%20years
. Accessed 2 Sept. 2023.
- Lyssenko, Lisa, et al. “Dissociation in Psychiatric Disorders: A Meta-Analysis of Studies
Using the Dissociative Experiences Scale.” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 26 Sept.
2017, ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2017.17010025.
- Sapp, Marty. *Hypnosis, Dissociation, and Absorption: Theories, Assessment, and
Treatment*. Charles C Thomas, 2015.

Proposed Timeline

(condensed as to not exceed the requested one-page maximum)

Planning with Dr. Barnett	09/18/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	10/02/2023
First draft of play due	10/09/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	10/16/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	10/30/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	11/13/2023
Reflection with Danielle	11/25/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	11/27/2023
Table reading	12/09/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	12/11/2023
Reflection with Danielle	12/16/2023
Production assignments released	12/17/2023
Planning with Dr. Barnett	01/08/2024
First draft due / Sent to team	01/13/2024
Reflection with Danielle	01/17/2024
Auditions / Callbacks / Casting	01/20/2024 - 01/21/2024
Planning with Dr. Barnett	01/22/2024
Planning with Dr. Barnett	02/05/2024
Rehearsals / Production meetings	(beginning) 02/17/2024
Planning with Dr. Barnett	02/19/2024
Planning with Dr. Barnett	03/04/2024
Planning with Dr. Barnett	03/18/2024
Planning with Dr. Barnett	04/01/2024
Load into DKA Studio Theatre	04/08/2024
First rehearsal in DKA Studio Theatre	04/08/2024
Cue-to-cue / Tech rehearsal	04/09/2024
Dress rehearsal #1	04/10/2024
Dress rehearsal #2	04/11/2024
TBD / Dark	04/12/2024
Performance #1	04/13/2024 @7:30pm
Performance #2	04/15/2024 @7:30pm
Strike	Directly following Performance #2
Debriefing with Dr. Barnett	04/22/2024

Proposed Supplies Fee Allocation

Actors	\$50 (x5)
Production Manager	\$100
Stage Manager	\$150

NOTE: As detailed under “Methods,” Dr. Barnett and I are currently working on a separate proposal through the Virginia Peck Trust Fund to pay Danielle Roos \$800.