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Impacts of theatre on the mental health of high school students

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IMPACTS OF THEATRE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

Madeline Ludwig
University of Northern Iowa
December 2021

This Study by: Madeline Ludwig

Entitled: Impacts of Theatre on Mental the Mental Health of High School Students

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation
University Honors.

12/13/21
Date

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Date

Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

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Abstract

This thesis explores the effects of participation in theatre on mental health in high school students. Though there has been more research since 2008 on mental health and its relation to the arts, there have been very few focused on mental health and theatre. However, the majority of these studies are centered around adults or young children. There is a lack of research centered around the impacts that theatre and drama have on the mental health of high school students. This study specifically focused on college students at the University of Northern Iowa and their reflection on their time in high school in hopes of gaining insight into how theatre can impact the mental health of those in high school. A voluntary survey taken by students at the University of Northern Iowa revealed that 75% of students found theatre only positively impacted their mental health while 15% found participation in drama and theatre only negatively impacted their mental health. These results revealed the negative impacts were due to the high expectations and stress that the adult in the room, such as a director or speech coach, placed on the high schoolers. However, the participants whose mental health was positively impacted by theatre and drama stated what it was due to the director, coach, and the environment that they created. Other participants shared that the escape that theatre allowed had a positive impact on their mental health. This data shows that high school theatre and drama programs can be a support for students who are struggling with mental health, if those in charge do not place too much pressure on the students.

Literature Review

The field of research on mental health is expansive; however, there are very few studies that specifically focus on theatre or drama and mental health. The 2008 systematic review by Katja Joronen, "School-based drama interventions in health promotion for children and adolescents: systematic review," is centered around a literature review specifically centered around the role of drama and theatre and health. The review concludes that there is a need for studies seeking to explore the health benefits of theatre. However, this review is not just focused on the mental health of the participants. The review is looking at all aspects of health including social and physical as well as health behaviors (Joronen). The systematic concluded that there is a need for more research on mental health in the theatre world.

A study published by Chiang, Bernard Reid-Varley, and Fan in 2019 focused on the effects of art therapy on schizophrenia, depression, bipolar, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The art therapy consisted of art, music, drama, clay, poetry, and writing. The study itself evaluated a multitude of previous studies, only two of which were focused on drama. This study concluded that participating in drama helped improve the negative symptoms associated with schizophrenia and encouraged higher social functioning and emotional expression (Chiang). Though this study mentioned the use of drama in their research, the main focus of the study were results in art therapy.

A 2019 study by Mak and Fancourt also looks at children in relation to arts therapy. In this study, the children were first interviewed as age ten and then again at age sixteen. The study itself examined the relationship between arts ability such as painting, drawing, and playing a musical instrument, and the children's behavior difficulties and self-esteem. Eventually, they concluded that the arts ability is associated with behavioral difficulties at the time of the follow

up when they were sixteen. Interestingly enough, there was not a significant relationship between self-esteem and the child's art ability (Mak). The study conducted included young people and arts therapy in general but lacked a focus on theatre, anxiety, and depression.

A study by Rosseau explores the use of theatre in immigrant and refugee youth in special education classrooms. This specific research was a randomized cluster trial and was focused on a school-based theatre intervention program. The study done to find the effects on the student's academic outcomes and their impairments. The researchers expected the theatre group would find a greater reduction in the impairment from symptoms. However, after analyzing the data, they found this was not true. There was no change in the self-reported impairments and symptoms (Rousseau). While this study focused on theatre in high school students, there was a lack of assessment of the impact the theatre experience had on the student's mental health.

The studies and research that focus on drama and theatre participation, do not usually focus on high school students. Felsman in 2020 evaluated the benefits of improvisational theatre. These benefits include reductions in anxiety and depression. However, this study was centered around the mental health of adults. The study acknowledges that there is a lack of research done in the field regarding the implications theater and drama have on the mental health of high schoolers. It also encourages those who have an interest in improvisational theatre to use it outside of a performance area and to simply use it for the psychological health benefits (Felsman "Improv Experience"). This recent study provides some helpful information when looking into theatre and mental health. However, it does not give any insight into young people and their experiences with theatre.

Peter Felsman also focused his dissertation on the relationship between social anxiety and improvisational theatre. He recognized the fact that there are very few studies centered around

mental health interventions. In his research he cited studies that found improvisation training may reduce anxiety in general. However, there haven't been prior studies that focus on social anxiety. Felsman wanted to explore social anxiety specifically as improvisation promotes a tolerance for uncertainty. This is because uncertainty is linked to anxiety. His research found that improvisation theatre ultimately helps those with social anxiety due to the preparation for the uncertainty that often plays a role in social anxiety (Felsman, Peter. "Improvisational Theater). This is one of the few studies that specifically uses theatre in relation to anxiety. Felsman's work is a start to understanding anxiety and depression in relation to theatre.

The previous research has focused on the health and mental health of adults and children. There is currently a very limited amount of research on mental health, the arts, and high school students. The study by Mak and Fancourt researched the effects on arts on a child and high schoolers self-esteem. However, this was not centered around theatre or drama and mental health struggle. There is a need for research on high school students and then impact that theatre has on their mental health struggles.

Methodology

This research study was conducted on the University of Northern Iowa campus and was approved by the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Review Board. A survey was distributed to student, faculty, and staff through an email sent by the theatre department, the honors department, and the student wellness department. To take this survey, participants had to select “yes” to being a current student at the University of Northern Iowa. The survey (see appendix A) asked college students about their experiences with high school theatre and their mental health while in high school. If a participant was not a student or did not finish, the survey still recorded their results. The survey ended at different points depending on a participant’s answer. If they answered “no” to “Did you participate in High School Theatre?” the survey ended. If they answered “no” to “Did you struggle with mental health in high school?” the survey ended. Because this survey was sent out from a variety of departments and the survey was on a volunteer basis, it was not randomized. The survey was anonymous, and the participants knew the data would be collected anonymously. The survey asked for their race and gender but did not identify individual participants.

College students were surveyed rather than high school students. This decision was made with the understanding that college students are able to look back and reflect on their time. It can be difficult to evaluate feelings in the moment and understand the impacts of what is going on around you. It was restricted to college students so that most of the data would come from participants who were in high school within the last five years. However, it is clear that not all students are traditional college students who enter college right out of high school and complete their degree within four years.

Results

Seventy participants took the survey. Of the 70, two did not complete the survey and 7 of the participants were not students at the University of Northern Iowa. This left 61 completed surveys to collect data from. However, this research was specifically focused on participants who participated in theater and those who struggled with mental health. Of the 62 participants, 20 participants experienced struggles with mental health and participated in theatre. These 20 students participated in Speech Competitions, Musicals, Plays, and Improvisation and struggled with anxiety, depressions, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, trauma related experiences, and attention deficit disorder. One participant also indicated that they worked tech for concerts throughout high school (see appendix C for charts).

Of these 20 participants, 15 said participation in theatre and drama positively impacted their mental health. 3 said it negatively impacted their mental health. 1 said it did not impact their mental health positively or negatively 1 person said participation in drama and theatre both positively and negatively impacted their mental health (Appendix D). Of the four participants who said theatre had a negative impact on their mental health, including the one who cited both positive and negative results, two of them cited the cause as the director and the speech coach. The other two said it was due to a “toxic environment, “the drive to always succeed,” and “way too much pressure.”

Of the twenty participants who participated in theatre and struggled with mental health, fifteen of them said theatre positively impacted their mental health. In an open-ended question some of the participants shared more about their experience. Some of the positive ways that theatre and drama impacted participants' mental health included confidence building, providing a supportive community, creating a space to destress and take a break, and allowed for a creative

outlet to express themselves. In the open-ended response, some of the participants who stated theatre positively impacted their mental health stated (Appendix A), “It helped me to become more confident around other people and I enjoyed being a part of something where the rest of the members genuinely wanted me there. All of my friends and my mom, who was the speech coach, begged me to be involved for a long time so they were excited and happy for me to show up at all the practices and events. Even though I played a very minor role, I had a really fun time with everyone, and it did help to make me feel more confident around others.” Other participants said, “While some parts of it were challenging for me, especially not being used to being around that type of environment, I think that the experience of getting on stage with my friends made me more confident. I felt like I was able to overcome my fears/worries because I saw the positive result of my performance” and “Definitely it gave me something to do and look forward to. Having such a supportive group of people in my life was definitely an experience I haven’t been able to replicate. My drama director most definitely saved my life.” There are more participants in the study who have shared similar experiences in this study (Appendix A).

In addition to those who exclusively experienced positive or negative experiences, there were also participants who experience both positive and negative or neither. The participant who stated that it neither positively nor negatively impacted their mental health stated, “Theatre didn't have much of an effect on my mental health because there were other factors aside from just being busy that caused it.” There was no specific relation to the race or gender and the impacts that theatre had on mental health. There was not a clear relation between the types of theatre and the impacts or the types of mental health and the impacts that theatre had on the mental health. The significant data pointed to theatre and drama positively impacted most students who were

struggling with mental health and that those who were negatively impacted said the main cause were due to a director or coach and the environment (Appendix C and D).

Discussion

With 75% of participants stating that theatre and drama positively impacted their mental health, it may be plausible to begin to look into theatre and drama participation as a more reasonable outlet for those struggling with mental health. For those who are struggling with mental health, it can be an escape. When asked to explain how theatre positively impacted their student health, many replied, “It was a nice break and a good place to direct my attention and take my mind off things,” and “Theatre gave me an outlet to be someone else and to express myself through a fun art form away from home.” Another participant said, “Having an outlet for my emotions was really important. Theatre was a way I could utilize some level of escapism to become centered on the issues surrounding my character, rather than myself.” Theatre and drama allowed these students to leave what they were struggling and dealing with behind, even just for a little bit, and enjoy what they were doing. These students were provided a space to just explore and enjoy life without the worries of the world around them.

However, for others, these theatre and drama experiences only heightened their mental health struggles. Of the participants who cited negative impacts from theatre on their mental health, 66% said that the director or coach had a direct impact on the negative experience. Though the director or coach can have a positive impact and support the students in ways that positively impact their mental health, they can also negatively impact the student. As the director or coach, it is important to keep these aspects of students in mind to best support them and their mental health.

An important distinction to make in this research is that while the majority of negative impacts theatre and drama had on mental health cited their director or coach, many participants had positive experiences because of the coach or director. One of the students who experienced

positive effects from high school theatre and drama stated, “My drama director most definitely saved my life.” A director or coach can have a positive impact on a student and their experiences as well. For this participant, their director was a lifeline. The director in the space not only created a safe environment but became a safe person as well. Directors and speech coaches and look to this and strive to create safe and healthy environments for the students.

Though many cited that theatre and drama positively or negatively impacted their mental health, there were two outliers. One participant said theatre and drama neither positively nor negatively impacted their mental health. She explained, “Theatre didn't have much of an effect on my mental health because there were other factors aside from just being busy that caused it.” In some cases theatre and drama may not have an impact either way. However, this participant did not directly state it was because of theatre or drama. Instead another participant said she experienced both positive and negative impacts. When asked to explain her answer to the question, “Did theatre positively or negative affect your mental health?” she replied, “A tad of both. Sometimes it would be a very toxic environment, and other times there were a lot of people I could depend on.” This participant experienced both implications, which can be a reality for some high school students. However, it seems as though this particular participant did not have a great support system in place within the theatre department. It depended on the day whether they were watching into a room of people who were creating a toxic space or supporting them.

Prior to this study, there had not be any specific research done encompassing high school students and the impacts that theatre and drama have on their mental health. Though more research is needed to make this claim, it is possible that most students who are struggling with mental health can benefit from participation in drama and theatre. However, one major factor of

a positive impact is the actions of a director or coach. The director or coach in the room can play a key role in the mental health of these students already struggling with mental health.

Conclusion

Through exploring the impacts that theatre had on the mental health of high school students, a small gap in research has been filled. Overall, theatre and drama can have a positive effect on mental health in high school students. 75% of the 20 participants said theatre had a positive effect on their mental health. Three of the 20 said that theatre had a negative effect on their mental health. One said theatre neither had a positive or negative impact on their mental health, and one other participant said theatre both positively and negatively impacted their mental health. Through the information the participants shared, it is important to note that the director or coach can directly have a positive or negative impact on the mental health of high school students. It is also possible that theatre and drama can positively impact the mental health of high school students because of their ability to let go of the world they are in and explore a character and the world around them. One limitation of this study was the small sample size. To gain a clearer picture and confirm the implications, the survey would need to be taken by a larger population. It would also be important to expand the research outside of the University of Northern Iowa. If this study were to continue to a wider variety of populations, it would be important to keep this anonymous so participants can openly share their feelings. One of the limitations of the research was not knowing when these participants were in high school. To combat this, the continuation of research could also be restricted to those who were in high school within the last three years. This may allow for reflection without too much time passing. Though this research has limitations, it can be a springboard to dive into the impacts that the director themselves have on the mental health of high school students.

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Appendix A

Impacts of Theatre on Mental Health of High School Students

Consent

This research is being conducted by persons at the University of Northern Iowa. This research is investigating the impact that theatre has on the mental health of high school students. The voluntary survey should take approximately fifteen minutes. By clicking “accept” you are agreeing to share this data with the researchers. Your name will not be attached to this data in any way. There will be no compensation for your time, and there are no direct benefits to you. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data transmitted electronically. The foreseeable risks of this study are minimal; however, if at any time you feel uncomfortable in this survey, please exit. Contact the student health center at (319) 273-2154 if you would like someone to talk to about your mental health. Grouped results will be shared in articles and presentations. If you have any questions regarding the research please contact Madeline Ludwig (ludwimab@uni.edu) or Dr. Jessica Moon (jessica.moon@uni.edu). If you have any questions regarding participants rights please contact the IRB Administrator at rebecca.rinehart@uni.edu or 319-273-6148.

- Accept (1)
- Decline (2)

Q1 Are you a student at the University of Northern Iowa

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Q2 How do you identify

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Other (4)

Q3 How do you identify

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian and Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (5)
- Two or more races (6)

- Other (7)

Q4 Did you participate in High School Theatre?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)

Q5 What kind of Theatre did you participate in? (May select more than one answer)

- Musicals (1)
- Plays (2)
- Improvisational (3)
- Speech Competition (6)
- None (4)
- Other (5)

Q6 What other forms of Theatre did you participate in?

Q7 Briefly describe your overall theatre experience.

Q8 Did you struggle with mental health in high school?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)

Q9 What type of mental health did you struggle with? (More than one answer may be selected)

- Anxiety (1)
- Depression (2)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (3)
- Bipolar Disorder (4)
- Attention Deficit (5)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (6)

- None (7)
- Other (8)

Q10 If you selected other, please describe your experience.

Q12 Did theatre positively or negative affect your mental health?

- Positively (1)
- Negatively (2)
- Neither (3)

Q13 Please explain.

Appendix B

Response ID	Consent	Are you a student at the University of Northern Iowa	How do you identify	How do you identify2
R_2Eid7S95I0Uvdb3	Accept	Yes	Male	White
R_11hWB9m2ouBsNtA	Accept	Yes	Non-binary	White
R_OMVtbP3VfXp5jEJ	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2axHt4V6B7XDuqa	Accept	Yes	Non-binary	White
R_r7KTkytBpY8PmRr	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2z7V0zU6g70gu8X	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_OjwVOYI9J8HD8cN	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_30k54KMGvcedFR9	Accept	Yes	Male	Two or more races
R_2qgEEUuKaRK66ZE	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2uCFcPtID3sgzxp	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3oyHwIF81xj7wnh	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_Tko4PzOn4oDjuQ9	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_308IDSLUADnAGxJ	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2wBrd8GeVp0XzEi	Accept	Yes	Other	Other
R_1Nfsj8q5iLZNEu0	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_pT4L6eMf4z3PCSd	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_vH9yTm0dZSFo7v3	Accept	Yes	Other	White
R_x2S1PWSNXnb8Kg9	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_tGVxdhbrUNhvL9f	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_cwHhpivzVDPX7Wh	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3074yp4WvPrVuPW	Accept	Yes	Male	Two or more races
R_3PFa07EC5WoUofm	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3qKgF7QzB8qsnjo	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_p9oGBJzNloVNXRD	Accept	Yes	Female	
R_2SiW4MPDGG80FS9	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2uOqy1qIOFGPcSE	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_21bnWIBVxZ7pqk2	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1jHypMhyGtHG50F	Accept	Yes	Male	White
R_1LcXLZJIYezcneF	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3kBdNn9lMpWBtyu	Accept	Yes	Male	White
R_25LvkhPZwU4OROj	Accept	Yes	Male	White

R_2OJFGFxa9TXcDeM	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1mzxI0uMYpxSyr	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2xJ28qcr5w8ngaV	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3EXsrXYtNpIMACb	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3MmtEISFc6VuxvU	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2dWs51rC8dySvmf	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1jAHFJiq4F9uKff	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2TuQk5dKYTmCos5	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3NEqP4CReKPLtjc	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_UQEy0s8wBF8qQEx	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3qyErjqkdmj7h	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3Re9Sfq1XlpdBqU	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_27s8xIBIhr0kyFq	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_OqzvHAHCc5UpFQt	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_3fjGglFvnrqa90	Accept	Yes	Non-binary	White
R_21dorakrbell5jj	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_cAtk182IJ6Lm7iV	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2pLYCWxtokWj5s2	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_30jG85stity06h1	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1EZCVK61KMsCyP3	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1GVLsW8hsY3VFWH	Accept	Yes	Male	White
R_2S1A3QZPYVOX32s	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1mwTPunecZyNSaV	Accept	Yes	Male	White
R_1KfkbkjBPxLdoCo	Accept	Yes	Male	Other
R_3nUI37kW9bM5VA0	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2wEofyRqmS212XW	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_2CNSsYPcNzMxQ1A	Accept	Yes	Male	White
R_vZTp9p32crW6tNf	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_1mF1oEk4UGT4Scx	Accept	Yes	Other	White
R_1mmFSajJZcjUHF	Accept	Yes	Female	White
R_wZ4xcFOizNfV0jf	Accept	No		
R_1CxNkvaWTUJ3S2c	Accept	No		
R_2EzvCPxfYuwrp9b	Accept	No		
R_3NLISWU5CF8uzGA	Accept	No		
R_1NeK0slPtDu2wSw	Accept	No		
R_RF7rOi99sD9nN4Z	Accept	No		
R_6VemQhrKH5KX4WJ	Accept	No		
R_1dhpfBLAwMlviky	Accept	Yes		
R_3hAecf4fafoRily	Accept	Yes	Female	White

Did you participate in High School Theatre?	What kind of Theatre did you participate in?	What other forms of Theatre did you participate in?
Yes	Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Other	Working tech for Concerts and other events that took place in our space.
Yes	Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Improvisational,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Improvisational,Speech Competition	
Yes	Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays	
Yes	Musicals,Plays	
Yes	Plays	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Improvisational,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays	
Yes	Musicals,Plays	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Improvisational,Speech Competition	
Maybe	Musicals	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays	
Yes	Musicals,Plays	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Improvisational,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Plays,Speech Competition	
Yes	Musicals,Speech Competition	

Briefly describe your overall theatre experience.

I participated in a Large Group One Act Play and a Thespians One Act Play my senior year. I did not have any speaking roles, but I played as a background role and as a dead body. I wouldn't consider myself an actor or theatre performer, but that little bit I was involved in did help me feel more confident around big groups of people

Very fun, stressful at times because of the director

I did musicals and plays, but I mostly focused on IHSSA speech, as that was just where I thrived. I absolutely loved it and I wouldn't have changed a single thing. Within individual speech, I competed in prose, acting, and original oratory throughout my four years in high school, and I always chose comedy pieces. I loved making people laugh, and the best part of speech was that I could clearly see my audience, so I could see exactly how they reacted to my jokes. Speech, and theatre too, were bright spots in my high school career and helped relieve stress from more stressful/demanding activities and academics.

It was wonderful even though during tech and show week it was stressful but other than that it was a lot of fun.

I was in theatre all four years of high school. In the beginning I really enjoyed it, but as the years went on I felt a lot of pressure from my coach to reach her impossible expectations. It also felt like our coach took advantage of our skills and she would always type cast us so we couldn't even explore characters we weren't used to playing.

I did all plays, musicals, and speech team seasons all four years of high school. I also tried improv my last year. I was elected onto my troupe's thespian board my junior and senior years, so I was heavily involved in planning for the thespian seasons (5+ additional events).

Long, competitive, also fun

I had fun! I got to interact with lots of different kinds of people and it was an interesting experience for me. I am traditionally a "sporty" person, so I had a lot of fun going out of my comfort zone and being in an area that I was uncomfortable in at first.

Theatre not only made me more confident and happy but also brought me into a community I felt comfortable in. While there were sometimes ups and downs with the long rehearsals, I miss them a lot.

I loved theatre it definitely dominated my high school experience and it's where I met my best friends.

I loved doing theatre, but it was a lot of work and could be stressful at times

My overall theatre experience was very positive. It helped me develop confidence and form relationships with my peers in school. It also connects me with friends in college who were theatre participants in high school as well.

It was great. I made a lot of new friends and theatre helped me find my voice on and off the stage. It helped give me and continues to give me an outlet.

LOL good!

My experience with high school theater wasn't the best but my community theater and college theater experiences have been very valuable

Wonderful, it was a blast. I was stage manager and student director

i did 1 musical as ensemble my freshman year, then worked as a lights technician for 8 shows

I started participating in theatre my sophomore year of high school. I was in multiple plays and musicals through my school as well as Missoula Childrens' Theatre productions.

I played trumpet in the pit orchestra for our musicals. It was a fun experience.

I was the Light tech for all of the plays and musicals. I was also on the speech team

It was pretty good and I only did theatre for 2 years as I got busy with more things.

I came from a small school, so there were definitely the favorite students that got the lead parts every year. But overall, it was really fun because everyone knew everyone and (for the most part) we all got along!

I was in ensemble in Musicals and light booth for plays

I did everything I possibly could like all the musicals, plays. For speech, I did mime, improv, musical theatre, poetry, storytelling, and readers theatre.

I worked backstage for 3 musicals and 2 plays during high school, and during my senior year I performed in our musical. I also participated in large group speech all four years of high school. Our theatre program was very well organized and supportive and I had very positive experiences with my friends and directors.

My freshman year I participated in a musical and played a few roles.

I absolutely loved it. I was involved in musicals from 4th grade until 12th grade and speech from 9th grade to 12th grade.

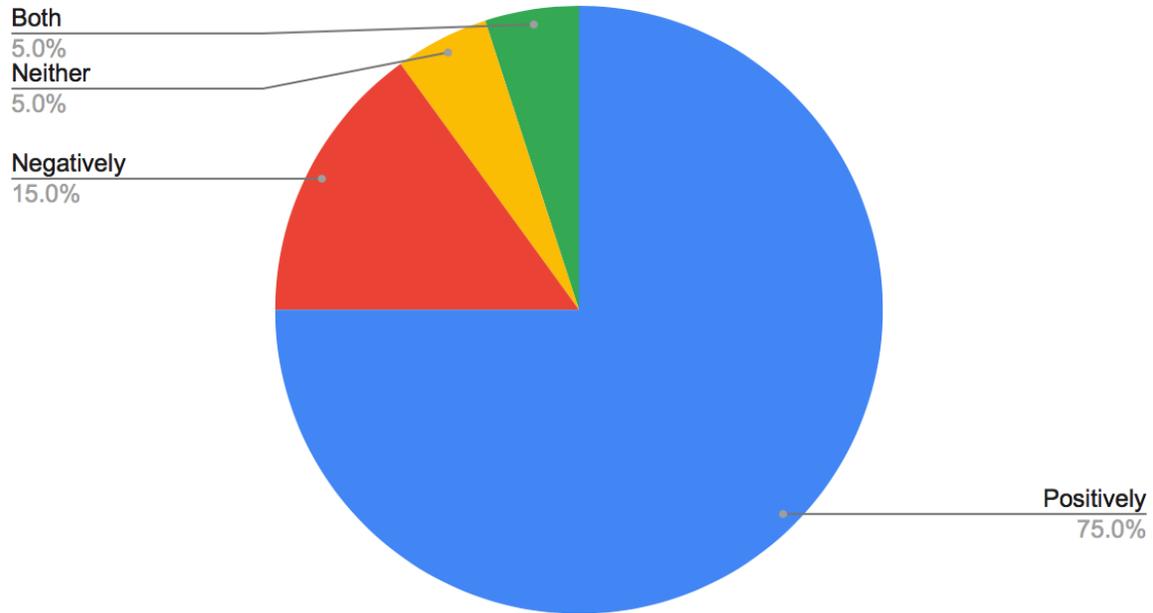
I had lead roles in many plays and musicals, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

I loved my experience in theatre.

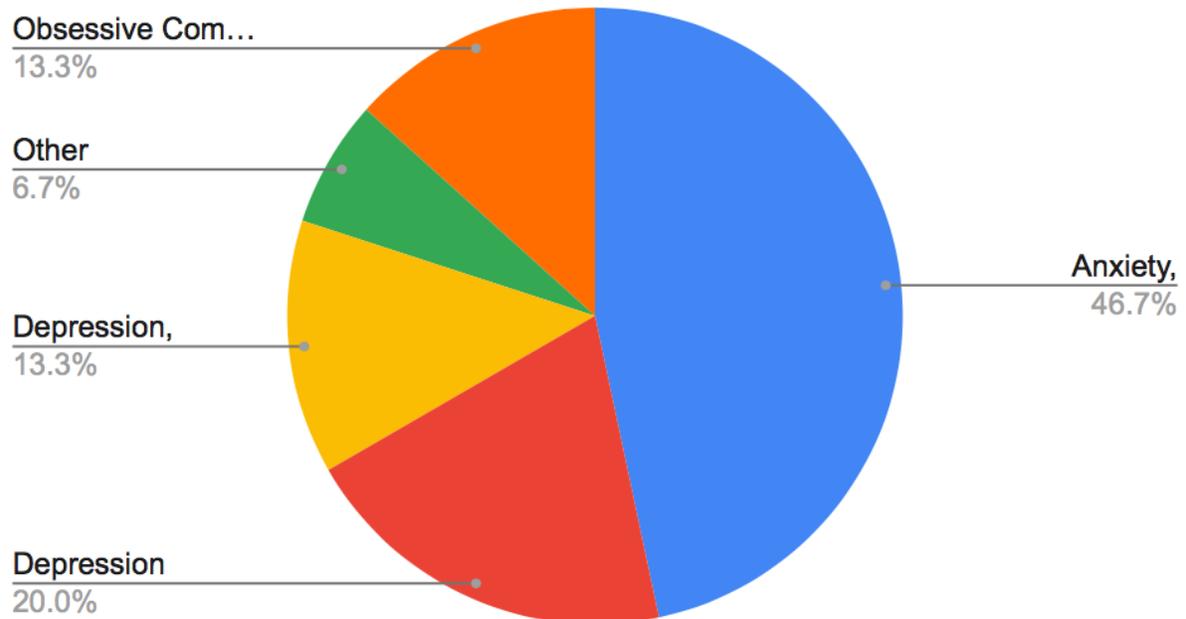
Did theatre positively or negative affect your mental health?	Please explain.
Positively	It helped me to become more confident around other people and I enjoyed being a part of something where the rest of the members genuinely wanted me there. All of my friends and my mom, who was the speech coach, begged me to be involved for a long time so they were excited and happy for me to show up at all the practices and events. Even though I played a very minor role, I had a really fun time with everyone and it did help to make me feel more confident around others
Negatively	Abusive director
Positively	always did well when I competed (I went to individual All State all four years of high school) which was a huge confidence boost. I was also on the dance team and participated in competitive dance outside of school, and my coaches were very toxic, constantly pushing us past our limits, telling us we were lazy and untalented. So the confidence boost that I got from speech helped me become less depressed and less anxious about myself and how others perceived me. When I got positive comments from judges, I would hang them on my wall and look at them when I felt like I was worthless. Speech made me feel like I could actually be good at something.
Positively	It was a nice break and a good place to direct my attention and take my mind off things.
Negatively	I feel like the theatre coach that my school had put way too much pressure on all of us. She wasn't good at giving us good feedback and it felt like at the end of every practice she had something negative to say. As the years went on, she kept raising her expectations to impossible goals so instead of theatre being fun, it felt like a chore.
Positively	
Positively	There were stressful times, but I was able to destress and relax in the theatre community.
Negatively	Stressed me out, especially the drive to always succeed drove me crazy
Positively	While some parts of it were challenging for me, especially not being used to being around that type of environment, I think that the experience of getting on stage with my friends made me more confident. I felt like I was able to overcome my fears/worries because I saw the positive result of my performance.
Positively	As I previously mentioned, it made me more confident and comfortable with my surroundings and knowing people wherever I went made my life a lot easier because I never had to sit by myself.
Positively	Definitely it gave me something to do and look forward to. Having such a supportive group of people in my life was definitely an experience I haven't been able to replicate. My drama director most definitely saved my life.
Neither	Theatre didn't have much of an effect on my mental health because there were other factors aside from just being busy that caused it
Positively	Theatre gave me an outlet to be someone else and to express myself through a fun art form away from home.
Positively	weren't afraid to talk about it. In hispanic culture we're meant to be strong and acknowledging mental health is still taboo. In theatre, I was able to explore my feelings and have a support system that encouraged me to do so.
Positively	Kept me busy and gave me ambition and purpose
Positively	My high school theater experience was very negative and has had a lasting impact on my mental health but I'm passionate about theater and wanted to pursue it professionally. My experiences at UNI and with counseling have helped me grow, recover, and pursue my love of theater (something that has positively impacted my mental health).
Positively	do
Positively	It gave me a family and support with structure
Both	a tad of both. sometimes it would be a very toxic environment, and other times there were a lot of people i could depend on.
Positively	Having an outlet for my emotions was really important. Theatre was a way I could utilize some level of escapism to become centered on the issues surrounding my character, rather than myself.

Appendix C

Did theatre positively or negative affect your mental health?



What type of mental health you did struggle with?



Appendix D

Did not participate in theatre	Participated in theatre but did NOT struggle with mental health	Participated in theatre AND struggled with mental health	Total participants
30	11	20	61

Did theatre positively or negative affect your mental health?				
Positively impacted	Negatively impacted	Both positively and negatively impacted	Neither positively or negatively impacted	Total
15	3	1	1	20