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# Playwright or Wrong: Gender, Body, Beauty, and Type in Three Plays by Women

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by

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**You Are Not My Type**

This past summer at an administrative internship with a professional theater company, my boss - who had never seen me perform - described to me my "type" as an actor. Making generalizations like "girl-next-door" and "hot nerd," my supposed mentor in this experience put me into a box without any prior knowledge of my acting talents, just based on my looks. "Type[1]" is a social construct often used within the theatre that casts actors based primarily on their physical appearance or other superficial traits, exposing theatre, film, and television as fields in which openly judging people based on looks is a widely practiced status quo. Confronting type starts early. For me, it began at age 14. Examples of things teachers, mentors, and directors have said to me since an early age include:

> "It really came down to the fact that the other actress was blonde."
>
> "Even if we put you in flats, you'll still tower over your scene partner."
>
> "Can we just drag you off the stage instead? I don't think I can pick you up."
>
> "Listen, you have got to play into your type, that's the only way you are going to get booked in this industry."
>
> "Realistically, you're going to be playing 'the girl next door,' don't bother trying to audition for the femme fatale."

During my formative years, I internalized shame around my type thanks to comments like these. I wonder what my artistic life would have been like if I had been allowed to follow my dreams without the constraint of people telling me what I can do based on what I look like.

[1] See for example https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/find-type-actor-3730/

In theatre, film, and television an actor's "type" often defines their career opportunities. This social construct uses physical appearance, race, gender, and other aspects of identity and self to define what kind of a person someone gets to play. Lynne Marie Rosenberg, professional performer and theatre journalist, writes in "How (Not) to Write a Casting Breakdown" that "actors are real humans who are reading and being defined by the character descriptions to which we 'submit' on a daily basis [...]." She offers a more thoughtful approach, emphasizing "energy of the character" and "skills required" over imposing "limitations placed on size, age, race, body type, or sexual appeal." Rosenberg describes an aspiration toward more open-minded casting practices and in that the potential for less harm towards the actors, who are experiencing the negative impact of the narrowmindedness of type. These character descriptions are often created with "sexual appeal" in mind, a main trait that female and male leads are described to have, which forces actors to sexualize themselves by conforming to beauty standards. Feminist theatre scholar Kim Solga writes in *Theatre & Feminism* that "post-feminism" is used to describe "a historical moment (roughly the period after the mid-1980's) in which men and women appeared to have achieved gender equality in the workplace and in the public sphere [...]" which presumed further feminist theory as "redundant" (Solga 7). This alleged "post-feminism" hasn't changed the strong patriarchal hold over theatre. Oftentimes, women's bodies are objectified by men in power, as they define the possibility of the roles women can have. American playwright, Rebecca Gilman, wrote in an article in 2019 for the Chicago Tribune that, "plays written by women account for only 29 percent of all plays produced [...]" and that "female directors and designers receive around 37 percent of the professional production opportunities" (Gilman). Through these statistics it is evident that even in the 21st century, women are fighting for equal

representation in the field. Women's roles are often shaped by the "male gaze," a term coined by film theorist Laura Mulvey. In Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" she explains that "the male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure… she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (808). The male gaze, the objectification of women, has a large part in assigning women certain types. Type favors certain people. Performers whose bodies, voices, race, and gender identity are "just not the right type" are pushed out. Those that type favors continue to get nourished by an abundance of opportunities and access. This shapes careers and aesthetics, and it tells audiences what the world is supposed to look like.

Patriarchal social standards like the aforementioned can be seen in iconic pieces throughout theatre history. In ancient Greece, the play *Lysistrata*[2] written by Aristophanes is an example. In this play, the women of Greece withhold sex from their husbands in order to negotiate the end of the Peloponnesian War. Through this story we are seeing the perceived value of women at the time, comedic figures narrowed down to the sex they can provide for men. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*[3] written in the 16th century is a more popular example of female representation on stage. Juliet is the classic ingenue, a very popular "type" in contemporary theatre for actors to get stuck in. An ingenue is a "naive girl or young woman" (Merriam-Webster) who is often associated with being pretty and petite. Juliet is a character who is not given much depth in the play until she tragically kills herself at the end of the story. *The Importance of Being Earnest*[4] by Oscar Wilde first performed in 1895 takes place in a time when gender roles were set in stone, men were the heads of the household and women took care of the

[2] See for example https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2101&context=etd
[3] See for example https://www.broadwayworld.com/chicago/article/BWW-Blog-The-Problem-with-the-Ingenue-20201120
[4] See for example https://sites.nd.edu/oascarwilde/2022/03/13/wildes-female-characters/

children. This is evident in the play's dumbing down of the two young female characters to look pretty and dream of the perfect husband and how Lady Bracknell is an arrogant and rude older lady. It seems that once an actress ages out of playing a young woman, they are forced to play characters like Bracknell, where their age makes them bitter. *A Streetcar Named Desire*[5] by Tennessee Williams, written in 1947, follows a similar structure. In this play, Williams writes the tragic story of a young woman named Blanche DuBois who goes on a journey filled with sex, death, and mental health issues. The story attempts to highlight the difficult antifeminist world of the mid-twentieth century, but somehow falters and twists Blanche into an antagonist. In each of these, male-dominated societies and narratives helped to shape today's social standards.

Even in the early 2000's, American theatre was still floundering in writing better roles for women. While attempting to shake-up the field, some playwrights made poor attempts at positive female representation. An example of this would be the play *Fat Pig*[6] written by Neil LaBute. *Fat Pig* is the story of a young businessman who starts to date a plus-size woman named Helen after they run into each other at a restaurant. At first this seems like an effort to have a plus-size woman as a lead romantic interest, but it quickly devolves into the opposite; Helen is harassed by her boyfriend's co-workers and he breaks up with her because of it. You see that the physicality of this woman is deeply affecting the characters in a negative way; she becomes a source of shame for the male lead. His shame as the motivation for judgment against her demonstrates a problematic pattern in the world and in the field. This judgment from the male character, and his

[5] See for example Blackwell, Louise. "Tennessee Williams and the Predicament of Women." *South Atlantic Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1970, pp. 9–14. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3197002. Accessed 23 Apr. 2023.
[6] See for example https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/jun/02/neillabutessexistpig

gaze, shows how generalized understandings of beauty can negatively impact women and work in connection to their representation in theatre.

Where the perspectives of spectators in the world of a play and in society reinforce stereotypical understandings of beauty, we observe the ways in which "type" is perpetuated. In *Theatre & Feminism,* Solga further explains that "the spectator's gaze at the theatre" is an:

> … unconscious commitment to shared social and cultural expectations about how men and women *should* each appear, act and speak, both on stage and in the world in a given place and time. (19)

This is an easy way to demonstrate how normalized "type" is in our society. It is so much considered the norm that it has a huge part to play in our socially accepted body standards. We associate actors with being beautiful people who we wish to replicate, but in actuality we are reinforcing these social norms. In reference to the roles available to women in theatre, Solga mentions "women characters typically figure as heroines to be saved or antagonists to be punished by those same powerful male leads" (21). These tropes are associated with physical types. Again, this helps reiterate that women are oftentimes put into one box or the other, a damsel in distress or an evil seductress. Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" declares that we have innate fascination with the human form and the concept of "women as image, man as bearer of the look" (Solga 808). It is impossible to neglect the work of Judith Butler when researching how gender and bodies relate to the field. Butler is an American philosopher and gender theorist who has published extensive research on the performative nature of gender. In Butler's book *Bodies That Matter*, they write that the "regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies [...]" and furthermore

"materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (Butler). Butler is associating the strict constructs of gender with the urge to make bodies material, in conversation with heteronormativity. This work is reminiscent of the male gaze and how gender is normally defined by heterosexual men. Jill Dolan, American author of sexuality studies and feminism, writes in her book *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* that "feminist performance theory agreed that ideology are inevitably written into form [...]" and that the form of theatre is a "psychological identification against women's own good; and its rising action, crises, and denouements, was bound to marginalize women" (xiv). The power of an outsider's gaze can mishape the one who is objectified when their seeing dictates the ways in which someone is called upon to perform to social expectations. Theatre does this and is complicit in perpetuating stereotype. In a historically male dominated field, the institution of theatre has been crafted through ongoing subordination of women. Where men have held the power as actors, directors, producers and writers, who women are and what women get to be has been dictated by often fraught patriarchal perspectives.

The construct of type is powerful, however, some artists are challenging it in bold, contemporary work. This rebellion is particularly strong in female playwrights, writing specific casting notes to disrupt this culture. This document explores the faults of type through close reading and analysis of three contemporary plays written by women. These three plays challenge and work to subvert type by discussing gender, body, and beauty standards. The exploration of problematic stereotypes called out in these pieces shows these writers in conversation with type through the particular aesthetic experiments of each play. Sarah Ruhl's *Stage Kiss* follows the life of a woman in theatre and how she is limited to certain roles because of her gender and age.

*Dance Nation* by Clare Barron subverts type by non-traditional casting of an entire ensemble of Women+ to play 13-year old competitive dancers. Tori Sampson's *If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must Be a Muhfucka* takes a good look at beauty and ugliness and the judgment that comes along with it in the particular experience of four Black teenage girls in the fictional setting of Afreakah Amirrorikah. All three plays subvert type. In each, the writers choose to do something unique with casting that upends understandings of beauty. They all approach it from different perspectives but each one is actively taking a stand against something the writer expresses is a current issue of representation right now. Their explicitly written casting notes are impassioned, lengthy pleas to playmakers to break away from whatever they think the "type" for these characters is supposed to be.

**“SHE AS WHORE” in *Stage Kiss* by Sarah Ruhl**

*Stage Kiss* by Sarah Ruhl, which made its NYC debut at Playwrights Horizons in 2014, uses sharp, witty dialogue to follow a character simply named "SHE" as she auditions, rehearses, and performs in several plays. The piece asks questions on what it means to be a middle aged woman past her "prime" acting years, returning to her theatre career after a break to raise a family. The format of *Stage Kiss* contains a play within a play and constantly breaks the fourth wall. This style allows Ruhl to comment on the pitfalls of theatre and also highlight the creativity behind the scenes. In Kim Solga’s *Theatre & Feminism,* she writes:

> Feminist theatre theory and practice allows us to understand the way *all* gender is constructed and reinforced in performance, for better and worse, and for all human beings on the planet - be they men, women, transpersons or others. (1)

The construction of gender in *Stage Kiss* is reinforced by, rehearsal process, and is a model of how a play can be a practice that addresses gender constructs and feminist theory. Theatre is a field that constantly constructs and reconstructs identity, reinforced through repetition, mainly the rehearsal process. This play theatricalizes this reconstruction as “SHE” repeats experiences in the plays within *Stage Kiss*. In *Stage Kiss,* playwright Sarah Ruhl explores how patriarchal societal norms limit the choices of roles for women in theatre.

“SHE”, after a long break from the profession, decides to audition for a play called *The Last Kiss.* At the audition, she meets the director Adrian Schwalbach, the reader, Kevin. “SHE” is a little out of practice but approaches the scene with a charming confidence that makes Adrian cast her. At the first rehearsal for *The Last Kiss,* “SHE” runs into “HE”, who will be playing her character's lover in the play. These actors have a past together. They were in a relationship when they were younger and it apparently ended badly because they haven’t kept in touch. “SHE”

moved on and now has a husband and daughter, while “HE” has a girlfriend who is a schoolteacher. Although they have their own lives now, “HE” and “SHE” can’t resist their connection as rehearsals progress. They kiss backstage after the final performance, sealing their decision to stay together.

The action of the scene continues to “HE’s” apartment the next morning. “HE” and “SHE” are reading the negative reviews for their show as their respective partners walk in the door. “SHE’s” husband and daughter beg for her to come back home, but she insists that she’s fallen back in love with “HE.” Adrian Schwalbach is the next to knock on their door as he tries to get the couple to audition for his next piece in Detroit. The director proclaims that there is a great role for the leading man, but the woman will be playing an “aging whore” who should be comfortable with nudity. The text is dark and contains physical and sexual violence towards women, “SHE” tries to decline the role but “HE” insists that they need the money. Their time in Detroit is plagued by conflict, as cracks start to form in their relationship. “SHE” is frustrated when her kissing scenes aren't handled professionally, “HE” is getting too rough. In an attempt to help show “HE” how to properly perform the stage combat, Adrian and Kevin repeatedly shake her causing an actual neck injury. “HE” and “SHE” fight about the real reasons they broke up and “HE” is furious. In an act of defiance, “SHE” refuses to do the fight choreography at the performance, staring out into the audience. “SHE’s” husband reveals that he is the one who financed the production, he commissioned the director to write a play about a whore and an asshole and cast “HE” and “SHE” in it, in order to prove a point. He asks her to come home with him along with a very moving speech about their love story. When “HE” comes back, he finally matures and says goodbye to “SHE.” Harrison and “SHE” share a simple kiss as the lights go out and the play ends.

Due to the manipulating of the fourth wall in *Stage Kiss*, Ruhl blatantly confronts conventions of type in many ways, including character descriptions and actor dialogue. For example, Ruhl's character description for "SHE" only offers, "a woman - She - in her mid-forties. Plays the role of Ada Wilcox," specifying just her age and her role (5). This, knowingly or not, is the type she is assigned as an older actress. The simplicity of her character description also speaks to an openness of interpretation for the actress playing her. She isn't given any particular personality traits or characteristics. Naming this character "SHE" is an intentional way to create a relatability or vagueness in the character. Perhaps any actress is supposed to see themselves in the character. The leading man of the show is also given the pronoun title, "HE." This is a way to show the generalization of how men and women are treated within the field of theatre. While "SHE" explains to "HE" why she has not worked in a while she says:

> If you are an actress in this country you are either Juliet or Lady Macbeth and there's nothing in between… So I think in the last ten years I've had two auditions, one for a maid on Broadway and one for an antidepressant commercial. I got the antidepressant commercial. (Ruhl 22)

This quote contains the most clear definition of the types of roles available for older actors. Sarah Ruhl herself is commenting here on the way aging women are assigned certain types and excluded from others. When "SHE" was younger, she most likely played the Juliet roles and now her options have been limited. It's revealed that she only booked an antidepressant commercial recently, so she isn't playing the roles like Lady Macbeth. She is picking up the few roles that she is able to play, small and obscure. This also helps the audience to understand why "SHE" would take the roles she is offered throughout the course of the play. Solga emphasizes:

> The feminist performance body (the body of the artist as well as the body of the critic) as we all get older in a world where women over a certain age (sadly, about 40) remain pitifully under-represented in public life and especially invisible in Hollywood and on Broadway. (4)

It's clear that this issue of limited opportunities for older women in the field is chronic. Near the beginning of the play, "SHE" has a brief exchange with a young actress who is playing her daughter in *The Last Kiss*. She says that the actress really looks like her real daughter to which the actress responds "I'm actually twenty-three. People always cast me as like teenagers. It's so annoying" (Ruhl 34). In this scene the "Young Actress" who plays Millie, is openly addressing her type. She is always cast as teenagers and is not happy about it. In the character description, she is described as "an actress in her early twenties who can believably play a teenager" (Ruhl 5). Ruhl seems aware of this, using this type of actor to poke fun at the field in this line, even though it's a very brief joke from a supporting character. It is also followed by a funny yet a bit demeaning line from Millie of, "What is it, Mummy" and "I'm a big girl, Daddy. You can tell me" (Ruhl 34). The contrast between the actress and the character creates the humor. What adds to these multiple layers of commentary is that this same actress is supposed to play "SHE's" sixteen-year-old daughter, Angela, in the "real world." Although Ruhl acknowledges this practice of casting adults as teenagers, she also actively enforces it by having that same actress play a teenager in the realistic portion of the play.

Another way that people in power, most often men, can determine roles for women is based on their perceived beauty. What is clear in movies, TV shows, and on stage is that beauty often equals worth. Many characters within the play *Stage Kiss* tell "SHE" why her beauty is

important, on and off stage. While “SHE” is contemplating why people like to see actors kiss on stage, “HE” responds:

> They don’t really like to see the act of kissing on stage, only the idea of kissing on stage. That’s why actors have to be good looking because it’s about an idea, an idea of beauty completing itself” (Ruhl 65)

This idea of beauty completing itself on stage appears to mean people want actors to be beautiful because the audience itself wants to be beautiful. In contrast, “HE” says:

> That’s why porn stars don’t have to be as good looking as actors because we’re not watching the *idea* of sex but sex itself which can be ugly. (Ruhl 65)

Interestingly, this analysis of beauty comes from the perspective of a male character in the play, “HE.”. "HE" presumes his personal opinions are facts, perhaps an insinuation from the playwright that his masculinity is tied to his confidence. Another instance of judging a woman based on her appearance comes later in the play when “HE’s” schoolteacher girlfriend “Laurie” interacts with “SHE.” Laurie abruptly says:

> I think you’re really funny and it’s just rare, you know, to find a pretty woman who’s also funny because usually women are funny to compensate for not being pretty, I find. Or sometimes you meet a pretty and funny woman and find out she used to be like two hundred pounds or got a nose job and you’re like: oh, right that’s how she developed a sense of humor, in adolescence. (Ruhl 88)

This idea plays into the social norm that a woman can either be pretty or funny and that the only reason they can be funny is if they were compensating for their looks. This particular line is spoken by a woman, which helps support the feminist framework of women themselves often having sexist viewpoints. This is reminiscent of a 2009 study undertaken by Emily Glassberg

Sands in the US that revealed not only systemic discrimination against women playwrights in that country, but that this discrimination was driven primarily by *female* literary and artistic directors (Cohen). Also, this dialogue from Laurie implies that the actor who plays “SHE” should be pretty. Where "pretty" is an entirely subjective descriptor, being intentional around casting for this role has the potential to subvert conventional understandings of this “type.”

Since “SHE” is a woman, there are many quotes that emphasize this fact and critique it. The mistreatment of “SHE” is subtle but can be found in many scenes in the play. This all comes to a head in the scene where she acts as “SHE AS WHORE,” but there are some underpinnings of this treatment throughout. The text naming the characters by their pronouns reinforces gender binaries in the field in a purposeful way. Naming the characters “SHE” and “HE” assigns them genders immediately and strips them of a unique title. Examples of this are particularly jarring in scenes like the audition scene at the beginning of the play. “SHE” while acting as Ada is given this text and these stage directions, “God, I love you. I love you I love you I love you. *They kiss… She kisses him again… She kisses him again… She kisses him again.”* (Ruhl 13) This speaks to the casualty of how intimacy is and was handled in theatre. An emerging professional standard includes rehearsals including intimacy coordinators who reinforce professional practices in physical romantic contact and proper consent. In this show, the act of the stage kiss is something presumed to be comfortable with “SHE” at the very start of the audition with no preparation. This could be a product of theatre practices in 2014 when the play was written, or Ruhl is purposefully trying to show how absurd auditions can feel.

When “SHE” is asked to play the role of “WHORE,” she reaches a breaking point when realizing that she doesn’t have agency over herself on the stage or in real life. When the director is pitching his new show to the actors he explains:

> Oh, there's a meaty role for the man, but the woman's role is- smaller and- well- she's a whore- an aging whore- she wants to leave the business and become an ophthalmologist- how comfortable are you with nudity on stage? (Ruhl 107)

This line reflects Ruhl's awareness of the industry norms and the ways in which men are put at the front and center at really any age. Men are given more opportunities to act professionally than women, which continues at an older age. In 2018, statistics from the Broadway production resource ProductionPro revealed that women "accounted for just 37 percent of the 233 principal roles" (Geier) in the new shows from that production season. In a situation where a working actor can get paid for being nude on stage, or not get cast and not get paid, there is a difficult line to be drawn in regard to consent. "SHE" seems uneasy about the prospect of playing a whore, even getting out of character during the audition saying "SHE AS WHORE: Oh! No!... wait, don't stop, I like it… (*Not acting, whispering to him*) I can't do this. HE: We need the money" (Ruhl 110). Here is a glimmer of the toxicity that "HE" has over "SHE"; "HE" prioritizes money over her comfort. There is a sense of autonomy over one's own body that can be pushed to its limits under the wrong circumstances in the theater. "SHE" begins to question how far she is willing to go to maintain her career in the theatre. "SHE AS WHORE" is experiencing a compromise with her body as well as the actor who plays "SHE." Near the end of the play, "SHE" attempts to advocate for herself:

> SHE: Also, can we choreograph the kiss, because it's a little rough, and I think I'm bleeding because he bit my upper lip.
>
> DIRECTOR: Do the two of you want to work it out on your own on the dinner break?
>
> SHE: No, I'd prefer it if the director directed it. (Ruhl 122)

In these scenes, “SHE” realizes her vulnerability around all of these men, and it scares her. While the director, Kevin, and “HE” all try to help her with the fight choreography, it becomes a moment of three men taking turns violently shaking her, it’s overwhelming and claustrophobic and she gets hurt. This represents how violent and all consuming men, specifically men in power, can feel as a woman and how she has to get out from under them and prove that they can’t control her. This is why it’s so beautiful when, during an actual performance, “SHE” just stops saying her lines and stares out into the audience. She effectively embarrasses “HE”, Kevin, and the director all at one time and feels good about it. The “SHE AS WHORE” section of the play is an example of how men in power can limit women, their worth, and their roles.

*Stage Kiss* is a refreshing contemporary glance at theatre and how women are impacted by the constraints and norms that have been and still are a part of the field. The fourth-wall breaking elements of the play allow “SHE” to participate in many different roles, ranging in depth. The character descriptions and pronoun-based names create a vagueness that implies that anyone could see themselves in the position of “SHE” or “HE”. The people in power, most likely men, are the people who determine the roles women get to play. The men who are directors, artistic directors, and producers have historically prioritized youth and beauty when making casting decisions. Ruhl’s creative project here is to critique the roles available for women in the American theatre while at the same time giving a middle-aged actor an opportunity to be complicated, messy, and inspiring.

**"Cuteness is Death" in *Dance Nation* by Clare Barron**

*Dance Nation* by Clare Barron had its world premiere at Playwrights Horizons in 2018. The play casts actors of all ages to play pre-teen characters, putting women's bodies, sexuality, and inner rage at the forefront. J. Ellen Gainor, a feminist theatre scholar, writes that "Barron wants to represent adolescence more authentically, not with a prescribed body type but rather through affect and memory" (178). The essence of these characters lies in their personalities rather than their physical attributes. The story tracks Amina, Zuzu, Connie, Luke, Maeve, Sofia, and Ashlee, seven members of a competitive dance team on their road to nationals in Tampa Bay, Florida. Their coach and parents are constant observers that often unknowingly create stressful situations. In an interview with the New York Times in 2018, Barron who grew up with a dance background, reflected on her time in ballet:

> There was really brutal stuff about your body and weight and whether or not you had a ballet body. There was this sense of people's bodies changing in a way that hurt their dance prospects, which is just a terrible toxic mentality. (Burke)

As a dancer herself, Barron has experienced the toxicity of dance culture and seeks to acknowledge and call out these practices as a part of her creative project through her work in *Dance Nation*.

*Dance Nation* by Clare Barron radically pushes against type, by creating a juxtaposition between youth and womanhood by casting actors of all ages to play pre-teen girls. This distinct way of casting helps to emphasize adolescent experiences and questions about women's bodies, including Sofia getting her first period, masturbation tips, and discussions about losing their virginities. Throughout *Dance Nation,* these girls acknowledge the stress of casting, puberty, sexuality, and beauty standards in scenes including an audition and discussions of reaching

perfection. Although the play grapples with countless issues within the realm of women's issues, *Dance Nation* puts the drama and awkwardness of being a pre-teen on full display.

The casting notes written by Clare Barron are a large part of how *Dance Nation* subverts standard casting practices. All of the characters are between 11 and 14 years old, but Barron insists that the actors should be cast at any age, writing that "there is no need for any of the actors to resemble teenagers. (In fact, please *resist* this impulse!)" (Barron 9). This diversity in age allows the audience to be "palpably aware of the actors' real ages and their distance from this moment in their lives" (Barron 9). Adding this layer to casting lets the audience experience an entirely different viewpoint, mainly seeing the distance these adults physically and emotionally have from their pre-teen selves. All of the characters are meant to be played by actors ranging in age from 12 to 75+. It's also not required that the actors have any dance experience or skills, even though the show has many dance numbers, in fact Barron writes that it's "*<u>better</u> if the actors possess no real dance talent"* (Barron 10). Feminist scholar Kim Solga suggests*:*

> The [male] gaze may be focused through individual viewers' eyes, but it derives from those viewers' unconscious commitment to shared cultural and social expectations about how men and women *should* each appear, act and speak, both on stage and in the world in a given place and time. (19)

Solga's point about "should" is important as it stresses the way "type" is rooted in patriarchal constructs developed from the male gaze. Barron's aesthetic point here is that audiences might be shocked to see bodies run on stage that aren't influenced by the male gaze, ie. women that are often sexualized for the benefit of men. It's important to note here that Clare Barron's writing was influenced by the reality TV show, *Dance Moms*, which featured a team of young dancers

and their highly demanding coach. In an interview with the New York Times in 2018 Barron noted:

> I'm a huge fan of "Dance Moms". That was the reason I started writing this play… that's where I got the sense of that whole world: the type of dances they do, the lingo, the ferocity of wanting to win and the despair of not being the best and being in competition with your friends. (Burke)

This ferocity and competition is what made *Dance Moms* such a hit, even though the drama was most likely manufactured behind the scenes. Reality television is controlled by the producers and people in charge in the network, leading the male gaze to be heavily present in each episode, from what costumes the girls wore to their breakdowns. This kind of media is what shapes the public's opinions of dance, so when audiences sit to watch *Dance Nation* the social expectation of what a little girl should look like is immediately being broken. This break in a shared cultural norm allows Barron to include more adult subject matter within the script. Material including the actors undressing on stage, masturbating, or discussing sexuality in youths is still controversial, but is possible because of these specific casting practices. Barron concludes her one page casting note with the sentence, "cuteness is death. Pagan feral-ness and ferocity are key" (Barron 9). This is another sentiment from Barron that leaves beauty and body type entirely out of the equation. The focus isn't on the beauty or "cuteness" of the characters, the emphasis is on the strength and power from the performances, no matter what they look like or how old they are. This format of this casting note is lengthy and unusual for a play, although audiences aren't seeing it, the production teams and casts will understand the importance of the kind of casting Barron wants for her show.

Tokenism with respect to race and ethnicity is a problem in the field of the American theatre with which *Dance Nation* is also in conversation. In this play, the problematic aspects of type are addressed through an in-play audition for the role of Gandhi. In an effort to create a winning dance routine, Dance Teacher Pat tells the girls:

> You'll all be playing Citizens of the World. And one of you will play the role of Gandhi.
>
> *They all look at CONNIE - the only Indian-American student in the class.* (Barron 17)

In this instance we see Connie being singled out and tokenized because of her ethnicity. It seems clear that Connie, the only Indian American student, should play Gandhi, but the girls blindly push that fact aside as they become fierce competitors in the fight for the role. Returning to Barron's inspiration from *Dance Moms,* there were a few episodes where the ALDC team encountered similar situations. In one episode[7], their coach had all the girls audition for a solo to play Rosa Parks, when only one girl on the team was Black. This episode helps to see that context that if Dance Teacher Pat chooses another girl to play Gandhi, the dance and role would become cultural appropriation[8]. Connie is concerned about the competitive reaction from her teammates and says:

> CONNIE: I think it's weird if Amina's Gandhi. I think you don't really fit.
>
> SOFIA: I think anyone can play Gandhi because Gandhi was about loving and accepting all people. (Barron 28)

When Sofia argues that anyone should be able to play Gandhi, she is touching on a completely different controversy of actors sometimes being cast to play a race different than their own, often

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[7] See *Dance Moms* Season 3, Episode 12 "The Apple of Her Eye" https://youtu.be/umL5Ps9fR1k

[8] "Cultural Appropriation" - A term used to describe the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095652789;jsessionid=ABD1622E8E1DF9D54BB1869BAE5E6953

called "whitewashing."[9] Having anyone play Gandhi is effectively taking an opportunity for representation away from Connie. Making decisions like this has a bigger impact. When the people with the power and authority to make decisions on who plays which roles and why do not include advocates for diverse representation, problematic images are crafted. In *Dance Nation*, Dance Teacher Pat and the girls on the team are not actively advocating for representation in this scenario. In the broader field, attention towards race and ethnicity in the casting process reveals the more difficult side of casting and how mis-casting can have a large impact on the integrity of the respective play.

Barron seeks to normalize and empower women's bodies and frank talk of women's sexuality. From the start of the play there is an emphasis on bodies in stage directions like the following, "*thirty little bodies dressed like sailors are tap dancing… Thirty little bodies run in all directions*" and "*a tiny dancer dashes back across the stage"* (Barron 10). There is a notable contrast between Barron's casting notes and these physical traits. The purpose of using this language in stage directions is not for the audience to see, but for the directors and actors. The use of "tiny" and "little" are reminders of the age of the characters, distant from the actors playing them. The focus on bodies continues as the stage directions illustrate:

> *The dressing room post auditions. THE GIRLS are changing into their street clothes. They get completely, uninhibitedly butt-ass naked in front of each other as they talk. LUKE is separated from them by a little curtain.* (Barron 23)

This act of undressing isn't the focus of this scene, as the bubbly conversation continues throughout, the nudity of the women is desexualized. In an interview with Playwrights Horizons in 2018, Barron said this scene "really grounds the play in the sense that this really is a play

[9] "Whitewashing" - a casting practice in the film industry in which white actors are cast in non-white roles. See https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20151006-when-white-actors-play-other-races for more information.

about women. It's not a play about little girls" (Sanford). The brief scene is a moment of celebration of women's bodies. J. Ellen Gainor elaborates in her article that:

> nudity…performed uninhibitedly, clearly reflects Barron's desire to capture the physical openness, interpersonal frankness, and inherent power of this adolescent dressing-room habitus. (179)

Jill Dolan comments on the use of female nudity in the book *The Feminist Spectator*. In reference to a popular avant-garde artist:

> To achieve his (Foreman's) aim of equalizing all the objects in the performance space, the seduction of the naked woman must be resisted. She must become an object no more important or interesting than the others. (50)

This equalization of performers in the space allows there to be a comfortability in the actions. Their bodies aren't interesting or important because the girls are focusing on bigger problems, like fighting for a solo or winning nationals.

*Dance Nation* by Clare Barron is a celebration of women and women's bodies. Barron's casting method of casting all ages of actors to play preteens is essential for her aesthetic approach of showing the contrast between childhood and adulthood. Her casting notes emphasize that "cuteness is death", that the true key to performing this show is to show the power and ferocity of young women. Her experience as a young dancer, specifically a ballerina, was drawn from in order to critique the toxic beauty and body standards within that field. An example of tokenism in regard to race and ethnicity is included within the plot, as it used to be, and still can be a common occurrence in dance and performance. *Dance Nation* normalizes talking about women's bodies, puberty, and sexuality which helps show the tight bond between the young

dancers. Clare Barron redefines what it can mean to be a female actor in the American theatre, by creating characters that are deeply powerful and flawed.

**"Pretty Privilege" in *If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must be a Muhfucka* by Tori Sampson**

*If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must be a Muhfucka*[10] by Tori Sampson had its world premiere at Playwrights Horizons in 2019. Written by a Black, Female playwright and featuring an entirely Black cast, *If Pretty Hurts* reimagines a popular West African folktale in the world of contemporary pop culture. It uses multiple storylines, magical realism, monologues in direct address to the audience, the social structure of a fictional society, experiences with friends and family, and romantic relationships to create a platform to critique and (re)define modern beauty standards. In Sampon's words, "beauty makes and breaks folks. To whom much is given, much is required and to whom little is given, much is desired" (Harris). Sampson is aware of the impact of "beauty" and explores its consequences throughout *If Pretty Hurts*.

Set in the present in the fictional village of Affreakah-Amirrorikah, *If Pretty Hurts* centers on four seventeen-year-old girls, Akim, Massassi, Adama, and Kaya. Their parents, friends, and acquaintances from school, all serve as examples throughout the play of the ways in which society reinforces certain standards of beauty. In an interview for Playwrights Horizons in 2018, Tori Sampson explained:

> There is POWER in beautiful. There is wealth and opportunity in being beautiful. No wonder so many desire it. Dream about it. Work tirelessly to attain it. Beauty opens doors and well… ugly closes them.

If beauty opens doors professionally in theatre by "beautiful" actors being more frequently cast, then being "ugly" leads to less professional success. Directors, casting directors, and producers - those theatre professionals who often hold the most power in a space - get to determine who is "beautiful." Playwrights, by demanding more intentionally diverse and subversive casting

[10] Henceforth in this document *If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must be a Muhfucka* will be abbreviated as *If Pretty Hurts.*

practices can intervene in this. Sampon's intentionality with her casting requirements ensures that she is creating representation within any companies that want to produce her work.

In *If Pretty Hurts,* Sampson confronts problematic beauty standards from the jump. Her casting notes engage with beauty and power by what her character descriptions suggest about the casting demands, and then challenge them. Before the play even begins, these descriptions offer essential understanding of the central messages of the play:

AKIM- Beautiful girl. Seventeen years life.

MASSASSI- Beautiful girl. Seventeen years life.

ADAMA- Beautiful girl. Seventeen years life.

KAYA- Beautiful girl. Seventeen years life." (Sampson)

From the prefatory pages we understand this play will be about beauty. However, Sampson's additional notes complicate what "beauty" might mean. The "NOTES ON CASTING" section instructs directors to:

Grant audiences the gift of basking in beauty beyond Eurocentric measurements.

Akim should not have a lighter skin tone than Massassi. Nobody needs to be tall, skinny, have straight teeth, clear skin, long hair, etc. BE beauty in all your glory. (Sampson)

The physical casting of the actors does not rely on social beauty standards. Sampson tells the people in power over the show's aesthetic that beauty can be defined quite broadly, offering even more explicit instruction around avoiding colorism[11] in casting for the most "beautiful" character in the play - Akim.

While this piece offers broad general commentary and critique on understandings of gender and beauty, *If Pretty Hurts* specifically centers the experience of Black Women growing

[11] "Colorism", the idea that light-skinned minorities are given more privilege than their darker-skinned peers. See https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/colorism-reveals-many-shades-prejudice-hollywood-n959756

up with Eurocentric standards of beauty, in which "whiteness" and beauty standards centering that trait are the norm. This is a feminist play advocating for women's rights, specifically Black Women's rights, which historically hasn't been the case. Sue Ellen Case writes a chapter in *Feminism and Theatre* titled "Women of Colour and Theatre" and discusses how "women of colour have described the feminist movement as primarily an upper-middle-class white women's movement" (97). This movement of feminism has often left out and excluded Black Women and Women of Color in activism in the American theatre. In *If Pretty Hurts,* Sampson highlights and celebrates Blackness and that beauty, often still underrepresented on the American stage. In the American Performers Action Coalition's (AAPAC) 2018-2019 visibility report, they reported that Broadway upholds a strong bias towards hiring white actors, writers, and directors over BIPOC artists. The people who are choosing which stories to tell on stage, broadway producers and general managers, are almost 100% white. In Tori Sampson's words, "as far as moving the pretty culture forward, my hope is that we expand our ideals of beauty. Stop depending on Eurocentric metrics to measure others" (Harris). Making room on stage for POC artists is urgently needed to critique "whiteness" as the beauty standard. Sampson's casting requirements ensure a certain amount of representation if her work is being produced.

Pushing back against any assumption that patriarchal and colonialist beauty standards are harmless, in a 2018 interview with Playwrights Horizons Sampson explained, "beauty is a social construct and the definition is in constant flux but - just like race and gender- its implications are very, very real". The characters in this play reinforce that there is a negative impact to being underrepresented in the world around you, these acts are in full display in *If Pretty Hurts*: the plot to murder Akim, the objectification of Massassi, and her brutal death, all harm that was instigated by internalizing beauty standards. The mother character, Ma, explains that she too has

internalized these standards and passed them on saying to Akim, “there is more to life than pleasing features, I know. More to your being than what meets the eye. But the exterior is where it begins. Learn that…” to which the Chorus replies, “because as most do, Ma sees the world the way the world sees her” (Sampson 34). This emphasis on the value of physical perfection is a cycle that spans generations, as shown with Akim and her mother, which will not be broken unless someone intervenes. Sampson is the one to intervene in problematic casting practices with this play’s casting notes to interrupt the cycle. Beauty standards are generational and go hand in hand with how actors have been cast throughout the years which contributes to the perpetuation of type.

Sampson’s fourth-wall breaking monologues are necessary departures from the story to address the internal reasons why there is so much jealousy directed at Akim. The monologues forecast later events in the play. Each one has a really strong theme. The Chorus, a constant presence on stage, serves as a connection between the audience and the actors, shining spotlights on each girl as they discuss their insecurities. Akim, the most perfect girl in the village, is the first to speak saying that:

> Carrying beauty is a daunting thing. Not just pretty or precious, but REALLY beautiful beauty. An image so distinct that it outranks all other examples… Beauty is neither your accomplishment nor your failure. (Sampson 2)

Akim’s point here is to convey the pressures of being considered “beautiful.” She describes in a monologue that she wishes she was ugly because there is so much pressure on her to stay perfect, causing her parents to be overprotective - her beauty is a source of frustration. In 2019, BOMB magazine wrote that “Tori’s piece complicates matters by acknowledging ‘pretty privilege’ and considering the ways we digest and perpetuate our own culture’s beauty expectations” (Harris).

Akim has pretty privilege and she's given more opportunities than the other girls. Akim's Ma and Dad are terrified that she will hurt herself or do something that fractures her beauty. Something as simple as her walking to the store is a threat to her. In actuality, her biggest threats end up being her friends because they envy the pretty privileges that Akim has.

In the world of Sampson's play, Massassi is the main instigator of the conflict between Akim and the girls. Growing up those around her would sexualize her body calling her, "thick. *Southern thick," "*much junk in the trunk," and "body" (Sampson 7). A younger Massassi hated that kind of attention. Someone like Akim fuels Massassi's jealousy because their society compares them to each other and decides Akim is the more beautiful one. This jealousy is fueled by the fact that Massasi's promised husband, Kasim, has feelings for Akim. Even when Kasim spends time with her, the connection is purely physical:

> KASIM: I compliment you all the time.
>
> MASSASSI: No. You grab my ass (*MASSASSI points to her breasts*) and tell THEM nice things.
>
> KASIM: They deserve it! Oh, and you make sure everyone knows just how much. Flaunting all that body in every direction. (Sampson 60)

Massassi wants to be loved, like Akim, not objectified and accused of "flaunting" her body. In this moment, Massassi's childhood fears continue into adulthood as she continues to be sexualized because of her body. This fear and anger is what fuels her motivation to get rid of Akim.

Kaya, Massassi's confident right-hand man, explains that "if circumstances had been altered it'd be *my* story you'd witness on this fine day," and says she's "not ugly but I'm not beautiful in the traditional sense- *Whatever that's supposed to mean"* (Sampson 18). Kaya is

brilliant, but that's not the first thing people notice about her. Kaya cannot continue to be compared to perfection, so she feels like getting rid of the source of that comparison, Akim, is necessary.

Adama's empathy for others leads to her initial death. A somewhat unwilling participant in the plot, she begins to speak:

> First Mistake? Opening my mouth and saying, 'Hello, my name is Adama. Nice to meet you.'... My interior is in constant conflict with my exterior. My body says something to the world that I don't agree with. It's like… How can I explain this? It's like people see me and they assume I carry things. Trauma. Pain. Distrust. Baggage. Anger. *That's not in me*. (Sampson 24)

The character is describing her feelings about the pressure to "stand for something" (25). She communicates that it feels overwhelming. She's talking to the audience. Where she would feel intimidated to say something so honest to her friends, she shares her feelings with strangers. However, if the audience represents a sample of society, she is also confronting them and the pressure they put on her to perform her "trauma, pain, distrust, and baggage." While the other girls are speaking about physical traits, Adama breaks that pattern and talks about a different kind of social insecurity.

The plot to kill Akim is triggered by a series of events where each girl felt unnoticed or undesirable. The monologues serve as a way to address the beauty, ugliness, objectification, intelligence, and revolution of young Black Women. These moments that depart from the story help clarify the character's motivations and provide insight into their decision-making throughout the story.

Men's opinions about women's bodies, and their objectification of women, are catalysts for the tragedies in this play. Akim's bodily autonomy and freedom are jeopardized by her overprotective parents who are behaving in this way because of society's disproportionate emphasis on "perfection" being maintained. Akim's dad values her so much that he tries to throw his wife into the river as a sacrifice to get her back saying:

> DAD: JuJu, you will not keep her! If it is more that you want, I will give you all that I possess. (*DAD grabs MA by the waist and hoists her over the river*)
>
> MA: Unhand me! My own action would have me touch the waters for my daughter. That is no verdict of yours. (Sampson 78)

Ma has consistently been agreeing with Akim's father in every decision they've made, and in this moment she realizes that it's not enough. Ma would have gladly sacrificed herself for her child, but she will not allow that decision to be forced on her by a man. Akim's dad sees Ma as less valuable than his daughter in part because Ma's beauty is fading as she grows old.

Akim's dad, Father Chagu, holding onto Akim's perfection is what leads to the trial of Massassi and Kaya. In this final act of the play, Father Chagu and the Chief hold all the power to decide the fates of the girls. Adama yells at him, "with due respect, Father Chagu, it was you who brought upon all this separation. It was you who used us to exemplify her attributes" (Sampson 82). This society and the men in charge brought about the jealousy and rage that fueled the girls' actions.

This social structure values the beauty and objectification of women which is written about in previous research. Most importantly Laura Mulvey's description of the "male gaze", or the portrayal of women as sexual objects to heterosexual male viewers. Jill Dolan, an American author, educator, and feminist theorist, writes:

> Performance usually addresses the male spectator as an active subject, and encourages him to identify with the male hero in the narrative. The same representations tend to objectify women performers and female spectators as passive, invisible, unspoken subjects. (*Spectator as Critic*, 1-2)

In *If Pretty Hurts,* Here, Tori Samson rejects this norm and makes her female characters the heroes and even anti-heroes. Massassi is a character who lacks morality in her decisions, making her appear to be the villain, while Akim is a hero. These characters are being manipulated by the world around them and how people are judged is life or death in this town. When Massassi decides to walk into the fiery pit and kill herself, she is making a stand against the entire town saying:

> For what is this construct we live in if there are no measurements? No comparisons? You NEED us to live - bitterly miserable, constantly loathing, meticulously dissecting - so that you can EXIST in all your GLORY. (Sampson 84)

Massassi takes drastic measures to disrupt the constant comparisons and measurements. She thinks this last act will make the people of Affreakah-Amirrorikah realize their society is built on beauty standards that cannot continue.

In the end, Father Chagu and the Chief are partially responsible for the "deaths" of Akim and Adama and Massassi's suicide. The girls of the town felt like they lacked bodily autonomy and that people would only value them for their physical attributes.

In theatre, the meaning of the word "beautiful" is most often determined by those in power, the directors, casting directors, and producers. Playwrights are deciding to intervene in these practices. Tori Sampon's *If Pretty Hurts,* redefines modern beauty standards through intentional casting and commentary. Her casting notes specifically addresses colorism in casting

and suggests that beauty can take many different forms. Just because Akim is described as perfect in the play, casting an actor against this type, as someone with imperfections, is accepted, encouraged, and reinforces what the thesis of Sampson's work is. The structure of the play, direct-address monologues and magical realism, all heighten the stakes and internal motivations for the characters. The men of the play are not perfect people and often reinforce negative feelings towards female bodies. This message resonated with audiences as well, when Sampson was asked in an interview with BOMB magazine what responses have been the most surprising, she said:

> I'm always surprised by the men after a show who want to discuss their role in the toxic culture of women's beauty! They're watching this play and are affected by the authenticity. I think they see their mothers, sisters, aunts, and partners in the characters and it weighs heavy on some minds. I didn't expect that. What a blessing! (Harris)

Sampson's project on beauty in this play parallels well to the real world where young girls are constantly crushed under the pressure of ever-changing beauty standards. The National Organization for Women reports that at age thirteen 53% of American girls are "unhappy with their bodies." This grows to 78% by the time those girls reach seventeen. This is evidence that this topic needs to be addressed and Sampson writes about body insecurity in a very cathartic way. *If Pretty Hurts* rethinks beauty, acknowledges pretty privilege, and insists that there be change in the field in regard to casting practices.

**Playwrights Righting Wrongs**

I hope this research will contribute to more humane casting practices, awareness around new opportunities for actors, and to draw attention to leading and emerging voices in the field whose work strives for change. By analyzing these plays and playwrights I explored the questions: In what ways can type be subverted? How are playwrights interacting with and pushing against the culture of typecasting? What is the impact on the field?

Decreasing subjective language like "pretty" in casting details allows directors to consider a larger scope of people who audition. A recent article from *Howlround* suggests that "one easy way leaders can begin this change is to remove qualifiers on attractiveness in their casting calls" with words such as "beautiful" and "attractive" because "including these qualifiers in casting calls reveals implicit fatphobia, and removing them opens the space to women who might otherwise be discouraged from auditioning" (Anderson). We can expand this logic to anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-ableist initiatives working towards more equitable casting practices.

Critiques of casting practices are being heard and it's noticeably female playwrights who are coming forward with scripts that challenge these social norms. In each of the case studies here, *Stage Kiss* by Sarah Ruhl, *Dance Nation* by Clare Barron, and *If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must be a Muhfucka* by Tori Sampson, type is explored and subverted in a unique way. Where aging women are given less opportunities in the field, Sarah Ruhl writes a play starring a middle-aged woman and creates commentary on limited roles for mature women in the industry. Where people are too scared to discuss women's bodies, Clare Barron writes a wildly fun play about growing up, sex, and what might be considered messy aspects of womanhood, but powerfully normalizes them. Where stories written by and featuring Black men and women aren't given enough attention in professional theatre spaces, Tori Sampson creates a vibrant, hilarious,

music-filled comedy which radically recenters the audience's gaze on young Black women and their own opinions on beauty itself. What each of these plays have in common is that their casting notes are beautifully detailed. Each playwright makes it clear that casting someone is about seeing much more than their beauty, age, or gender. There are other similarities that connect each play to another, including each play's dedication to breaking the fourth wall between the actors and the audience. *Stage Kiss* stages a play within a play, while *Dance Nation* and *If Pretty Hurts* have their characters directly address the audience in the form of a monologue. This is no coincidence, as this act of breaking the fourth wall connects the actor to the audience to deliver some message, Ruhl, Barron, and Sampson are all making commentary on beauty, body, and gender standards. All three shows also incorporate music, including song and dance, within the text. Each of the plays made their premieres at Playwrights Horizons, a non-profit off-Broadway theater with a mission statement that:

> We believe that playwrights are the great storytellers of our time, offering essential contributions to civic discourse and illuminating life's greatest paradoxes. And we believe in the singularity of a writer's voice, valuing the broad, eclectic spectrum and diversity of American writers.

Playwrights Horizons is committed to producing diverse writers who tackle civic discourse and paradoxes, which explains why they produced plays like *Stage Kiss, Dance Nation,* and *If Pretty Hurts.*

This thesis explores the theoretical framework of casting in modern American theatre, including the treatment of actors and playwrights in the field. As someone who is learning to direct and cast actors, it is integral for me to educate myself about the potential harms of the field and hopefully contribute to a better environment.

This thesis is significant because it centers on highly modern plays. This modernity allows me to contribute new commentary to the field by asking why these playwrights are addressing these issues now. In the era of the #MeToo movement and the overturning of Roe v. Wade, our so-called "post-feminist" world seems unreal. We are in a precarious position in history and change is called for. Theatre is a powerful medium to express grievances, passion, and anger. I have seen a pattern of female playwrights in the past ten years publishing highly relevant discourse on modern issues, like reproductive rights and the patriarchal choices about women's bodies. As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, Arena Stage recently presented "My Body No Choice" which features monologues from eight prominent female playwrights, including Sarah Ruhl, about women's bodily autonomy. By highlighting these three plays at this moment in history, I am showing the impact of typecasting on representation, the impact of representation on narrative, and ultimately the impact of narrative on policy.

The issue of typecasting in the theatre based on physical appearance is a tired and unnecessary social norm. It can affect anyone, but especially children growing up within this toxic culture. It needs to be said that typecasting is also used to tokenize marginalized groups. I am approaching this issue as a straight, cisgender, white, able-bodied woman, and I acknowledge that other voices on this specific topic need to be highlighted. I aim to do this by using text and commentary from prominent BIPOC and queer scholars and playwrights and refer to them on how typecasting can affect communities in this way. This thesis hopes to acknowledge the faults of the social construct of "type," bring attention to it, and contribute to the conversation.

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