CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS IN HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL THEATER SHOW SELECTION

by

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ABSTRACT

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Many high schools present musical theater productions annually. In some cases, high school students present material that could be considered controversial or uncomfortable for performers, their directors, or audiences. The purpose of this study was to examine content issues of musicals that high school theater directors must consider when selecting a show for high school performance. Topics analyzed included: sexualization of characters and sexism, references to sexual activities including kissing and simulation of sexual acts; profanity, racially-defined Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) roles, racism, LGBTQ characters, gun violence, the use of alcohol and drugs, domestic violence, direct religious messaging or plots with religious connections, potentially controversial political elements, and elements of physical and mental health.

This research used a mixed-methods approach where a survey, of mostly quantitative questions with some opportunities for qualitative responses, was given to 27 high school musical theater directors. Interviews were also conducted with three musical theater directors in various sized communities, with varying years of experience. Survey data revealed that audiences rarely reacted negatively to a show that was presented with mature content. Data analysis produced the following emergent themes, (1) Director comfort in working with the material and with students; (2) Interactions with administration; (3) Student comfort and safety; (4) Educating students about potentially controversial topics; and (5) Being aware of community comfort, morals, and values.

This study provided some insights into the thoughts and comfort-levels of directors, their students, and their communities regarding a range of potentially controversial content considerations. Directors' perspectives provided models for handling many of the topics listed. This research may help directors determine what is too mature for them, their students, or their community. This will hopefully lead to more students, directors, and audiences enjoying high school musical theater both on stage, behind the scenes, and in the audience.

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DEDICATION

To my wife Jessica–thank you for listening when I needed to process ideas, thank you for reading when I needed edits, and thank you for caring for our family and home when I needed time. I love you!

To our son, Angus–I hope you will enjoy musical theater as much as your parents.

To my sister, Cheryl–thank you for showing me how to love learning in my younger years.

To my parents–thank you for unending support, and for introducing me to the many facets of musical theater.

To those I've directed at Columbus High School (the casts of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Grease*, and *The Drowsy Chaperone*), Beaver Dam High School (the casts of *Grease, The Sound of Music*, *Mamma Mia*, *Songs for a New World*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *All Shook Up*), and Beaver Dam Area Community Theatre (the casts of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Footloose*, *Newsies*, *Working*, *Big Fish*, *Mean Girls*, and *Anastasia*)–you have taught me how to direct and love musical theater. We have all helped tell some wonderful stories throughout the years, many of which will be referenced directly or indirectly in the following pages.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A Hypothetical Scenario

It was around 5:00 P.M. on a Sunday afternoon, the second weekend in November. I grabbed the drill to start disassembling the set from the fall musical. After another successful show, my mind wandered to what shows I could select for next year's musical; the seniors would have moved on, and a new batch of freshmen would arrive. I saw some leadership begin to emerge this year from some of the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. I would need to account for the number of male- and female-identifying students likely to audition and the strengths they bring. I would need to limit the dance requirements for next year since the last wave of strong dancers will have graduated. In a conversation with the orchestra director, they mentioned that a bigger pit orchestra would be nice next year to give more instrumentalists an opportunity to be part of the show. The costume designer does not want to sew 15 dresses again next year. Since we did something modern this year, we should consider something a bit older; expose students to a "classic."

This type of thought process is common for high school musical theater directors. To adequately prepare for production choices, thoughts about the next show can start as much as a year or more before the next opening night. As a director considers personnel and design elements for a show, they must also consider what would be comfortable and appropriate to portray on stage. Musical theater scripts are full of controversial material which, depending on the comfort level of the director, students, and community, may or may not be appropriate for the high school stage.

A Personal Account

In the Spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down professional and amateur theaters across the country. Many schools had to cancel their spring musicals, community theaters tabled their summer shows, and many high school directors looked warily at the fall

ahead, while Broadway remained closed for over a year (Durkee, 2021). To keep performances alive, theater licensing companies started securing permission from authors, composers, and estates to allow internet streaming productions, an unheard-of concept at the time (Culwell-Block, 2020). This included Music Theatre International, one of the major licensing companies for musicals, which began offering streaming licenses for some of their productions in May, 2020 in collaboration with the ticketing website ShowTix4U (Music Theatre International, 2020). This opened a world of new possibilities for directors.

During the pandemic, I began looking for shows that were segmented into individual scenes, rather than a traditional show with a continuous plot. A scene-based production allowed for small group rehearsal and the social distancing mandated by the pandemic. For the summer of 2021, my production team and I chose *Working* by Stephen Schwartz. The show was scene-based and available for licensing. It is based on a book by Studs Terkel, which contains interviews with American workers from Chicago (Music Theatre International, n.d.).

With the show selected, the summer production team started to analyze the script and determine how we wanted to present these "interviews" based on the ongoing production limitations. This analysis led to some tough choices for the production team. One of the characters, Conrad, tells the audience about how he makes excitement in his day by scaring people (Carnelia et al., 2010). He states:

> If you see a nice little honey laying out there in her backyard in a two-piece bathing suit, she'll be laying there on her stomach with her top strap undone – if you go there and you scare her good enough, she'll jump up! (p. 26)

As a team, we needed to decide if we were comfortable having a male high school student portray this character who engages in this type of sexual harassment, exemplified by his attempt to trick a woman into exposing herself to him. This concern became amplified considering that we are living in the age of the "Me Too" movement, a period where sexual assault and harassment allegations were more visible and being taken more seriously. Accused and

convicted perpetrators included high profile people like the convicted film producer, Harvey Weinstein (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2021).

One page later in the script, Roberta enters the show and tells us about her profession, prostitution:

> I was 15, I was sitting in this coffee shop when a friend came by and said: 'Yo, hurry up – I got a cab waiting, you can make five hundred dollars in 20 minutes.' We went up to this penthouse. The guy up there was quite . . . well-known. He wanted to watch two women do it, and then he wanted to have sex with me. It was barely sex. He was almost finished by the time we started. It was a tremendous kick. I mean, there I was, doing nothing, feeling nothing, and in 20 minutes I was gonna walk out of there with five hundred dollars in my pocket. Just out of curiosity, how many people you know make five hundred dollars for 20 minutes work? And I was still in high school. (Carnelia et al., 2010, p. 27)

The reality of this young character's circumstance cannot be overlooked, however, bringing it to life on stage pushes an audience to accept the uncouth behaviors more often kept out of the public eye. While few laws are on the books at the federal level regarding prostitution in the United States of America, most states have penalties for both the prostitute and the customer determining that both people are considered at fault (ProCon.org, 2018). These penalties range from 10 days in jail and a $50 fine to a year in jail and $10,000 for first offenses (ProCon.org, 2018). In the case of this character who is underage, the law would place a higher blame on the customer but might also put the young woman in protective care. The show presents an illegal profession with moral undertones, which, in this case, would require a high school student to step into the role. Separating the character from the performer could prove difficult for some audience members and the student actress as well.

Furthermore, the social and emotional risks for the performer needed to be considered. Chapman (2000) cited an example of her discomfort at a production of *Damn Yankees*, where a high school girl dressed in a costume that "revealed her voluptuous figure," moved provocatively and sang about "promising sexual pleasures" to those who gave her what she wanted (p. 124). In some self-questioning, Chapman believed that these young performers should be able to express themselves as sexual beings, "with the ability, experience, and maturity to understand those

experiences" (pg. 124). Conversely, Chapman also brought up concerns about women being praised for taking on these roles. She described situations where underage women impersonated adult women which forced them to abandon their childhood selves for the sake of portraying a character. She also described this process as "an opportunity for young female performers to gain knowledge—positive and negative—about their gender identities" by stepping into these roles (p. 130).

Considering the legal issues of what was being presented, as well as our concern for the mental well-being of performers, the production team decided to ask only the female seniors who would turn 18 before the performances if they would be interested and comfortable portraying this role. We were fortunate to have options, and decided to cast the role with someone who expressed that she was fully aware of what was being asked and old enough to consent to the content. The team and I decided to keep the lines as written.

Late in the show, the character of a firefighter called Tom shares a story about a time when he was a police officer. He references a run in with a "big Black guy." Tom had drawn his firearm because he had seen the man's elbows "movin' around his belt." The man complied with Tom's instructions to turn around, and only then did Tom realize that there was a woman behind him, and they were having an intimate moment (Carnelia et al., 2010).

The murders of George Floyd, Brionna Taylor, and Daunte Wright at the hands of White police officers had all made national headlines in the 12 months leading up to auditions for this show in May of 2021 (McLaughlin & Hall, 2021). The production team wrestled with the question of whether it was right or appropriate for us to present this scene that deals with the discussion of violence toward a Black man. We decided to leave the scene in the show, as it shows a police officer making the choice not to use excessive force. The character, Tom, cites the incident as the reason he chose to get out of police work and switch careers.

Prior to the auditions for the show, a student approached me asking if it was "appropriate" for her to audition for Maggie, a cleaning woman who intends to be the last of

many generations of cleaning women in her family (Carnelia, et al., 2010). The character is written using African American Vernacular English, implying the actress should be Black. The student who approached me was of Guatemalan descent and said that she was afraid that she would be "playing into a stereotype" if she auditioned for the role. As the director, I was shocked to hear that she was interested in the role but nervous about placing herself into what could be seen as a stereotyped role. Having known this young woman for four years, this portrayal seemed like the sort of challenge that would excite her. If anything, I was nervous that *I* would be the one playing to a stereotype by putting a Latina actress in the role as the best representation of the character if she were cast. At auditions, we did not have any Black actresses audition, making the decision to cast the student who approached me before auditions a logical and appropriate choice.

Based on content in musical theater already presented here, research is needed to help determine what is appropriate and acceptable content for the high school musical theater stage. A wide range of topics have the potential to create areas of concern: sexualization of characters and sexism, references to sexual activities including kissing and simulation of sexual acts; profanity, racially-defined Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) roles, racism, LGBTQ characters, gun violence, the use of alcohol and drugs, domestic violence, direct religious messaging or plots with religious connections, potentially controversial political elements, and elements of physical and mental health. Directors must balance the art of presenting a production true to the script, with the values the production might represent to the school and wider community. Additionally, they must consider how they will feel directing high school students in these situations, how the students might feel in these scenes, and how the community will perceive adolescents in these sometimes very adult situations.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review, Purpose Statements, & Research Questions

Literature Review

Literature, in many areas, framed the issues and considerations for musical theater productions at the high school level and ways that they have been presented over time. Issues such as the sexualization of characters, profanity, and racist characters within the script have been issues in musical theater throughout its history. These social and cultural ideas can challenge the comfort level of actors, the guidelines of school rules and the expectations of the audience. Directors and production team members perform a balancing act to meet the dictates of the script while considering a wide variety of elements necessary to stage a musical at the high school level, specifically due to the age of the actors involved.

Technical Considerations in Show Selection

Many issues for the production of a musical are outside of a director's control, but are key to the success of the production. The performance venue size, both for the audience and performers, can affect what shows are possible to produce in a given space. Schedule of the facility, in addition to cast, crew, orchestra, and director availability, might influence which shows can be produced (Burnau, 1966). The number of students at the school and the budget for the show (either provided by the school or through ticket sales/sponsorships) may also play a factor in what shows would be successful (Peluso, 1970; Seidel, 1991; Janicki, 1982). All these issues are essential to a high school production's success.

In many high school productions, the director and production team are selected from available professionals or assigned to the production based on job roles within a school. Many high school musical theater directors have little to no formal training in theater, but are more often trained in areas of music, speech, or English (Peluso, 1970; Seidel 1991). This lack of specific background in theater production could result in rehearsal techniques that make inefficient use of time or space, and the need to learn "on the job" for new directors which can

impact the overall effectiveness of a production. It may also result in the selection of musicals that are beyond the musical or theatrical skills of the students available or the time and skills of the production team. Similarly, a choreographer's abilities and background in creating a dance intensive show, such as *Pippin* (Janicki, 1982) within the abilities of students may be balanced against the demands of a more traditional, golden-era choice where movement options are more broadly defined.

Design elements, such as costumes and lighting, can also create problems for production if not considered at the time of show selection. Janicki (1982) points out that these issues could play a larger than normal factor in selecting a show if funds are limited or if the director and oversight team lacks sufficient knowledge of these design elements. In the case of costume design, Janicki suggests that shows with simplistic costumes or everyday clothing, such as *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* or *West Side Story* can eliminate or simplify one of these production issues.

Similarly, Howard (1990) wrote that student auditionee abilities must also be considered. Demanding vocal ranges or instrumental passages that require professional level skills may make a show inaccessible to high school students. Howard created a "Summarizing Rating Device" which can be used to determine a show's appropriateness based on factors such as performer abilities and design elements. The topics are listed in a Likert-type scale grid from "Questionable" to "High Value," seen in Figure 1. In the Figure, the term "appropriateness" is used to weigh each issue in relationship to the ability of performers or the available budget for production. For instance, "appropriateness for available dancers" is not about how provocative the dance moves are, but rather, how difficult the dance moves may be for the students performing them. The director and production team are then able to consider a similar set of issues across possible productions to aid in making an informed selection.

Figure 1

Summarizing Rating Device (Howard, 1990)

Topic	Questionable (1) to High Value (5)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Educational value of the book					
Educational value of the music					
Purity of dialogue					
Ease of instrumental parts					
Chance of involvement of chorus members					
Appropriateness of choral parts					
Opportunity for dancers					
Appropriateness for available dancers					
Ease of costuming					
Ease of staging					
Appropriateness of solo parts					
Appropriateness of dramatic roles					
Appropriateness of rental costs					
Appropriateness of other costs					
Ease of conducting					
Ease of lighting and special effects.					

Sensitive Issues in the Theater Program

In addition to the technical elements of musical theater productions, the material presented in the script must also be considered. Performers may have varying levels of comfort in portraying certain roles or aspects of a show. Likewise, directors and audience members might be uneasy directing or watching certain types of material performed by high school students.

As far back as 1992, it was noted that teachers, and more specifically teachers of theater, often served the function of cultural reformer. Schuster (1992) stated that teachers must "address issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and more" (p. 20). Schechner (1992) concurred, speaking to the importance of performance in multicultural education. He noted,

> Performance engages intellectual, social, cultural, historical, and artistic life in a broad sense. . . . Performed acts, whether actual or virtual, more than the written word, connect and negotiate the many cultural, personal, group, regional, and world systems comprising today's realities. (p. 9)

Seidel's (1991) survey of theater education in the United States featured a segment on sensitive topics in theater programs. The following topics were addressed in high school theater programs through theater coursework and productions, at the following rates:

- Drug/Alcohol abuse, 79%
- Multicultural education and issues, 74%
- Teen suicide, 72%
- Sexual identity, 71%
- Divorce and single-parent families, 71%
- Teen sexuality and pregnancy, 69%
- Gang, street, and family violence, 68%
- Abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases, 50% (p. 9)

Lazarus (2005) suggested that theater provides an exploration of "social class, disability and ability, language, culture, ag, gender, sexual orientation, and religion . . . in the theatre classroom [and] in production work" (p. 23). These topics, while not totally missing from earlier eras of musical theater, have gained new levels of portrayal in today's musicals that challenge the developmental appropriateness for high school production.

Another place where developmental appropriateness might differ between professional, amateur, and high school theater is the words presented in the script. The use of suggestive and crude language is often restricted by school code of conduct and should be considered when choosing a show which would require students to address this issue. The community in which a show will be performed, and the context required in the plot of the show may alter how a student or director feels about the language in question (Robinson & Poole, 1990).

Race and racism are, at times, predominant factors in musical theater scripts. Shows like *The Wiz* and *Once on This Island* feature characters of color situated in specific context. Davey (2010) points out that for *The Wiz,*

> Although it was the most successful Black show of the [1970s] decade, any theatre company or school with actors of any ethnicity can mount a production of this energetic and fun-filled musical. (p. 53)

There is nothing about the show that specifically outlines African American cultural norms despite the fact that the original production used a cast of African American actors. However, the script does use African American vernacular English and the score contains a lot of Motown sound which has led many people to make the ongoing association with an African American cast. Turnbow and Rose (2021) are both White teachers who believe White students should not be performing in BIPOC roles or even songs from shows meant for BIPOC performers. In the case of *The Wiz,* Turnbow and Rose would not allow their White students to sing material from the show. Conversely, they recommend not limiting BIPOC performers to certain roles and styles from culturally specific characters.

The reference to sexual activities, sexualization of characters, and sexism within theatrical plots are all topics that have been considered within musical productions appropriate for high school actors. *Mamma Mia!* references sexual activities, though the script dialogue never includes the topic outright. High schools have put on productions of *Spring Awakening* which contains a scene of a man masturbating. Additionally, at the end of the first act there are two high school-aged characters who engage in a simulated sex scene. This level of sexual content becomes a significant issue for choosing high school productions (Derschowitz, 2018).

Characters kiss in many musicals. Students and/or directors may need guidance to create a realistic yet appropriate process for rehearsals and performances of even this basic physical contact between performers (Rikard, 2022). Some musicals, like *Cabaret* and *Rent*, have plot points that deal with character's sexual orientation. Productions like *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *Grease*, which are often performed at the high school level, present sexist messaging. While these shows have been produced for decades, the reality of these social issues has changed in public perception over the years.

Profanity is included in a lot of shows and has a much more open and common place in daily rhetoric. The use of profane language and gestures, however, presents issues for high

school students. Most schools do not allow profanities in the classroom, but they may be allowed on the stage. Determining what words are acceptable and the frequency of these utterances within the school theatrical setting could be explored. For instance, the score for *Hamilton* needed to cut two uses of "fuck" to keep a PG-13 rating on Disney+ (Haasch, 2020).

Drug and alcohol use could be controversial on stage. Productions like *9 to 5* and *Rent* reference or show drug use, and countless shows contain drinking such as *Grease* and *Bye, Bye Birdie* which are frequently produced in high schools. Other social issues such as domestic and gun violence are prominent in *Little Shop of Horrors* and *West Side Story*. These topics may need to be carefully addressed when choosing a show.

Religion and politics could be explored as a topic of interest, especially when considering the type of school presenting the performance (private vs. public). Shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar* or *Godspell* might be a hard sell to a public-school administrator as they deal with the Passion of Christ. Conversely, some religious-based schools might find the same shows difficult to work with, as they do not present a direct interpretation of the Bible. *Fiddler on the Roof* is the story of a Jewish community but not a holy story from the Torah. Politics are present in *The Sound of Music* with actors portraying Nazis and depending on how it is staged, Nazi imagery can be present on stage as well. *Newsies* presents the issues of child labor laws and unionization. These topics may not always come to the front of a director's mind when selecting a show, but could potentially cause problems if not handled carefully.

Wicked, Newsies, and *Next to Normal* all deal with physical disability or mental health. In Wicked, Nessa is portrayed as a sympathetic character by being wheelchair-bound. In *Newsies*, Crutchie fights back against anyone who says his limp helps him sell papers. The portrayal of characters with physical disabilities by able-bodied actors has begun to come under criticism (Harris, 2014). Diana in *Next to Normal* is diagnosed as bipolar. In these scenarios, directors are faced with the challenge of portraying characters appropriately, which some young

actors may lack the maturity to do. The perpetuation of stereotypes through these characters should be closely considered in show selection.

Development of the American Musical

To understand how musical theater content developed into the themes we see in productions today, it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of the genre in the United States. Topics that today would be considered controversial, were common in these early forms of theater. The content of these early shows also presented material accessible to the middle and working classes. By looking to see how theater in the U.S. began, we can find connections to how it has since developed.

In the Introduction of her book *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, Rodger (2010) noted that little is written about theatrical entertainment targeting the masses. Her book relates to the early years of musical theater: vaudeville, minstrelsy, and variety theater. She notes that academic writers have and continue to write more about theater for the upper social class elite than theater enjoyed and developed for everyday working-class people. She cited opera as one such genre often written about (Rodger, 2010), meaning there is much less research about vaudeville and variety shows available (G. Rodger, personal communication, July 2, 2021). This sentiment is reinforced in Slide's (2012) introduction to his *Encyclopedia of Vaudeville* where he noted a surprising lack of history being available on the subject. An effort has been made to document the historical progression of musical content in theatrical productions and the connection to the social and cultural development in the United States beginning in the 1800s.

Theater for the Working-Class. Snyder (1989) described vaudeville as aiming to "stage shows with something for everyone . . . with enough rough fun for workingmen, enough glamour for middle-class women, and enough old-country sentiment for immigrants" (p. xiii). Vaudeville, at the turn of the twentieth century, presented clowns and comedians challenging codes of propriety and gentility. It allowed the children of slaves and immigrants to perform, giving new multicultural meanings to the identity in the United States, but also leaned into

racial stereotypes, distorting the portrayal of Black Americans through blackface minstrelsy (Snyder, 1989).

Vaudeville shows were able to continue being popular through the turn of the nineteenth century by adapting the content to audience interests. Audience members could encounter strangers, through performers and occasionally others in the audience, which allowed for an exchange of social and cultural ideas, and paved the way for changes in thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding those perceived as different from themselves. As such, acts were selected and presented to appeal to specific groups within the larger audience (Snyder, 1989).

Some of what could be considered musical theater performances in the United States began in the early 1800s in Bowery theaters. In the 1830s, New York saw the immergence of blackface minstrelsy at such establishments. These shows mocked Black Americans to make ordinary White Americans feel superior through oversimplified and stereotypical presentation and commentary (Snyder, 1989).

Melodrama was also presented at the Bowery. It used many of the same characters as minstrel shows but avoided moral ambiguity. That which was right and wrong was determined by the characters themselves, rather than making commentary on situations or society. It also contained racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes. According to Snyder (1989), “Melodrama was serious about common people and their emotions. It wrestled with the conflict between good and evil, the hopes and fears of the time” (p. 6).

Variety shows in theater of the 1840s and 1850s were written to offer insight into working-class culture which was, at the time, quite relevant to many different ethnic and racial groups (Rodger, 2010). Local traditions were formed based on ethnicity, geography, and class guiding the popular song tradition in the U.S. (Potter & Sorrell, 2012). As the nineteenth century marched on, so did variety, which involved representing a more ethnically diverse working class and the eventual distancing of second-generation U.S. citizens from the working class through adopting a middle-class identity. Variety shows also allowed immigrants to learn about the

United States and allowed the working-class to learn about new immigrants. Eventually women were also allowed to attend and grew to enjoy variety shows. Toward the end of the century the focus of variety shows had moved away from commentary on class to a debate over race, specifically whiteness, inscribing a racial hierarchy through its acts (Rodger, 2010).

During the mid-nineteenth century in New York, concert saloons, and many U.S. institutions were stratified based on social status. Audiences began to be divided by social elements like race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Vaudeville entrepreneurs worked to unify audiences around shows that could be enjoyed by more than one fraction of the population. It was no easy task though, exemplified by the Astor Place Riot of 1849, where 22 people died because of audience disagreement over who should be allowed to perform Shakespeare: an English actor or one from the United States. This tragedy resulted in further stratification of theater, with drama and opera houses being reserved for the wealthy elite, cheap Bowery theaters for the poor, and foreign-language theaters for the immigrant population (Snyder, 1989).

Comic Singers and Stereotypes. The priority for male performers was comedy (Rodger, 2010). Often songs used characters based on the people that could be found in the big cities, like New York: workingmen, upper-class men, Irish, Germans, and African Americans. Minstrelsy was dominated by African American characters, where variety had a more even balance of characters.

Irish characters were often depicted as drunkards and fools using nonsensical lyrics and heavy dialect for comedic affect. In the latter half of the 19th century, as Irish immigrant families now included a second generation, these songs persisted, but more sympathetic portrayals of the Irish appeared, easing the earlier stereotypes. The cruel songs were not gone, however, as they would make a reappearance if the audience seemed particularly anti-Irish. Even Irish performers would perform such songs, as pleasing the audience was the goal, even if it meant

disregarding ethnic pride and dignity. Things got better for the softening of the Irish stereotype after the Irish participated courageously in the Civil War (Rodger, 2010).

Some similarities exist between stereotypes presented for Irish and blackface characters. Songs were sung about the comforts of "home" in the rural plantations for blackface characters, and Ireland for Irish characters. Both genres used heavy dialects and nonsense words (Rodger, 2010).

Blackface characters were also presented with larger-than-life movement, including exaggerated facial gestures and grotesque dances. For example, songs about lost love were not sung for sentimental purposes, but for comedic effect at the character's expense. In minstrelsy and variety shows, Black Americans were only represented by white actors as foolish, lesser beings. Unlike the softening of the Irish stereotype over time, depiction of African Americans did not change, perhaps due in part to the lack of their presence in audiences. While African Americans occasionally performed in minstrelsy, they were not regularly a part of variety shows until after 1900. The collaborative nature of variety shows meant performers assisted each other with their acts. The presence of women in variety shows meant African Americans could not be present, since it would mean sharing the stage with White women, which violated the standing segregation laws in place at that time (Rodger, 2010).

Tony Pastor, a showman of the nineteenth century, began writing and performing as a comic singer in the 1860s. He also sang some gentler works but some of his material was described as "racy" —singing a variety of stereotypes in his performances: "shrewd Yankees, rowdy Irishmen, and childlike blacks" (Snyder, 1989, p. 14). Many of the songs Pastor published were about living in an exploitative world where individuals must fend for themselves, messages that easily resonated with a working-class audience. He did not shy away from politics in his performances, with one song parodying a Civil War recruitment song with lyrics chiding the rich for being able to afford the $300 to avoid the draft (Snyder, 1989). As the 19th century soldiered on, so did Tony Pastor, who moved his show to a more respectable part of New York City, and

with the move, cleaned up the show to be more appealing to the middle-class and women, though still providing "hearty, genial, and racy" entertainment (Snyder, 1989, p. 18).

For performers who did not perform ethnic or racial characters, the main character often appeared to be a White workingman, like the audience for whom he was performing. These songs would deal with love, courtship, leisure, or other themes in solidarity with the working class. In the songs supporting the working class, lines were repeated, which may have been to encourage the audience to sing along. When songs protested social inequity, lyrics largely placed the blame on the middle- and upper-classes (Rodger, 2010).

Women on Stage. When women would sing during the 1860s and 1870s, the female characters mentioned were often depicted through behaviors considered appropriate in working-class culture: being active, flirtatious, quick to advocate for themselves, revealing the inadequacy of men, and filled with praise for the men to whom they were attracted. Some of the material would present women using their appeal to men for their own benefit, presenting this concept as pragmatic. Women's songs of the time did not mention careers or work, sometimes depicting the woman wandering about a city or countryside alone. This contrasted to material sung by men, which depicted women identified with their work, or describing how the characters met. Ultimately, the visual appeal of women was important to variety shows; however, the female singers themselves were rarely among the leading performers (Rodger, 2010).

Irish sentimental songs were essential to the repertoire of Jennie Hughes and Jennie Engel, two rather successful performers in the latter half of the 1800s. Their songs depicted loss, longing, and at times, women waiting home in Ireland for their love to return. When not singing sentimental songs, these two women also included music that represented what life was like for working-class women in cities. Prominent song topics included men and marriage. In these songs, lyrics often described individual men as the perfect mate, often military men who were brave, handsome, and greatly admired. Songs about such men could be sung in the past tense,

implying his death during the war and allowing for an idyllic representation of the character. Other songs about military men could be more pragmatic, ending in the couple becoming married, presenting such men as good, and reliable partners (Rodger, 2010).

The search for an ideal partner was presented in songs like “Show Me the Man” performed by Emma Alford in the 1870s. In this song she sang about the importance of fun, joking, and leisure with a potential mate. The song also encouraged honesty and courage. The song ended with the singer wanting a partner to be her equal in good times and bad, despite not actually expecting such behavior. “Speak Out Like a Man” with lyrics and performances by Jennie Engel presented a courtship ritual of the woman denying a suitor’s advances, while encouraging him to by persistent. At the time, these actions were symbolic of a woman who was serious about marriage (Rodger, 2010).

Beginning in the late 1870s, a woman named May Fisk led her own theater troupe billed as the “English Blondes,” the first woman to have success in such a position. She presented sexualized material while being criticized both in the communities where the troupe toured and by other performers within the theater world. Though successful, she was rarely afforded the opportunity to perform at bigger venues and in anything larger than a small town, due in part to the risqué material the troupe presented which easily drew in a male audience. The group performed a “standard touring female minstrel combination that presented minstrelsy, burlesque, and variety together in a single evening” (Rodger, 2010, pg. 161).

Eva Tanguay was considered the Queen of Vaudeville. Her act was full of energy, combining song, dance, and sexual innuendo. She would change costumes many times throughout an evening, always on stage behind a piano or in a dark corner. While performing drinking songs, she’d douse herself in champagne. In her twenty-minute performance, she would use almost anything at her disposal to please her audience (Hilsabeck & Sante, 2021).

A special role for women in variety was the “male impersonator”–women who would don male clothing and sing in a low alto voice material typically reserved for men. These acts were

generally loved by their audiences. Male impersonators did not fool anyone, nor was this their intent. Everyone was aware that they were watching a woman perform as a man. Variety shows were not the first place for women to portray men on stage. Women could be found playing as men in spoken drama, including lead Shakespearean roles. Unlike narrative drama, variety shows allowed male impersonators to improvise and respond to audiences in much the same way their male counterparts would (Rodger, 2010).

Conversely, men would don glamorous clothing and impersonate women. Today performing in drag is often associated with the LGBTQ+ community. In the 1800s, sexuality had nothing to do with such performances. These performers would use operatic falsetto voices to impersonate coloratura sopranos (Slide, 2012).

Changes. Entrepreneurs in the 1860s and 1870s attempted to convert concert saloons into venues for vaudeville performances. This involved attempting to reconcile social divisions present in the saloons, such as those fond of drinking alcohol, usually the working-class and immigrants, and those who were not, the middle-class Protestants. Some would condemn the saloons as "scenes of crime, prostitution, and drunkenness," making these venues less desirable for performances (Snyder, 1989, p. 9).

In the 1880s, some established variety performers shifted into performing in new musical comedies or topical dramas as variety shows started to venture westward across the nation. These new shows had minimal narrative to them, making them only slightly different from the variety shows that came before them and increasingly appealing to the new self-identified middle class. (Rodger, 2010)

As variety show managers led their shows around the country, they would adjust by engaging in local debates over identity, class, community standards, and rational leisure. These adjustments also affected the business practices of the managers, such as how they would market the show. These adjustments led to two different styles of variety shows. The respectable

variety show was appropriate for a family audience, and the sexualized variety show, also described as obscene, catered to the working-class man (Rodger, 2010).

B. F. Keith and Edward F. Albee were entrepreneurs who helped vaudeville evolve greatly. In the late 1880s, Keith opened a museum featuring "attractions like a baby midget and a mermaid" (Snyder, 1989, p. 27). The museum eventually added a room with a stage for performances but was met with many difficulties. Keith reached out to Albee, a friend from his earlier life in the circus. The two ended up staging a pirated version of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* five times a day at lower, vaudeville prices. They continued the system later with condensed versions of operas. Part of their success was insisting on civility from performance acts and audiences, including providing instructions for audience members to teach them how to interact at such venues (Snyder, 1989). The 1880s and 1890s also brought along censorship of material, due to more women in the audience. This shift toward more middle-class values, at times was regulated by managers and theater owners (Rodger, 2010).

Social Issues in Musical Theater Productions

It is not possible to present a full history of musical theater in this document. Rather, this section will present some highlights of shows that featured social issues. Extra focus will be paid to shows that are more influential to high school musical theater production. In the paragraphs that follow, shows will be categorized into topics that may cause difficulty when being presented in a high school setting. Many shows may be listed in one category but apply to one or more other categories as well.

As Broadway continues to push boundaries on stage, so does amateur theater. Drugs, alcohol, suicide, and sexuality have become major plot points in an increasing number of productions. When watching a professional or an adult amateur theater production of a show, the average theatergoer might not think twice about race and racial issues, sex and sexual identity, disability, violence in many forms and elements of politics or religion being portrayed

on stage. When one is a director of high school musical theater productions, perspectives on those issues shift.

Racially-Defined BIPOC Characters. The student body of many Midwest schools is mostly racially homogenous, with most students being White. This makes casting for shows with racially-defined BIPOC characters a challenge, even if the show would otherwise be an excellent fit for the school. Some examples of such shows include: *West Side Story* which features two rival gangs, one of which consists of Puerto Rican immigrants (Florjancic, 2005; Griffin, 2002; Bernstein et al., 1957); *The Wiz,*, a retelling of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* from an all-Black cast, incorporating the sounds of Motown (Smalls & Brown, 1975); *Miss Saigon* has many characters who are Vietnamese (Schönberg et al., 1991; Florjancic, 2005); and *In the Heights*, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, featuring an ethnically diverse cast set in Washington Heights, NYC (Miranda & Hudes, 2008). Though not yet available for amateur production, Miranda's second show, *Hamilton*, combines many musical styles, but mostly rap, to tell the founding father's story through a cast of mostly BIPOC performers (Kenrick, 2017; Miranda, 2015).

Racism. *Show Boat* is a show not frequently presented by high schools but was the most popular of the early romantic musical plays during its release in 1927, which was part of a wave of theater that came after World War I and into the Great Depression (Kenrick, 2010). The musical includes caricatures of Black characters that were established by White writers at the advent of silent film (Breon, 1995; Florjancic, 2005; Griffin, 2002). Cole Porter wrote the music and lyrics for *Anything Goes* in 1934, infusing the musical theater stage with a healthy portion of his jazz-style as well (Gänzl & Findlay, 2022). The end of the show features racist stereotypes of Asian people portrayed by White characters (Umehira, 2016).

"The Golden Age" of musical theater began on the precipice of the Second World War. Much credit is given to *Oklahoma!,* Richard Rodgers first collaboration with Oscar Hammerstein II from 1943, as being something new to start the Golden Age of musical theater. Geoffrey Holden Block (2014) went so far as to split his book, *Enchanted Evenings*, in sections

"before *Oklahoma!*" and "after *Oklahoma!*" The show did not invent any theatrical devices. It was, however, a tight package of many of the ideas that had been floating around, combining a cohesive plot with songs and dances that advanced the plot and developed characters (Kenrick, 2010). Though Rodgers and Hammerstein might be the most famous duo in musical theater history, their shows are not without present day controversy. *Oklahoma!* presents an idealized version of early America, entirely erasing racial difference (Griffin, 2002). Despite taking place in Oklahoma Territory, which was largely inhabited by first Native Americans, the show presents no Native characters. Additionally, the Original Broadway Cast and movie versions of *Oklahoma!* presented the Persian character of Ali Hakim with White performers (Rodgers & Hammerstein, 1943).

Racism and racist depictions of characters are present in other Rodgers and Hammerstein's collaborations as well, including *South Pacific* from 1949 (Florjancic, 2005; Most, 2000; Rodgers et al., 1949) and *The King and I* from 1951 (Florjancic, 2005; Rodgers & Hammerstein, 1951). Irving Berlin's hit *Annie Get Your Gun* from 1946 originally featured many more stereotypical depictions of Native Americans than its 1999 Broadway revival (Berlin et al., 1946; Gänzl & Findlay, 2022; Hoffman, 2020).

Sexism. Frank Loesser wrote music and lyrics for *Guys and Dolls* (1950) and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1961). Both shows were successful, receiving many accolades. The shows also present sexist ideology—*Guys and Dolls* features the two leading women singing the song "Marry the Man Today" where they list off all the negative attributes of their potential partner, but also the importance of marrying him sooner rather than later (Kenrick, 2017; Loesser et al., 1950). These sexist elements can be downplayed or presented satirically, but ultimately not eliminated (Agustin, n.d.). *How to Succeed* features the songs "A Secretary is Not a Toy" sung by the men of the office, "Happy to Keep his Dinner Warm" sung by the women in the show, and "Brotherhood of Man" sung by the men about the business world

(Loesser et al., 1961). The sexism is overt; Cherry (2005) describes it as obvious to all, including those not immersed in the world of musical theater.

Many other shows of this era featured overt or subtle hints of sexism, including Cole Porter's second success—*Kiss Me, Kate* from 1949 (Bogaev, 2019)— and Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady* from 1956, rife with misogyny through the song "An Ordinary Man" (Gänzl & Findlay, 2022; Loewe & Lerner, 1956; Ray, 2014). In addition to *My Fair Lady*, Lerner and Loewe collaborated on *Brigadoon* in 1947 and *Camelot* in 1973, all of which portray various levels of sexism (Kenrick, 2017; Lester, 1999). Jerome Robbins directed and/or choreographed many successful shows for the Broadway stage including *The Pajama Game* written by George Abbott and Richard Bissell in 1954 which portrays quite overt sexism (Kenrick, 2017; Marks, 2018).

Referencing Sexual Activities. Though first a movie starring Kevin Bacon, *Footloose* made its Broadway debut in 1998. One scene in the show features two characters having a miscommunication about "doing it" where one is referencing dancing and the other referencing sex (Snow et al., 1998). *Mamma Mia* uses the music of Swedish pop group ABBA to tell its story (Kenrick, 2017). In addition to a plot that references the character of Donna sleeping with three different men, resulting in the paternity of her daughter, Sophie, being unknown, the show's song "Honey Honey" features Sophie, through her mother's diary, reading the line "dot dot dot," when referencing having sex with men (Ulvaeus et al., 1999). More recently, *Mean Girls* presents high school aged characters with lines such as "are you a virgin?" and "Karen has slept with 11 people" (Richmond et al., 2017, p. 40).

Simulation of Sexual Acts. *Pippin,* by Stephen Schwartz, of *Godspell* and *Wicked* fame, follows the titular character as he seeks to find himself. One of the adventures Pippin takes involves a scene simulating sex (Schwartz & Hirson, 1972). Though produced much less frequently by high schools, the rock musical *Spring Awakening* is much more overt in its stage directions for simulating sexual acts. The show features a man masturbating under his clothes during the song "My Junk" and the end of the first act features two of the main characters

simulating a sex scene, with the woman baring her breasts and the man revealing his buttocks (Sheik & Sater, 2006).

Sexualization of Characters. In addition to the previously mentioned racism in *Anything Goes* by Cole Porter, the show also features sexualization of the female characters (Umehira, 2016). Sexualization of characters is also seen in some works by legendary composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim. His lyrics were used in *Gypsy*, a story about a mother and her two daughters, one of whom becomes a burlesque dancer (Styne et al., 1959). He wrote the music and lyrics for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Sondheim et al., 1962), another show with sexualization of characters (Kenrick, 2017). That show's hyper sexualization was mocked in a regional production in 2023 with the use of an all-female cast (Wild, 2023). Stephen Sondheim's collaboration with James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, is a retelling of many fairy tales combined with an inserted story of a baker and his wife in their attempts to have a child. The show also portrays two princes competing with each other for various female characters in the woods (Kenrick, 2017; Sondheim & Lapine, 1987).

Grease debuted on Broadway in 1971. *Grease's* 1978 film starred John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John, who donned a skin-tight leather outfit for the final song of the show (Kenrick, 2017; Paramount Pictures, 1979). Another show with sexualization of characters, through revealing costumes aa well as lyrics and dialogue about female bodies, comes from *Chicago,* originally debuting on Broadway in 1975 (Kennedy, 2014), with a successful revival beginning in 1996 still running today (Kenrick, 2017).

LGBTQ Characters. LGBTQ Characters have been a part of musical theater for many years. Going back to the 1960s, Cliff, one of the leading characters in *Cabaret* (Kander et al., 1966) is outed as bisexual. *A Chorus Line* (Hamlisch et al., 1975) and *Falsettos* (Finn & Lapine, 1992) are also examples of shows that feature gay characters, though the two shows are not commonly presented at high schools. More recently, *Rent* (Larson, 1996), *Mamma Mia* (Ulvaeus et al., 1999)*, The Prom* (Sklar et al., 2016), and *Mean Girls* (Richmond et al., 2017), all

have varying levels of gay characters, from a closeted gay man in *Mamma Mia's* Harry, who comes out in the last minutes of the show, to *The Prom*'s entire plot being focused on Emma, a high school aged lesbian who wants to attend prom with a girl, despite the town's negative reactions.

Profanity. Countless shows feature profanity to varying degrees. Of shows already mentioned, *Mamma Mia!*, *Rent, Mean Girls,* and *Footloose* have profanity in the script (Richmond et al., 2017; Ulvaeus et al., 1999; Larson, 1996; Snow et al., 1998). The definition of what is profane has changed over time. Even shows from the late 1990s and early 2000s have been suggested to need some updates to the language (A. Melendez, personal communication, March 21, 2024).

Alcohol and Drugs. *Bye, Bye Birdie* uses blues-inspired rock of the 1950s for its score to highlight titular-character Conrad Birdie's draft for military service (Kenrick, 2017) and features multiple characters drinking alcohol, including minors (Stewart & Adams, 1960). *Big Fish* and *Beauty and the Beast* are examples of shows that feature characters drinking, but do not portray any characters as intoxicated (Lippa & August, 2013; Menken et al., 1994). On the other hand, *Mamma Mia!*, *Mean Girls*, and *Fiddler on the Roof* do present characters as intoxicated from drinking alcohol (Richmond et al., 2017; Ulvaeus et al., 1999; Bock et al., 1964).

A school edition is available for *Rent*, which includes references to HIV/AIDS being transmitted through the use of sharing needles while using drugs. It also presents drug deals and the song "Light My Candle" where the character Mimi loses her stash and looks around for it (Larson, 1996). In *Mean Girls*, the song "Whose House is This?" includes lyrics "clouds of marijuana, molly in the kahnnah" (Richmond et al., 2017, p. 87 & 91) and "that is not a bong" (p. 88).

Violence. *Les Misérables* (1985), the musical retelling of Victor Hugo's novel of the same name presents many of the topics discussed in this chapter, including many uses of prop firearms (Schönberg et al., 1980). Even extremely family-friendly shows can have some

potentially controversial elements, like *Beauty and the Beast*, with Gaston's use of a prop gun (Menken et al., 1994). Violence is also present in Off-Broadway's *Little Shop of Horrors*, which brought the low-budget 1960 film to life. In addition to the man-eating plant from outer space, the character of Dr. Orin Scrivello is physically and verbally abusive to his girlfriend, Audrey (Menken & Ashman, 1982).

Religion. Shows with direct religious messaging contain stories from religious texts. These can be difficult to navigate in a public-school setting, as these shows often present religious ideology. Andrew Lloyd Webber wrote two such shows: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* originally presented in a London school production in 1968 (Lloyd Webber & Rice, 1973), and the "rock opera" *Jesus Christ Superstar,* which debuted on Broadway in 1971 (Lloyd Webber & Rice, 1971). Stephen Schwartz also had a hit of a religious nature with *Godspell* in 1971 (Kenrick, 2017; Schwartz & Tebelak, 1971). Slightly different are shows with plots that contain a religious connection. Though not the most controversial of topics, it can be tricky to navigate if not undertaken carefully. *Fiddler on the Roof* is an early example. The plot is based around Tevye, a Russian Jewish man, and his family who suffer religious persecution (Bock et al., 1964). Similarly, *The Sound of Music* features fictional characters at an Abbey in Austria (Rodgers et al., 1959).

Potentially Controversial Politics. This broad category can include anything political that might cause audiences to react negatively. Shows that feature Nazis are a common example; *The Sound of Music* being the most produced at high schools (Rodgers et al., 1959). Additionally, *The Producers* was a huge success on Broadway, taking satirical jabs at the issue (Brooks & Meehan, 2001). *Evita* tells the story of Eva Perón and her controversial rise to fame and political success (Lloyd Webber & Rice, 1978). *Annie* shines a light on child labor (Strouse et al., 1977). Child labor is also an element in *Newsies*, which features discussion of unionization (Menken et al., 2012).

Disability. The musical *Annie* features a scene with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was wheelchair bound during his presidency. Though this physical disability is well known, directors may still need to be cautious about how they present physical disability on stage, labor (Strouse et al., 1977) especially if an able-bodied performer plays the role. Andrew Lloyd Webber's biggest title is the current record holder for longest running Broadway show: *Phantom of the Opera*. The phantom wears a mask to hide the physical deformity of his face, until one of the last scenes in the show (Lloyd Webber et al., 1986). *Newsies* features the character Crutchie, a nickname given due to his use of a crutch for his limp. The origins of the injury are unknown, but it is mentioned throughout the show (Menken et al., 2012).

In addition to physical disabilities, musicals have portrayed a variety of mental health issues. Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* features the show's titular character spending much of the show murdering people in his barber chair (Sondheim & Wheeler, 1979). With a difficult score and libretto, the show is occasionally presented by high schools. Frank Wildhorn adapted the classic tale for his 1997 musical *Jekyll & Hyde* (Kenrick, 2017). Dr. Jekyll's alter ego, Mr. Hyde, torments people, including a sexually abusive interaction with a character called Lucy (Wildhorn & Bricusse, 1990). *Next to Normal* (2009) is another musical that deals with mental health struggles. The show centers around the character, Diane, who has many mental struggles. Part of the show features her being treated for those struggles (Kitt & Yorkey, 2009).

Summary of Social Issues in Musical Theater. The social issues listed here came about in one of three ways. First, the show was written at a time when the issue at hand, such as racism and sexism, were not viewed in the way they are today. Society has evolved since the time many shows were written. Second, the show was written to intentionally draw attention to the social issue and promote an audience response such as the racism in *Hairspray* and religious persecution in *Fiddler on the Roof*. These social issues are essential plot points within the shows. The final way social issues could be found in musical theater are when they draw extra attention by their presentation by high school students portraying adult characters. Shows

containing profanity or overt sexuality, as in *Rent*, force inappropriate social behavior on underage actors. These issues, presented in shows on high school stages, cannot be ignored.

Censorship in Education

Many of the same topics that pose challenges in school musical theater programs have been targeted for censorship when they appear in print media available to school-aged children. Four decades after the inception of Banned Books Week, challenging and banning books in school settings is on the rise. According to the report *Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools*, 1,648 unique books were banned between July 2021 and June 2022 (Friedman & Johnson, 2022). Most of these bans did not follow guidelines for challenging books as established by the American Library Association or the National Coalition Against Censorship. Books were banned for a multitude of reasons, with LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning) themes being the most frequent (41% of banned books). Other topics include sexual content (22%) and race/racism (21%). Furthermore, 40% of books included feature major characters of color. Many of these bans are coming from advocacy organizations rather than spontaneous concern from parents or community members. Almost three-quarters (73%) of these advocacy groups were founded since 2021 (Feldman, 2022).

Some say that banning media is a parental right, while others point out that removing access to books violates the rights of other parents. Author Laurie Halse Anderson said,

> By attacking these books, by attacking the authors, by attacking the subject matter, what they are doing is removing the possibility for conversation, you are laying the groundwork for increasing bullying, disrespect, violence and attacks. (Harris & Alter, 2022, p. A1)

Books that are intended for children who are pre-readers, or just beginning to learn how to read, are being challenged and banned. For example, *King & King* (2003) by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland is a picture book that came under fire because of its depiction of a homosexual marriage. Another picture book, *Pinkerton, Behave!* (2019) by Steven Kellogg, depicts violence

and includes a character holding a gun. A final example is *Walter the Farting Dog* (2001) by William Kotzwinkle and Glenn Murray, due to some objectionable vocabulary. All the topics presented in these picture books are depictions of real life for some children of that age (Linder, 2015).

Just as musical theater educators work with controversial materials, language arts educators regularly navigate challenges as well. Picture books that are being challenged and banned in some communities, such as those previously mentioned, are being used as a means for critical analysis and considering multiple points of view in the middle and high school classroom (Linder, 2015). When working with these challenged and banned books, teachers have noted a need to be well prepared, including ensuring they have the support of school and district administrators. Approval will require solid rationale and providing material ahead of time. Having a plan for potential objections from parents or community members will be better than figuring something out on the fly after instruction has begun.

Scarbrough et al. (2018) reported how some teachers use theatrical elements to help students understand differing viewpoints about challenged and banned books. Students took up a role-play scenario after reading a book that has been challenged or banned in other communities. Some options for characters to be played included: principal, school board member, librarian, school counselor, and concerned parent. The role-play scenario immersed students in the discussion about whether challenging or banning books is appropriate in a deeper, more meaningful way.

School censorship seems to be "driven by the desire to control mass behavior" (Korpe et al., 2006, p. 239). Music teachers are often asked to make ethical decisions regarding repertoire choices. Decisions about repertoire selection are often a balance of what a student needs regarding nurture protection as we aim to teach students both academically and socially. Teachers assume the role of "moral entrepreneur," balancing promotion and enforcement of agreed-upon social norms in a school setting (Kallio, 2017).

Censorship in Media

Many of the topics presented in this chapter are items tracked by The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) when it determines ratings for feature films. The MPAA movies ratings that "reflect the opinion of most American parents about the suitability of that motion picture for viewing by their children" (Motion Picture Association, 2020, p. 6). The ratings are: G—General Audience, films contain nothing that would offend parents of younger children. Specifically listed items include theme, language, nudity, sex, and violence; PG—Parental Guidance Suggested, films may have some profanity, and some depictions of violence or brief nudity, but no drug use content; PG-13—Parents Strongly Cautioned, films are considered acceptable for children who are 13 or older, but parents should be informed before allowing children under 13 to watch. Drug use in a movie will require at least a PG-13 rating. Nudity that is not sexually oriented and "more than brief" will also yield a PG-13 rating. One instance of the word "fuck" is allowed in a PG-13 movie, but it must not be used in a sexual context. Violence may be depicted but is generally not both realistic and extreme, or persistent; R—Restricted, films are not to be attended by minors without an accompanying adult. R-rated movies may include "adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually oriented nudity, drug abuse, or elements" (Motion Picture Association, 2020, p. 7); and NC-17–No One 17 and Under Admitted, movies not allowed to be seen by minors. This rating can be given based on "violence, sex, aberrational behavior, drug abuse, or any other element that most parents would consider too strong, and therefore off-limits, for viewing by their children" (Motion Picture Association, 2020, p. 7).

These ratings state what is acceptable and unacceptable for viewing according to the MPAA. In theater, no such rating scale exists for viewing performances, though productions will reference the MPAA ratings as can be seen on the Music Theatre International website when looking at specific shows. Those ratings are for viewing a movie or show, not performing in it. Being an audience member for a production and performing in the production may require a

different rating as the interaction with content in the rehearsal process is much longer than watching a show.

Literature Review Summary

For well over a century, musical theater has been entertaining audiences and, at times, pushing boundaries. Much has been written about the technical elements of theater for the high school stage. Less has been researched about the content of the musicals and that content's appropriateness for high school performances. Issues of race, sexuality, social issues, religion, politics, and disability may be appropriate for some audiences and not others. The same could be said of performers as well. All of these factors are to be considered in a world where censorship of media is increasing in schools across the country.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine content issues of musicals that theater directors must consider when selecting a show for high school performance. My research explored three questions:

1-What social content factors do high school theater directors consider when selecting a show?

2-How do the comfort and opinions of directors, students, and communities affect show selection?

3-Can any correlation be found between director opinions/choices and specific demographic information about the student and community populations in which they teach?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

I used a mixed methods model for this study utilizing Creswell & Clark's (2011) embedded approach. I gave a quantitative survey, created through Qualtrics, as well as semi-structured interviews following Fontana & Frey (1994) to deepen understanding of the survey results (West, 2014), as is common in music education research (Cook, 2018; Schumann, 2014; White, 2007).

Recruitment of Survey Participants

I sent the survey to high school musical theater directors in the Midwest with a goal for a sample size of at least 40 (n=40). I used Facebook to reach out to potential survey participants. On May 3, 2023, I posted a link to the survey from my personal account to the groups "Mad City Actors" and "Acting Auditions SE Wisconsin." I then posted the survey on my personal page on May 11, tagging known choir/musical theater directors. Finally, on May 17, I posted the survey in the group "Wisconsin Theatre Chat/Auditions & Show Info."

I also sent recruitment emails to the heads of the following statewide organizations beginning on May 3, with a request to forward the survey to the organization's members:

Wisconsin Music Educators Association (WMEA)
Wisconsin Choral Directors Association (WCDA)
Wisconsin Association of Community Theatres (WACT)
Wisconsin High School Theatre Festival
Jerry Awards (through the Overture Center)
Center Stage Awards (through the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center)

On May 6, the President of WACT responded that she would send out the information. On May 22, the Jerry Awards shared their member list with me. On May 23, WMEA included the survey in their release of the *Wisconsin School Musician*. On May 25, I emailed 38 theater professors at the 13 University of Wisconsin schools, requesting their help in distributing the survey to any individuals who may have graduated from their institution or teach geographically near their institution for whom they have contact. On May 31, the Executive Director of

Wisconsin Interscholastic Speech & Dramatic Arts Association, which hosts the Wisconsin High School Theatre Festival responded to me about sending a "quick blast" the following day. I did not receive a response from Center Stage Awards. On June 6, 2023, the survey was closed.

Survey Procedure

The survey asked questions regarding directors' opinions and experiences with different elements of musical theater content. It also asked directors to consider how students and community members might feel about the same topics. Likert-type scale questions were used to help quantify these opinions. An example question being: How comfortable would you be directing a show where characters kissed? (1=Extremely Uncomfortable to 5=Extremely Comfortable). All survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Consent was received for 57 people at the start of the survey with three not responding to any further questions, reducing the sample to 54. An additional seven answered "no" when asked if they were high school musical theater directors, further reducing the sample size to 47. No further questions were answered by 14 respondents, four were from out of state, and two only answered demographic information about their school and recent show history. All 20 of these responses were deleted, leaving a final sample size of 27.

Interview Participants

The goal was to interview four to eight respondents who volunteered to share additional ideas after taking the survey. Only two respondents volunteered, and both were able to provide an interview: Bryce, who teaches at a small, rural school and Caroline, who teaches at one of multiple public high schools in a university town. Seeking a third perspective from a different type of community, I reached out to directors from more urban communities. Fortunately, Holly who works in one of six high schools in an urban community was willing to be interviewed. Some names have been changed to pseudonyms at the participant's request.

Interview Procedure

Interviews were planned to be approximately one hour. All interview participants were able to meet in a public location convenient for them. Bryce was interviewed in a meeting room of a local community theater for 70 minutes. Caroline's interview took 55 minutes and was conducted in a coffee shop in the town where she works. Finally, Holly was interviewed on the patio of a restaurant in the city where she lives, which is different from where she works. Her interview lasted 90 minutes.

The questions asked were similar to those in the survey, but the semi-structured format allowed me to probe for deeper understanding of how participants handled potentially controversial content and gave them opportunity to cite specific examples from productions when applicable. I asked follow-up questions to clarify answers or seek additional understanding. The basic questions are provided in Appendix B.

I recorded interviews using the Voice Memo application on a mobile phone and transcribed them using otter.ai. The audio files were automatically transcribed then errors were edited. All sources of data were analyzed using open-coding based on the techniques of Saldaña (2016) to create marginal notes. Data analysis and interpretation was based on the techniques of Huberman & Miles (1994) through data triangulation from all sources (Janesick, 1994). School names were gathered during the survey process and used to compare demographics of the school and its surrounding geographical area through publicly-accessible data including school population and racial/ethnic information.

Writing Process

Racially-Defined Roles

While I wrote and distributed the survey, and while I conducted interviews, I referenced "shows with BIPOC characters" as a topic of potential concern. In the writing process, I was introduced to the term "racially-defined roles." This term better encapsulates what I meant, as it accurately describes that race is a necessary part of these roles. Since White roles can also be

racially defined, as would be the case with the Von Tussels in *Hairspray* (Shaiman et al., 2002), I will use "racially-defined BIPOC roles" throughout the paper as it most accurately describes the types of characters meant to be discussed.

Script Edits

I feel it necessary to note the frequent references to editing scripts in this document. Musical theater licensing contracts typically include statements forbidding the adding, deleting, or changing of music, lyrics, dialogue, and an assortment of other show elements (Music Theatre International, 2021). These contracts also include that any proposed changes, additions, or omissions be proposed to the licensing company and accepted prior to performance (Music Theatre International, 2021). I assumed that those surveyed and interviewed contacted licensing companies to obtain permission before making any edits to their shows.

Summary

The following chapters will bring together information from the survey and interviews to reveal the challenges high school musical directors faced in handling the diverse content of current musical theater productions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Survey Analysis

Introduction

This chapter includes analysis of quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from the surveys taken by 27 Wisconsin high school musical theater directors. Survey questions can be viewed in Appendix A, as well as a list of shows recently directed by survey participants n Appendix C. The topics addressed in the survey specifically asked about experiences with the issues of race, sex/sexuality, profanity, drug/alcohol use, religion, and disabilities in musical theater shows being produced at the high school level. Participants did not respond to every survey question, as some questions became irrelevant based on previous answers. The survey contained 239 quantitative questions, 56 qualitative questions, and 18 quantitative questions with a qualitative explanation response, where respondents could select "other" and clarify that selection.

Directors were surveyed about their history of working with shows containing each of these topics. The frequency of shows directed by topic can be viewed in Appendix D. Where relevant, further survey questions, usually quantitative, asked about the inclusion of administrators in the decision-making process, adjustments made to the script by means of changes to script, blocking, choreography, costumes, hair, makeup, or props, as well as the general response to these issues from audience members and those involved with the show (cast, crew, orchestra, and production team). Collectively, directors responded that they had directed shows with mature content 232 times over the 18 different topics surveyed. Only two of those 232 times did audiences respond negatively to the topic presented. All other responses were positive or neutral.

Those who had not directed musicals involving a specific topic were asked if they had considered shows with these issues. If they had, more questions were asked about what caused the director to choose something else, and again, whether administrators were involved in the

decision. Finally, all participants were asked questions about their comfort level regarding directing a hypothetical show containing the topics being discussed. First, they were asked to answer for themselves, as director. Second, they were asked to consider the same topic from the perspective of their student performers. Third, they considered the vantage point of the audience watching the show. These final three questions used a Likert-type scale, with 1 representing Very Uncomfortable, 2 as Somewhat Uncomfortable, 3 as Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable, 4 as Somewhat Comfortable, and 5 as Extremely Comfortable. Table 1 below compiles this data.

Table 1

Average Comfort Level in High School Musicals with Potentially Controversial Topics

Topic	Director	Student	Audience
BIPOC Character(s)	4.22	4.15	4.00
Racist Character(s)	2.37	1.93	2.22
Kissing	4.15	3.81	3.85
Referencing Sexual Activities	3.62	3.42	2.96
Simulating Sexual Activities	1.58	1.23	1.27
Sexualized (Objectified) Character(s)	3.27	3.12	2.88
Sexist Character(s)	3.50	3.08	3.42
LGBTQ Character(s)	4.27	4.12	3.00
Profanity	4.35	4.12	3.35
Drinking	4.42	4.38	3.81
Drugs	2.96	3.19	2.73
Domestic Violence	3.23	2.92	2.81
Guns	3.38	3.62	3.46
Direct Religious Messaging	3.27	3.19	3.69
Plot Contains Religious Connection	3.69	3.58	3.96
Potentially Controversial Politics	3.73	3.88	3.46
Physical Disability	4.04	3.73	3.77
Mental Disability	3.80	3.60	3.56

Table 1 shows directors and students often being more comfortable with topics listed than audiences. Racially-defined BIPOC characters and simulated drinking of alcohol stand out as being quite comfortable for all groups. Conversely, the simulation of sexual acts and racist characters were uncomfortable topics for all groups. Most of the topics were statistically on the

"Somewhat Comfortable" side of "Neutral. Table 1 will be referenced frequently throughout this chapter.

Directors were given qualitative survey questions as well. They were asked to list specific shows they had produced or considered producing that involved each specific topic. Survey participants were also asked to share what factors led to an alternate show being chosen. Finally, at the end of each topic, directors were asked for any additional comments they wished to share on the specific topic. These additional comments can be viewed in Appendix E.

Of the 27 responses analyzed, one did not give their school name or location. School populations can be viewed in Table 2. Two of the schools were private, religious schools, one was a charter school, and the remaining 23 were public schools. Table 3 shows similar information regarding the size of the communities in which directors led shows.

Table 2

School Population of Respondents

Number of Students	Number of Schools Represented
No data	1
Less than 500	5*
501-1,000	9
1,001-1,500	9
1,501+	2

*Two respondents directed at the same school

Table 2 shows that approximately one-third of respondents direct at schools similar to the national average of 833 students (De La Rosa & Robelen, 2024). Another approximately one-third are at schools in a range slightly larger to nearly double that national average. Table 3 shows that a majority of respondents work in communities smaller than 20,000 residents. This shows that small and medium-size communities make up a majority of this research, with large, urban areas not as well-represented.

Table 3

Community Population of Respondents

Number of Residents	Number of Communities Represented
No data	1
Less than 5,000	4
5,001-10,000	5
10,001-20,000	6
20,001-30,000	1
30,001-40,000	2
40,001-50,000	3
50,001-60,000	0
60,001-70,000	1
70,001-80,000	1
80,001-90,000	0
90,001-100,000	1

Racial Elements

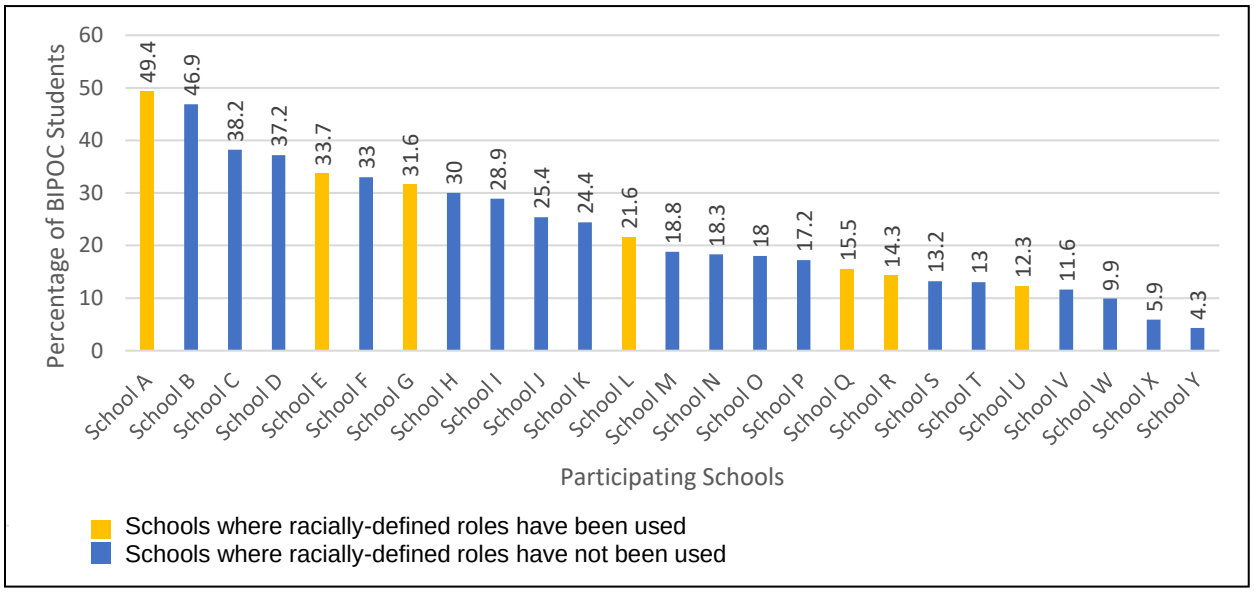
Racially-Defined BIPOC Roles

Though professional theater still has much work to do in creating opportunities for individuals who identify as Black, indigenous, or other people of color on stage and behind the scenes, representation has improved compared to the early years of Broadway (Bandhu & Kim, 2019). Of the 27 survey respondents, 20 answered that they had not directed a musical theater production with racially-defined BIPOC roles. Five of the seven directors who had directed BIPOC characters, were confident they had the necessary racial makeup in their audition pool to meet the casting needs. Figure 2 shows the percentage of BIPOC students at survey participants' schools.

The two school directors that did not think they had the correct racial makeup to meet the character descriptions also signaled they made no adjustments to the script to accommodate for this difference. These two schools had overall student populations that were 21.6% and 15.5% students of color. This seems to suggest that these directors cast White performers in roles meant for BIPOC performers.

Figure 2

Percentage of BIPOC Students at Participating Schools



Of the 20 directors who had not directed shows with BIPOC characters, 12 expressed that they had considered shows with BIPOC characters in the past. The most popular shows being considered were *Hairspray* (listed five times) and *Once on This Island* (listed four times). Of the 12 directors, 11 chose to direct another show due to concern about the racial makeup of their potential cast. The 12th director is set to direct *Once on This Island* as their next show. Of those directors who have not directed a show with BIPOC characters, 90% stated they would definitely (seven directors) or maybe (11 directors) consider such shows in the future. The Likert-type scale revealed directors, students, and audiences finding the prospect of a show with racially-defined BIPOC characters as something with which they would be comfortable.

The qualitative survey answers on the topic of BIPOC characters revealed that 13 directors have a willingness to direct these shows. Their concerns arose with not having enough racial diversity in the school or theater programs to meet the characters needed for authentic representation. One director summarized this sentiment with, “The diversity at our school is not large (almost entirely White). I would be comfortable directing a show with BIPOC characters if

we had a more diverse cast." Another director noted, "we are a pretty White school, so theater is pretty White. My dance classes are where our BIPOC students gravitate." On the same topic, it was mentioned, "we work to cast BIPOC actors into a variety of non-race specific roles, including roles traditionally played by White actors."

Two directors also mentioned problems with older shows. One stated, "many of the older shows have racist/ethnic/sexist comments and structures. This is a huge issue." The other wrote, "I have directed *The King and I*—it was very tricky, with numerous conversations about honoring culture and making best effort to not have caricaturizations [sic] of roles."

Racism

The number of participants directing shows with characters who they described as racist was the same in the survey as those directing musicals with BIPOC characters (seven out of 27). Of those seven, four answered that they directed shows with both racism and BIPOC characters. Three directors did not alter the script to eliminate or diminish racial statements or ideas. An additional three directors adjusted the script to diminish the racism, and one director eliminated it entirely through script adjustments.

Of those who had not directed shows with racism, nine of 20 had considered it in the past. Most directors had not considered shows with racism having cited a lack of the correct potential cast members to play BIPOC roles. This suggests that directors were focusing on shows like *Hairspray* that present BIPOC characters as the target of racism from other characters. When asked about comfort in presenting a show with racist characters, directors responded that they thought students would be the most uncomfortable. They projected audiences and themselves slightly closer to a neutral opinion, but still uncomfortable.

The qualitative survey answers on this topic noted many directors finding opportunities for "teachable moments" within these ideas, "I think if you teach it and handle it well it can be a teachable moment (i.e., if a school did *To Kill a Mockingbird* and taught about the racism, didn't push it aside or ignore it)." In many cases, teachable moments included identifying historical

patterns and social phobias which clarified the context of the show's racist elements. Several written comments highlighted this point:

> If there was a way to educate the students and audience about the racism and make it a learning point, I would consider it.
>
> How the racist character is used to tell the story matters. Sometimes they help us see racism as bad. Other times they are presented as normal. I would only be comfortable with the first type of character.
>
> I'd only consider a show with a racist character if it was written to be racist, not because people were racist at the time it was written.
>
> Part of theater is portraying parts of our history, even if we aren't always proud of them. Some of the shows…need to be re-written as the racist content is inexcusable.
>
> I would only choose a show that shows the racist characters as the "bad guys" and deals with them as such.

In addition to the directors from above, another wrote about engaging with audiences: "a show with a racist character would need audience discussion and encouragement to engage in learning about racism, why it is wrong, and how the racist character in the show helps us understand how racism is wrong."

Summary: Racial Elements

The survey revealed that directors felt they, their students, and their audiences were comfortable presenting works that featured racially-defined BIPOC characters. In many cases, the biggest barrier to directing those shows was a lack of diversity at schools or in theater programs. Despite this perceived barrier, some schools still presented shows with racially diverse characters, with demographic data revealing that those schools had varied levels of racial diversity.

It seems that shows featuring racism would make the same parties uncomfortable. The topic is not avoided outright but directors agreed it needed to be presented in a way that shows racism as a bad thing, and provide opportunities for "teachable moments" for both performers and audiences.

Sexual Elements

Kissing

All but one of the 27 survey participants responded that they had directed a show where characters are expected to kiss. The only director who indicated that they had not chosen shows with kissing listed *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Sound of Music* as shows that their school had recently done, both of which include kissing in the script.

Of the other 26 directors, one signaled that they had altered the script to eliminate the kiss from the show. All 26 listed no negative responses from audiences (13 positive and 13 neutral) and those involved with the production (10 positive and 16 neutral). On the Likert-type scale questions, directors thought they would be quite comfortable directing scenes with kissing, with audience and student scores averaging .3 and .34 lower, respectively.

Of all topics discussed, kissing was the one that received the most show-specific examples with 40 unique shows being listed. *The Addams Family* was listed most frequently (10 respondents) of the shows featuring kissing. For comparison, 15 respondents listed *The Addams Family* as a show that has been done at their school in the last five to 10 years.

In the qualitative survey portion for this section, comments were made about editing kissing out of a show either through changing the kiss to an embrace or a stage kiss:

> If the staging can be done to cut it, I cut it. If we can stage it to cheat, we do.
>
> We have changed blocking to be a hug, embrace or a fake kiss, depending on the comfort level of the actors. We have never had the characters actually kiss.
>
> I usually leave it up to the actors playing the characters. We do ‘stage kisses' or hide behind something, etc. if they don't want to kiss on stage.

Directors also wrote about students needing to feel comfortable with any kissing in the shows. One noted, “It’s fun. Kids love it.” Another wrote, “Staging can help mitigate any discomfort and I never push my kids to do anything they don’t want to do.” The frequency and type of kissing also can play a factor for some directors. One director stated, “a kiss in *Cinderella* is different than a kiss in *Spring Awakening*.” The frequency of kisses can be another

consideration: “I think we would have an issue if the students were doing a lot of kissing versus one or two.”

Some talk of additional training for directors on this issue was mentioned. One director has “taken workshops on stage intimacy and feel much more comfortable in recent years than I did when I started my career.” Another mentioned that “this is work that has to be put in – intimacy coaching and making sure everyone is on the same page” to assure comfort for everyone involved. It was not clear if this director meant that this is work that theater educators need to put in to learn more, or if it is work that directors need to lead for their students to feel secure. Another director mentioned, “we hire an intimacy coordinator when we can.”

References to Sexual Activities

Directors were asked about shows that referenced sexual activities beyond kissing. These activities were not necessarily depicted on stage but alluded to through dialogue or blocking. An example listed in the survey was the repeated line “dot dot dot” in the song “Honey Honey” from *Mamma Mia*. The character Sophie reads from her mother’s diary with the “dot dot dot” implying sexual relations that occurred, without saying it outright. The plot of *Mamma Mia* hinges on Sophie having three potential fathers, through her mother’s sexual relations with three different men. A majority of the survey participants (19 of 26) said they had directed such shows.

The Addams Family came up as the most frequently listed show that referenced sexual activities. Six respondents listed the show as containing references to sexual activities, lower than the 10 who listed it as a show they directed that contains kissing. The character lines for Alice describing a relationship with Mal include some suggestive references that may be considered subtle enough to alleviate opinion on whether the show references sexual activities. *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Chicago*, *Grease*, and *Mamma Mia* were all listed by three directors as fitting the criterion for reference to sexual activity. Of the 19 directors who directed shows with references to sexual activities, seven said they had adjusted some lines to

diminish the references to sexual activities, but none edited the script to remove the lines entirely.

Audiences responded positively to these shows as noted by four of the 19 directors. The rest responded neutrally (15 of 19). Those participating in the show were more positive about references to sexual activities on stage, in seven of 19 cases. Neutral feelings about referencing sexual activities in the show were signaled by 11 directors, with one director expressing a negative response from those involved with the show.

Of the seven respondents who have not directed shows containing references to sexual activities, only two had considered it at any point. In another line of questioning, two directors said they would consider directing such a show in the future, with four saying they would "maybe" consider it, and one saying they would not consider shows that reference sexual activities. When asked about their comfort level directing a show that referenced sexual activities in the future, directors gave themselves the highest rating of comfort at 3.62. They scored students .2 lower, and audiences just barely on the "uncomfortable" side of neutral with a score of 2.96.

Qualitative data for this topic revealed directors shifting their considerations to those of their audiences:

> Depending on your community they [references to sexual activities] could be toned down.
>
> References to sexual activities makes the production more difficult to market to child audience members.
>
> In my community, innuendo is received just fine so that is where we have to live. Any overt references don't go over well, but innuendos are ok.

Some directors continued to talk about the necessity of communicating clearly and frequently with the cast: "when not enough time is spent, or if there isn't good direction it can get awkward for everyone, but a good director will do just fine with these moments that are part of the human experience." Or as another director put it bluntly, "Sex is everywhere, they all

know, it is up to the director to keep it mature and respectful." On a contrary note, a director stated, "most of my actors' hesitance with reference to sexual activities stems from them not being able to separate character from person," a concept they feel is an important consideration for young actors' education.

One director talked about staying true to the script, "I hold the line that these are the words written by the playwright and are a part of the musical. What we perform for the school and community is an authentic musical." Presenting the show as written shows a strong commitment to the authors and the copyrighted work. Whereas another participant noted that, "we usually change the lines."

Simulation of Sexual Acts

Only two (of 26) directors had done shows that direct actors to simulate sexual acts on stage. One of the two directors made some line adjustments to diminish the simulation of sexual acts in the show. The shows listed by those two directors were *Pippin* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

Of the 24 directors that had not directed shows where characters simulate sex, two mentioned that they had considered it, citing *Heathers* and *Spring Awakening* as specific shows that had been considered. In one of those two instances, administration played a factor in the decision not to produce the show. Both directors made similar notes about their decision not to produce the show: "not the right time in a district like ours" and "not ready for that conversation yet." Most of the directors (20 of 24) shared that they had no plans to consider such shows in the future, with three sharing that they "maybe" would direct such a show, and one stating they would consider shows that simulate sexual acts in the future. Shows with simulation of sexual acts were the lowest rated category of all surveyed on the Likert-type scale for all three groups.

Over half (eight of 13) of respondents who wrote in the qualitative portion for this topic listed the concept of simulated sexual acts as inappropriate for high school theater programs:

> For this age level and audience, sex is not something we will include in our shows.
>
> Absolutely not appropriate for an underage production.
>
> I don't think this is something that needs to be done at a high school level; there are many great shows without this.

Some remarked that the only chance of directing something like this was if scenes or songs could be cut: “They are high school students, I don’t think it is appropriate. However, I would direct clean scenes from the show, or do these shows in a college setting,” and “Those wouldn’t make it past our perusal-unless we had permission to cut the scene/song."

One respondent brought up school leadership: “Admin would never let it happen.” Age was brought up as well: “for me it’s unnecessary to pick a show that has a sexual scene…they are MINORS, ranging in age from 14-18,” and “There is an issue when adults are telling teens to pretend to have sex on stage.”

Sexualization of Characters

Directors were asked about moments in shows where characters are sexualized, through means of objectification or referencing characters’ bodies in a sexual manner. Twenty-two of the 26 directors listed that they had directed such a show. Most did not change any lines in the show (15 of 22) or any of the costumes, hair, or makeup recommendations (13 of 22) to diminish or eliminate sexualization of characters from the show. Half made no adjustments to performer’s blocking or choreography. One director adjusted lines, another altered blocking or choreography, and a third made changes to costumes, hair, and makeup to eliminate the sexualization of a character entirely. The rest made some modifications to diminish the prevalence of character sexualization in the show. Directors felt everyone involved with a show would be quite neutral regarding their comfort, based on the Likert-type scale.

Only nine respondents wrote in the qualitative portion of the survey about this topic. Conversation with students was discussed as a necessity:

> I think education needs to occur about the context of the sexualization in the musical, when it occurs and how it happens, why it is included in the story and how it drives the story forward. This is most especially important to address with the students.

Two respondents wrote about editing the lines, with one writing, "when possible, I seek to diminish those moments." Three directors wrote about the audience or community's perception of the show as important. One wrote, "I have been an audience member in high school productions of *Legally Blonde* with my friends and we were uncomfortable because we were watching minors."

Sexist Characters

Of 26 directors, 15 stated that they have directed a show with one or more sexist characters. The most common shows were *Guys and Dolls* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. In 11 of 15 instances, no changes were made in the script to diminish or eliminate the sexism in the show. Only one director edited the script to eliminate the sexism, and three more adjusted the script to diminish the show's sexism. Directors' comfort level in producing a show with sexist characters was directly between "neutral" and "somewhat comfortable" on the Likert-type scale. They indicated audiences would feel similarly, but students would be much closer to neutral.

Six directors responded individually in the qualitative section about this topic. Two directors focused on using the sexism in the show as a teachable moment, one noting, "a rebuttal to the sexism is important to address with the students and, in some way, the audience" and another, "if you teach it and give context, it can be great teaching or learning moments."

Some directors suggested that the era in which the show was written should be considered for older shows. One stated, "you can stage it and show how ridiculous or farcical it is" and another noted, "songs from another time are not sexist necessarily because in that time they were not viewed that way. I would not look at "Marry the Man" [from *Guys and Dolls*] today as a sexist song – it's from the 40s! Give me a break!" In these instances, I find it important to note that sexism has always been sexism. It may have been more accepted at

different points in history due to men being the decision makers, and often the authors of such works.

Another director ruled out *My Fair Lady* as a show they would direct because, "Older people don't think the shows are sexist. The students and I have great conversations about the sexism." On the topic of *My Fair Lady*, a counterpoint was offered:

> In general, I think most sexist characters tend to be the villain, so the cast and the audience know that their sexism is a negative trait not to be celebrated. Either that or the sexism is played for laughs and is a more lighthearted jab. Or in the case of Henry Higgins, he undergoes a bit of a transformation.

Lastly, respondents spoke about the context of the sexism: "If it is portrayed as good and normal, then I would not be comfortable with it nor would my students and audience. If it is used to show how change is needed, that would be different."

Summary: Sexual Elements

Director comfort varies from "uncomfortable" with shows portraying the simulation of sexual acts to 'comfortable' with shows where characters kiss. Shows with the simulation of sexual activities were an outlier, with most directors finding the topic inappropriate for high school performers. Of the other elements listed, directors brought up educating students and audiences as a key to their presentation on stage. In most cases, directors did not eliminate these topics from their shows, but some found ways to alter the show to diminish the presence of these elements through methods like modifying a kiss to a hug, using fewer revealing costumes, or altering lines. For directors who have presented shows with these topics, audiences and performers rarely consider them a negative element of the show. Directors most often saw neutral or positive responses.

Social Issue Elements

LGBTQ Characters

Gender diversity has been given more attention recently for adolescents (Marino et al., 2023). The presence of LGBTQ characters in productions can reflect a level of support for

students who may be exploring their own sexual orientation. Of the 26 directors, 12 responded that they had directed a show with LGBTQ characters. *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* was listed twice, as well as single instances of: *The Addams Family*, *Bring It On*, *Legally Blonde*, *Mamma Mia*, *Mean Girls*, *Rent, Rock of Ages*, *Spamalot*, *The Wedding Singer*, and an original jukebox musical titled *Weird*.

Of the 12 who had directed a show with one or more LGBTQ characters, only one mentioned that the audience responded negatively to the LGBTQ character(s) in the show, with seven directors saying audiences responded positively, and four neutrally. Those involved with producing the performance perceived the LGBTQ characters in the show as positive in 10 of 12 cases, with the other two seeing the element as neutral.

Of those who have yet to direct a show with one or more LGBTQ characters, eight of 14 have considered such a show, but decided against it. Reasons listed for not directing the show included: "haven't had the right people yet," "just not the right time," "not yet . . . upcoming," "a different show fit that year's cast more," and "just haven't done it yet. It's slated for our 2024 show." Two of the directors were denied permission to do the show from administrators with one commenting: "it would not get district approval." Director and student comfort, as determined by the Likert-type scale, was moderately high for shows presenting LGBTQ characters. Audiences were predicted to be much less comfortable, averaging a "neutral" response.

In the qualitative portion regarding LGBTQ characters, many directors responded with comments about the community in which they live:

> Our drama students and audience tend to be more affirming of LGBTQ characters within our rural community as a whole.
>
> Students and community members active in the LQBTQ+ community would love to see representation in a show (background chorus members add it sometimes). We have one church in town that would be very against it and members of that church have students in the musicals.

> The community reported me to the school board, and the school board said I did nothing wrong as they did not show affection on stage.
>
> I do NOT work in a county that is overly supportive of this in particular, and have been told in the past to avoid it.
>
> My community doesn't handle blatant LBGTQ themes well. If it is a side story/character it is ok but they are conservative otherwise.

One director listed a concern with administration: "my admin is very strict on this; I have been denied permission to perform at least three shows because of this content." One director noted, "we have opened our casting so even if it [a role] is not explicitly LGBTQ we have had trans students playing lead roles, we've had same-sex couples dancing in the ensemble, etc."

There was discrepancy between the lists of shows directors have done portraying an LGBTQ character and the list of recently produced shows. For instance, *The Addams Family* is the most produced show in that time with 15 productions, but only one director listed it as a show containing an LGBTQ character. Perhaps this is because Fester's lack of "specific sexuality," (Lippa et al., 2010, p. 67) which could be seen as queerness or asexuality in the LGBTQ umbrella, is not a major plot point. Similar arguments could be made for Harry and Niko coming out at the end of *Mamma Mia* and *Legally Blonde*, respectively.

This increasingly relevant topic seemed to be a point of concern for directors. They shared that audiences are less comfortable with the topic being presented on stage than performers or directors themselves. In some cases, administrators have stepped in to reject shows presenting LGBTQ characters. It seemed some directors attempted to show support for LGBTQ youth in their programs while not upsetting potential audience members or administrators.

Profanity

Most directors, 23 of 26, mentioned directing shows containing profanity. Of those, 15 have edited the show to diminish the amount of profanity presented. One director edited the script to eliminate the profanity entirely.

Of those who have directed shows with profanity, one (of 23) felt the audience responded negatively to the use of profanity, and two directors felt those involved with presenting the show perceived the element negatively. Audiences were mostly positive (10 of 23) or neutral (12 of 23) about the topic, with those involved with the production feeling positive (13), or neutral (eight) as well. Like the previous category, directors rated themselves and students quite comfortable with presenting profanity on stage. Audiences were rated a full point less comfortable than directors.

Directors were asked about the frequency with which they would be comfortable directing certain profane words considering student comfort and separately considering audience comfort. They were offered options of Never (1), Once (2), 2-3 Times (3), or 4+ (4). Mean scores showed that directors rate audience comfort (2.27) slightly lower than student comfort (2.51). Table 4 shows all of the mean scores by word. The order of comfort was the same for both student and audience comfort, with directors being willing to allow more frequent profanity when considering student comfort versus audience comfort.

Table 4

Profanity in High School Musical Theater

Word	Student Comfort (Mean)	Audience Comfort (Mean)
Heck	3.96	3.92
Crap	3.77	3.72
Hell	3.62	3.32
Damn/Dammit	3.5	3.24
Ass	3.19	2.88
Bastard	2.65	2.32
Shit	2.42	2.08
Goddammit	2.38	1.96
Jesus Christ	2.38	1.88
Bitch	1.88	1.68
Dick	1.85	1.44
Fuck	1.38	1.28
Pussy	1.15	1.04
Nigger	1	1

In the qualitative portion related to this topic, one person listed some hard lines about what profanity was acceptable on their stage, "[I] never use profanity that uses a religion or is racist. Anything that I would hear the students say often I keep, except 'fuck.'"

Other directors talked about editing shows:

> I put the swearing back into *Chicago*. 'Single my foot' really didn't encompass the feelings of the character. We much preferred 'single my ass' and so did the audience.
>
> We always do Teen/High School editions, which have profanity already lessened/changed.
>
> I always give the students a secondary option for a line that uses profanity, in cases that the actor is uncomfortable with saying that word.

One director considers profanity "the number one issue with available musicals that are relevant." Another added, "profanity is used on prime-time TV, so I remind people of that."

As these last statements note, profanity is prevalent in our society. Many students use it as they walk around high school hallways. While it may not be universally accepted, most people know that it is out there. Most directors and performers show a level of comfort to work with profanity in shows. Despite audiences scoring more conservatively through a couple of metrics, it seems they, too, can handle profanity to a certain degree on stage.

Alcohol

Most directors (21 of 26) listed having directed a show which presents alcohol on stage. Of those 21, only two adjusted the script to diminish the presence of drinking alcohol on stage. Three directors adjusted blocking and choreography to diminish the presence of alcohol in their show, with six others doing the same to diminish the presentation of intoxicated behavior. Two directors adjusted props to diminish the alcohol on stage, and one director eliminated the prop all together.

Participants reported that alcohol on stage was received neutrally (13 of 21) or positively (eight of 21) by audiences. Those involved with the show saw the topic as positive or neutral equally (10), with one production listing it as a negative aspect. The Likert-type scale revealed

that directors gave themselves and students a comfort score above “somewhat comfortable.” Audiences were projected to be less comfortable with the prospect, but still more comfortable than not. Some directors wrote about their comfort leaving references to alcohol in the show:

> We keep true to the script and use the alcohol to help us tell the story in the musical.
>
> We are telling life stories—there's a rousing huge dance number in *Bright Star* all based around "pour me another round" and it's a huge hit. I did not find this offensive nor did the audience.
>
> Parents let kids drink, so it shouldn’t be a shock.

Other directors expressed some concern: “I change it to diminish or eliminate it” and “I have only done shows where the characters drinking are adults . . . I think it would be different if the characters were teenagers.”

Drug Use

Only three of 26 directors have presented shows portraying drug use. Of those three, one director edited lines, adjusted blocking or choreography, and modified props to diminish the presence of drug use in *9 to 5*. Of those 23 who had not directed such a show, only four said they had considered the idea, with five saying they would consider it in the future, and 10 other directors listing that they would “maybe” consider it. Directors listed everyone’s comfort in interacting with a show where drug use is portrayed as rather neutral. They reported students would be the most comfortable and audiences the least comfortable, with a difference of .46 between the two. Qualitative responses regarding drug use portrayal included:

> If the script allowed us to address drug use in honest and helpful ways in our community, that would be a good show to use.
>
> It wouldn’t be the audience members who would complain, it would be community members who have never seen a high school theater production.
>
> There aren't too many shows that come to mind that I'd consider directing that involve drug use. In general, I'd shy away from it.
>
> We implied the women [in *9 to 5*] smoked and just hit the subtext hard.

Domestic Violence

Fourteen of the total directors have produced shows containing domestic violence. When asked for specific shows, *Little Shop of Horrors* was listed by eight of them. For 10 of the directors, no lines were changed regarding the domestic violence in the show. One director eliminated domestic violence from the script, while three adjusted lines to diminish the presence of domestic violence in the show. Eight of the directors also made no adjustments to blocking or choreography for the show. Four made some adjustments to diminish the domestic violence, with two eliminating it from the blocking or choreography altogether.

Domestic violence on stage was received neutrally (nine of 14) or positively (five of 14) by audiences. Those involved with the show saw the topic as positive (seven) or neutral (six), with one production listing it as a negative aspect. Half of the directors (six of 12) who have not directed a show with domestic violence have considered it, with *Little Shop of Horrors* being listed an additional five times as the main show being considered. In all cases, domestic violence was not the factor that drove directors away from the show. Directors stated, "Not directing long enough to do these shows" and "casting" as the specific reasons for choosing something else. Directors rated themselves, on the Likert-type scale, as the only group that would be slightly comfortable working with a show that contained domestic violence. Students and audiences were also close to neutral but leaning to the uncomfortable side. Many directors talked about the necessity of presenting domestic violence with care:

> Education and care need to be taken in working with students on performing stage violence. I don't think it is the job of a high school drama program to teach this, but more of a college level program.
>
> Doing *Matilda* next year—will be frank and open about the violence/abuse.
>
> Would depend on the story and how the violence is portrayed– to help with bringing attention to the problem versus seeing it as okay.
>
> I would have discussions about the importance of bringing awareness to the situation, and that domestic violence is never okay in real life. I'd then talk to kids about how to get out of a domestic violence situation.

Two directors wrote about the musical *Carousel*:

> *Carousel* demanded lots of discussion in the cast regarding character choices. We also talked openly about societal and generational changes. In the end, we as a cast made the decision to donate part of the proceeds from our show to a Women's Shelter.

> For *Carousel* the older crowd didn't think it was domestic violence. For everyone else, we partnered with a women's shelter and raised money and learned from people about domestic violence. Everyone liked that."

A director mentioned, "I would get a fight coach," for a show with domestic violence. It seems this director was just referencing violence in general. Though a little unclear, this director seems to be suggesting the importance of performer safety. One shared, "We had the hit happen off stage [during *Little Shop of Horrors*] so it was heard but not seen. Students high fived to make the smack sound." Others were quite resistant to the idea: "if we can't change it, we don't do it," and "a lot of our students have likely witnessed or experienced domestic violence in their home and it would be triggering for them to witness/portray it on stage."

Guns

Guns have been present on stage for 18 of 26 directors surveyed. One director altered lines to eliminate the firearm from their show, as did three others through blocking or choreographic means. One additional director used stage movement to diminish the presence of guns on stage.

As with other issues, most audiences (12 of 18) and performers (10 of 18) were perceived as neutral about the topic. No negative opinion about guns on stage was reported; six of the 18 directors considered their audiences to be positive on the topic and eight thought their production team felt positive about their experience with guns on stage. Through the Likert-type scale, directors projected students would be the most comfortable working with prop guns. Audiences and directors themselves were projected more comfortable than neutral, but not quite as high as students. The biggest topic respondents wrote about related to guns was safety:

> Education is important in understanding why the gun in used in the show, and how to safely perform on stage with a weapon.

> We talked to our in-house police officer, so they knew guns were being used & where they were stored. Guns were kept in a lock box in a separate room which only the directors had the key to.
>
> We hire a fight choreographer when/if needed. All prop guns are maintained by adults when not in use.
>
> We simulated guns with shadow work and hand gestures for *Chicago* - there were a couple of newsworthy school shootings during the year we did this, so we didn't want any guns on stage. We also have had kids steal the prop guns and threaten people with them, so we want to eliminate guns entirely.
>
> We usually keep the orange plastic tips on the prop guns and we keep them locked up and take them home with us each night.
>
> In 2012, all of our guns were taken for our production of *Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* the day before we opened. We ended up having to do the show with toy guns until I convinced the school board to change policy. I have a professional fight director that teaches us safety.
>
> Mostly just with the current state of affairs regarding gun violence in the schools—it's a question to simply move to a "gun neutral" production or modify with sound instead of blanks now (in light of the Alec Baldwin incident).

The context of the show was noted by one director: "people seem to be fine with shows that are about war or the west (versus other types of gun violence)." One director was less concerned: "I teach in a HIGHLY conservative community, where they value their second amendment rights STRONGLY and vocally. Guns on stage are not an issue for us."

Potentially-Controversial Political Elements

Just over half (14 of 26) of directors shared that they had directed a show with potentially-controversial political elements. In the survey, examples were given of the presence of Nazis in *The Sound of Music*, *Newsies'* portrayal of child labor conditions and unionization, and *Hadestown*'s commentary on capitalism. *The Sound of Music* was specifically listed by seven of 12 directors.

Directors surveyed indicated that performers (10 of 14) were positively receptive to this type of show. They were neutrally receptive in four cases. Directors reported that audiences were positive in six of 14 instances, with the remaining eight feeling neutral. For this topic, directors

felt that all parties would be more comfortable than not, but closer to neutral. Audiences would be the least comfortable, with directors predicting students would be the most comfortable.

Two directors mentioned political topics making their shows even more relevant, at specific times:

> We performed *Anastasia*, which is a Russian based princess musical, chosen right as the war between Ukraine and Russia broke out, and performed a year into the war. We discussed the political representation of the Russian culture represented (royalty vs socialist) and its implications in our world today.
>
> I did *The Pajama Game* the year Governor Walker dissolved unions and that show is all about a union. I was uncomfortable at the time because I wasn't sure how my administration would react. The musical was approved before the unions were dissolved and the protests started.

Other directors wrote about the specific political issue making a difference in their presentation on stage:

> Probably depends on the politics. Historical politics are accepted more than modern perhaps.
>
> For beloved shows, some people just turn an eye to these things. Again, it is how it is presented.
>
> It depends on how overt the elements are, and what message they are portraying. We are in a 'red' county/area, so anything too progressive/liberal might cause tension with the community.
>
> It depends on the issue. *Newsies* was relevant, but the audience didn't see it that way due to the setting.
>
> I don't see how Nazis in *The Sound of Music* are a controversial political element –this is depicting a terrible time in history. I have directed *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Is that controversial now . . . ?
>
> Potentially controversial political elements are ever evolving. Shows like *Anastasia* became more relevant following Russia's attack on Ukraine in early 2022. *Pajama Game* was especially relevant in 2010 as Governor Walker and the state legislature disrupted unions in the state. Other elements, like the portrayal of Nazis in shows like *The Sound of Music* is still of concern for directors nearly 80 years after World War II. In all instances, educating performers seems to be an important element of telling those stories.

Summary: Social Issue Elements

In many cases, directors pay attention to the culture of their community when selecting and performing musicals. Directors and students list alcohol as the topic they are most comfortable portraying on stage, with audiences listing it as their fourth most comfortable topic. For both alcohol and other drugs, some directors will find ways to diminish the presence of these elements in their show, if they feel it is necessary.

When domestic violence or firearms are presented on stage, safety becomes a priority for directors, with many directors being extra cautious with guns due to the connection between gun violence and schools. This caution includes communicating with local or school police officers, keeping the props locked when not in use, and occasionally signaling to the audience that the firearm is a prop using an orange tipped weapon.

Religious Elements

Direct Religious Messaging

Six directors (out of 26) have directed a show with direct religious messaging: a show where the plot tells a religious story or is based on a religious text. Of those six directors, five stated that both the community and performers responded positively, with the other director interpreting the feelings more neutrally. None of the directors made any alterations to the show's script. *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Godspell* were listed by three directors each as a show they have done.

Joseph and *Godspell* were listed, four and two times respectively, by directors who have considered shows with direct religious messaging but decided against it. *Jesus Christ Superstar* was listed twice as a show considered. These 20 directors were split as to the possibility of directing such shows in the future, with seven each saying they would and that they might produce one of these shows. The remaining six were not interested in directing a show with direct religious messaging. The Likert-type scale revealed that audiences would be the most comfortable with a show presenting a direct religious message, though not quite high enough to

meet the score of "somewhat comfortable." Students were projected as least comfortable, scoring 0.5 lower than audiences, with directors slightly higher. Two of the survey's respondents are directors from religious private schools.

Many directors' comments in the qualitative portion of the survey regarding direct religious messaging were about the dichotomy between audiences and performers. For instance:

> Our community would love it; the kids would hate it and I don't think it's appropriate.
>
> I am a minister myself, and performing a musical with a religious message is alienating for a number of our students. I think there are right contexts for when and how a religious musical can be performed.
>
> There is a slim chance I'd direct *Godspell*. The community would be fine with it, but an increasing number of my students are not religious and would be uncomfortable. I also, though semi-religious, struggle with producing a religious show given the toxicity of a large number of mainstream Christians.
>
> Our community is largely Christian, but our admin/student services team is very focused on inclusivity, and we don't think they will be open to a predominantly Christian show.

Fiddler on the Roof was listed twice as a show with a "direct religious message" despite being classified as a show with a "plot containing religion." It does have a lot of references to Judaism, as most of the characters are devout Jews, but it is not a story from any Jewish texts. Once again, more or clearer questioning could yield better results.

Plot Containing a Religious Connection

Nine directors (of 26) have produced shows where the plot has a religious connection. These shows present religion on stage but do not present a narrative from a religious text. *Fiddler on the Roof* was listed six times as a show that has been directed, and four times by those who have considered such a show but have not directed it yet. The show frequently mentions both religious and cultural Judaism, but the characters and story are not from the Torah or other Jewish texts. *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* was listed five times as a show that has been directed, and an additional four directors had considered it. The source material for *Joseph* is the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible. Though the story

does not necessarily "push" religion on the audience, it is a biblical story. All nine directors who have presented such a show have not changed the script. Seven (of eight, one director did not answer these two questions) directors said audiences and those involved with the show reacted positively to this style of show, with one director saying the same groups were neutral on the topic.

Of those 18 participants that had not directed a show with a plot containing a religious element, nine had thought about it. None of those nine directors were denied by administrators or indicated they decided against the show due to the religious element of the plot. Directors cited many reasons for not choosing to do the show, the most frequent being that they did not have the right casting options at the time. Audiences were again projected as the most comfortable for shows containing a religious element, scoring just shy of "somewhat comfortable." Students and Directors were keener on this topic compared to shows with direct religious messaging, leaning closer to "somewhat comfortable" than "neutral."

Three directors wrote specifically about *Fiddler on the Roof* in the qualitative portion of the survey:

> We do a background lesson on each show. In *Fiddler* we had a Rabbi come in to teach the session.
>
> We have a high Jewish population, so doing *Fiddler* was very popular.
>
> The exception would be *Fiddler on the Roof*. While their Jewish faith is a large part of the plot, it is not the only plot.

A director shared, "These shows can be fun if done in the right way. They are big shows in my mind, and our school would need to have a depth of student participation to do one of these." Another wrote, "I think they [unclear who 'they' is referencing] would be uncomfortable with anything that isn't Judaism or Christianity." Lastly, "if some kid doesn't want to perform, then it is their choice. I'm not, not going to direct a show for one kid."

Summary: Religious Elements

Despite interest from communities, many directors shied away from musicals with direct religious messaging, either for their comfort, their students' comfort, or potentially to limit questions about the separation of church and stage. Productions that reference religion were more accepted, but with education for performers to be sensitive in the portrayal of any religious elements.

Elements of Physical & Mental Health

Physical Disability

Over half of directors surveyed (14 of 26) have directed a show where a character has a physical disability. The most frequently-listed show was *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which was directed eight times. One of the characters, Logainne Schwartzandgrubenierre has a lisp. For all 14 respondents, no lines were altered due to this element of the show. Here again, audiences and performers were either neutral (five of 14) or positive (nine of 14) about the topic. The averages from the Likert-type scale, show directors, students, and audience members close to the "somewhat comfortable" rating. Directors scored themselves highest, with students and audiences about 0.4 lower.

One director referenced a specific physical disability in the qualitative portion of the survey for this topic, writing, "I feel like a speech impediment is very different than feigning physical disability. Viewed more like a vocal choice." Education around the topic was mentioned by two directors:

> I have had actors with disabilities that weren't written into the script.
>
> Education and understanding context for why the character has a disability in the story, how it textures the story and makes the characters as a whole feel more authentic and real life.

Another director noted, "I don't feel comfortable casting an able-bodied person in a role like this."

Mental Health Conditions

Only one director (of 26) surveyed had presented a show that portrayed a character with a mental health condition and that director actually wrote their own jukebox musical. Of the 25 that had not, nine mentioned considering it and deciding against it for reasons unrelated to the character(s) in question, citing examples including, "content," "not the right time," "costs," and "didn't have the kids." When considering the prospect of producing such a show, directors gave themselves the highest rating, though students and audiences were close as well, leaning closer to "somewhat comfortable" than "neutral."

The qualitative portion only had four responses for this topic:

> Working on helping the students and audience understand mental disabilities is key to performing a show like this.
>
> I think it would shine a light and make students with mental disabilities more normalized by showcasing them in a show .
>
> I feel you must work with professionals to do this without offending anyone.
>
> I would recommend differentiating between mental illness and neurological disorders and perhaps refrain from using the term disability.

Summary: Elements of Physical and Mental Health

Characters with physical and mental health conditions, especially those with mental conditions, were not overly prevalent in high school musical theater. Little was mentioned about using an actor with a disability to present a character with the same disability. Participants indicated education is once again key to working with students in these roles. Directors seemed to suggest that this is a way to help performers who are able-bodied or neurotypical to understand the potential hardships or limitations of those with disabilities.

Conclusions

Some topics, like profanity, LGBTQ characters, BIPOC characters, racism, kissing, and referencing sexual activities yielded much discussion from directors when considered for high school actors. The survey yielded a variety of results and feedback from participants that may

prove useful to directors as they work to select musicals for their schools in the future. These topics will be discussed further in the next chapter through the voices of three directors with years of experience producing high school musicals.

CHAPTER FIVE

Interview Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of three interviews that were conducted in the summer of 2023 to give further detail to the data gathered through the surveys. Only two participants who had filled out the survey offered to be interviewed at the end of the survey. One participant was asked to participate by the researcher to provide a third unique perspective on this research based on the individual's community representation and types of shows produced. Some names have been replaced with pseudonyms for the participants at their request.

Interview questions paralleled those of the survey but allowed for more open-ended responses through a semi-structured interview process. The questions were chosen to gain greater understanding of audience and show participants' perception of controversies, strategies used to mitigate controversial topics, and perceived support of administration at the schools. Interview questions can be viewed in Appendix B. Transcripts of interviews can be seen in Appendices F (Bryce), G (Caroline), and H (Holly).

Bryce

Biography

Bryce had been a part of school and community theater shows since he was a child. His first time directing a musical was in 2009, before obtaining his bachelor's degree in choral music education. During his undergraduate work, he decided it was likely he would be involved in musical productions and added a theater minor to gain skills, knowledge, and credibility when the time came to seek a teaching job. With his expertise and experience, he was asked to direct a high school play in his first job in a small, rural district. He then spent seven years teaching at a slightly larger rural school, where directing the musicals was one of the job responsibilities. His philosophy as a director was shaped by the directors he worked with in the past and molded by

his role as an educator. He noted a difference in how he directed shows in a school setting versus those at a community theater. Beginning in the fall of 2023, Bryce will begin working at a new school in a larger community with a school district population more than double his current position. He will be vocal directing musicals, but not overseeing the entire production.

Perusal of the Scripts

Bryce had the trust of his administration, and as such did not have much micromanagement in his show selection process:

> I've always self-edited [scripts] based on my sensibilities. I've never really had administrators request to read the script prior to my choosing it. They've given me that responsibility of choosing a show. It's a blessing and a curse because if all of a sudden they come in later and say, "well, hang on a second . . . "

He balanced his comfort as the teacher, his students' comfort as performers, perceived concerns from administrators, and audience comfort:

> Even though a lot of students listen to and say, far worse than anything I would give them in a script, I still feel it is my responsibility as a teacher to be cognizant of what I'm giving them to portray. Not assuming they would be okay with saying that, and getting a read on the community and what our audience would be comfortable with hearing. . . . If the administration were to read this, what might they not be okay with? So far, the process has worked. I've never had someone come up to me and say, "that was too far." I've never had a student lament that they couldn't say the line as printed in the script.

With the comfort of his students, administrators, audience, and himself in mind, Bryce is hesitant to leave profanity in the script:

> If there's one "hell" somewhere in the script, and it's only one in the whole script, not a big deal. Now, if there were one f-word in the script, I would probably edit that just on the severity of generally how people feel about that. If there were multiple f-words in the script, it's probably a script I wouldn't have ultimately chosen. I don't have an official list, but a "shit" somewhere, maybe. A "damn" somewhere, maybe. I know "Goddamn" is one that is a for sure switch. Mostly because, [prior to becoming an educator], I was performing in a musical revue, and we were doing the song "Pandemonium" from *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. In that song, it says "Goddammit" and our adult advisor said "you need to change that. People get really up in arms about 'Goddammit.'" You even hear that on the radio. They [radio stations] will bleep out the "God"' part but leave the "dammit." The "dammit" people are okay with, it's the "God" people have a problem with.

He makes decisions about what profanity can stay in versus what gets cut prior to selecting the show:

> I liked the list in the survey, it made me think for a second, “where do I draw the line on this?” It's always been semi-arbitrary or on a case-by-case basis. A lot of that goes into the selection process for me. If I’m reading through a script, and it has a lot of profanity, its front loaded in that sense. It never makes it to the students, because I’ve done that work of reading and thinking, "this is probably crossing the line. So, if there’s a better script out there that I can do, let’s do that.” Unless I absolutely fall in love with the show.

Bryce also hesitated to present alcohol on stage, in part due to an uncomfortable experience prior to his time as a high school musical theater director:

> I try to avoid it unless it’s an absolutely necessary plot point. I remember as an audience member seeing a musical revue produced by high schoolers/recent high school grads. They did a song where the premise is this female character singing a solo and she’s going around stage, swilling a drink, sitting on guys’ laps, and talking about this and that. It just felt a little uncomfortable for me as an audience member. This was before I ever started directing shows at the high school level. I didn’t particularly enjoy that song in the show. I couldn’t even get to the heart of it, like, “Wow, what a great talented singer she is” because I was focused on it being a little uncomfortable. Also, knowing that they selected the songs in the show. There are millions of songs out there in the world. Why this one?

In his current teaching position, alcohol is a topic he considers with care. He references a scene in *Guys and Dolls* where two characters go to Havana, Cuba. Sarah, a sheltered, straight-laced, sober character ends up unknowingly drinking alcohol and becomes very intoxicated:

> It's one area in this community that I was especially sensitive to because a lot of these students come from families with alcoholism and substance abuse. That can be potentially triggering for them. I wouldn’t say it ever deterred me from selecting the show, but most of the shows I've selected haven’t had any overt moments like *Guys and Dolls*, where they go to Cuba. There’s no scene like that in any of the shows I’ve done. There are no bar scenes.

Directing a show with guns as a part of the plot is something Bryce would not necessarily do in his community.

> Knowing my community, anything that might have a gun is probably less likely to be picked, for other reasons. I can’t think of many shows that have a gun moment in them off the top of my head. So, they’re probably just already less likely for me to pick them to begin with. It wouldn’t necessarily be the gun, but it’s a conglomeration of things. . . . In the community, I don’t think people would bat an eye at it. I think it would depend on the context of the gun.

After discussing some different contexts for guns in musicals, like skill shooting in *Annie Get Your Gun* or the comedic, threatening manner where the weapon is not actually used in *Little Shop of Horrors,* he softened on the idea a bit:

> I think the community themselves wouldn't be concerned. For me as a teacher, if it's a moment where, "I have this gun, and I'm pointing at you when I'm threatening to kill you," and it's a very heated tense moment, as a teacher I would say, "mmm I don't know about that." *West Side Story,* for instance . . . I'd probably think, "let's see if there's something else out there" just because in our community, I would be wary of it. If I could justify it, to my cast, to my admin, and I had a sound reason for it, where everything else lined up perfect for *West Side Story,* I might push through.

Religious messaging in musicals, like the passion of the Christ as shared in the gospels of the Bible and presented through shows like *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, is another place where Bryce takes into consideration his community's values as well as thoughts from his students:

> I think people [in the community] would have cheered if I did *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I never chose those shows because of students' emerging thoughts on religion and the diverse spectrum of where students have beliefs. So, I avoided those more so for the students' sake, not the community. The community would have eaten it up, they would have loved it. . . . I know that a lot of the students that I interacted with at my school weren't necessarily of the religious kind, or they may have had some bad experiences with religion. . . . So, doing *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*, where that's the whole thing, I probably wouldn't have done that for the students' sake.

The idea of "gender bending" musicals is something Bryce believes needs to be explored, as it is something he often thinks about as he is selecting a show. Gender bending is a concept of presenting a character with an actor of a different gender identity:

> We have such a deficit of guys in our programs, typically. Especially from smaller areas. . . . I think with more visibility and prevalence of transgender students and the transgender community, we will have to be careful and delicate about that.

Difficulties like this resulted in a struggle to find accessible shows every year. First, he considers logistical elements. The content is a secondary factor:

> It's a daunting process every year. I'd sit and go through the entire MTI [Music Theatre International] catalog. . . . I think every year of the personnel challenges I have at school. I can't have a huge cast. I don't really have dancers. I only have two or three ringers when it comes to singing. What shows fit and check off all these boxes? . . . If it's a show I don't know, it makes it onto my list of "this works people wise and requirements wise," then it's read through the script, listen to the music. What's the story here? Is there content that I should be aware of?

With that said, he avoids shows that he does not think he will enjoy working with:

> Do I pick a show that I'm passionate about? Or that I really am into? Or do I pick a show just based on it checks all the boxes? One show that I've always avoided is *Matilda*. I

> cannot get past the opening number. . . . It checks some of the boxes for me, but if I can't get into it, that makes my job harder as a director.

This has led to him considering shows that are not as well known:

> I think not being afraid as a director to go outside of the box is good. . . . There's a show called *Ranked* through Uproar Theatrics. It was a show that two directors got together and wrote about their students, things their students were experiencing.

Bryce clearly had knowledge of his community, being aware of what they would enjoy seeing in musicals at his high school. This also included knowledge of his students and what they might be okay performing in those shows. His limited casting options made the show selection process arduous, but knowing his administrators were flexible made the process slightly easier.

Planning the Show

After selecting a show, Bryce makes plans about how to present that show on stage. Some examples of those thought processes are listed on the following pages. Bryce was planning to direct his first show that originally called for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) characters this coming fall, though he has since accepted a teaching position in a different high school and is unsure of the show's fate for this fall. He had considered the show *Once on This Island* the year prior:

> My assistant at the time and I talked about the fact that it's originally written for a racially-diverse cast, particularly including African American or Black characters. It just gave me enough hesitation; I wanted to do a little more looking into this [concern] before I commit. There was another show that was an equally good option, so I went with that instead.

In his research about the show, he learned:

> The authors of the show specifically have a note in the libretto that says "though originally written for a diverse cast this story essentially transcends race" and there are some alternate versions of the lines provided so you can do this with a non-diverse cast. So, the fact that it came from the authors themselves, and I consider them to be experts on the subject, so that's why I went back to it.

With this added information, he was prepared to present the show in the fall of 2023.

Bryce wrote a musical, based around the music of American pop rock band, Hanson, which he titled *Weird*. One of the main characters was queer:

> I talked with the administration about how to go about it in a way that was going to minimize any potential controversy. My superintendent at the time really believed in the message of the show and didn't want that to get tainted by people causing a stir. She didn't want the message to get lost in some sort of controversy. In our advertising materials, I was asked to label it PG-13, to give a heads up, so people weren't bringing their young children expecting a Disney show, so to speak. We [the administrator and I] talked about various moments in the show. I don't think I was asked to censor or lighten anything with the queer character, but I was very sensitive in writing those scenes to make sure I wasn't necessarily preaching a 'right' or a 'wrong,' or 'this is the way it should be.' It just was a lens into this character's experience. There was a mom who was unsupportive, and a dad who eventually showed his support by taking a character to a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) meeting. But [the characters in the show] never preached about whether homosexuality was right or wrong. There weren't any religious jabs or anything in there. I made sure to really walk a line there, knowing the community I would be presenting it in.

As a part of the writing process, Bryce ran the script by administrators. They respected his vision for the show but did have concerns they wanted addressed, like profanity:

> I was asked to eliminate a couple of moments of swearing. . . . I think there were only one or two in the whole show. I felt in writing this that the use of profanity met the moment. . . . I think the word was "assholes" and that one got vetoed, and that was okay.

The portrayal of a character that was living in poverty and homelessness needed some revisions:

> There was also a moment where one of the characters, who was living in poverty and homelessness, her mom was bouncing between jobs. She got a job as a lunch lady in the school. . . . They [administrators] brought up a concern that we have students in the school whose mom's work as lunch personnel and [they didn't want to be] sending the message that is something to be embarrassed about. I reworded it slightly to make sure that the mom might embarrass her by telling an embarrassing story . . . not just her presence as a lunch lady.

Another concern arose as Bryce used the term "Weirdos" to describe the ensemble in the script, rather than the standard "Ensemble." It was a term the cast came up with, but drew extra scrutiny from the Director of Special Education, who helped write a monologue for a student with special needs:

> There was a moment in the show where two of the ensemble characters gave their own personal testimonials. . . . To be able to give their perspectives, on being immediately seen as different, but "this is how I'm not different." I gave them the opportunity to write their own [lines]. . . . Our Director of Special Ed. had some hesitation because I labeled the ensemble rather than saying "ensemble," they were the "weirdos." They [the cast]

> kind of came up with this. But they [the Director of Special Ed.] had some hesitation with these two students . . . being labeled as weirdos in the script. Kind of some of those semantics. I got a little fired up about that just because I thought it was such a poignant moment in the show for them to be able to speak from their perspective. They [the Director of Special Ed.] did work with the student in the special ed program to change the narrative a little bit, "these are the things I'm good at, but l struggle to clean my room" or "I don't like doing this, but I like shooting baskets and I like doing this," and "I'm different, but I'm just like you." So, it was edited into a positive spin on it, which was fine with me. I didn't have any parameters that said, 'you have to talk about that you are different.' . . . The student in the wheelchair talked about how "I wish people would not see the chair, and just see me." Or "they think I'm depressed all the time because I'm in this chair." It was really powerful. . . . I had a little tug of war battle with that, making sure that it honored the intent of my vision, but that everyone was satisfied with how it was portrayed. We came to an amicable conclusion on it, and I felt good about the final product.

In *The Addams Family*, Wednesday is a macabre character, who has a propensity for torturing her brother and others. One line in the show caught Bryce's eye, which he edited prior to students seeing the script:

> There was a line that I edited before making the script available for students to read to preview before auditions. It was a line about setting fire to the Jehovah's Witnesses. And Wednesday, she's growing up, "ahh, all the good memories," she used to torture her brother, so on and so forth. We happen to have Jehovah's Witnesses in our district. I knew of one that may be auditioning for the show, and I wanted to not even put it out there. . . . I changed it to the effect of setting fire to the mail man, it's still someone who comes to the door. Still gets the same effect without offending Jehovah's Witnesses in our community.

Once a show was selected, Bryce worked to continue ensuring comfort for those who interacted with the show. In rare cases, this involved consultation with administrators. He showed caution in making sure he represented shows appropriately, as seen with his delay to learn more about *Once on This Island*. He continued to strive for student comfort through show edits.

Rehearsal Process

Once the show began rehearsing, Bryce was flexible while working with his students. Changes were made as interpersonal relationships between actors were established or as family or community concerns arose. These changes helped to ensure that the teacher, students, and audiences were comfortable for performances.

Kissing characters was something that Bryce tended to avoid: "It's never been as crucial of a plot point." As such, he always worked around it. During a production of *The Addams Family*, Bryce recounted an interaction with the actors who play Wednesday and Lucas, the characters around whose engagement *The Addams Family* plot is based:

> Wednesday and Lucas get married and there's supposed to be a kiss because they're getting married. The actors who played Wednesday and Lucas talked about, "we've got to do that." …I said, "that's up to you. Whatever your comfort level is," I knew they weren't going to be making out on stage if they did a kiss, it'd be a quick peck. . . . I never forced the issue, we got to dress rehearsals, and they never did it. We did the bows [when the kiss was scripted to occur], they never talked about it, and it never ended up happening. I was okay with that. She was in a wedding dress. It's fine.

Bryce shared how he went about defusing some sexual content in *The Addams Family* presented by Alice, a bored, sexually frustrated, middle-class housewife:

> She says, "don't you remember, Mal, how we would go out to dinner and sometimes we'd give each other a look and we'd leave the restaurant right there, and we'd drive home, and sometimes we couldn't even wait until we got home to . . . " It goes on about them going to have sex. I had the student kind of trail off a little bit, it almost turned into like she was whispering in his ear. Some of those words I let trail off, so it didn't fully get to the implication that they were going to be having sex.

In a production of *Freaky Friday*, Bryce directed the first kiss at a wedding: "we circumvented it by having the bride, Catherine, put the bouquet up as they lean in towards each other, so they don't actually kiss." In his experience, no students have ever had a problem with a kiss being cut: "I've never run into a student that said, 'I really want us to kiss here.'"

In Bryce's original musical, *Weird*, the queer character was a point of contention for a cast member's parent.

> The father of a cast member was offended by this [the existence of a queer character]. He had clear opinions and beliefs regarding LGBTQ identity. It wasn't even his daughter that was playing the character. Because it [a queer character] existed in the show he threatened to call the principal. I don't know if he ever followed through on the threats. If he did, I had the support of the administration, so it wouldn't have really gone far. He [the father] talked about "maybe I'll show up to the show dressed as a girl then." The character in the show wasn't transgender. [The parent was] just kind of making a stink about it, to make a stink about it. Ultimately, he came to the show, no issues, he didn't say anything, didn't cause a ruckus or anything, just observed the show and then that was that.

Once Upon a Mattress has some sexist lines that Bryce needed to manage with the character of Sir Harry who frequently interacts with Lady Larken, who is pregnant with his child:

> Sir Harry, in *Once Upon a Mattress*, is kind of misogynistic, sexist. "Why should we both suffer all our lives just because you had a moment of weakness?", talking to Lady Larken.

With this line, he suggests that it is her fault that she is pregnant. This is one of many sexist lines he has throughout the show. Another instance in the script implies Sir Harry may take advantage of the French lady, who only can say "yes" in English:

> There is another moment in *Once Upon a Mattress* with a lady that Sir Harry's dancing with at a party. She speaks French, and she only knows one word of English, "Yes." For personnel reasons we didn't have a lady to play that part. We skipped over that part as it wasn't absolutely crucial to the plot. It's just Harry dancing with another woman.

Regarding the character of Sir Harry, Bryce continues,

> I made it clear that Sir Harry is a caricature, although, there are some people who think that way. The character, in the context of the show, lives in a different time period. That may have been the prevailing thought of the time period. It was played very tongue in cheek; the audience was in on the humor of it. I don't think that actors had an issue. I know the actor playing Lady Larken didn't agree with that line of thinking but recognized that it's a character and it's a product of the time. It wasn't like she took umbrage with it to the point where it was a serious issue that we had to talk about it.

In *Annie,* Bryce took some steps to diminish the alcoholism of Miss Hannigan, the woman who runs Annie's orphanage:

> Miss Hannigan in *Annie* is supposed to be pretty sloshed a lot of the time. I didn't have her overly slurring her words. It wasn't a point of emphasis for me and blocking it. In "Little Girls," she acts a little nutty and free. I don't know if I ever gave her an empty bottle in her hand or not. If so, I don't know that I ever had her take a swig I don't know that I ever had her do any heavy drinking.

Shout the Mod Musical dealt with some heavier topics in monologues, like alcoholism:

> It had a monologue that talked about her husband's drinking or alcohol use. It was never portrayed on the stage but was talked about in one of those heavy moments of the show.

Another heavier topic that was presented as an option was drug use: "there was a scene originally in there about smoking marijuana, I believe. But they gave a full alternate scene, and so we just chose that alternate scene."

Domestic violence and abortion were also discussed through a monologue in the show:

> There was also mention of abortion. I think that's more so what I cut out of that monologue. In that community, that was a no-fly zone. It [the monologue] talks about domestic abuse, but the other girls in the scene rally around her. It's one scene in the context of the whole show, and I have not been afraid to necessarily approach those subjects. I don't think we gave her like a big old bruise on her eye or anything like that, she just gave the monologue and then the show continued.

Summary of Bryce's Perspectives

Bryce was always thinking of his students' comfort when selecting and editing shows. It was as if he considered a hypothetical student that would be the most uncomfortable and edited the show to make them comfortable. Often these edits were made after students receive their scripts and begin working on the show:

> I typically don't scratch it out before giving them the script, they get the script and then I say, "when we get to it in the read through, or in the blocking phase we're going to say this instead."

He kept in mind that they were students, and that he was their teacher:

> I know . . . they're actors playing characters. So, what the *character* is saying is not necessarily what the *student* is doing or saying, but as their teacher I don't want to see my students in those compromising positions.

He was aware of elements in shows that his community may or may not be interested in seeing as well as topics that would not be received well in the community. Bryce also enjoyed support from his administrators in his most recent position. They did not micromanage his show selection process and did their best to support his vision when writing a show that presented some controversial topics.

Caroline

Biography

Caroline spent her first two years in education at a private 6th-12th grade school and spent the 12 years before data collection at one of multiple public high schools in a university town. She was the sole director and music director for their productions and had directed 14 musical theater productions and additional musical theater cabaret-style showcases. She grew up with a

family that loved musicals and by the time she got to high school, she had a notebook full of ideas about how she would direct them. She listed school-day performances for middle and elementary students as her highlight in directing high school musical theater. She said she loved seeing her students inspire the younger students through their hard work and storytelling abilities.

Perusal of the Scripts

Caroline was careful when selecting shows. There are parts of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* that she enjoyed, but she said it needed a rewrite:

> *Thoroughly Modern Millie* has some racist jokes that don't work especially with my community and student population. I love the music. I love the show, but I would love to see an updated version of that.

Until that updated version comes out, the show sits in Caroline's spreadsheet of potential shows as one that cannot be done.

Kissing presented itself as a stage direction in almost every musical Caroline has directed. She was flexible with these scenes, willing to change the staging if concerns arose: "If a student, a family, or parent had a concern, then I would just address it as needed. But I haven't had that as an issue." She had strategies if it ever became an issue, from when she was a performer in high school: "It was mimed, with hands blocking the lips."

She was aware of the discomfort of directing students in certain types of scenes and stressed the importance of safety and comfort for actors. She ensured there was enough practice time, while keeping an eye on student comfort by paying attention to how they reacted. Part of her motivation to ensure student comfort and safety came from her uncomfortable situation as a high school performer:

> As an actor I have been put in really uncomfortable situations on stage where a director doesn't support you or give you the appropriate rehearsal to feel comfortable. When I'm coaching that with students, I try to really read how they are feeling. We talk about it a lot, and I try to be really open and make sure that they feel comfortable and safe. They're not doing what I had to do when I was in school, where I had my first kiss in front of 100 people. I try to follow the lead of the high schoolers, make sure that I'm being respectful to them, and make sure that they feel as comfortable as I can make them.

During this conversation about kissing, Caroline brought up her desire to have additional support on her production team: "I wish that we could have intimacy coaches, like Broadway gets to do." She looked to professional organizations to help with this idea:

> Someone needs to lead a WMEA (Wisconsin Music Educators Association) or WCDA (Wisconsin Choral Directors Association) training session on it. They [school administrators] are not going to give me a budget to hire someone for that. Even just a protocol, or some sort of book, or workshop we could take. That way we could just do it in a way that has integrity and is not creepy.

Caroline was used to seeing profanity when looking for shows to direct at her high school:

> I feel like every show has something in it. Even if it's "damn" or something. . . . Except maybe the ones that are really kid-centric, like *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*.

If a show with profanity was selected, "we keep it in and then we edit it for [middle and elementary school] student performances." When deciding whether to clean up the language of a show, she considered her own comfort, student reactions as they read the script, and thinking through how administrators might feel when they saw the show. She noted that she wished editing lines was easier: "I wish more of them [scripts] had suggested alternate lines."

Caroline was keeping an eye to the future about potential types of shows she may encounter: "Disability or mental illness, we haven't necessarily gotten the high school versions of those shows yet." She also shared,

> Queer relationships, that's more of a modern trend. There are more shows coming out now, which is great. I've had a lot of LGBTQ+ actors in shows, but none of the shows I've directed had that as a topic. We've had people playing all sorts of genders.

She also looped in the casting process to these ideas: "Shows with flexible race or gender casting, I think that we're going to see more of it in the next decade."

Caroline also keeps in mind *where* she is teaching, and recognizes what she sees as an advantage to her school's location:

> Each community is different . . . what I can get away with doing in my town is different than smaller towns, or maybe a private school or whatever it is. That's part of it is knowing your students, knowing your community, and knowing where you are, and what

> they'll embrace or what they'll have a problem with. . . . The city I'm in is very purple. It's 50/50 Republican/Democrat. Our department is very accepting, very open, very progressive. I don't know why, it just is. I just feel like it's a luxury compared to what I hear from some other teachers around the state.

She also kept in mind that selecting a musical to direct is a long-term commitment: "If you're going to spend a year of your life on something, there's got to be some meat to it, there's got to be some things you can unpack." Later adding, "Anyone who's just starting out, don't just pick a show because you like the music. There are so many shows that are just done because they're catchy."

In our interview, she referenced her willingness to select shows that push boundaries:

> Musical theater is a platform that's meant to push the envelope. There's a time and a place for things, and maybe some shows should never be done. But I also think if there's just a little bit of it [envelope pushing], you can teach about it, you can talk about it.

Later in the interview she mentioned, "I like that musical theater is political."

Unlike Bryce, Caroline left the script alone until she knew how the students performing the show might feel. She was willing to adjust the lines and blocking of the show but found that they are not often needed. This difference could stem from the different types of communities the two directors work in, Caroline describing hers as "purple," a mix of Republican (red) and Democrat (blue) supporters. Bryce mentioned many ways in which his community might lean more "red," including comfort with guns and religious messaging in shows.

Rehearsal Process

Caroline used the rehearsal process to educate her students about topics presented in her shows. Talking about sensitive topics ahead of time was essential for Caroline's production of *Guys and Dolls*. She talked about characters being objectified:

> We talked a lot about the time period it was written and how even then they were making a joke of it, that's the whole point was a commentary on the stereotypes of the time. We really educated the cast on it. We had something in our program about it, as well.

Guys and Dolls is one of many shows that Caroline has directed that portrays drinking alcohol and drunkenness. When it came to an actor portraying drunkenness, she was clear with them:

> "this is acting and this is something you should not be doing in high school." I try to reiterate the school rules about it. We talk about it when we're blocking, the physicality of what it looks like, and what it does to you. Usually, the students have seen enough of it in movies and other media that it's not foreign to them. I've never had anyone be weird about it. We treat it as part of the storytelling aspect and how it fits into the plot. . . . We sometimes tone it down a little bit, more than an adult production would.
>
> In *Crazy for You*, Caroline had to direct a character being cat-called:
>
> It was not an issue. It's described in the script. The students didn't even have an issue with it. The actress who was the focus of it was totally fine and didn't ever show or verbalize being uncomfortable. So, we didn't really adapt it. I think we definitely talked about how you don't do that. This is not something we do today. It was a joke, you had to do it for that scene. It's not something we could really edit out.

She commended her students' work with the show: "Nobody was being inappropriate; they all were definitely mature and responsible about it." She also shared that it is not something that needs to be feared by directors: "I feel like it's how you approach, how you educate, how you lead. I don't think you can just skirt away from controversy."

Education was an essential element in Caroline's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, not just for the students, but for her as the director:

> We talked, in *Fiddler*, about costuming. "Why are they wearing prayer shawls?" "Why are their heads covered?" That helps the story telling. The importance of their costume and treating those pieces with respect. So that was a cool teaching moment and learning for me. I'm not an expert in those kinds of things either.

Educating students about the history of the setting in *The Sound of Music* was important as well:

> We talked a lot about what was happening in Austria at that time. I led some questions with the cast about what they already knew about World War Two. I believe we also had a note in a program for that as well. I don't tolerate if a student is going to be immature. If they were to make a comment, I would shut it down. I haven't had to do that; they take it really seriously. I'm proud of my students for how thoughtful they are when it comes to more sensitive or controversial elements of shows. They want to do the show justice. They want to tell the story the best possible way they can. I just feel like I haven't had as many issues.

This extra caution was due to some of the set pieces present in Caroline's production: "We used actual Nazi flags. So that was horrible. . . . They are sickening to look at. We wanted it [the flags] to show that threat [to the audience]."

All the education and preshow planning Caroline did was not foolproof. In her first job, a principal asked her, on opening night, about the possibility of removing the moments of kissing in *Singin' in the Rain*.

> The principal got an email from someone who didn't really identify themself, complaining about the amount of kissing in the show. We were pretty sure it was the boyfriend of one of the leads. The principal came to me and asked, "Can you change any of this? We got this email." I said, "Look, we don't even know who that's from." It was already opening night. We weren't going to change much at this point. It was too little too late. Then the principal ended up understanding our side and let us keep it as is.

Clearly, Caroline cared for her students and had an artistic vision for her shows. She worked with her students to ensure they had the necessary knowledge to present these challenging elements. Whereas Bryce focused on adjusting the script to his student's comfort, Caroline aimed to increase her students' knowledge to make them comfortable with the script. Caroline had backup plans in place if her students were still uncomfortable.

Performance

Caroline had yet to direct any shows where the casting of a BIPOC actor in a BIPOC role was essential:

> We did *Big Fish* this year, and the character of Josephine was originally played by a Black actress and we also had a Black actress play it, but there was no mention of race, nothing to do with the plot.

Shrek was another show that featured a BIPOC character: "When we did *Shrek* our donkey was Black. . . . I think that role is now getting some controversy with it. It is a little bit of a minstrel character." The character is written with "retrogressive racial stereotypes (Brater et al., 2010, pg. 167)." This connection to minstrelsy could be seen prior to entering the theater for the show's Broadway debut. A poster of Daniel Breaker as Donkey featured his eyes opened extremely wide in a comic effect that aligns with a trope of minstrelsy: bugging the eyes for comic effect to accentuate the Blackness of the burnt-cork makeup (Brater et al., 2010).

Les Misérables has some risqué moments that were tamed down a bit, as Caroline did the school version of the show. She referenced the song "Lovely Ladies," which is sung by sailors seeking out prostitutes:

> I don't think we've ever done anything where there's any sort of sexual innuendo other than *Les Mis*. We did the student version of that, so we didn't do any sort of simulation. It was very tame, all that red-light district stuff, the song "Lovely Ladies," was shortened. The choreography was not as risqué as an adult group would have been. Our choreographer's really good about being really sensitive to things like that and still making the scene work without needing to always push the limit.

Crazy for You is one of a handful of shows that Caroline mentioned directing that used prop guns. She speaks here of the caution they take with those props:

> We usually are really careful when using the props, especially in rehearsals. I lock them up. I don't want them floating about the school, or some kid walking in and out of the building with them, especially with gun violence as it is right now in our schools.

In the show there was a "fake shoot out, but it's a comedic thing. They pretend to shoot each other up and then they're high fiving each other afterwards. It's like a Western scene." When it came to the sound of gun shots, Caroline said,

> You could do it either way . . . in *Les Mis* it was audio. The sound person was running those because there was so much of it. In *Crazy for You,* I think we did have one gun that did the popping noise.

Comfort was brought up for the audience as well:

> We're putting it [the presence of a gunshot] in the program, and signs in the lobby. Trying not to catch anyone off guard. I have never had a student say, "I'm uncomfortable with the gun noise." If I had, I probably would have changed it even more.

Reception

Caroline shared two stories of "minor" criticisms that came after a show had closed. A 'Letter to the Editor' was written about *The Most Happy Fella,* bringing up concerns about the show.

> There's an unwed woman who gets pregnant. There was someone who wrote a Letter to the Editor in the newspaper and never talked to me. It said this [topic] was inappropriate for a high school to be addressing, and they should do other shows. My administration didn't blink. They didn't think twice about it. It didn't turn into anything more than that.

A less extreme example of this post-show criticism came from Caroline's production of *Shrek:*

> When I did *Shrek*, I got an email months after a performance saying that the show uses the word "ass" too many times, and their grandson had been repeating it because of our production. Again, my administrators are just very supportive and helped handle it. I didn't even have to respond.

Summary of Caroline's Perspectives

Similar to Bryce's administrators, Caroline's administrators allowed her a lot of autonomy over the show selection process:

> Every year, I usually run it [the show selection] by my principal . . . they typically don't read through the script or watch it. I've had several principals, some of them are more knowledgeable about the shows I'm picking than others. Sometimes they just always trust me to make that decision. We were going to do *Les Mis* and it was the same thing, "There are some more adult themes here." We just communicate that. We typically do student performances for middle and elementary schools. Some years we don't have them, or we just have middle schools. My principals have trusted me to make that judgment call as needed.

Caroline spoke of making sure students were comfortable and safe when it came to performing, especially when dealing with interpersonal elements:

> I try to be really open and make sure that they feel comfortable and safe. . . . I try to follow the lead of the high schoolers, make sure that I'm being respectful to them, and make sure that they feel as comfortable as I can make them."

She saw musicals as being about storytelling. Her handling of potentially controversial topics is framed through that lens: "We treat it [drunkenness] as part of the storytelling aspect and how it fits into the plot."

Caroline shared some poignant final thoughts with me during our interview:

> I feel like doing high school musicals is so important. There are so many great shows out there. . . . I like that you can watch the story of America through shows that come along with the different decades. I think it's fascinating. . . . To me, it's not just entertainment, there's so much more to it, and there's so much more teaching that goes into it. I'm glad that we get to celebrate more diversity. And I'm hopeful that in the future that's even more of the case. That theater can continue to be a safe place for students.

Holly

Biography

Holly began her career at an urban junior high school in south central Wisconsin. She was one of two choral directors who taught choir, guitar, and general music. Outside of school

hours, she directed two musicals annually, led a madrigal group, and a show choir. She left the school to go to Chicago where she was an actress, earning her Actors Equity Card, in addition to performing jazz and pop music on the side. When she came back into teaching, she worked at an urban alternative high school. In her first year at the school, she directed two musicals. On her boss's suggestion, she started a summer musical theater program the following year. The program has since grown to be a district-wide offering, where all students audition together for 12 to 16 shows at three different high schools. All who audition are accepted, but the show they are in is not necessarily at their high school and is made up of students from all of the high schools. After a shift in academic focus at her current school, Holly was asked by the principal of another school in the district to come teach at his school. She was still teaching choral music and theater at the time, but the position has since shifted to be just theater due to growth in the program. In that time, she grew to have a connection with Music Theatre International (MTI), frequently piloting high school versions of shows for the company.

Perusal of the Scripts

When considering shows to direct, Holly has the representation of race in the forefront of her mind, as she taught in a "majority minority school district." Her district was 46.9% White, with 30.2% Hispanic/Latino, 13.6% Black, 7.4% Two or more races, 1.7% Asian or Asian Pacific Islander, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. She referenced *Once on This Island*, *Hamilton* and *The Wiz* as shows that need to be performed with actors of color:

> Even though in its licensing, it says it's okay for everybody to do it, it was licensed many moons ago, and right now, in my community, we are definitely mixed culture. It does not work that way anymore. Maybe in a different community it works, maybe that's okay. In my community we need to make sure that you're casting as close to that Haitian culture as possible. Because that's where my culture is right now.

Her updated understanding of the importance of race in musicals would prevent her from directing *Miss Saigon School Edition* again: "We probably shouldn't have now because we don't have that culture. I put a Latina in the lead role" even though *Miss Saigon* is set in

Vietnam. Holly implied that her school district does not have the Asian student body to support this kind of show now. It also shows how she has grown in her understanding of cultural representation.

As part of Music Theatre International's (MTI) pilot program, Holly was offered the opportunity to direct *Spring Awakening High School Edition*. It was one of the few times that she decided not to pilot something for them. She said, "I don't know that you can do sexual repression without the sex. . . . I don't think that's going to fly with parents." It was not a solo decision to turn down the opportunity; Holly took the discussion to her team where it was decided that it was too much.

"The Form"

In Holly's school district, teachers have a form they fill out any time they believe content they are teaching has anything that could be considered mature content. The form can be seen in Appendix I. Musical directors use this form in the show selection process.

> If we are going to present something that is of mature nature, we have to apply. Nobody reads the script, but we have to delineate what is mature about it, and that goes to the district in a document. Then, in any publicity, all of that [mature content] is stated in advance. And then before the show starts, we state it once more in front of the audience.

The form is not specific to theater. It appears to be for any "presentation" of mature content in the school setting. It contains basic questions about who is presenting the material and when; 'yes or no' questions about materials being previewed and speakers being interviewed; as well as three open-ended questions: materials description, reason for including this topic of study, and alternative instruction plans for students not participating. The last question is irrelevant to Holly's productions, as students are not required to participate in musicals. In Holly's time in the district, a show has never been rejected due to anything written on the form: "The only time [administration approached us] was *Dreamscape*," when the administrators were approached by the local police department due to an officer-involved shooting being presented on the stage.

Shows with “BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] characters would be culturally mature,” Holly said, and would require a form to be submitted. When asked if that was a blanket statement for all shows with BIPOC characters, she clarified, “Most of them need it, if it’s good literature, I’ll be honest. There’s not a whole lot of fluff.” When offered the example of Trix, a Black character in *The Drowsy Chaperone*, where only one line references her race, Holly thought “probably not for something like that.” Shows like *Hairspray* that deal with issues like racism and civil rights: “if there’s any of that [racism] in the show, we’d turn in the form.”

When elements of a show are sexual, the educator completes the form. This happened for *Mamma Mia*, as characters reference sex in the song “Honey Honey” but also because of the nature of the character Sophie having three potential fathers. When *Cabaret* was chosen, administrators did have a conversation about the song "Two Ladies” upon receiving the form. Holly and her team explained their plan, which was to present the scene through puppetry. *Miss Saigon* had a scene where two characters were to simulate sex; another instance of the form being effectively used.

Holly’s decision on whether to use the form for depictions of alcohol depended on how much alcohol was in use on stage. Her initial instinct was to say alcohol on stage meant the form got filled out. She then realized some lighter instances of alcohol use, like wedding toasts, might not require it to be used.

In addition to being submitted for the sexual nature of the song “Two Ladies,” *Cabaret*’s setting of Nazi Germany would also be a reason for form submission. Holly noted for shows like *The Sound of Music*, “if it’s a show that has been out there forever, we would not turn in a form.” This seems to imply that if a show is well known enough, notifying administration and the public would not be necessary as it is common knowledge.

For Holly, the form has never been denied. I asked her if she and the administration had ever differed on what constituted mature content or whether administrators had ever questioned not getting a form. She answered, “no,” that has never happened, but that “it’s not

spelled out [in a policy]. We are going to delineate what it [the mature content] is, and we send it to our fine arts boss. And the district is aware of what's going on."

This form seems to do a lot of the work for communicating with administrators. Though Caroline seems to do fine with her brief check in with her administrator, perhaps a more formal system, like this form could be helpful. With Bryce's autonomy over show selection, perhaps the "curse" side of what he described as a "blessing and a curse" could be eased a little if he filled out something like Holly's form after he had decided on a show.

Planning the Show

When preparing a show, Holly's artistic vision was flexible whether a kiss stayed in a show she directed or not: "If they're not comfortable with that kind of contact, you don't do it. You stage it differently. You can cover it." If students were comfortable with it, "you do it in stages. Start with touching hands or with a hug after that. Then make sure there's a private rehearsal and not in front of an entire cast. Just let them figure out their comfort level."

Profanity was left in Holly's productions, unless students were not comfortable with it. Even if a word or phrase was not explicitly profane, she was happy to adjust the dialogue: "anything they're not comfortable saying, they do not have to say." The same was true for presenting alcohol on stage. She was happy to do so if cast members were comfortable with it. For shows that contained heavy drinking, she would check in with administration, whereas lighter fare, like wedding toasts, did not need that check in. If Holly selected a show with characters with disabilities, she aimed to cast students with disabilities in those roles. If that was not possible, she said, "there needs to be people that come in and can help us explain that disability to us [the cast and production team]."

When Holly had an idea of how to change a show, she was willing to reach out to the licensing company. She encouraged other directors to do the same: "if you have to reach out to the licensing agency, you reach out to the licensing agency." This communication was to

encourage bold ideas, such as her "gender free *1776*." She also made mention of the recent Broadway revival of *1776* being presented with all female, nonbinary, or trans cast members.

Rehearsal Process

While working in high school musical theater, Holly's main priority was student comfort. She said, "Start with the students. What are they comfortable with?" This was reiterated when asked about shows where characters are sexually objectified: "Always check in with students. . . . If they're not comfortable with it, you can't do it." Profanity brought some of the same concerns: "Anything you [the student] are not comfortable saying you do not have to say." This is where she confirmed, "Student comfort is greater than artistic vision."

Holly stressed the importance of keeping families engaged in the process of being comfortable when it came to potentially controversial content in shows. An example of this came when she was talking about shows with BIPOC characters: "[we're] making sure that the children are comfortable with it and making sure that you're talking to them, their families are comfortable with it." She reiterated this idea in discussion about shows that reference sexual activities and shows with characters who have racist lines or actions. Holly also mentioned providing access to counseling for students of color if needed:

> If [the content of the show] is strong enough, we will bring counselors into rehearsal. If not, then we will say "here's the contact information for some of the things, if you don't feel you can talk to us."

One tough moment for Holly in recent times of racial tension was when one production was presented with an actor of color in a role originated by a White person. The production team realized a less-than-ideal situation during the rehearsal process, inadvertently creating some racist imagery. Some performers felt it should have been addressed from the outset. After a conversation with many stakeholders, including teachers, students, and community members, a series of policies were created for the department when actors of color are cast in roles that were not originally written as such. This included ensuring that resources, like counseling, are

available for performers and discussion is held about these elements early in the rehearsal process.

Despite turning down the opportunity to direct *Spring Awakening,* Holly has directed other shows with simulated sex scenes. She was insistent that sexual scenes should not take place in a bed. In *Miss Saigon School Edition,* Holly had the couple hug, kiss, and fall in water to help convey the sexual connection of two characters. She referenced the non-musical play, *Metamorphosis*, from which she was inspired, noting that "when clothes cling to bodies, when they get totally wet, that definitely sends a message."

Student comfort was at the front of her mind during a production of *Parade*. A student wanted to continue with the show despite her brother having recently died by suicide:

> I said, "you tell me what you want to do" because she was crying all the time. She talked to her parents, and we all sat down and talked. She said, "I really want to be in this." I said "but there's a funeral scene." She said, "I want to do the funeral scene." I said, "can we set up some people supporting you, that if it becomes too much, you can just quietly leave the stage?" "Yes, I would feel very good about that." I was like, "Okay," And some days she stayed, and some days she didn't.

Holly discussed a more proactive approach to working with parents during the rehearsal process. Like Bryce and Caroline, she checked in to ensure students were comfortable. Where Bryce and Caroline were happy to work with parents as concerns arose, Holly directly informed families about what was going on throughout the process. Holly also showed an aptitude for finding ways to work with students to tell stories on stage that might be uncomfortable, either due to material written in the script or personal circumstances.

Performance

A powerful show with mostly BIPOC characters that Holly worked on was *The Scottsboro Boys:* "The show is done in a minstrel style." With that in mind, Holly hired a Black, Chicago-based director-choreographer for the show; someone with more life experience and expertise in presenting a show in a minstrel style. One of the stronger elements of the show came at the end, when the students put on blackface:

> We did do the blackface, per our director's direction. The parameters that were set for that were that if any young man walked in at any moment and didn't want to do it, then it would not happen. Every night, the cast made the decision as a whole as to whether they had the strength to do that or not. At the end of the show, the actors put on blackface and then leave the stage, which is crazy strong. Just the idea that they can now walk away from that art form that was so detrimental to Black America. . . . All those things that have kept the Black culture down, and they've satirized them in a negative way. . . . So, the director, as a Black man, felt that it was a good thing for the kids to have the choice to do it. Every night they chose to do it.

Holly became more reserved about the use of prop firearms in the last few years, describing the present situation as "very sensitive." She later cited an instance where "a policeman shot a young man seven times" in her community. With that said, she used prop handguns a few years back in *Assassins* (a musical that portrays the historical figures who attempted, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to assassinate Presidents of the United States). More recently, she removed the gun moment from her piloted production of *Groundhog* where the main character, Phil, shoots the groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, and then himself. For Holly, keeping a pulse on opinions, thoughts, and events of her community determine whether she used guns on stage or not. She described this as "where your culture is at, at that moment in time."

Reception

Holly had a propensity to engage with community members through talkbacks after shows, especially ones she considered "strong literature." In these talkbacks, community leaders played a role in leading the conversation, but anyone in the community who attended the show could engage and learn. After performances of *Scottsboro Boys*, the director, Holly, the cast, and community members led talkback discussions with the interested audience members about the elements of race and race relations presented in the show. One community member who shared at the talkback was a performer's grandmother, who lived through protests in Montgomery in the 1960s. Having this real-life connection to the story of the show added to the discussion. It also made Holly realize that due to the strong nature of racially-dependent characters and race in *Scottsboro Boys*, she would not have been able to do this show to start her career at the

school. The program has grown over the years, and with it, the ability to present "stronger and stronger literature."

A talkback was used after Holly directed a pilot of *Trevor: The Musical*. The talkback was used to address parts of the show, such as the titular character's struggles with queerness in a school setting and his attempted suicide. Talkbacks were also used after productions of *The Sound of Music* and *Cabaret*, so the audience could talk about the historical context of Nazi Germany in what was presented. She suggested, "If you feel like you can do it in your community, and you feel that there's controversy, have a talkback. Talk about history. Have the audience talk about it." She also emphasized the importance of teaching students history through these types of shows:

> The kids need to know the history. I think if you do the research with them, it becomes apparent to students why you are doing this, and to their parents. . . . Parents were thrilled because their kids were learning all this history that probably isn't done in their history class.

With the racial diversity of the urban school district where Holly works, she has had many interactions with shows presenting BIPOC characters. One such show that she directed was *West Side Story*. It drew some criticism within the cast and at the International Thespian Festival (ITF). Black performers were cast as members of the Puerto Rican gang, the Sharks. According to some students after they graduated, they were not informed well enough about Puerto Rican history as a slave colony to understand that the presence of Black Puerto Rican characters was historically accurate. Holly shared that this difficulty within the cast may have come from a Latino boy who was disappointed to not get the role of Bernardo. At ITF, Holly was disappointed that she left a note about this historical fact out of the program which might have alleviated concerns about Black and Latino actors playing the Puerto Rican characters.

In *Mean Girls High School Version,* a painting of a girl's lips, teeth, and braces gets turned 90 degrees to create a visual joke where the painting then vaguely replicates a vagina. In Holly's piloted production of the show, this joke was the only complaint she received. This

implied a lack of concern over some of the other risqué material, such as profanity, drug and alcohol use, and a song titled "Sexy."

The Cast of Characters

Holly, like Caroline and Bryce, mentioned being sensitive to the community where she worked. She said that directors need to have their pulse on their community. All three directors mentioned the importance of student comfort and safety. For Bryce, that meant planning ahead and editing the show to make it as comfortable as possible for students. For Holly and Caroline, this meant leaving the show alone, but keeping in communication with students about their comfort, and having a willingness, as director, to change as needed.

Holly had a form to communicate with her administrators about potentially mature content in her shows. Bryce and Caroline also communicated those concerns, through conversations rather than a specific form. Holly embraced discourse about her productions with the community, especially when she knew she had administrative support. If someone had a problem, she saw it as an opportunity to learn more about her community, saying, "How do you meet your community until you hear them complain? How do you know where you should take stories until you have a real conversation with the community?"

Holly had some thoughts like Caroline's regarding pushing boundaries and telling stories through musical theater:

> We, as educators, lead our communities through these stories. That's part of what we're doing. Part of what I realized, as we did more and more, is that we can get away with things that other people can't, because we have built an audience that comes to have that experience; to watch young people be a part of that communicative process, and a part of that understanding of our culture, and part of storytelling like that.

Holly wrapped up our conversation by mentioning the importance of live theater for creating a sense of community:

> You decide to go to a movie, you're kind of thrilled when there's nobody else there because you can get your thing and put your feet up and spread out and have a great time. When you come into a theater and it's half full, your heart sinks a little bit because you came to experience this with your community.

Despite working in different-sized communities, all three directors showed that they prioritize their student's wellbeing. They went about those strategies in a variety of ways: pre-editing the show, educating performers, and communicating frequently with students and families. In the next chapter, these strategies, and more, will be compared with survey data presented in the previous chapter, with conclusions and implications for the future.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine content issues of musicals that theater directors must consider when selecting a show for high school performance. The quantitative and qualitative data in Chapters Four and Five provided insight into director opinions and practices. This chapter will explore the implications of that data.

Data analysis produced the following emergent themes for discussion:

1-Director Comfort
2-Interactions with Administration
3-Student Comfort and Safety "Student comfort is greater than artistic vision"
4-Student Education
5-Community Perspectives

Director Comfort

Directors revealed that they were comfortable with most topics surveyed. Though the topics surveyed in this research differ from those Seidel (1991) used, there seem to be some comparable findings. Seidel was pursuing the frequency topics were presented through theater coursework and productions, whereas this research asked director comfort with the idea of directing the topic. If the topics were being addressed in Seidel's research it seems a fair assumption that the director was comfortable working with the material.

The most frequently addressed topic in Seidel's (1991) research was drug and alcohol abuse. In this research, the two topics were separated. Drug use was one of the three topics in this research directors listed that they would be somewhat uncomfortable directing. Alcohol use was the topic that directors listed as the one they would be most comfortable directing.

Seidel's (1991) research also showed multicultural education and issues as a prominent topic addressed in high school theater. Though not a direct correlation, racist and racially defined BIPOC characters seem as if they would be a part of this category in Seidel's research. Racially defined BIPOC characters was a topic that current directors were quite comfortable

managing. Racist characters was another of the three areas that the directors in this study would be uncomfortable directing.

Chmielewski (2009) was conflicted regarding racial elements when directing high school musicals at a predominantly African-American school. She debated directing exclusively Black shows and explored casting Black performers in shows that were historically performed by all- or mostly-White casts. She ended up finding ways to make both approaches work, with thoughtful consideration regarding both types of shows. *Ragtime* which features plenty of Black characters was rejected due to the school's lack of White performers needed for the show. Conversely, knowing that the 1976 Broadway revival of *Guys and Dolls* was presented by an all-Black cast made that show's choice much easier.

Sexual identity, teen sexuality and pregnancy, and gang, street, and family violence were all topics Seidel (1991) found to be addressed by more than two-thirds of directors surveyed. This research showed director comfort with topics including LGBTQ characters, referencing sexual activities, sexualizing characters, and domestic violence. The topic directors were not comfortable addressing was the simulation of sexual activities. It is unclear if the simulation of sexual activities was an element in Seidel's topic of teen sexuality and pregnancy. Omasta (2015) found that sex was the topic directors of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) were most likely to avoid in their productions.

Interactions with Administration

According to the survey data, administrative approval was sought 50% of the time or less when selecting a musical or when deciding against a show after considering it. This communication is encouraged by Lazarus (2005). Perhaps directors have strong enough relationships with their administrators that they do not worry about some of these topics or feel they are more in touch with community perceptions than their administrators. Administrators were described as the reason for shows being preemptively not considered or denied after being strongly considered.

The interviews contradicted the survey data, with all three interview subjects having some form of communication with administrators when selecting shows, in at least some cases. Even when not directly communicating with administrators, their thoughts and opinions were still considered in decision-making.

Student Comfort and Safety

Student comfort and safety were widely talked about in qualitative data, both through the opportunities provided in the survey and in the three interviews. The topics directors listed as the most uncomfortable for students to represent on stage were simulating sexual activities, racist characters, and domestic violence. These three topics were all averaged as the only three on the more "uncomfortable" side of neutral. Lazarus (2005) advised using the mantle of director wisely. Some of her suggestions included: using the inherent power with benevolence, avoiding sharing secrets and personal information, and not being alone with a student.

Sexual Elements

Sexual elements in shows seemed to be a topic that directors spent a lot of time considering to assure student comfort and as such was approached with caution. This hesitancy is reinforced by Derschowitz (2018) who noted that sexual content becomes more of a significant issue in a high school setting. Though not heavily researched, some studies have shown that just listening to music referencing sex over a long period of time is associated with earlier initiation of sex, riskier sex, and greater likelihood to acquire an STI in adolescence (Martino et al., 2006; Wingood et al., 2003).

When scripts called for characters to kiss, directors had many options of how to proceed. Some found ways to eliminate these moments right from the beginning of the production process. Others left the decision about how to handle the kiss up to the performers. A third group did not alter the script or stage directions regarding kisses. These approaches are supported by Rikard (2022), who, though writing for acting in a post-COVID theater space, offered some excellent options for how to get around actors touching lips at all. Ideas included

closing distance with the foreheads, closing distance with the noses, or one actor closing the distance with their nose to the other actor's cheek.

Intimacy coaches were suggested in the research on multiple occasions. They are becoming more popular on Broadway and in Hollywood. Intimacy coordinators are a relatively new position involved with stage and screen acting, coming out of the wake of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements (Villareal, 2022). They are most often brought in for intimate scenes that may involve nudity or sexual contact. An analogy could easily be made to a fight choreographer who comes in to ensure everyone is safe simulating a battle. The intimacy coordinator ensures everyone feels safe while representing a sexual scene.

Profanity

Most schools do not allow profanities in the classroom, but they may be allowed on the stage. Directors suggested that they were ready to adjust if needed, either due to administrative intervention or student discomfort. Multiple directors cited having some kind of backup plan. Similarly, Lin-Manuel Miranda used a backup plan when allowing the censorship of two profanities in the professional video recording of his show, *Hamilton*. This edit to the original production allowed it to retain a PG-13 rating and availability on Disney+ (Haasch, 2020). Many directors referenced the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings scale when discussing shows, suggesting they may use similar language with their students. The MPAA ratings are established attempting to take the perspective of most American parents regarding what would be appropriate for their children (Motion Picture Association, 2020).

Other Topics

Being aware of topics that are unsettling for students is also important for directors. Prop guns caused a lot of directors to write about safety. Multiple directors mentioned securing these props in a location to which only adults had access. Notices to police departments and school liaison officers were also described. Some of these strategies, and others, are presented in "Firearm Safety Onstage" (Chambers, 1992) an educational video demonstrating essential safety

measures when using prop guns in live theater. Alec Baldwin's October 2021 accidental fatal shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on the set of the movie *Rust* was cited as an example of the need for caution with props (Astor et al., 2023).

This research found the flexibility and willingness to adapt elements of a show based on student comfort essential. Communication with parents regarding content in the show also assured many directors that students were comfortable with what was being presented on stage. Ultimately, as Holly often alluded to, the director's vision cannot be more important than student comfort or safety.

Student Education

Teachable moments were frequently mentioned in qualitative data from both the survey and interviews. Participants shared ideas about teaching racism as a negative aspect of society through their presentation in a show. In the case of racism, directors were keen to note that any racism in a show needed to be intentionally written, not a product of the time within which the show was written. The former provides opportunity to learn from mistakes characters make, where the latter may present racism in a normalized way.

In a similar vein, Turchi & Christensen (2018) discussed how race could be used to change the intent of the author. They used Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as an example. The two families in the show are supposed to be "both alike." If a director would split the families on racial lines, they would no longer be "alike." In this instance, racism in *Romeo and Juliet* would not have been intentionally written, nor a product of the time, but in its own category. If this racial casting decision were to be made, the teacher would have many opportunities to teach about similarities and differences to Shakespeare's intent.

Omasta's (2015) survey of TYA directors asked about social issues that TYA productions *should* be addressing. Highly rated issues included: bullying, race/racism, gender/sexism, diversity, sexual identity/homophobia, drugs, politics, and sex. Many of these topics overlap

with the research of this thesis. Omasta's findings provide topics about which directors could educate their casts and audiences.

Teachable moments were described by directors of shows with sexist characters. Violence, including firearm use and safety, was cited with a need for education as well. Proper context was also needed for characters with disabilities as well as shows with negative historical elements, like Nazism. In any of these instances, a director knowing their own abilities can be essential, allowing for guests to be brought in to teach elements about which the director is not comfortable leading an educational session. Finally, it is also important to teach students to separate themselves from their character; an important step in a young actors' education.

Community Perspectives

Community Comfort

Accounting for the community in which a high school musical is presented was a common thread when reporting about shows. Directors seemed to pay a considerable amount of attention to the audience members who might come to their shows. This research showed that, for the most part, directors consider audiences, the group that interacts with a show last, to be the least comfortable group with which they interact.

In only two of 232 instances, of directors signaling their presentation of one of the 18 potentially controversial topics, did audiences respond negatively. All other audience responses were categorized as positive or neutral. This could mean that audiences are more comfortable than directors realize, or that directors know where the line is in their community and know how much they can push the envelope on difficult topics. Moving forward, this data might give directors reassurance that they are able to try new, boundary-pushing material without fear of major repercussions.

Omasta (2015) found similar results to that of this research. He surveyed directors of Theater for Young Audience (TYA) productions. When asked if any topics were off limits, some directors responded by saying that the audience's perspective must be considered, with most

suggesting any topic could be addressed, if handled in a manner in which the community would approve.

Lazarus (2005) suggests including parents in open discussion about the show selected, including the rationale for that selection. She encourages communicating with parents and guardians if anything occurs in rehearsal that may have been upsetting or concerning for students. Communication through programs and lobby displays is another of Lazarus's suggestions, similar to sentiments shared by Caroline and Holly.

Talkbacks

Participants mentioned that audiences can learn from many of the topics discussed here, if presented correctly. Talkbacks are opportunities for the cast, director, and/or others involved with a show to take questions and comments from the audience following a performance, conversing about what was just presented on stage (Lazarus, 2005). Omasta (2015) found that 85% of TYA directors thought that producing companies were responsible for having conversations about controversial content within produced shows. Similarly, 86% said that the conversation should be led by a professional educator. He also noted that although many respondents said these conversations *should* be happening, they also admitted that they were not happening in practice. Though not directly mentioned in his research, it seems that Omasta would consider a talkback a means of having these researched conversations.

Talkbacks can be used to address socially difficult topics like racism when they cannot be easily removed from the script. Talkbacks are not universally beloved, though. Some see it as an oversimplification of art, or "the stage equivalent of didactic wall text telling museum visitors what to think about a painting" (Miller, 2017, np). Professionals in the theater industry see them as a demand on their time and spirit (Embrey, 2021). Additionally, talkbacks open artists to the potential for direct criticism from the audience. Others think talkbacks might be more beneficial if they were more informal, as people tend to be shy in large group settings. Both Miller (2017)

and Embrey (2021) suggest theaters provide a structured location and time for congregation after the show, such as drinks or a meal.

Summary

This discussion showed evidence of five main themes directors must contend with when considering the content of high school musicals they wish to direct. Directors must be comfortable working with students regarding these potentially controversial topics. Depending on the school, administrators may need to be more or less involved in the process of selecting and presenting a show. Students need to feel comfortable and safe while dealing with any topic. One way to ensure this comfort and safety is through educating them about the topics being presented. The communities in which directors lead shows must be comfortable with the material being presented as well.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

This research study revealed decision-making processes used by directors of high school musicals, but left final answers about the inclusion of difficult content yet to be determined. I embarked on this research as it allowed me to ask questions of others that I was asking myself on a regular basis. It was no surprise to find out that I need to trust my instincts and know the comfort levels of my administrators, students, and community when I make decisions about the shows I am directing.

I'm Not Alone

It is reassuring to see other directors grappling with these same show selection and production questions. The fact that directors have found ways to work with or work around every topic presented proves that if there is a desire to direct a show, there is likely a way to make it happen in a manner that is safe and comfortable for students and audiences.

In the survey, most directors did not report checking in with their administrators when selecting a show to present with their high school students. I have always been more cautious than that. Over the years I have settled into a system similar to what Caroline described. I share the show title with my administrator, and make them aware of any mature content in the show, as well as my strategies to work through those areas.

When I directed *Grease*, I went through the script and pulled out any language that I thought might be of concern to my administrator. This led to a conversation where I listed the profanities to my boss, asking which ones I could keep, and which ones needed to change, while providing context if any were questioned. In this, and other shows, my administrators have not asked for me to change much, but rather to clarify why I want to present mature material. For *The Sound of Music*, my administrator approved the show before I explained anything. I then reminded her of the Nazi imagery present in the show and requested 20-foot-high Nazi banners

for the end of the show. She understood my concern but agreed that it would be an excellent way to help the audience feel the intensity of that moment in the show.

It's Not About Me, It's About Everyone Else

As I began this research, I had just finished directing the show *Working*, which I discussed in the introduction. The show presented monologues involving sexual harassment, prostitution, and the threat of gun violence to a Black man. In *Working,* most of the characters are adults. In many ways, as I wrestled with what to edit and what to keep, I was considering what was "too adult" for my students to perform, or what might be "too adult" for audiences to watch students perform. With three years of hindsight, the prevailing memories from the show had nothing to do with the controversial content, rather more typical show memories: funny line deliveries in rehearsal, dance numbers, and poignant character portrayals.

The survey data showed that audiences rarely reacted negatively to a show that was presented with mature content. Perhaps it is because those directors know what their communities can handle. Maybe, like Holly mentioned about herself, community members are intimidated by directors and are not willing to address us if they dislike something.

My experience with *Working* aligns with this data; I had no negative reactions from audiences. During my research, I directed *Mean Girls High School Version*. This show has characters objectifying each other regularly, discussing sexual activities, as well as plenty of profanity. As a means of preparing students for the show, I asked them to complete a "comfort survey" prior to auditioning, so I knew what they would be comfortable portraying on stage. If there was an element of the show with which a student was uncomfortable, the students, my production team and I would either choose a role that did not put them in that uncomfortable situation or edit the scene. Most of the students were comfortable with more than I expected. Knowing that the students were feeling good, my worry turned to the audience. Despite my concerns about the show, I have yet to receive any negative feedback about the show directly.

Holly spoke of student comfort being greater than artistic vision. This "comfort survey" seemed to work well to help align those two elements so that they were not at odds with each other. Checking in with administrators helps align their comfort with the artistic vision of a show as well. Ideally, between directors and administrators, a general idea of audience comfort level can also be established, ensuring that all elements can work together in a manner that is comfortable for all involved, while still holding true to a director's artistic vision.

Balancing Artistic Vision with Job Security

My experience with these two shows, *Working* and *Mean Girls*, are a little different than the average high school musical theater production. I presented these two shows through a local community theater, using high school performers from the area. Instead of speaking with administrators about decisions, I had to work with a Board of Directors and Managing Director. Like many directors mentioned, I had the full support of my "administrators" in these instances, which helped put my mind at ease in the event concerns were to arise.

I will often discuss hypothetical shows with my students. It has been said that I am much more comfortable directing risqué material at the community theater than I am at my high school. In part, this is due to the lower level of comfort my high school administrators have compared to the community theater's board. My "risk taking" at the community theater may also be in part due to my full-time job not being connected with that institution, where the opposite is true when directing at the high school. In either instance, we are clear about the content of shows in our publicity to ensure no one is surprised by what will be presented on stage.

During these discussions of what shows we could do, I noticed that almost across the board, students are willing to push the limit of what might be considered appropriate high school material. Often, I am holding students back for the sake of the audience. A show that regularly gets suggested by the students is *Heathers* which involves high school characters in sexual scenes as well as gun violence. Though the students are prepared to tackle these topics

that are relevant to them, the community and I may not be ready to watch them tell those stories.

Implications

Licensing Companies

I see much potential for licensing companies to make life easier for theater directors, particularly high school musical theater directors. Having recently directed *Mean Girls High School Version*, I experienced alternate lines provided in the script for the first time in a long time. At the start of the script, four pages of alternate lines are offered to reduce some mature moments in the show, including sexual content, profanity, and references to drugs. Despite not choosing to use any of the alternate lines, it was reassuring knowing they were there within the licensing guidelines. This past fall I directed *All Shook Up* without any confidence of having Black students audition. The original script requires two Black performers, and one Biracial performer. The only reason I was comfortable selecting the show is because the authors have offered alternate lines for casts that do not have those Black performers.

I would love to see alternate lines become the standard operating procedure for all amateur productions, including high school shows. Reaching out to licensing companies can take days sometimes, with representatives rarely being available by phone and taking over a week to respond by email. If they were to work with authors to find alternate lines, it would provide each director the opportunity to select which lines are best suited for their cast and community.

In a similar way, gender is becoming more fluid as we move further into the 21st century. Casting actors in roles other than the gender they present is sometimes the only way high schools can cast some shows. Language regarding gender should be removed from contracts so directors are not put in the position of needing to ask for permission to change a character's gender, ignore those lines in the contract, or put trans and nonbinary actors into uncomfortable situations. Broadway is beginning to become more flexible in their presentation of shows. The

2021 Broadway revival of *Company* saw Katrina Lenk take up the leading role of Bobbie, which until the 2018 West End revival was called Robert. The 2022 Broadway revival of *1776* featured a cast of multi-racial trans, nonbinary, and female performers; quite a departure from the traditional cast of mostly White men representing the founding fathers. These are just two examples in the last two years.

Along with gender flexible casting, many licensing companies offer transpositions of musical numbers as an option, but the cost of transposition can be a barrier. If the pinnacle of professional theater is allowed to make these creative choices, I certainly hope that amateur productions can make their own bold choices soon.

Content Too Mature for High School

Holly mentioned multiple times having pushed boundaries more than the average teacher. *Scottsboro Boys'* racial context backs up that sentiment. When offered the opportunity to direct a school edition of *Spring Awakening*, she determined that was too much for her community. She expected the many issues in it from sexual content to teen suicide would not gain approval from students' parents.

This research may help other directors determine what is too mature for them, their students, or their community. Many aspects of different topics were discussed and analyzed. Perhaps as directors read this, they will be shocked by what other directors are allowing. Maybe they will be surprised at how comfortable other directors are when presenting shows. Even if the "line" of what should or should not be presented by high school performers is not fixed, it may be a little less blurry having read some of the information shared in this text.

Directors should also be wary of setting expectations for themselves or their shows too firmly. Opinions, societal norms, and community perceptions can and should evolve over time. Things can change in a community in an instant. Those changes can affect schools and associated activities as well. An issue such as Holly faced after police shot a young man in her community, changed the likelihood of using prop guns in her productions.

Community changes could also be more subtle. When directing a production of *Footloose*, I reached out to my city's mayor to see if she and the City Council would be willing to pass a resolution pretending to ban dancing in the community, as is done in the musical. She was initially enthusiastic about this small publicity opportunity. As we neared our agreed upon date, she asked if she could back out of our agreement, due to a petition in the community about noise ordinances and outdoor music circulating around the same time. Though this incident had no effect on the production on stage, it can serve as an example of how something little could necessitate adjustments to a show.

Organizational Support

Many directors expressed interest in learning more about ways to ensure students feel comfortable when acting in scenes with physical contact. Professional teacher organizations could do a lot more to help high school musical theater directors learn more about how to work with students in their theater programs. Intimacy coaching and other topic workshops could also address how to quickly have an educational moment in the middle of rehearsal regarding topics like racism or sexism in shows. Workshops about inclusive language for directing might also be beneficial.

High school musical theater programs, like those associated with the National High School Music Theatre Awards (The Jimmys) could provide opportunities for directors to learn about and discuss topics relevant to the profession. Many of the topics discussed in this thesis could become sessions led by such organizations.

State-, region-, and nation-wide organizations yield a lot more power than individual teachers and could use their connections to help influence decision-makers at licensing companies. The Jerry Awards and The Center Stage Awards in Wisconsin have individuals who are well connected to leaders in the Broadway industry in New York. Both organizations send students to compete in the National High School Musical Theatre Awards annually. During their workshop in 2019, The Jerry Awards brought in Tony Award winner Annaleigh Ashford, as well

as leaders of various theater companies in New York, including Broadway Media Distribution, from whom I have twice rented digital backdrops due to that very workshop. These companies also have contact with major licensing companies, as they need to secure rights to perform this music at award shows annually. With these connections, discussing practical changes with industry leaders could be beneficial for all involved.

Future Research

It would be naïve to think that any research was flawless. Early in my analysis of survey data, I noticed statistics that did not match my understanding. Based on information provided about specific shows being produced, and participants' misunderstanding of what shows contain racially-defined BIPOC characters likely rendered inaccurate descriptive statistics.

One respondent said that they had directed *Big Fish, Shrek,* and *The Mikado* but responded that they had not directed any shows with BIPOC characters. *The Mikado* is set in a fictional Japanese city, and as such, most of the characters should appear to be of Japanese heritage. Since individuals of Japanese heritage would be considered people of color, this production should have been identified as having BIPOC characters. It is possible that respondents were thinking about BIPOC actors rather than BIPOC characters. Clearer questioning in follow up research could shed more light on how well directors understand the distinctions in this area.

Further clarification could be made as to the difference between shows with direct religious messaging and shows with a plot where religion is a part of the plot. Similar clarification could be made about smaller elements of shows, like LGBTQ characters in *The Addams Family* (Uncle Fester), *Mamma Mia* (Harry Bright), and *Legally Blonde* (Niko Argitakos). Alternatively, perhaps some directors have been able to get to a point where LGBTQ issues are no longer a factor in their school or community. Further in-depth questioning could provide answers unattainable with the limited data set collected here.

Final Thoughts

This study provided some insights into the thoughts and comfort-levels of directors, their students, and their communities regarding a range of potentially-controversial content considerations. Directors' perspectives provided models for handling many of the topics listed. This will hopefully lead to more students, directors, and audiences enjoying high school musical theater both on stage, behind the scenes, and in the audience. Future investigation into each of the mentioned topics could offer additional benefits to high school musical theater educators as they continue to work with high school students to tell stories through song, dance, and acting.

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APPENDIX A:

Survey Questions

Content Considerations in High School Music Theatre Show Selection

Start of Block: Introductory Questions

Q1.1 Are you a high school musical theatre director? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey Q1.1 = No

Q1.2 At what high school do you direct musicals?

Q1.3 In what village/city/town is that school?

Q1.4 Please list the musicals your high school has done over the last five to ten years, along with month and year of production, starting with the most recent (e.g., The Addams Family-November 2022; Bye, Bye Birdie-November 2021)

End of Block: Introductory Questions / Start of Block: BIPOC Characters

Q2.1 Have you directed a show with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) characters? e.g. The Wiz (all cast), Aida (Aida, Mareb, and others), The Drowsy Chaperone (Trix), Once on This Island (The peasants), The King and I (The King, Lady Thiang, and others) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q2.2 If Q2.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q2.8 If Q2.1 = No

Q2.2 Which shows have you directed that had one, or more, BIPOC characters?

Q2.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q2.4 Did you have potential cast members whose racial/ethnic identity matched the show as written/originally presented? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q2.6 If Q2.4 = Yes / Skip To: Q2.5 If Q2.4 = No

Q2.5 Did you make any script adjustments to accommodate your casting decision? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q2.6 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q2.7 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q2.13

Q2.8 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for BIPOC characters?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q2.9 If Q2.8 = Yes / Skip To: Q2.12 If Q2.8 = No

Q2.9 Which shows have you considered directing that had one, or more, BIPOC characters?

Q2.10 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not have the correct racial makeup to produce the show. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q2.11 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q2.12 Would you consider directing a show with a script that calls for BIPOC characters in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q2.13 How comfortable would you be directing a show with one or more BIPOC characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q2.14 How comfortable do you think your students would be being involved in a production with one or more BIPOC characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q2.15 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with one or more BIPOC characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q2.16 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with BIPOC characters?

End of Block: BIPOC Characters / Start of Block: Racism

Q3.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for one, or more, racist characters? e.g., Hairspray (Velma Von Tussel and others), West Side Story (The Jets), Annie Get Your Gun (Dolly Tate), South Pacific (Emile, Cable, and Nellie) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q3.2 If Q3.1= Yes / Skip To: Q3.7 If Q3.1 = No

Q3.2 Which shows have you directed that had one, or more, racist characters?

Q3.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q3.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the impact of racist statements (1)
Yes, to eliminate racist statements (2)
No (3)

Q3.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q3.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q3.12

Q3.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for characters to be racist?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q3.8 If Q3.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q3.11 If Q3.7 = No

Q3.8 Which shows have you considered directing that had one, or more, racist characters?

Q3.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want racist characters. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q3.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q3.11 Would you consider directing a show with a script that calls for racist characters in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q3.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with one or more racist characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q3.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be being involved in a production with one or more racist characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)

Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q3.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with one or more racist characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q3.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with racist characters?

End of Block: Racism / Start of Block: Kissing

Q4.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for characters to kiss on stage? e.g., Disney's Beauty and the Beast (Belle & The Beast), Big Fish (Edward & Sandra), The Addams Family (Gomez & Morticia)
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q4.2 If Q4.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q4.7 If Q4.1 = No

Q4.2 Which shows have you directed that had kissing?

Q4.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q4.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the kissing. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the kissing. (2)
No (3)

Q4.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q4.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q4.12

Q4.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for characters to kiss?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q4.8 If Q4.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q4.11 If Q4.7= No

Q4.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the script called for characters to kiss?

Q4.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?

Did not want characters kissing? (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q4.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q4.11 Would you consider directing a show with a script that calls for characters to kiss in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q4.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show where characters kissed?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q4.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be being involved in a production where characters kissed?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q4.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show where characters kissed?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q4.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows where characters kiss?

End of Block: Kissing / Start of Block: References to Sexual Activities

Q5.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for characters reference to the existence of sexual activities? e.g., Mamma Mia ('dot dot dot' in "Honey, Honey"), Brigadoon ("The Love of My Life"), Footloose (Willard talking about dancing while Ren thinks they are talking about doing "it"), Grease (Rizzo's pregnancy scare) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q5.2 If Q5.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q5.7 If Q5.1 = No

Q5.2 Which shows have you directed that had reference to the existence of sexual activities?

Q5.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q5.4 Did you change the lines of the script?

Yes, to diminish the impact of racist statements (1)
Yes, to eliminate racist statements (2)
No (3)

Q5.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q5.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q5.12

Q5.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script had reference to the existence of sexual activities?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q5.8 If Q5.7 Yes / Skip To: Q5.11 If Q5.7= No

Q5.8 Which shows have you considered directing that had reference to the existence of sexual activities?

Q5.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want references to the existence of sexual activities. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q5.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q5.11 Would you consider directing a show that had reference to the existence of sexual activities in the future?
Yes (1) /Maybe (2) /No (3)

Q5.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show that had reference to the existence of sexual activities?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q5.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be being involved in a production that had reference to the existence of sexual activities?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q5.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show that had reference to the existence of sexual activities?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)

Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q5.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with references to the existence of sexual activities?

End of Block: References to Sexual Activities / Start of Block: Simulation of Sex

Q6.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for characters to simulate sex? e.g., Spring Awakening ("I Believe"), Avenue Q ("Loud as the Hell You Want")
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q6.2 If Q6.1=Yes / Skip To: Q6.8 If Q6.1 = No

Q6.2 Which shows have you directed where the script called for characters to simulate sex?

Q6.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q6.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the simulation of sex in the show. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the simulation of sex in the show. (2)
No (3)

Q6.5 Did you change blocking from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to diminish the simulation of sex in the show. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the simulation of sex in the show. (2)
No (3)

Q6.6 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) /Neutrally (2) /Negatively (3)

Q6.7 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q6.13

Q6.8 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script called for characters to simulate sex?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q6.9 If Q6.8 = Yes/ Skip To: Q6.12 If Q6.8 = No

Q6.9 Which shows have you considered directing where the script called for characters to simulate sex?

Q6.10 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?

Did not want the simulation of sex on stage. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q6.11 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q6.12 Would you consider directing a show where the script called for characters to simulate sex in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q6.13 How comfortable would you be directing a show where characters simulate sex?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q6.14 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show where characters simulate sex?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q6.15 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show where characters simulate sex?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q6.16 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with characters simulating sex?

End of Block: Simulation of Sex / Start of Block: Sexualization of Characters

Q7.1 Have you directed a show where the script references the sexualization of characters? e.g., Legally Blonde ("Bend and Snap"), Mean Girls ("Sexy"), The Addams Family (Gomez [referencing Morticia's dress]: "cut from here to Venezuela"), Grease (Sandy's reveal for "All Choked Up" or "You're the One That I Want")
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q7.2 If Q7.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q7.9 If Q7.1 = No

Q7.2 Which shows have you directed where the script references the sexualization of characters?

Q7.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q7.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the sexualization of characters. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the sexualization of characters. (2)
No (3)

Q7.5 Did you change costumes/hair/makeup from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to diminish the sexualization of characters. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the sexualization of characters. (2)
No (3)

Q7.6 Did you change blocking/choreography from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to diminish the sexualization of characters. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the sexualization of characters. (2)
No (3)

Q7.7 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q7.8 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q7.14

Q7.9 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script references the sexualization of characters?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q7.10 If Q7.9 Yes / Skip To: Q7.13 If Q7.9 = No

Q7.10 Which shows have you considered directing where the script references the sexualization of characters?

Q7.11 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want any characters to be sexualized. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q7.12 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q7.13 Would you consider directing a show where the script references the sexualization of characters in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q7.14 How comfortable would you be directing a show where characters are sexualized?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q7.15 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show where characters are sexualized?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q7.16 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show where characters are sexualized?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q7.17 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with characters that are sexualized?

End of Block: Sexualization of Characters / Start of Block: LGBTQ Characters

Q8.1 Have you directed a show with a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) character? e.g., Legally Blonde (Nikos), Mean Girls (Damien), The Prom (Emma & Alyssa), Rent (Angel, Collins, Maureen, & Joanne), Spamalot (Lancelot & Herbert) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q8.2 If Q8.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q8.7 If Q8.2= No

Q8.2 Which shows have you directed with one or more LGBTQ characters?

Q8.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?

Yes (1) / No (2)

Q8.4 Did you change the lines of the script?

Yes, to diminish the reference to LGBTQ themes. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the reference to LGBTQ themes. (2)
No (3)

Q8.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?

Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q8.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?

Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q8.12

Q8.7 Have you ever considered directing a show with one or more LGBTQ characters?

Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q8.8 If Q8.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q8.11 If Q8.7 = No

Q8.8 Which shows have you considered directing with one or more LGBTQ characters?

Q8.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want LGBTQ characters in a show. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q8.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q8.11 Would you consider directing a show with one or more LGBTQ characters in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q8.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with one or more LGBTQ characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q8.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with one or more LGBTQ characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q8.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with one or more LGBTQ characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q8.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with LGBTQ characters?

End of Block: LGBTQ Characters / Start of Block: Sexism

Q9.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for one, or more, sexist characters? e.g., Pajama Game ("I'm Not at All in Love"), How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying ("A Secretary is Not a Toy"), My Fair Lady (Henry), Annie Get Your Gun ("The Girl That I Marry"), Guys and Dolls ("Marry the Man Today")
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q9.2 If Q9.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q9.7 If Q9.1 = No

Q9.2 Which shows have you directed with one, or more, sexist characters?

Q9.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q9.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the sexism (1)
Yes, to eliminate the sexism (2)
No (3)

Q9.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q9.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q9.12

Q9.7 Have you ever considered directing a show with one, or more, sexist characters?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q9.9 if Q9.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q9.11 if Q9.7 = No

Q9.8 Which shows have you considered directing with one, or more, sexist characters?

Q9.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want sexist characters in a show. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q9.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q9.11 Would you consider directing a show with one, or more, sexist characters in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) /No (3)

Q9.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with one, or more, sexist characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q9.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with one, or more, sexist characters?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q9.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with one, or more, sexist characters?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q9.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with sexist characters?

End of Block: Sexism / Start of Block: Profanity

Q10.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for characters to use profanity? e.g., Mamma Mia, Grease, Little Shop of Horrors, Footloose Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q10.2 If Q10.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q10.7 If Q10.1 = No

Q10.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for characters to use profanity?

Q10.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q10.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to reduce the profanity (1)
Yes, to eliminate the profanity (2)
No (3)

Q10.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q10.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q10.12

Q10.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for characters to use profanity?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q10.8 If Q10.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q10.11 If Q10.7 = No

Q10.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for characters to use profanity?

Q10.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want profanity in a show. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q10.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q10.11 Would you consider directing a show with profanity in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q10.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show that contains profanity?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q10.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show that contains profanity?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q10.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show that contains profanity?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q10.15 Considering the impact on your student actors (not accounting for audience), how frequently would you be comfortable allowing the use of the following words in a musical that you directed at the high school level?

	Never (1)	Once (2)	2-3 times (3)	4+ times (4)
Ass (1)	○	○	○	○
Bastard (2)	○	○	○	○
Bitch (3)	○	○	○	○
Crap (4)	○	○	○	○
Damn/Dammit (5)	○	○	○	○
Dick (6)	○	○	○	○
Fuck (7)	○	○	○	○
Goddammit (8)	○	○	○	○
Heck (9)	○	○	○	○
Hell (10)	○	○	○	○
Jesus Christ (11)	○	○	○	○
Nigger (12)	○	○	○	○
Pussy (13)	○	○	○	○
Shit (14)	○	○	○	○

Q10.16 Considering the reaction from your audience (not accounting for cast reaction), how frequently would you be comfortable allowing the use of the following words in a musical that you directed at the high school level?

	Never (1)	Once (2)	2-3 times (3)	4+ times (4)
Ass (1)	○	○	○	○
Bastard (2)	○	○	○	○
Bitch (3)	○	○	○	○
Crap (4)	○	○	○	○
Damn/Dammit (5)	○	○	○	○
Dick (6)	○	○	○	○
Fuck (7)	○	○	○	○
Goddammit (8)	○	○	○	○
Heck (9)	○	○	○	○
Hell (10)	○	○	○	○
Jesus Christ (11)	○	○	○	○
Nigger (12)	○	○	○	○
Pussy (13)	○	○	○	○
Shit (14)	○	○	○	○

Q10.17 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows that contain profanity?

End of Block: Profanity / Start of Block: Alcohol

Q11.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for characters to simulate drinking alcohol? e.g., Grease (Basement scene), Footloose (Bar-B-Q scene), Big Fish (Wedding scene), Mamma Mia (Beach scene) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q11.2 IfQ11.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q11.10 If Q 11.1 = No

Q11.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for characters to simulate drinking alcohol?

Q11.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q11.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to reduce simulated alcohol use. (1)
Yes, to eliminate simulated alcohol use. (2)
No (3)

Q11.5 Did you change the props from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce simulated alcohol use. (1)
Yes, to eliminate simulated alcohol use. (2)

No (3)

Q11.6 Did you change the blocking from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce simulated alcohol use. (1)
Yes, to eliminate simulated alcohol use. (2)
No (3)

Q11.7 Did you change the blocking from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce intoxicated behavior. (1)
Yes, to eliminate intoxicated behavior. (2)
No (3)

Q11.8 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q11.9 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q11.

Q11.10 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for characters to simulate drinking alcohol? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q11.11 IfQ11.10 = Yes / Skip To: Q11.14 If Q11.10 = No

Q11.11 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for characters to simulate drinking alcohol?

Q11.12 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want the simulation of drinking alcohol on stage. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q11.13 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q11.14 Would you consider directing a show where the script calls for characters to simulate drinking alcohol in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q11.15 How comfortable would you be directing a show where characters simulate drinking alcohol?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q11.16 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show where characters simulate drinking alcohol?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)

Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q11.17 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show where characters simulate drinking alcohol?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q11.18 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with characters simulating drinking alcohol?

End of Block: Alcohol / Start of Block: Drugs

Q12.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for characters to simulate using drugs? e.g., 9 to 5 (Beginning with "Dance O' Death"), Rent ("La Vie Boheme"), Next to Normal ("Perfect for You")
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q12.2 If Q12.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q12.10 If Q12.1. = No

Q12.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for characters to simulate using drugs?

Q12.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q12.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to reduce simulated drug use. (1)
Yes, to eliminate simulated drug use. (2)
No (3)

Q12.5 Did you change the props from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce simulated drug use. (1)
Yes, to eliminate simulated drug use. (2)
No (3)

Q12.6 Did you change the blocking from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce simulated drug use. (1)
Yes, to eliminate simulated drug use. (2)
No (3)

Q12.7 Did you change the blocking from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce intoxicated behavior. (1)
Yes, to eliminate intoxicated behavior. (2)
No (3)

Q12.8 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?

Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q12.9 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q12.15

Q12.10 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for characters to simulate using drugs? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q12.11 If Q12.10. = Yes / Skip To: Q12.14 If Q12.10 = No

Q12.11 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for characters to simulate using drugs?

Q12.12 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want the simulation of using drugs on stage. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q12.13 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q12.14 Would you consider directing a show where the script calls for characters to simulate using drugs in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q12.15 How comfortable would you be directing a show where characters simulate using drugs?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q12.16 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show where characters simulate using drugs?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q12.17 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show where characters simulate using drugs?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q12.18 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with characters simulating drug use?

End of Block: Drugs / Start of Block: Domestic Violence

Q13.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for domestic violence between characters? e.g., Footloose (Wes hits Ren), Little Shop of Horrors (Orin hits Audrey), Carousel (Billy discusses hitting his wife, Julie) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q13.2 If Q13.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q13.8 If Q13.1 = No

Q13.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for domestic violence between characters?

Q13.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q13.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to reduce the domestic violence (1)
Yes, to eliminate the domestic violence (2)
No (3)

Q13.5 Did you change the blocking from what was listed in the script?
Yes, to reduce the domestic violence (1)
Yes, to eliminate the domestic violence (2)
No (3)

Q13.6 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q13.7 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q13.13

Q13.8 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for domestic violence between characters? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q13.9 If Q13.8 = Yes / Skip To: Q13.12 If Q13.8 = No

Q13.9 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for domestic violence between characters?

Q13.10 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want domestic violence on stage. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q13.11 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q13.12 Would you consider directing a show where the script calls for domestic violence between characters in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q13.13 How comfortable would you be directing a show with domestic violence between characters?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q13.14 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with domestic violence between characters?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q13.15 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with domestic violence between characters?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q13.16 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with domestic violence between characters?

End of Block: Domestic Violence / Start of Block: Guns

Q14.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for guns on stage? e.g., West Side Story (Chino), Oklahoma (Curley), Little Shop of Horrors (Seymour), Annie Get Your Gun (Annie & Frank)

Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q14.2 If Q14.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q14.8 If Q 14.1 = No

Q14.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for guns on stage?

Q14.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?

Yes (1) / No (2)

Q14.4 Did you change the lines of the script?

Yes, to reduce the guns in the show (1)
Yes, to eliminate the guns from the show (2)
No (3)

Q14.5 Did you change the blocking from what was listed in the script?

Yes, to reduce the guns in the show (1)
Yes, to eliminate the guns from the show (2)

No (3)

Q14.6 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q14.7 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q14.13

Q14.8 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for guns on stage?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q14.9 If Q14.8 = Yes / Skip To: Q14.12 If Q14.8 = No

Q14.9 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for guns on stage?

Q14.10 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want guns on stage. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q14.11 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q14.12 Would you consider directing a show where the script calls for guns on stage in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q14.13 How comfortable would you be directing a show with guns on stage?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q14.14 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with guns on stage?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q14.15 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with guns on stage?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q14.16 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with guns on stage?

End of Block: Guns / Start of Block: Direct Religious Messaging

Q15.1 Have you directed a show where the plot sends a direct religious message? e.g., Jesus Christ Superstar, Godspell Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q15.2 If Q15.1 = Yes/ Skip To: Q15.7 If Q15.1 = No

Q15.2 Which shows have you directed where the plot sends a direct religious message?

Q15.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q15.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the religious messaging. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the religious messaging. (2)
No (3)

Q15.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q15.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q15.12

Q15.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the plot sends a direct religious message?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q15.8 If Q15.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q15.11 If Q15.7 = No

Q15.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the plot sends a direct religious message?

Q15.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want to send a direct religious message. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q15.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q15.11 Would you consider directing a show where the plot sends a direct religious message in the future?
Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q15.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with a direct religious message?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)

Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q15.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with a direct religious message?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q15.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with a direct religious message?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q15.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with direct religious messages?

End of Block: Direct Religious Messaging / Start of Block: Connection to Religion

Q16.1 Have you directed a show where the plot contains a connection to religion? e.g., Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (story from the Christian Bible), Fiddler on the Roof (most characters are Jewish), Children of Eden (stories from the Christian Bible) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q16.2 If Q16.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q16.7 If Q16.1 = No

Q16.2 Which shows have you directed where the plot contains a connection to religion?

Q16.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q16.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the connection to religion. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the connection to religion. (2)
No (3)

Q16.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) /Negatively (3)

Q16.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q16.12

Q16.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the plot contains a connection to religion?

Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q16.8 If 16.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q16.11 If Q16.7 = No

Q16.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the plot contains a connection to religion?

Q16.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?

Did not want to direct a show connected to religion. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q16.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q16.11 Would you consider directing a show where the plot contains a connection to religion in the future?

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

Q16.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with a connection to religion?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q16.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with a connection to religion?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q16.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with a connection to religion?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q16.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with connections to religion?

End of Block: Connection to Religion / Start of Block: Political Messaging

Q17.1 Have you directed a show where the plot references potentially controversial political elements? e.g., The Sound of Music (Nazis), Disney's Newsies (unions & child labor), Hadestown (capitalism)

Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q17.2 If Q17.1 = Yes/ Skip To: Q17.7 If Q17.1 = No

Q17.2 Which shows have you directed where the plot references potentially controversial political elements?

Q17.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q17.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the political elements. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the political elements. (2)
No (3)

Q17.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q17.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) /Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q17.12

Q17.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the plot references potentially controversial political elements? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q17.8 If Q 17.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q17.11 If Q17.7 = No

Q17.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the plot references potentially controversial political elements?

Q17.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not want to send any politically controversial messages. (1)
Other reason(s) (2)

Q17.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q17.11 Would you consider directing a show where the plot references potentially controversial political elements in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q17.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with potentially controversial political elements?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q17.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with potentially controversial political elements?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q17.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with potentially controversial political elements?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q17.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with potentially controversial political elements?

End of Block: Political Messaging / Start of Block: Physical Disability

Q18.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for a character with a physical disability? e.g., Disney's Newsies (Crutchie-limp), Wicked (Nessa-wheel chair bound), The Who's Tommy (Tommy-deaf/blind), Young Frankenstein (Igor-hunchback), The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (Logainne-lisp), The Secret Garden (Colin-bed ridden) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q18.2 If Q 18.1 = Yes / Skip To: Q18.7 If Q18.2 = No

Q18.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for a character with a physical disability?

Q18.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?

Yes (1) / No (2)

Q18.4 Did you change the lines of the script?

Yes, to diminish the physical disability. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the physical disability. (2)
No (3)

Q18.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?

Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q18.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?

Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q18.12

Q18.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for a character with a physical disability? Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q18.8 If Q18.7 = Yes/ Skip To: Q18.11 If Q18.7 = No

Q18.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for a character with a physical disability?

Q18.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not have anyone with the physical disability as a potential cast member. (1)
Did not want to portray a character with a physical disability. (2)
Other reason(s) (3)
_____

Q18.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q18.11 Would you consider directing a show where the script calls for a character with a physical disability in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q18.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with a character who has a physical disability?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q18.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with a character who has a physical disability?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q18.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with a character who has a physical disability?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q18.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with characters who have physical disabilities?

End of Block: Physical Disability/ Start of Block: Mental Disability

Q19.1 Have you directed a show where the script calls for a character with a mental disability? e.g., Next to Normal (Diane), Dear Evan Hansen (Evan), Sweeney Todd (Sweeney Todd) Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q19.2 If Q19.1 = Yes/ Skip To: Q19.7 If Q19.1 = No

Q19.2 Which shows have you directed where the script calls for a character with a mental disability?

Q19.3 Did you seek administrative approval to do the show specifically due to this element of the show?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Q19.4 Did you change the lines of the script?
Yes, to diminish the mental disability. (1)
Yes, to eliminate the mental disability. (2)
No (3)

Q19.5 How did the audience respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Q19.6 How did the cast/crew/orchestra/production team respond specifically to this element of the show?
Positively (1) / Neutrally (2) / Negatively (3)

Skip To: Q19.12

Q19.7 Have you ever considered directing a show where the script calls for a character with a mental disability?
Yes (1) / No (2)

Skip To: Q19.8 If Q19.7 = Yes / Skip To: Q19.11 If Q19.7 = No

Q19.8 Which shows have you considered directing where the script calls for a character with a mental disability?

Q19.9 Why did you decide not to direct the show(s)?
Did not have anyone with the mental disability as a potential cast member. (1)
Did not want to portray a character with a mental disability. (2)
Other reason(s) (3)

Q19.10 Did administration play a role in your decision not to direct the show? Yes (1) / No (2)

Q19.11 Would you consider directing a show where the script calls for a character with a mental disability in the future? Yes (1) / Maybe (2) / No (3)

Q19.12 How comfortable would you be directing a show with a character who has a mental disability?
Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q19.13 How comfortable do you think your students would be participating in a show with a character who has a mental disability?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q19.14 How comfortable do you think your audience would be watching a show with a character who has a mental disability?

Extremely uncomfortable (1)
Somewhat uncomfortable (2)
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
Somewhat comfortable (4)
Extremely comfortable (5)

Q19.15 Are there any other ideas or issues that you encountered regarding high school shows with characters who have mental disabilities?

End of Block: Mental Disability

APPENDIX B:

Interview Questions

1. Have you had any major controversies with audience members because of the content of a show you directed? If yes, what show(s) and what happened?
2. Have you had any major controversies with cast/crew/orchestra members because of the content of a show you directed? If yes, what show(s) and what happened?
3. Have you decided against directing any shows because of concerns from your production team about the content of the show?
4. Have you been told not to direct a show, or edit a show, because of concerns from your administration?
5. Have you directed a musical(s) with BIPOC Characters or Racism? If yes, how did you handle these elements?
6. Have you directed a musical(s) with kissing, references to sexual activities, simulation of sex, sexualization of characters, LGBTQ characters, or sexism? If yes, how did you handle these elements?
7. Have you directed a musical(s) with profanity? If yes, how did you handle it?
8. Have you directed a musical(s) with alcohol or drug use portrayed on stage? If yes, how did you handle these elements?
9. Have you directed a musical(s) with domestic violence or guns on stage? If yes, how did you handle these elements?
10. Have you directed a musical(s) with direct religious messaging, a connection to religion, or potentially controversial political messaging? If yes, how did you handle these elements?
11. Have you directed a musical(s) with characters with physical or mental disabilities? If yes, how did you handle these elements?

APPENDIX C:

Recently Produced Musicals by Survey Respondents

Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	6
9 to 5	1
The Addams Family	15
All Shook Up	2
All Together Now	1
American Beauty	1
Anastasia	1
Annie	1
Annie Jr.	2
Annie Get Your Gun	2
Anything Goes	1
The Apple Tree	1
Beauty and the Beast	5
Big Fish	3
Brigadoon	1
Bright Star	1
Bye Bye Birdie	2
Carousel	2
Chicago: Teen Edition	3
Cinderella	6
Crazy for You	2
Damn Yankees	1
The Drowsy Chaperone	1
Elf	1
Evita	1
The Fantasticks	1
Fiddler on the Roof	5
Fly By Night	1
Footloose	2
Freaky Friday	2
Go-Go Beach	2
Godspell	1
Guys and Dolls	4
Hello, Dolly!	2
High School Musical	1
Honk	1
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	1
Into the Woods	2
James and the Giant Peach	2
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat	5

Legally Blonde	3
Les Misérables	2
The Little Mermaid	3
Little Shop of Horrors	5
Little Women	3
Mamma Mia	2
Mary Poppins	5
Matilda	3
Mean Girls	1
The Mikado	1
Most Happy Fella	1
The Music Man	5
My Fair Lady	2
Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed	1
Newsies	2
Nunsense, The Mega-Musical	1
Oklahoma!	2
Oliver	1
Once Upon a Mattress	4
The Pajama Game,	1
Peter and the Starcatcher	1
Peter Pan	2
The Pirates of Penzance	2
Pippin	4
Rock of Ages: High School Edition	1
The Secret Garden	1
Seussical the Musical	4
She Loves Me	1
Shrek	6
Shout! The Mod Musical	1
Singin' in the Rain	2
Singin' in the Rain Jr.	1
Sister Act	1
Songs for a New World	1
The Sound of Music	6
South Pacific	1
Spamalot	1
Spitfire Grill	1
State Fair	1
Tarzan	1
Thoroughly Modern Millie	1
Tuck Everlasting	1
The Wedding Singer	2
Weird (an original jukebox musical)	1
White Christmas	2
Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory	1
The Wizard of Oz	5
Working	1

The World Goes Round	1
Xanadu	2
You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown	3

APPENDIX D:

Musicals Directed by Topic

BIPOC Characters	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	1
Aida	1
The Drowsy Chaperone	1
Hairspray	1
In the Heights	1
Little Shop of Horrors	2
Ragtime	1
Scottsboro Boys	1
Songs for a New World	1
The Wiz	1
Racist Characters	
Show	Frequency
Annie Get Your Gun	2
Anything Goes	1
The Drowsy Chaperone	1
Hairspray	1
The Music Man	1
Ragtime	1
Kissing	
Show	Frequency
The Addams Family	10
Aida	1
All Shook Up	1
Anything Goes	1
Beauty and the Beast	3
Big Fish	2
Bright Star	1
Bye Bye Birdie	1
Cinderella	3
Crazy for You	2
Elf	1
Go Go Beach	1
Grease	3
Guys and Dolls	2
How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying	1
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	1
Into the Woods	2
Legally Blonde	2
Les Misérables	1
The Little Mermaid	1
Little Shop of Horrors	1

Kissing (continued)	
Mean Girls	1
The Music Man	3
My Fair Lady	1
Newsies	1
Oklahoma	2
Once Upon a Mattress	1
The Pajama Game	1
Pippin	1
The Pirates of Penzance	1
Rent	1
Rock of Ages	2
Shrek	2
Singin' in the Rain	1
Sister Act	1
The Sound of Music	3
Spamalot	1
The Wedding Singer	2
White Christmas	1
Xanadu	1
Referencing Sexual Activities	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	3
Addams Family	6
Bright Star	1
Catch Me if You Can	1
Chicago	3
Clue the Musical	1
Crazy for You	1
Damn Yankees	1
Footloose	1
Grease	3
Legally Blonde	1
Little Shop of Horrors	2
Mamma Mia	3
Mean Girls	1
My Fair Lady	1
Once Upon a Mattress	1
Pippin	2
Rent	1
Rock of Ages	2
The Wedding Singer	2
Simulating Sexual Acts	
Show	Frequency
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat	1
Pippin	1

Sexualization of Characters	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	1
The Addams Family	14
Chicago	3
Crazy for You	1
Damn Yankees	1
Go Go Beach	1
Grease	3
Legally Blonde	1
Little Shop of Horrors	3
Mean Girls	1
The Music Man	1
Pippin	1
Rock of Ages	2
Sister Act	1
The Wedding Singer	2
LGBTQ Characters	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	2
The Addams Family	1
Bring it On	1
Legally Blonde	1
Mamma Mia	1
Mean Girls	1
Rent	1
Rock of Ages	1
Spamalot	1
The Wedding Singer	1
Weird (an original jukebox musical)	1
Sexist Characters	
Show	Frequency
Annie Get Your Gun	2
Beauty and the Beast	1
Carousel	1
Chicago	1
Damn Yankees	1
Guys and Dolls	6
How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying	1
Legally Blonde	1
Little Shop of Horrors	4
Matilda	1
The Music Man	2
My Fair Lady	1
Once Upon a Mattress	1
Pajama Game	1
The Pirates of Penzance	1

Sexist Characters (continued)	
Thoroughly Modern Millie	1
The Wedding Singer	1
Profanity	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	3
The Addams Family	6
Annie	1
Chicago	2
Crazy for You	1
Damn Yankees	1
Elf	1
Grease	2
Les Misérables	1
Little Mermaid	1
Little Shop of Horrors	6
Mamma Mia	2
Mean Girls	1
The Music Man	1
My Fair Lady	1
Oklahoma	1
Pippin	2
Rent	1
Rock of Ages	2
Singin' in the Rain	1
Sister Act	1
Songs for a New World	1
Spamalot	1
Weird (an original Jukebox musical)	1
Drinking	
Show	Frequency
The Addams Family	3
Anastasia	1
Annie	1
Anything Goes	1
Beauty and the Beast	1
Big Fish	2
Brigadoon	1
Bright Star	1
Chicago	1
Chicago	1
Crazy for You	2
The Drowsy Chaperone	1
Fiddler on the Roof	2
Godspell	1
Grease	3
Guys and Dolls	2

Drinking (continued)	
Hello, Dolly	1
Legally Blonde	1
Les Misérables	1
Little Shop of Horrors	1
Mamma Mia	3
Musical Comedy Murders of 1940	1
My Fair Lady	1
The Pajama Game	1
Rent	1
Rock of Ages	2
Sister Act	1
The Sound of Music	2
The Wedding Singer	2
Drugs	
Show	Frequency
9 to 5	1
Little Shop of Horrors	1
Rent	1
Domestic Violence	
Show	Frequency
Bright Star	1
Carousel	2
Chicago	2
Footloose	1
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	1
Legally Blonde	1
Little Shop of Horrors	8
Matilda	1
The Music Man	1
Guns	
Show	Frequency
The Addams Family	1
Anastasia	1
Annie Get Your Gun	4
Beauty and the Beast	2
Chicago	3
Crazy for You	1
Guys and Dolls	2
Les Misérables	2
Little Shop of Horrors	6
Musical Comedy Murders of 1940	1
Oklahoma	2
She Loves Me	1
Sister Act	1
The Sound of Music	2

Direct Religious Messaging	
Show	Frequency
Fiddler on the Roof	2
Godspell	3
Jesus Christ Superstar	1
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat	3
Plot Contains Connection to Religion	
Show	Frequency
Fiddler on the Roof	6
Godspell	1
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	1
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat	5
The Sound of Music	1
Potentially Controversial Politics	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	1
Anastasia	1
Chicago	1
Newsies	2
The Pajama Game	1
Rent	1
Rock of Ages	1
Songs for a New World	1
The Sound of Music	7
Spamalot	1
Physical Disability	
Show	Frequency
The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee	8
Big Fish	1
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	1
The Music Man	2
Newsies	1
The Secret Garden	2
Mental Disability	
Show	Frequency
Weird (an original jukebox musical)	1

APPENDIX E:

Qualitative Survey Responses, by Topic

BIPOC Characters

BIPOC characters are not a problem, being a predominantly (over 90%) White school is what presents the challenge.

Um, there are not a lot of them. We work to cast BIPOC actors into a variety of non-race specific roles, including roles traditionally played by White actors.

It might be good to clarify if the character is supposed to be BIPOC or if the OBC [Original Broadway Cast] had a BIPOC person playing the part - for instance we have lots of BIPOC students play all kinds of roles in our shows that aren't specifically designated as BIPOC roles

Many of the older shows have racist/ethnic/sexist comments and structures. This is a huge issue.

White students talking about limited casting, casting for all, great discussions about representation, parent questions about all of that as well -- the words and issues of 'color-blind'

Our student body is not very diverse so I can not count on having the right cast members to do these types of shows.

No

Our population does not always support the diversity needed

Our biggest issue is the racial makeup of the school

I have Directed *The King and I* - it was very tricky, with numerous conversations about honoring culture and making best effort to not have caricaturizations of roles.

while our general student body is more diverse, the population that auditions for shows is NOT diverse; that would be the one factor that would keep me from producing a show with BIPOC designated characters

The diversity at our school is not large (almost entirely White). I would be comfortable directing a show with BIPOC characters if we had a more diverse cast

I directed *The Drowsy Chaperone* in 2013 and had no people of color in the cast at the time, so I cast the role of Trix to a super strong singer, and in 2021 we did a virtual musical review in which I included "I Do, I Do in the Sky" and I did have person of color sing that role.

Racial makeup of the school and theatre program, and not wanting to force students into a specific role because they are BIPOC.

I would only do a BIPOC show if I had BIPOC students. I would not cast a White student in a BIPOC role.

For us, our school is 97% Caucasian. If I were to consider a BIPOC show, it's because we would have the personnel to justify the decision.

My school is 90% White/Caucasian, and I have a hard time getting POC students to audition. Currently, I have two to three in each production who identify as a POC, and two who are on the backstage crew. I'm afraid to cast a show UNLESS it states that it have a POC in the role. I had a district lawyer tell me I cannot cast a student in a role that is designated a certain person of a certain race unless it explicitly states that type of ethnicity is required in the contract.

Before I was hired at my current school, my predecessor directed many shows that called for BIPOC actors and did not cast BIPOC actors - *Sister Act*, *Once on this Island*, *Little Shop of Horrors*. Selecting these shows when your student population is 90% White.

We are a pretty White school, so theatre is pretty White. My dance classes are where our BIPOC students gravitate.

We don't have the talent needed to put on a BIPOC show.

If the BIPOC character is a "token" character, I don't think the community would mind much. However, if the BIPOC character(s) are speaking to racial injustice or inequality, the community I teach in would probably be more uncomfortable.

We don't have a diverse enough program to be able to direct these shows.

Racism

No

A show with a racist character would need audience discussion and encouragement to engage learning about racism, and why it is wrong, and how the racist character in the show helps us understand how racism is wrong.

I think if you teach it and handle it well it can be a teachable moment (i.e. if a school did *To Kill A Mockinbird* and taught about the racism, didn't push it aside or ignore it)

No

social media and out of context thoughts and ideas, kids talking about it out of context, any posting of script or words out of context

How the racist character is used to tell the story matters. Sometimes they help us see racism as bad. Other times they are presented as normal. I would only be comfortable with the first type of character.

while there is history of racist characters in many great shows; there are also lots of great shows without racist characters

If there was a way to educate the students and audience about the racism and make it a learning point I would consider it.

Negative community reaction

If I ever directed a show with a racist character, I would make sure to have several discussions about why this character's behavior is unacceptable, and that part of theater is portraying parts of our history, even if we aren't always proud of them. However, some of the shows listed above need to be re-written as the racist content is in-excusable.

I would only choose a show that shows the racist characters as the "bad guys" and deals with them as such.

removing the racist lines in the *Music Man* was doable and approved by MTI.

I'd only consider a school with a racist character if it was written to be racist, not because people were racist at the time is was written.

It depends on how it is presented. Educationally, or mocking, historical, or comical.

Because of the limited diversity of our program and community, racism feels much more targeted and is a delicate topic

Kissing
I try to let my actors know that stage kissing is a part of performing, and many shows do call for a kiss. I work with the students to help them understand the context of the kiss and how to address issues and use actor tools to provide for their comfortability and protection during the kissing scene.

We try to make students as comfortable as possible and we edit or stage it differently if someone has any concerns

I coached my students in order to make them completely comfortable with the idea. If the kiss is staged in such a way that it is comfortable for the actors, the audience will not feel uncomfortable about it. This is work that has to be put in - intimacy coaching and making sure everyone is on the same page.

It's fun. Kids love it. You talk with them about it. You ask permission and let parents know what's happening. You talk with the cast and let them know that it's like a dance and it's uncomfortable and it will always be in public (no private rehearsals) and I make sure I'm not the only adult in the room.

I think we would have an issue if the students were doing a lot of kissing versus one or two. Also we often do stage kisses and not real kissing.

If the staging can be done to cut it, I cut it. If we can stage it to cheat, we do. We hire in intimacy coordinators when we can.

Depends on the kiss on whether or not audience would be uncomfortable - a kiss in *Cinderella* is different than a kiss in *Spring Awakening*

Levels of intimacy (kissing/embracing/touching a face lovingly) can convey similar story needs

I have taken workshops on stage intimacy and feel much more comfortable in recent years that I did when I started by career

I would like to direct a show in the future with a LGBTQ+ kiss in it at some point

I did have two students who declined to kiss and I accept their opinion, but they were not major roles.

In our productions, we have not changed lines for where they kissed, as there have not been lines that directly reference kissing. We have changed blocking to be a hug, embrace or a fake kiss, depending on the comfort level of the actors. We have never had the characters actually kiss.

I would ensure throughout the process that both actors felt safe and comfortable with the kiss, and it would not be required. We would also do a stage kiss where they don't truly kiss, but it looks like they are kissing to the audience.

COVID change a LOT of this aspect. Pre-pandemic, there were no qualms. However, now we do staging to ELUDE to the kiss. Close physical and intimate contact is mitigated through staging and blocking choices.

Only acknowledging the age of the performers, and that some this might be their first kiss. Trying to make sure they see it as "Acting" and "choreographed" including proper rules and intimacy training - advising students about the nature of consent.

I usually leave it up to the actors playing the characters. We do "stage kisses" or hide behind something, etc. if they don't want to kiss on stage.

When we did *She Kills Monsters* in 2015, they tried to censor the kids between two girls and laid drown rules about same sex kisses. But 2020 when we did the show again, I'd shown them the error of their ways and they no longer had rules other than my intimacy direction rules.

Flu Season

I haven't directed a show where lines in the script directly correlate to kissing. While it has been in the stage directions, we've been able to get away with not changing lines but avoiding the kiss/switching to an embrace. I don't have a desire to select shows where kissing and other intense physical affection is depicted or referenced (i.e. *Grease*) because as the students' teacher, I don't need/want to see them in that position, whether acting or not.

Staging can help mitigate any discomfort and I never push my kids to do anything they don't want to do

Referencing Sex

I hold the line that these are the words written by the playwright, and are a part of the musical. What we perform for the school and community is an authentic musical.

Again, if you stage these sort of situations or conversations well - no one should be uncomfortable. I think when not enough time is spent or if there isn't good direction it can get awkward for everyone, but a good director will do just fine with these moments that are part of the human experience.

make sure everyone knows the context and the content ahead of time.

What happens on stage versus what is referred to matters. Also if it treats excessive sexual activities as normal and desirable.

Administration was very nervous about this - we made direction choices to be more implied than literal with the sexual events/references suggestive rather than literal with most su [sic]

Roles that give innuendo through staging/scene and costuming (ie. *The Baker's Wife* after they run away together, *City of Angels* bedroom scenes)

Depending on your community they could be toned down

References to sexual activities makes the production more difficult to market to child audience members.

My community did not like the gay dads in *Putnam*, even though they didn't kiss. However, they had no objections to kissing in *Shrek*. I think that our community is more homophobic than against stage kissing.

Only about the age-appropriateness of youth seeing the show

We usually change the lines.

There was a little old lady who complained about interracial kissing when we did *Carousel* and my leads were Black and White. The admin has only gotten edgy when we do same sex romances on stage.

Sex is everywhere, they all know, it is up to the director to keep it mature and respectful

Most of my actors hesitance withe the references to sexual activities stems from them not being able to separate character from person. So my Lady Larken didn't enjoy the fact that she was referencing intimacy with the actor who played Sir Harry. In *The Addams Family*, a lot of the references are innuendo and comedic, so it was easier to downplay them. Alice didn't have any difficulty with the "Parents do it!" line because she found the humor in it. Though the build up to that moment with her description of pulling over the car etc. was a little uncomfortable and I instructed the actress to downplay it.

In my community innuendo is received just fine so that is where we have to live. Any overt references don't go over well, but innuendos are ok

Simulation of Sex
For this age level and audience, sex is not something we will include in our shows.

Absolutely not appropriate for an underage production

This would be a very hard sell for the community - we would probably have to imply it offstage or not do it at all

I don't think this is something that needs to be done at a high school level; again, there are many great shows without this

I think that's not an option for High School shows

They are high school students, I don't think it is appropriate. However, I would direct clean scenes from the show, or do these shows in a college setting

There are so many options for show choices. I understand everyone is different, but for me it's unnecessary to pick a show that has a sexual scene or even overtone for high school students -- they are MINORS, ranging in age from 14-18. This would also include *Chicago* for me.

I take into consideration the age of my lead performers - I have mostly freshmen and sophomores now, and that age group seems on the young side for mature content matter. On the other hand, many of them have seen live theatre with me that explores the topic - *Beetlejuice* on Broadway, and *Hamilton*, so I'm unsure where I stand exactly.

Those wouldn't make it past our perusal-unless we had permission to cut the scene/song.

There is an issue when adults are telling teens to pretend to have sec on stage. Already there is an issue with making kids kiss on stage, so having an adult tell kids they will pretend to have sex on stage is pretty intense and people who think otherwise need to stop and think.

I would get an intimate coach if I were to tackle this. But admin would never let it happen.

We didn't need to change lines or specific blocking, just had to create choreography to diminish the sexuality.

I feel that there are a plethora of musicals available to produce that a high school producing educational theatre does not need to produce such a graphic show. I'm not a prude, but it puts students, the audience, and the director who has to give the students blocking, in a very uncomfortable situation.

Sexualization of Characters

I think education needs to occur about the context of the sexualization in the musical, when it occurs and how it happens, why it is included in the story and how it drives the story forward. This is most especially important to address with the students.

Chicago: Teen Edition does sexualize characters in a way, but if directed thoughtfully, the sensuality can still be there without the overt sexuality. It's all in balance and how it's delivered

Depends on your community

Cast/crew/pit reaction is not yet able to be assessed since we have not begun our production yet.

It depends on the line, the comfort of my students, and my community. Either way, I am discussing this with my admin and my students to make the best choice for our cast.

We change the lines

I have been an audience member in HS productions of *Legally Blonde* and my friends and have been uncomfortable because they were minors we were watching.

When possible, I seek to diminish those moments.

Again, anything too overt doesn't go over well, but jokes/innuendo are received ok

LGBTQ Characters

Our drama students and audience tend to be more affirming of LGBTQ characters within our rural community as a whole.

We have opened our casting so even if it's not explicitly LGBTQ we have had trans students playing lead roles, we've had same-sex couples dancing in the ensemble, etc.

I currently don't have any shows with LGBTQ on my wish list but it's not because of that - I just haven't come across one that I want to direct for reasons other than this topic

my admin is very strict on this; I have been denied permission to perform at least three shows because of this content

Students and Community members active in the LQBTQ+ community would love to see representation in a show (background chorus members add it sometimes). We have one church in town that would be very against it and members of that church have students in musical. I try to always use my classroom/spaces to teach acceptance of all.

Audience/performer reaction is unable to be assessed since we have not begun production.

The community reported me to the school board, and the school board said I did nothing wrong as they did not show affection on stage

I had a local staff member sit in on the "Lancelot" song to screen the musical beforehand in 2017 - but it seems to be an issue that comes up more recently.

Again, it depends on how you the leader go about it. Mature or not

I do NOT work in a county that is overly supportive of this in particular and have been told in the past to avoid it

There has been a shift at our school in regards to acceptance of LGBTQ issues. When I wrote/produced *Weird* in 2019, I was delicate to craft it in a way that didn't take a hard line stance on whether same sex attraction was right or wrong, but did portray the character's mother being unaccepting and the father taking her to a GSA meeting. I feel we tread that line carefully and the results were overall positive. There are several students who already identified as LGBTQ that were thankful for the representation, and others who were able to come out/come to terms with their own orientation.

My community doesn't handle blatant LBGTQ themes well. If it is a side story/character it is ok but they are conservative otherwise

Sexist Characters

Education is key, and a rebuttal to the sexism is important to address with the students and, in some way, the audience.

If you teach it and give context (Golden Age shows like *G&D*, *H2$*) it can be great teaching or learning moments, or you can stage it and show how ridiculous or farcical it is

Some of the examples given are not what I would call a "sexist" character or song. These are songs from another time. Songs from another time are not sexist necessarily because in that time they were not viewed that way. I would not look at "Marry the Man" today as a sexist song - it's from the 40s! Give me a break!

Again this would matter how the character is used. If it is portrayed as good and normal, then I would not be comfortable with it nor would my students and audience. If it is used to show how change is needed, that would be different.

Older people don't thing the shows are sexiest. The student and I have great conversations about the sexism. I will never do *My Fair Lady* for that reason.

Sir Harry is definitely misogynistic, but it's played for laughs and it's not too terribly offensive (a product of the time period in which the show is set). In general, I think most sexist characters tend to be the villain, so the cast and the audience know that their sexism is a negative trait not to be celebrated. Either that or the sexism is played for laughs and is a more lighthearted jab. Or in the case of Henry Higgins, he undergoes a bit of a transformation.

Profanity

Profanity is a hard issue, and I teach my students that the word is not to be emphasized, but used to enhance the character's line.

I consider the cast and audience in all decision-making -- the show itself is the same and I have to teach both the cast and audience

I actually put the swearing back in *Chicago*. Single my foot really didn't encompass the feelings of the character. We much preferred "single my ass" and so did the audience.

We always do Teen/High School editions, which have profanity already lessened/changed

Never use profanity's that uses a religion or is racist. Anything that I would hear the students say often I keep, except fuck.

I always give the students a secondary option for a line that uses profanity, in cases that the actor is uncomfortable with saying that word.

I change them. I let Ass stay in *Shrek*. We used damn and hell once in *Newsies*. The rest got changed.

All slurs.

again, profanity is used on prime-time TV, so I remind people of that.

Admin did ask me to remove one or two from our original show (*Weird*). But otherwise, I usually do the censoring myself if necessary, though I try to avoid it.

It is the number one issue with available musicals that are relevant

Alcohol

We keep true to the script and use the alcohol to help us tell the story in the musical.

We are telling life stories - There's a rousing huge dance number in *Bright Star* all based around "Pour me another round" and it's a huge hit. I did not find this offensive nor did the audience.

Kids would think it's hilarious, audience is a toss up

I change it to diminish or eliminate it.

I've only done shows where the characters drinking at adults… I think it would be different if the characters where teenagers

Parents let kids drink, so it shouldn't be a shock

Any simulated drinking in shows I've directed has mostly been related to a toast, which is fairly innocuous. Miss Hannigan was supposed to be a little tipsy (i.e. Little Girls) and just played it more as quirky/loopy.

Drugs

If the script allowed us to address drug use in honest and helpful ways in our community, that would be a good show to use.

depends on the drug

We did *Jekyll and Hyde* (not a musical) and we made the drug use almost nonexistent. He was on a raised platform and his back was turned to the audience.

It wouldn't be the audience members who would complain, it would be community members who have never seen a HS theatre production

There aren't too many shows that come to mind that I'd consider directing that involve drug use. In general, I'd shy away from it.

Again, implied/innuendo is fine. We implied the women smoked and just hit the subtext hard

Domestic Violence

Education and care needs to be taken in working with students on performing stage violence. I don't think it is the job of a high school drama program to teach this, but more of a college level program.

Doing *Matilda* next year - will be frank and open about the violence/abuse

Would depend on the story and how the violence is portrayed - to help with bringing attention to the problem versus seeing it as okay.

We had the hit happen off stage so it was heard but not seen. Students high fived to make the smack sound

I would have discussions about the importance of bring awareness to the situation, and that DV is never okay in real life. I'd then talk to kids about how to get out of a DV situation

Carousel demanded lots of discussion in the cast regarding character choices. We also talked openly about societal and generational changes. In the end, we as a cast made the decision to donate part of the proceeds from our show to a Women's Shelter.

I think we have to remember that the reaction from the audience should make them uncomfortable when it comes to domestic violence.

If we can't change it, we don't do it.

For *Carousel* the older crowd didn't think it was domestic violence. For everyone else we partnered with a women's shelter and raised money and learned from people about domestic violence. Everyone liked that.

I would get a fight coach

A lot of our students have likely witnessed or experience domestic violence in their home and it would be triggering for them to witness/portray it on stage.

Guns

Education is important in understanding why the gun in used in the show, and how to safely perform on stage with a weapon.

I decided NOT to do *9 to 5* based solely on the scene with the gun. In *Chicago* there is no need for real guns or props - it's a dance show it's done in a theatrical way but I have no interest in having real guns onstage.

We also talked to our in house police officer so they knew guns were being used & where they were stored. Guns were kept in a lock box in a separate room which only the directors had the key to.

People seem to be fine with shows that are about war or the west (versus other types of gun violence).

We hire a fight choreographer when/if needed. All prop guns are maintained by adults when not in use.

We simulated guns with shadow work and hand gestures for *Chicago* - there were a couple of news worthy school shootings during the year we did this, so we didn't want any guns on stage. We also have had kids steal the prop guns and threaten people with them so we want to eliminate guns entirely.

we have to use nerf guns. In no way can the gun look like a real gun. It actually got a lot of laughs!

I teach in a HIGHLY conservative community, where they value their second amendment rights STRONGLY and vocally. Guns on stage are not an issue for us.

Mostly just with the current state of affairs regarding gun violence in the schools - it's a question to simply move to a "gun neutral" production, or modify with sound instead of blanks now (in light of Alec Baldwin incident)..

We usually keep the orange plastic tips on the prop guns and we keep them locked up and take them home with us each night.

In 2012 all of our guns were taken for our production *of Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* the day before we opened. We ended up having to do the show with toy guns until I convinced the school board to change policy. I have a professional fight director that teaches us safety.

When I directed this was a much less of a concern than it is today

Direct Religious Messaging

I am a minister myself, and performing a musical with a religious message is alienating for a number of our students. I think there are right contexts for when and how a religious musical can be performed.

Directing is about telling stories - as long as we are telling stories and not preaching a message I am fine with it

Our community is largely Christian, but our admin/student services team is very focused on inclusivity and we don't think they will be open to a predominantly Christian show

I feel that there are a lot of shows out there that don't have religious messages to do instead

Like the guns, being in a highly conservative community brings comfortability with religious overtones.

Most places I have worked at the big religious shows like *JCS*, *Godspell*, etc., are not a problem.

There is a slim chance I'd direct *Godspell*. The community would be fine with it, but an increasing number of my students are not religious and would be uncomfortable. I also, though semi-religious, struggle with producing a religious show given the toxicity of a large number of mainstream Christians.

Our community would love it, the kids would hate it and I don't think it's appropriate

Plot Containing Religion

These shows can be fun if done in the right way. They are big shows in my mind, and our school would need to have a depth of student participation to do one of these.

We do a background lesson on each show. In *Fiddler* we had a Rabbi come in to teach the session

I think they would be uncomfortable with anything that isn't Judaism or Christianity

I answered the questions in reference to Judeo/Christian religions

We have high Jewish population, so doing *Fiddler* was very popular.

If some kid doesn't want to perform, then it is their choice. I'm not, not going to direct a show for one kid.

The exception would be *Fiddler on the Roof*. While their Jewish faith is a large part of the plot, it is not the only plot.

Potentially Controversial Politics

We performed *Anastasia*, which is a Russian based princess musical, chosen right as the war between Ukraine and Russia broke out, and performed a year into the war. We discussed the political representation of the Russian culture represented (royalty vs socialist) and its implications in our world today, so it felt timely and helpful. Same with *Sound of Music* and fascism.

I don't see how Nazis in *The Sound of Music* are a controversial political element - This is depicting a terrible time in history. I have directed *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Is that controversial now?

Probably depends on the politics. Historical politics are accepted more than modern perhaps.

We always treat this as an educational moment and prompt student led discussions about content and the meaning behind different themes

It can be used as a learning tool. Make sure to not preach a side to the cast, but rather showcase a reality of the world

I did *The Pajama Game* the year Gov Walker dissolved unions and that show is all about a union. I was uncomfortable at the time because I wasn't sure how admin would react. The musical was approved before the unions were dissolved and the protests started.

For beloved shows, some people just turn an eye to these things. Again, it is how it is presented.

It depends on how overt the elements are, and what message they are portraying. We are in a "red" county/area, so anything too progressive/liberal might cause tension with the community.

It depends on the issue. *Newsies* was relevant, but the audience didn't see it that way due to the setting

Physical Disability

Education and understanding context for why the character has a disability in the story, how it textures the story and makes the characters as a whole feel more authentic and real life.

I don't feel comfortable casting an able-bodied person in a role like this

Don't poke fun of the disability (unless it's *Young Frankenstein*)

I have had actors with disabilities that weren't written into the script. Again education and maturity.

I feel like a speech impediment is very different than feigning physical disability. Viewed more like a vocal choice.

Mental Disability

Again, working on helping the students and audience understand mental disabilities is key to performing a show like this.

I think it would shine a light and make students with mental disabilities more normalized by showcasing them in a show

I feel you must work with professionals to do this without offending anyone.

I would recommend differentiating between mental illness and neurological disorders and perhaps refrain from using the term disability.

APPENDIX F:

Interview with Bryce-Transcript

Mark (M): Have you had any major controversies with audience members because of the content of a show you've directed? And then if so, what show, and what happened?

Bryce (B): Yeah, for the fall of 2019, I really struggled with finding a show that was speaking to me, so I decided to write one for my students and take into account some of the things they experience. The title of that show was *Weird*, it was a jukebox musical featuring music by Hansen. The premise of the show focused on four main characters who felt like outcasts, or excluded, or different because of personality traits or things in their life. One of those was a character who identified as queer [she never officially labels herself, she just knows she is attracted to the same sex]. A father of a cast member was offended by this. He had clear opinions and beliefs in regard to LGBTQ identity. It wasn't even his daughter that was playing the character. Because it [a queer character] existed in the show he threatened to call the principal. I don't know if he ever followed through on the threats. If he did, I had the support of the administration, so it wouldn't have really gone far. He [the parent] talked about "maybe I'll show up to the show dressed as a girl then." The character in the show wasn't transgender. [The parent was] just kind of making a stink about it, to make a stink about it. Ultimately, he came to the show, no issues, he didn't say anything, didn't cause a ruckus or anything, just observed the show and then that was that. But it was something. I talked with the administration about how to go about it in a way that was going to minimize any potential controversy. My superintendent at the time really believed in the message of the show and didn't want that to get tainted by people causing a stir. She didn't want the message to get lost in some sort of controversy. In our advertising materials, I was asked to label it PG-13, to give a heads up, so people weren't bringing their young children expecting a Disney show, so to speak. We [the administrator and I] talked about various moments in the show. I don't think I was asked to censor or lighten anything with the queer character, but I was very sensitive in writing those scenes to make sure I wasn't necessarily preaching a 'right' or a 'wrong,' or 'this is the way it should be.' It just was a lens into this character's experience. There was a mom who was unsupportive, and a dad who eventually showed his support by taking a character to a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) meeting. But [the characters in the show] never preached about whether homosexuality was right or wrong. There weren't any religious jabs or anything in there. I made sure to really walk a line there, knowing the community I would be presenting it in.

M: It sounds like an advantage of having created your own show is you didn't need to worry about licensing companies. We often have to sign these contracts saying "all words on the page must be presented as written." You were able to craft your own journey and tell the story in a way that was sensitive to the students you were working with, with consent from your administration, and community support, for the most part.

B: Yes

M: Any other shows?

B: I don't think that there was any audience controversy. I never had anyone get up and walk out of a show or raise hell with the school board because of a show. Probably the second most controversial show I did was *The Addams Family* this last fall. There was a lot of innuendo in that, but there was no audience chaos.

M: Any major controversies within the cast, crew, and orchestra members because of the content of the show you directed. If so, what shows or what happened?

B: I don't think I've ever experienced major controversies within the cast other than minor personal preferences. In *Once Upon a Mattress*, the characters of Lady Larken and Sir Harry are romantic together, and she's pregnant with his child. The girl who played Lady Larken was not fond of the guy who played Sir Harry and so having to act like that was kind of 'ugh.' It didn't cause any tension to the point of a major disruption. No one quit the show. Same thing with *The Addams Family*—actually, the same girl. She played Alice, during her transformation from the acremonium, she talks a little sexual there with Mal, the husband. Outside of the slight discomfort with the person playing the character, there weren't any controversies.

M: Nothing you'd call "major?"

B: No, nothing that needed any sit down meetings or anything like that. Just "suck it up, and act." (chuckle)

M: Have you decided against directing any shows because of concerns from your production team about the content of the show?

B: The fortunate thing about me being the whole production team is that I have sole discretion. I did have assistants for a few of my shows. Probably the only time I didn't direct a show was before choosing *The Addams Family*. I had considered *Once on this Island*. My assistant at the time and I talked about the fact that it's originally written for a racially diverse cast, particularly including African American or Black characters. It just gave me enough hesitation, I want to do a little more looking into this before I commit. There was another show that was an equally good option and so I went with that instead. I was planning on directing it this coming fall—I had come back to *Once on this Island* after doing some looking and reconciling with myself a little bit. Like "how might I play this moment with a non-diverse cast?" I know the authors of the show specifically have a note in the libretto that says "though originally written for a diverse cast this story essentially transcends race" and there are some alternate versions of the lines provided so you can do this with a non-diverse cast. So, the fact that it came from the authors themselves, and I consider them to be experts on the subject, so that's why I went back to it.

M: You were planning to do that this fall but aren't because of your job change?

B: Yes, because of the job change, I don't know if that'll happen or not, it will just kind of depend on who takes up the directing of things.

M: Have you ever been told not to direct a show, or been told to edit a show because of concerns from your administration?

B: When I did the original show, *Weird*, I sat down with administration, and we went over certain parts that from their standpoint just needed a little tweaking. I was asked to eliminate a couple of moments of swearing. I wasn't going to die on that hill. I think there were only one or two in the whole show. I felt in writing this that the use of profanity met the moment. But like I said, it wasn't something that I was going to die on the hill for. I think the word was "assholes" and that one got vetoed, and that was okay. There was also a moment where one of the characters, who was living in poverty and homelessness, her mom was bouncing between jobs. She got a job as a lunch lady in the school. She tells that to the daughter, who's a student at the school and the student is afraid the mom is going to embarrass her. They [administrators]

brought up a concern that we have students in the school whose mom's work as lunch personnel and [they didn't want to be] sending the message that is something to be embarrassed about. I reworded it slightly to make sure that the mom might embarrass her by telling an embarrassing story or something like that, not just her presence as a lunch lady. It was a concern by the former Superintendent, who has a really big heart for our students and sees things from those perspectives. Again, [the Superintendent] really believed in the message of the show and didn't want to unintentionally offend someone or make someone lose sight of the message because they were offput by something. There was a moment in the show where two of the ensemble characters gave their own personal testimonials. It was a powerful moment in the show. One student was in the special ed program, and the other student is in a motorized wheelchair. To be able to give their perspectives, on being immediately seen as different, but "this is how I'm not different." I gave them the opportunity to write their own [lines]. What did they want to say to the audience? Our Director of Special Ed. had some hesitation because I labeled the ensemble rather than saying "ensemble," they were the "weirdos." They [the cast] kind of came up with this. But they [the Director of Special Ed.] had some hesitation with these two students. Now one, who was in the special ed program, and one, who is in a wheelchair, are being labeled as weirdos in the script. Kind of some of those semantics. I got a little fired up about that just because I thought it was such a poignant moment in the show for them to be able to speak from their perspective. They [the Director of Special Ed.] did work with the student in the special ed program to change the narrative a little bit, "these are the things I'm good at, but l struggle to clean my room" or "I don't like doing this, but I like shooting baskets and I like doing this," and "I'm different, but I'm just like you." So, it was edited into a positive spin on it, which was fine with me. I didn't have any parameters that said, 'you have to talk about that you are different.'

M: There wasn't a plot point that they needed to push, right? It was an opportunity for actors getting to play characters, kind of themselves.
B: Right and then the student in the wheelchair talked about how "I wish people would not see the chair, and just see me." Or "they think I'm depressed all the time because I'm in this chair." It was really powerful. I know there were audience members who talked about that being a powerful moment and it led into the final song which was not sung by any of the main characters. It was an ensemble number where each ensemble member had a small solo. The message of the song was "I was born to be someone no one's ever been before" or "to do something no one's ever done before," it led into that idea. I had a little tug of war battle with that, making sure that it honored the intent of my vision, but that everyone was satisfied with how it was portrayed. We came to an amicable conclusion on it and I felt good about the final product. I don't lament what could have been. It still worked in the final product.

M: Any other instances of being told to edit?

B: No. Other than that, I've always self-edited based on my sensibilities. I've never really had administrators request to read the script prior to my choosing it. They've given me that responsibility of choosing a show. It's a blessing and a curse because if all the sudden they come in later and say, "well, hang on a second you need to."

M: You talk about self-editing. What goes through your mind when you read a script and you're choosing to edit? What's your process? Do you have a list of words that if you see, you know you are changing? Is it a gut reaction? Is it a conversation? What's your process? How does that self-edit work?

B: Since I'm picking the show myself anyway, part of that is in that process. If I'm reading through a script and I go "I don't know if I could make this moment work without really doing

some trimming." I know they are students playing characters. They're actors playing characters. So, what the character is saying is not necessarily what the student is doing or saying, but as their teacher I don't want to see my students in those compromising positions. For this reason, I won't choose to direct *Grease*—unless I just have a home run cast that I think "man, they just really would knock *Grease* out of the park," I don't necessarily see myself doing that. In *The Addams Family*, with Alice and the acremonium, her little speech right after she talks about, "don't you remember, Mal, how we would go out to dinner and sometimes we'd give each other a look and we'd leave the restaurant right there, and we'd drive home, and sometimes we couldn't even wait until we got home to." It goes on about them going to have sex. I had the student kind of trail off a little bit, it almost turned into like she was whispering in his ear. Some of those words I let trail off, so it didn't fully get to the implication that they were going to be having sex. Although then Lucas's character says "mom!" and Alice says "lighten up, Lucas. Parents do it." But the verbiage of the "lighten up parents do it" is light enough of a punch line that it it's not like "parents have sex" with that s-word in there and 'cover the ears of the children.' It worked. I don't think I look a lot at frequency, when it comes to swearing. If there's one "hell" somewhere in the script, and it's only one in the whole script, not a big deal. Now, if there were one f-word in the script, I would probably edit that just on the severity of generally how people feel about that. If there were multiple f-words in the scripts, it's probably a script I wouldn't have ultimately chosen. I don't have an official list, but a "shit" somewhere, maybe. A "damn" somewhere, maybe. I know "Goddamn" is one that is a for sure switch. Mostly because, [prior to becoming an educator], I was performing in a musical revue, and we were doing the song "Pandamonium" from *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. In that song, it says "Goddammit" and our adult advisor said "you need to change that. People get really up in arms about 'Goddammit.'" You even hear that on the radio. They [radio stations] will bleep out the 'God' part but leave the "dammit." The "dammit" people are okay with, it's the "God."

M: So, when you're making self-edits, is it your comfort as the teacher to edit? Are you thinking "If I were to give this script to my administrators, they would say something about it, so I'm just going to take care of it?" Are you thinking "if the audience hears this, they're not going to be happy with it?" Or is there something I'm missing?

B: It's kind of a little bit of all three. It's my comfort as the teacher and the student saying the lines and what position am I putting them in? Even though a lot of students listen to and say, far worse than anything I would give them in a script. I still feel it is my responsibility as a teacher to be cognizant of what I'm giving them to portray. Not assuming they would be okay with saying that, and getting a read on the community and what might our audience be comfortable with hearing. And, yeah, if the administration were to read this, what might they not be okay with? So far, the process has worked, I've never had someone come up to me and say "that was too far." I've never had a student lament that they couldn't say the line as printed in the script. I typically don't scratch it out before giving them the script, they get the script and then I say "when we get to it in the read through, or in the blocking phase we're going to say this instead." There was a line in *The Addams Family* that I edited before making the script available for students to read to preview before auditions. It was a line about setting fire to the Jehovah's Witnesses. And Wednesday, she's growing up, "ahh, all the good memories," she used to torture her brother, so on and so forth. There's line about setting fire to the Jehovah's Witnesses, and we happen to have Jehovah's Witnesses in our district. I knew of one that may be auditioning for the show, and I wanted to not even put it out there. Now, if they went and listened to the original cast recording, they would have heard the line as it was supposed to be, but we were doing the school edition. I changed it to the effect of setting fire to the mail man, it's still someone who comes to the door. Still gets the same effect without offending Jehovah's Witnesses in our community. I'd say it's a little bit of all three. I would say, of the pie that I'm cutting up here, the

smallest wedge would be what the administration would think because I think if I'm doing my job on the other two parts, then the administration will likely be okay with whatever else remains. If I'm doing my diligence as a teacher, what do I feel comfortable giving my students? And being in the district for seven years, I had a pretty good read on what the community would and would not support. With those two pieces in place, the third piece also resolved itself.

M: Are you directing the musicals in your new position?

B: In my new position I will be vocal directing.

M: So you won't be deciding what shows to do? You might be part of a team that makes those decisions?

B: Correct.

M: I was curious, having gone through a job change in the past, where I switched communities. You're familiar with the community you've been in for seven years, to jump somewhere else. Is that a whole different mindset? Are you kind of familiar with the community you are going to be teaching in? But, if you're vocal directing, you're a part of a team.

B: That team might be able to help. It's something that in my role as choral director, I'll have to learn too. I can imagine if I were in charge of solely picking and directing the shows in the new community, I would be reaching out to admin, "hey, what do you think." I might choose a pretty no-brainer safe choice the first year to dip my toes in the water then get a feel for things.

M: The rest of these questions are about some of the specific elements. It is okay if you don't really have experience with the topic, we don't need to talk about it, then. A lot of these questions, I'm asking about characters not necessarily the actors. Have you directed a musical with BIPOC characters (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) characters? Or along with that, racist characters? And then if yes, how did you handle those elements?

B: *[Once Upon a] Mattress* and *The Addams Family*? No, I don't think there was anyone either BIPOC characters or inherently racist characters. No.

M: Have you directed musicals with kissing, references to sexual activities, simulation of sex, sexualization of characters, LGBTQ characters, sexism.

B: Yes

M: We've already talked about some LGBTQ characters with your original show.

B: With *Once Upon a Mattress* two characters who it's implied that they have had sex and that she is pregnant. In *The Addams Family* there's mention of sexual elements between a couple of characters. I think there's been kissing moments in *Freaky Friday, Once Upon a Mattress*, and *The Addams Family*. I say "I think" because in all cases I've chosen to get around that. The kissing has never been such a big plot point that it was absolutely needed. The bows scene is ridiculously plotted out in *The Addams Family* script, I don't know if you've ever seen it but it's ridiculous. It's this whole story that gets told through the bows. But Wednesday and Lucas get married and there's supposed to be a kiss because they're getting married. The actors who played Wednesday and Lucas talked about, "we've got to do that." [I said], "it's up to you. If you want to you may do that, I'm not going to force you." It also was a different layer of things where

our Lucas was played by a female and female identifying not trans, we had the gender bend the role. But I said, "that's up to you. Whatever your comfort level is," I knew they weren't going to be making out on stage if they did a kiss, it'd be a quick peck. I might have given thought to the fact that even though the characters are male and female, it's two females on stage. I never forced the issue, we got to dress rehearsals, and they never did it. We did the bows, they never talked about it, and it never ended up happening. I was okay with that. She was in a wedding dress. It's fine.

M: Do you let the students decide whether or not they're going to kiss? Or is it your default that they aren't going to kiss? If they really want to, you'd figure it out?

B: I pretty much default to "we don't need the kiss here." I haven't had a show where it's absolutely necessary that they do kiss. I think in *Freaky Friday*, we might have circumvented it by having Catherine put the bouquet up as they lean in towards each other so they don't actually kiss. It's never been as crucial of a plot point. If there was a show where there's a husband and wife and the husband goes off and kisses someone else, then "you kissed so and so," that would be a plot point, you kind of have to have a kiss in some way there. There's also a million different ways to stage it, too. But I pretty much default to no kiss. Or, if you [actors] are comfortable with it, and that's something you feel like you want to do, let's talk about how to make that work. But I've never run into a student that said, "I really want us to kiss here."

M: Okay, so we talked about kissing and references to sex. Any sexualization of characters?

B: I don't think any of the characters have ever been really sexualized.

M: Does the school edition of *The Addams Family* have the line "with a dress cut down to Venezuela?" Or is that edited? And I think that can be interpreted. Even if you have your actress in a relatively high cut dress, it's still a kind of a sexualization thing, right.

B: I'm trying to remember if that line is in there or not. It may not be in there. I can follow up on that. But, like you said, even if the character doesn't have a dress, that's 'cut down to Venezuela,' it still mentions it, it makes the audience look, or it makes the audience take notice. And so that would be that would be a moment of sexualization.

M: I'm not familiar with *Freaky Friday* to know if anything's in there.

B: I think most of the kissing is after Ellie has switched bodies with her mom and the fiancé wants to go in for a kiss. And she avoids it with, "oh, no, I have a cold sore." So, I think it's always dodged, and then there's the wedding at the end.

M: Is there any sexism that you've had to direct?

B: Sir Harry, in *Once Upon a Mattress*, is kind of misogynistic, sexist. "We can't let something something something all because you had a moment of weakness", talking to Lady Larken. There is a moment in *Once Upon a Mattress* with a lady that Sir Harry's dancing with at the party. She speaks French, and she only knows one word of English, "Yes" For personnel reasons we didn't have a lady to play that part. We skipped over that part as it wasn't absolutely crucial to the plot. It's just Harry dancing with another woman.

M: That line that you did reference for Sir Harry. How did you feel directing that scene? That line? What was that experience?

B: I made it clear that Sir Harry is a caricature. Although, there are some people who think that way. The character, in the context of the show, lives in a different time period. That may have been the prevailing thought of the time period. It was played very tongue in cheek; the audience was in on the humor of it. I don't think that actors had an issue. I know the actor playing Lady Larken didn't agree with that line of thinking but recognized that it's a character and it's a product of the time. It wasn't like she took umbrage with it to the point where it was a serious issue that we have to talk about. It's kind of like, the end of *My Fair Lady* where Higgins says, "Eliza, where the devil are my slippers" and it's played as a callback to the other thing, and you still think "Oh, Higgins, that scoundrel." It's not like "fetch me my sandwich woman." Sort of heavy moment like that. Or "why can't a woman be more like a man?" That one's more sexist.

M: We kind of already touched on this as you've directed some shows with profanity. You talked about how you've handled some profanity through a self-edit. Is there anything else to kind of elaborate more on when it comes to profanity?

B: No, I think I've pretty well covered it. I liked the list in the survey, it made me think for a second, "where do I draw the line on this?" It's always been semi arbitrary or on a case-by-case basis. A lot of that goes into the selection process for me. If I'm reading through a script, and it has a lot of profanity, its front loaded in that sense. It never makes it to the students, because I've done that work of reading and thinking, "this is probably crossing the line. So, if there's a better script out there that I can do, let's do that." Unless I absolutely fall in love with the show.

M: It is something that you're considering when you select a show: how much profanity? I'm excited to kind of share out the results of this element So that we, as directors can show administrators, "I want to do this show. It's got a couple swears, but this research that somebody in our state did shows this is kind of where people are feeling comfortable. Now, I also realize you have to know your community. If you're in a larger city, it's probably a little bit different circumstance than rural Wisconsin.

B: Bigger programs that are putting on these really massive, impressive productions are different worlds. I can't remember which school got to premiere the school edition of *Rent*. For a school to do *Rent* in Wisconsin, it would not have been my community, right? I think the research will be important in that sense, because administrators love to say, "go talk to some of your colleagues. What are they doing?" "I have it right here." It will be helpful.

M: Have you directed a musical or musicals with alcohol or drug use portrayal on stage? And if yes, how did you handle those moments?

B: Miss Hannigan in *Annie* is supposed to be pretty sloshed a lot of the time. I didn't have her overly slurring her words. It wasn't a point of emphasis for me and blocking it. In "Little Girls," she acts a little nutty and free. I don't know if I ever gave her an empty bottle in her hand or not. If so, I don't know that I ever had her take a swig I don't know that ever had her do any heavy drinking. It's one area in this community that I was especially sensitive to because a lot of these students come from families with alcoholism and substance abuse. That can be potentially triggering for them. I wouldn't say it ever deterred me from selecting the show, but most of the shows I've selected haven't had any overt moments like *Guys and Dolls*, where they go to Cuba. There's no scene like that in any of the shows I've done. There are no bar scenes. *Shout the Mod Musical* might have had a monologue that talked about her husband's drinking or alcohol use. It was never portrayed on the stage, but was talked about in one of those heavy moments of the show, but then we're going to follow up, five minutes later, in the next scene, it's going to be a

rousing rendition of "Downtown." We have to give you a poignant moment in the show, to make you feel and then we're going to throw more of these jukebox songs at you because that's what you came here for. Kind of similar with kissing, I try to avoid it unless it's an absolutely necessary plot point. I remember as an audience member seeing a musical revue produced by high schoolers/recent high school grads. They did a song where the premise is this female character singing a solo and she's going around stage, swilling a drink, sitting on guy's laps, and talking about this and that. It just felt a little uncomfortable for me as an audience member. This was before I ever started directing shows at the high school level. I didn't particularly enjoy that song in the show. I couldn't even get to the heart of it, like, "Wow, what a great talented singer she is" because I was focused on it being a little uncomfortable. Also, knowing that they selected the songs in the show. There are millions of songs out there in the world. Why this one?

M: You didn't mention anything on drug use?

B: In *Shout the Mod Musical* they gave an alternate scene, so I dodged it all together. But there was a scene originally in there about smoking marijuana, I believe. But they gave a full alternate scene, and so we just chose that alternate scene.

M: Have you directed a musical or musicals with domestic violence or guns onstage? And if so, how did you handle those elements?

B: Domestic Violence. Other than there was maybe some mention in one of the monologues in *Shout the Mod Musical*. I think I edited the monologue all together. Although in that monologue, there was also mentioned of abortion. I think that's more so what I cut out of that monologue. In that community, that was a no-fly zone. It [the monologue] talks about domestic abuse, but the other girls in the scene rally around her. It's one scene in the context of the whole show, and, and I have not been afraid to necessarily approach those subjects. I don't think we gave her like a big old bruise on her eye or anything like that, she just gave the monologue and then the show continued. Guns. I know *The Addams Family* has the crossbow. She shot it once off the stage in the opening number, "you need to grab your bow and arrow" It's supposed to hit a bird. Later, she shoots the arrow at Lucas, but the ancestors are the ones bringing the arrow across [the stage]. She's doing it blindfold and "what if you miss," "then you'll be the last thing ever see," and it's a very lighthearted moment. It's not like she's threatening him with a crossbow. It's like, "I'm guiding the arrow with your love to the apple on my head." Other than that, I don't think any other shows I've done have had a gun or anything like that.

M: And it's not that you're avoiding these shows, it's just there are so many shows in the world and so many different topics?

B: Knowing my community, anything that might have a gun is probably less likely to be picked anyway, for other reasons. I can't think of many shows that have a gun moment in them off the top of my head. So, they're probably just already less likely for me to pick them to begin with. It wouldn't necessarily be the gun, but it's a conglomeration of things. Sure.

M: Were you saying that in your community, you would even shy away from the use of guns on stage?

B: In the community, I don't think people would bat an eye at it. I think it would depend on the context of the gun. If it's in a lighthearted scene, like he pulls the gun out and it squirts water.

M: I think *Annie Get Your Gun* is a good example of not gun violence, per se. They're using the guns to show their skills at shooting. Whereas *West Side Story*, that's used as a violent weapon. In *Little Shop of Horrors t*here is a gun present, and it never gets fired. He's, but he's holding it and thinking about right. So, context would matter, but you don't think that the community you were teaching would necessarily be too terribly concerned?

B: Not necessarily. I think the community themselves wouldn't be concerned. For me as a teacher, if it's a moment where, "I have this gun, and I'm pointing at you when I'm threatening to kill you," and it's a very heated tense moment, as a teacher I would be like, "mmm I don't know about that." Like *West Side Story,* for instance. If there weren't any other issues with *West Side Story*, let's say that was the only moment that I would take issue with. I'd probably think, "let's see if there's something else out there" just because in our community, I would be wary of it. If I could justify it, to my cast, to my admin, and I had a sound reason for it, where everything else lined up perfect for *West Side Story,* I might push through.

M: Have you directed a musical or musicals with direct religious messaging or a connection to religion in some way? Or any potentially controversial political messaging? And then if yes, how did you do it?

B: No overt religious messaging or political messaging, other than just the connections that the audience themselves draws to LGBTQ issues or mental health issues. And in W*eird* there were characters who experienced mental health struggles, LGBTQ identifying, poverty, and homelessness, and a single parent household. LGBTQ and mental health issues, people might draw religious or political lines to, but there was no messaging in the show. I didn't have the mom of the LGBTQ character "I'll pray for you," "let's talk to our pastor about this." There was no messaging that led them that way. It's just the audience's own beliefs about it.

M: Since you mentioned it with *Weird*. It sounds like you probably would try and avoid shows that would have a direct religious messaging? I think of shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar* where a story is taken from a religious text, and we present that on stage. The association to religion, my example is *Fiddler on the Roof* where Judaism is definitely mentioned, religious leaders are mentioned. But the story of *Fiddler* was taken from the Torah or other Jewish texts. And then like with the political elements, I think of *The Sound of Music*, having Nazi imagery on stage. When I directed it, I was not promoting Nazi ideals, but I was aware that Nazi imagery on stage can be a concern for some people.

B: It can be alarming to see. Oddly enough, you know, in the community where I teach, I think people would have cheered if I did *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I never chose those shows because of students' emerging thoughts on religion and the diverse spectrum of where students have beliefs. So, I avoided those more so for the student's sake, not the community. The community would have eaten it up, they would have loved it. That bleeds over into my choral directing. I know that a lot of the students that I interacted with at my school weren't necessarily of the religious kind, or they may have had some bad experiences with religion. So, I was always delicate about how often are we you know, needing solid justification to program a piece. So doing *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*, where that's the whole thing, I probably wouldn't have done that for the students' sake.

M: Have you directed a musical or musicals with characters with any physical or mental disabilities? If yes, how would you handle those? We kind of already talked about some mental health struggles with *Weird*.

B: *Weird* had mental health struggles and had the two characters talking about their differences or uniquenesses in terms of being confined to a motorized wheelchair or being in the special ed program, and having those particular differences. So the mental health struggles, the character did go see a therapist and that was part of the story that I wanted to include to encourage others who are seeing it [the show] to seek the help that they need. It wasn't done in a preachy way. It was that character's journey and their road to being able to accept themselves. The student who was confined to a motorized wheelchair was in several of my shows. It was always something we worked around and really wasn't any great Herculean task to do so. It was never used as a ploy, it was never played for laughs. It wasn't like she was riding a horse in *Once Upon a Mattress* because she had this chair the whole time. We didn't try to 'old' up her wheelchair to make it look like it belonged in the Middle Ages. It was part of her, and we just went with it. But other than that, I haven't directed shows that have characters with specific disabilities or mental illnesses, like Crutchie in *Newsies*, other than previously mentioned mental health struggles.

M: Is that something that you would shy away from?

B: I don't think I would shy away from it. It's definitely something that I would want to do in a sensitive way. Connect that student with someone who has that lived experience. Knowledge is power. When I was [an actor] in a production of the *Miracle Worker*, we got the opportunity to meet with two young boys who were hearing impaired and talk with their mom. Getting to interact with someone who has that lived experience made us more sensitive to it within the context of the show, even though the actress who played Helen was the only one who had to portray the disability. If someone's blind, they're not just staring off into the distance the whole time. There are nuances to it, so giving a nuanced performance versus a caricaturized rendition of it. Crutchie is on a crutch, but that doesn't mean he has to be like dragging his one leg far behind, he can just act normal, just with the crutch. In *Annie* we actually didn't have to have the Franklin Delano Roosevelt problem because we didn't have Franklin Delano Roosevelt. So that became Eleanor. But that would have been another case where it's just normal. Someone wheels Franklin in and he delivers lines. It's not like we're dancing with them and doing donuts with them. Anytime I've had my student who is confined in the motorized wheelchair, I was cognizant when it came to choreographing. We modified as necessary, and did what they were able. It was just how it worked out. It wasn't never really like played for laughs, or "you ran over my toe," or anything like that. It was just an extension of the person.

M: That's all the questions I have. Is there anything else that when it comes to the content of a show, anything in your process that might be useful for other music theater educators?

B: I think the world of gender bending is something that needs to be examined or explored. We have such a deficit of guys in our programs, typically. Especially from smaller areas. And how can we do that [gender bend shows] effectively? Logistically, even? Just some guidance in doing that. There are communities out there, Facebook groups, and people will share, "I did *[Once Upon a] Mattress,* I gender bent these three characters, and I only had to change the key for this." I think with more visibility and prevalence of transgender students and the transgender community, we will have to be careful and delicate about that. Is there a show with cross dressing? *Tootsie* is not available, but that's a show with cross dressing. *Mrs. Doubtfire* is a show with cross dressing. I can't think of any others off the top of my head that have cross dressing, but it's something to definitely be cognizant of, and doing it in a in a nuanced way.

M: We're also going to need to get the licensing companies on board with that, to some extent. In a lot of rain, a lot of our contracts state "All genders must be cast as presented."

B: Or "you can't change pronouns." That it is something that would be easier if the process was more understood. One of the Facebook groups I'm a part of, a representatives from Concord [Theatricals] is a member and will answer questions. That process seems scary and daunting to request a line change, or other type of change, but what is that process like? And then if it can be explained the reasons it would be turned down. Rights holding companies might think its a great change, but it's got to go through the authors. There's this whole chain of command that something like that has to work through before they can say, "yes, you can say 'him' instead of 'her.'" When it comes to selecting shows, there are so many shows out there. I think not being afraid as a director to go outside of the box is good. We don't have to always pick the well known ones. Now, for a self funding program, having one of those surefire hits is important. There are so many shows out there. I'm learning some new ones all the time. There's a show called *Ranked* through Uproar Theatrics. It was a show that two directors got together and wrote about their students, things their students were experiencing. That parallel was kind of interesting to me. I've been there and done that, but they wrote the music themselves, which is far more daunting than I would have ever taken on. I would have never known about it unless someone mentioned it in that Facebook group. Then what else does Uproar Theatrics have to offer? We always think of the big ones. It helps that Concord [Theatricals] has now taken over Tams[-Witmark], Samuel French, and Rodgers and Hammerstein. So those are all in one place. It's fewer places to look along with Theatrical Rights Worldwide, Broadway Licensing, and MTI [Music Theatre International]. I think every year of the personnel challenges I have at school. I can't have a huge cast. I don't really have dancers. I only have two or three ringers when it comes to singing. What shows fit and check off all these boxes. I went through the process with my theater class: Onstage and Behind the Scenes. I said, "You're going to do what I do every year. Here are the sites, look for examples, and then let's talk about them." How many guys? How many girls? Can these roles be gender bent? How do you know? We went through and finally narrowed it down. It becomes more difficult if you put more parameters on it. One of the students had mentioned, "we haven't done like, a *family* family show in a while like, *Cinderella."* So, we put that parameter on it, and now what happens to the list. I think we settled on like the final two on the list were *Cinderella*. and *Once on this Island Jr*. At the time, I was considering the junior option, because I know the junior option has already done the grunt work of taking out a lot of the race-based line. There's one song, "The Sad Tale of the Beauxhommes," that is all about this curse on the family because a White guy fell in love with a peasant and had a son. The song deals a lot with race. So that's just gone from the show. I thought, "well, if I don't have to ask them to cut it, then so much the better." It's a 60 minute version of the show, versus the show itself is only about 90 minutes. Ultimately, I reversed course. There's so much from the story missing from the junior that it's more impactful if I do the full version. Those were the two that we settled on. *Once on this Island* isn't inherently a family show but it has a lot of heart and a great message and moral. It's *The Little Mermaid* but it's Calypso . It's a beautiful show. Great story. Fantastic music. Pretty much sung through. It's a lot of music. A really great show. It can be powerful. But there's the race component. Another challenge as a director is, "Do I pick a show that I'm passionate about? Or that I really am into? Or do I pick a show just based on it checks all the boxes?" One show that I've always avoided is *Matilda*. I cannot get past the opening number. No matter how many times I've tried, I can't make it through "my mommy says I'm a miracle" and then 10 minutes later, we're still singing the song. We talked to the doctor and he had his whole bit, and then the mom does her whole bit, and then we come back to "my mommy says", and it's grating, I can't get past it. It checks some of the boxes for me, but if I can't get into it, that makes my job harder as a director. If it was the only option, then I grit my teeth and do it. I was familiar with *Cinderella* already [when suggested by students], but I watched the old VHS, and it's kind of a snoozer in some parts. So I would have done it, if I really felt it was the right show. And I probably would have gotten into it eventually. So that narrows the list even further.

M: There are so many shows out there.

B: It's hard to find new shows too. A lot of modern Broadway is not necessarily being written with a high school cast in mind. So *Come From Away*, when eventually that comes available. It's a fantastic show. Love the show. Do I see my high schoolers doing it? With the right group, maybe? There's a good amount of swearing. It's a great message. And it's a great overall show. But it definitely would take some talks with the admin and what are we comfortable with. *Dear Evan Hanson,* people love that show. And people love "You Will be Found." I always go "but the context." It's a little iffy in the show. Even *Wicked* by comparison, which is still on Broadway, I think it's 20 to 25 years old. Even that is pretty tame by comparison to a lot of shows you find now on Broadway. How do I pick that guaranteed hit when a lot of the newer stuff that's been written is edgier? Then you have to find something that's off the beaten path. How do I publicize that enough if I'm a self sustaining program? Fortunately, I never had to worry about that too much. My budget for my shows came from the district and we had an activity account that all the ticket sales went into. To my knowledge, it was never supposed to go back to the general fund.

M: You always were getting enough investment from school that if the show was unsuccessful, the program wasn't in jeopardy?

B: Yeah, they never they never came to me saying like "what was your intake for ticket sales?" Not that I was budgeting a whole huge ton for a show, but by the time you add in rights, I think we're probably somewhere in the neighborhood of three to four grand, which was budgeted from the school district. The only thing I needed the activity account for was if we bought shirts, students would reimburse that. Of if we did a meal for the cast, that comes from the activity account. It's a daunting process every year. I'd sit and go through the entire MTI catalog. Ones I've even looked at every year, and think, "Wow, maybe I'll look at it and listen to it again." But there are some that I don't even click into, because I look at it I think, "I don't know. That doesn't seem appealing," or "I don't even see my students getting remotely interested in that. So pass." Same thing with Theatrical Rights Worldwide, Broadway Licensing, and Concord. I tried to go through the whole catalog, and then when you end up with like five shows.

M: When you go through these catalogs, do you go through the logistical elements in mind first? The potential boys and girls that you might cast, the dance requirements, the set, and costumes. Or are you thinking what I'm researching here, the content first? Or is it kind of all at once?

B: The first line of defense is logistical. Number of guys, dance requirements, things like that. If I happen to know a show that disqualifies itself based on content, like, *Avenue Q*. Pass.

M: So, even though it's a small cast, and might be really good for your group this year?

B: Right. I know that one [*Avenue Q*] is a no. If it's a show I don't know, it makes it onto my list of "this works people wise and requirements wise," then it's read through the script, listen to the music. What's the story here? Is there content that I should be aware of? One that I've always ended up passing over, and I don't even know if it's for content reasons, is *A Little Princess*. I think Andrew Lippa did the music for that one. I've always, for one reason or another, found another show that also fit and I'll go with the show I know versus the new one that I would have to do some work on. My first line of defense is logistics for me only because my program is short on guys. It may be a different balance for you at your [larger] school, where you have at least a few more guys.

M: It's probably a similar ratio.

B: For *The Addams Family* I had two.

M: I don't remember what I had for my fall production last year. But it's probably a similar ratio. Still having eight or 10 to work opens up some more possibilities

B: Eight or 10. Even if only three of them can really sing and dance. You'd still have leftovers for the supporting roles that only speak or the ensemble. Otherwise, you know, they get to the ball, and there's no one to dance with because there's no guys left because they're all the leads.

APPENDIX G:

Interview with Caroline-Transcript

M: Do you direct other musical theater at all, adult shows or anything?

C: No, just high school, I have performed in community theater, but I haven't directed.

M: Have you had any major controversies with audience members because of the content of the show you have directed? And then if so, what shows what happened?

C: I haven't had major ones. The worst I've had is when I did *the Most Happy Fella* long ago. There's an unwed woman who gets pregnant. There was someone who wrote a letter to the editor in the newspaper and never talked to me. It said this [topic] was inappropriate for a high school to be addressing, and they should do other shows. My administration didn't blink. They didn't think twice about it. It didn't turn into anything more than that. Similarly, when I did *Shrek*, I got an email months after a performance saying there that the show uses the word "ass" too many times, and their grandson had been repeating it because of our production. Again, my administrators are just very supportive and helped handle it. I didn't even have to respond. So that's the worst kind of controversy. Overall, my administration, families, and community are pretty supportive of what we do. If there is something we think might be a little controversial, we try to address it.

M: You said the administration is on board and has supported you? For these two instances with *The Most Happy Fella* and *Shrek* did they preview the script? Did you say "heads up this show has an unwed pregnant person" or "this show uses the word 'ass'" which frequently is referencing Donkey in *Shrek*?

C: It's always referencing Donkey. It's just a border line. That's the show. Every year, I usually run it by my principal, "Hey, this is the show I'm planning to do next year," they typically don't read through the script or watch it. I've had several principals, some of them are more knowledgeable about the shows I'm picking than others. Sometimes they just always trust me to make that decision. We were going to do *Les Mis[érables]* and it was the same thing, "There are some more adult themes here." We just communicate that. We typically do student performances for middle and elementary schools. Some years we don't have them, or we just have the middle schools. My principals have trusted me to make that judgment call as needed.

M: Have you ever had any major controversies, where the people involved with the show had a problem? So the cast, the crew, the orchestra perhaps, where they had a problem with the content of the show?

C: No. If someone did, they didn't say anything, there was never a parent intervention or anything.

M: Have you decided against directing any shows because of concerns from the team that you have that put on the show? Regarding the content of the show?

C: Absolutely. I have a whole spreadsheet of shows I would love to do some day. Shows I don't think I'll ever do. Shows that I could potentially do, if there was like a rewrite maybe I would be more open to doing. A show like *Thoroughly Modern Millie* where some of the racist jokes don't work especially with my community and student population. I love the music. I love the show,

but I would love to see an updated version of that. There are definitely shows I just don't see myself doing with the high school level or with the community that we have.

M: Is that spreadsheet self-made?

C: Yes. It's not public.

M: Right. I meant is it only edited by you? You aren't suggesting show X to your pit conductor and they're responding, "Oh, do you realize that there's this innuendo going on throughout the entire show." As a joke my former colleague would always suggest *Miss Saigon*. I'd always tell him, "it's not going to happen," but I'm talking to the reverse. Maybe you've suggested something and somebody shoots you down, you're saying you are shooting yourself down before anybody else on your team is ever getting to it?

C: If someone has a concern, I vet it. It comes down to me and my choice. For instance, my choreographer, we'll talk about shows, "Oh, that one? I don't think we should do that one." It doesn't happen that I say "I want to do this show," and they respond "we shouldn't do it." That's never happened.

M: It might be a couple of you talking through a show and realizing together it's not a good fit?.

C: Yeah.

M: I don't know if I would use it. Would you be interested in giving me access to the spreadsheet and potentially using it?

C: Sure. I don't know if it would help you. It's my personal thoughts. Some of it's like, "I don't like the music enough to spend a whole year of my life working on it." It's not necessarily all because of controversy, or gender issues, or race.

M: It's all of your thoughts. Just kind of put in one place. Maybe aside from my research, I like the idea of personally. I'll look at a dozen shows and decide "no," for some reasons, but then I won't necessarily remember did I say decide "no, forever?" Or did I decide "no," because I don't have enough X right now?

C: Right. For instance, my friend at different high school in the city is doing the *Chicago Teen Edition* this upcoming year. She had read the full script a few years ago, and thought it wasn't appropriate. Then they came up with a more edited version. So she came back to it.

M: I've seen a couple—I know, DeForest did it this last year.

C: Yeah. It's like ninety minutes. It's short. I would say it's in between a Junior Show and an actual show. It's short. So anyways, that's an instance where she revisited it. She liked the show, wanted to do it, but some things were changed.

M: Like you were saying with . . . *Millie*, you might be interested.

C: if they updated it.

M: Have you ever been told not to direct a show? Or have you ever been told to edit the show because of concerns from your administration?

C: When I was in a private school, yes. We did *Singing in the Rain, a*nd the principal got an email from someone who didn't really identify themself, complaining about the amount of kissing in the show. We were pretty sure it was the boyfriend of one of the leads. The principal came to me and asked, "Can you change any of this? We got this email." I said, "Look, we don't even know who that's from." It was already opening night. We weren't going to change much at this point. It was too little too late. Then the principal ended up understanding our side and let us keep it as is. That was kind of awkward. It wasn't a cast member or a family member. It was just some random, anonymous emailer.

M: Sounds like you've got a lot of autonomy over your shows, which has to be very nice as a director. Now we're going to dig into some of the specific elements. I've grouped them together, within bigger topics. If we need to split it out, we can. Have you directed a musical or musicals with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) characters or with racism? If yes, how did you handle those elements?

C: So where race is an element of a plot? Or is traditionally played by a person of color?

M: Or the original Broadway cast, maybe had a personal color in a role. The example I think of is when I directed *The Drowsy Chaperone*, there's a character, Trix. She was originally Black actress, and there is a single line in the show that references her as a Black character. I happened to have a Black actress who auditioned for that role, so that worked out excellently. I've also been in the show where we didn't have any Black actresses audition, so we needed to just adjust that single line. In that second instance, when I was acting, we had a BIPOC character in the show, but we did not have a BIPOC actress playing that role. Sometimes, the race of the character is inconsequential to the plot.

C: We did *Big Fish* this year, and the character of Josephine was originally played by a Black actress and we also had a Black actress play it, but there was no mention of race, nothing to do with the plot.

M: I directed that show last summer. I did not remember that the original cast had Josephine as Black. So, when you say there's nothing that references it, you are quite right.

C: I don't know if you would count like Hispanic characters in *The Addams Family*. The Broadway people weren't necessarily Hispanic.

M: *The Addams Family* characters are ancestrally from Spain correct? So, it's not necessarily a race issue.

C: Yeah, so I don't know. That's a kind of a question mark. I should get out my device here. When we did *Shrek* our Donkey was Black.

M: There's nothing really race-related in *Shrek*, right?

C: I think that role is now getting some controversy with it. It is a little bit of a minstrel character. I don't know if you've seen anything.

M: I've not read anything, but I had spoken with a music theater expert, and they were talking about how that roll is kind of playing into Black stereotypes in a theater scene, not necessarily in a cultural sense. Like you said, kind of a minstrelsy situation.

C: We did *Fiddler on the Roof*. That's not really race.

M: Okay, and none of those shows really discuss racism.

C: No

M: I was hearing you say that in any instances with some BIPOC characters, you were able to cast them appropriately?

C: Yeah

M: Even when it was not necessarily necessary to plot, you were able to have a Black Josephine. You were able to have a Black Donkey.

C: Yes.

M: This next one's a big category lumping a lot of topics together. You already touched on kissing in shows. So we can dig into that more. In this question, I'm asking about shows you've directed with kissing, references to sexual activities, the simulation of sex, sexualization of characters, LGBTQ characters, or sexism. If so, how did you handle those elements? Goods? Bads? Whatever may have happened?

C: I've had kissing in almost every musical I've ever directed. I wish that we could have intimacy coaches, like Broadway gets to do. Especially because they're your students, and you're doing your best to make them feel safe and comfortable. As an actor I have been put in really uncomfortable situations on stage where a director doesn't support you or give you the appropriate rehearsal to feel comfortable. When I'm coaching that with students, I try to really read how they are feeling. We talk about it a lot, and I try to be really open and make sure that they feel comfortable and safe. They're not doing what I had to do when I was in school, where I had my first kiss in front of 100 people. I try to follow the lead of the high schoolers, make sure that I'm being respectful to them, and make sure that they feel as comfortable as I can make them. I know I've heard lots of horror stories from other high schools where things are almost inappropriate. So I would hate for that to ever be the case. I feel like most of the time it usually ends up fine. And sometimes we've staged it as a fake kiss, if needed.

M: What determines if needed?

C: When I was in high school someone wasn't allowed to, because of their religion. It was mimed, with hands blocking the lips. If a student, a family, or parent had a concern, then I would just address it as needed. But I haven't had that as an issue.

M: As a director, if there's a kiss in the script, you have not ever changed away from it.

C: No. For COVID, yes. We did *Guys and Dolls* in 2022 because we were still masking. We edited it for that. Sometimes we lessen it. We did *Crazy For You,* and there are some really long kisses. Sometimes it's like changing the length of it. I don't think we've ever done anything where there's any sort of sexual innuendo other than *Les Mis*. We did the student version of that, so we didn't do any sort of simulation. It was very tame, all that red light district stuff, the song "Lovely Ladies," was shortened. The choreography was not as risqué as an adult group would have been. Our choreographer's really good about being really sensitive to things like that and still making the scene work without needing to always push the limit. [Participant requested this material be redacted] The other one was, LGBTQ?

M: Yeah, LGBTQ characters?

C: I don't know that I've done a show, where anything has been explicitly a queer relationship. That's more of a modern trend. There are more shows coming out now, which is great. I've had a lot of LGBTQ+ actors in shows, but none of the shows I've directed had that as a topic. We've had people playing all sorts of genders. That's maybe a different topic.

M: That's not something that I'm necessarily digging into here: gender bending characters for casting purposes.

C: That's part of it, but also I've had trans students. Just trying to listen to the students and let them do what they need to do. But again, that's probably a separate topic.

M: Any simulation of sex?

C: Just that red light scene.

M: In *Les Mis* which you worked around. Any sexualization of characters?

C: We did *Guys and Dolls*. We talked a lot about the time period it was written and how even then they were making a joke of it, that's the whole point was a commentary on the stereotypes of the time. We really educated the cast on it. We had something in our program about it, as well. I don't know if there are any other characters in the shows we've done. Are there shows that you think of when you're asking them?

M: Not in particular. I just got off directing *Mean Girls*. There's a lot of sexualization in that one. In *Mamma Mia,* Tanya, when she's at the beach, there's a little bit of sexualization of her.

C: Sure C*razy For You,* there's some of that, the guy's kind of whistle and hoot at a girl.

M: You mentioned *Guys and Dolls*. *Crazy for You,* you're describing some kind of cat call situations. How do you direct that? How do you approach that with students?

C: It was not an issue. It's described in the script. The students didn't even have an issue with it. The actress who was the focus of it was totally fine and didn't ever show or verbalize being uncomfortable. So, we didn't really adapt it. I think we definitely talked about how you don't do that. This is not something we do today. It was a joke, you had to do it for that scene. It's not something we could really edit out.

M: And everybody was mature about it, they understood "I'm acting as somebody who's catcalling" or "acting as somebody being cat called?"

C: Nobody was being inappropriate; they all were definitely mature and responsible about it. I kept coming back to that for a lot of the topics in your survey. I feel like it's how you approach, how you educate, how you lead. I don't think you can just skirt away from controversy. Musical Theater is a platform that's meant to push the envelope. There's a time and a place for things, and maybe some shows should never be done. Maybe that's fair, but if there's just a little bit of it [envelope pushing], you can teach about it, you can talk about it.

M: I think that's what I'm going for here. Where's the line for us as high school directors?

C: Each community is different too. What I can get away with doing in my town is different than smaller towns, or private schools. That's part of it, knowing your students, knowing your

community, and knowing where you are, and what they'll embrace or what they'll have a problem with.

M: What do you think about your community makes it receptive to that, where a smaller community might not be as receptive?

C: I don't know, I haven't taught in a smaller one. I'm not saying that in a way to demean or belittle. I'm thinking more about my concerts as I program for my choirs. I know that I have the privilege of being able to do things without getting fired for singing a song about gender equality or LGBTQ acceptance. I'm able to do that, whereas other people in our state are not. I don't know if it's our district or what. I don't know what it is. The city I'm in is very purple. It's 50/50 Republican/Democrat. It's not like I'm in Madison. Our department is very accepting, very open, very progressive. I don't know why, it just is. I just feel like it's a luxury compared to what I hear from some other teachers around the state.

M: Do you think you've directed any shows with sexism in it? You mentioned *Guys and Dolls*.

C: *Crazy for You*, certainly.

M: That's kind of wrapped in with what you were talking about with sexualization of characters. You've had mature performers that understand that context?

C: Yeah.

M: I love what you said about wishing you had an intimacy coordinator. I wonder if that's something that will happen in the future?

C: Someone needs to lead a WMEA or WCDA training session on it. They're not going to give me a budget to hire someone for that. Even just a protocol, or some sort of book, or workshop we could take. That way we could just do it in a way that has integrity and is not creepy. I'm curious about how *Mean Girls* went for you. Because I had some students who really wanted to do it and other students were like, "We shouldn't do it." So were they positive?

M: My students were on board. There was not concerns. I did have a little bit of a situation with a parent of one of the performers. So maybe that's something after we've wrapped up, I'd be happy to chat. I wish I was done with this [thesis] prior to having started that journey. Going into that process, I feel like it would have been a whole lot more comfortable for me if I had some data to back it up. Have you directed any musical or musicals with profanity? If so, what shows? How did you handle it?

C: *Shrek*. I feel like every show has something in it. Even if it's like "damn" or something. I feel like every show has something, except the ones that are really like kid-centric, like *Mary Poppins* or *The Sound of Music*. We keep it in and then we edit it for [middle and elementary school] student performances. Then we just replace it with something more okay. I don't remember, but I'm sure we have had it, *Crazy for You* has a lot of innuendo, but not a lot of outright swearing. *The Addams Family* has some. Even *Big Fish* doesn't have much. It's like "damn."

M: Maybe like "hell" somewhere in there? So you've never changed a line?

C: With *Les Mis* we changed the "bitch" to "witch," I think. Thenardier has it in there somewhere.

M: In that instance, for *Les Mis,* was that your note in your script before students even saw it? "This is what I'm going to do." Was it watching how students reacted, "I'm going to respond." Was it you knowing administration was going to look over your shoulder and see it, and call you out for that one?

C: Yes. To all. For instance, in *Big Fish*, we took out the "penis" line [while looking at an ultrasound, a character says "a penis! It's a boy!"] because we have a few trans actors, who felt it was transphobic. That was brought to me by another person on my team. Then I edited that out. Other times, it's just me saying, "we're not going to say that." Usually, we just swap it. It's not like a giant rewriting or something. I wish more of them [scripts] had suggested alternate lines.

M: Having just done *Mean Girls*, they give you three pages of alternate line options. I'm about to do *All Shook Up* this fall. The original cast has BIPOC characters. And the authors realized there are some homogenously racial schools out there that like the show, like Elvis music, and would like to do it. They put boxes around some lines and then at the end of the script, they've got alternate lines for if you've got a cast that's racially homogenous. I did not consider the show for many years because I didn't see that option. I don't know if it's a new option, or if I just didn't get the right script. I agree it would be nice to have more high school editions give you the original script with alternate lines, like they did with *Mean Girls*. I believe the script itself for the show was the same as the script they are using on the national tour. "You don't need to call us [the rights holders]." That's also going to take some convincing [of the companies in] New York. Have you directed musicals that have alcohol or drug use portrayed on stage?

C: Alcohol. Yes. *Crazy for You*. *Guys and Dolls*, do they drink?

M: In Havana, the dulce de leche.

C: Sure, there we go. Yeah, *Guys and Dolls, Big Fish*, *Les Mis,* I guess *The Addams Family*. *T*hose are the big ones, probably

M: I know in *Guys and Dolls*. Sarah Brown needs to really portray drunkenness. In general, how do you handle drinking in shows. *Big Fish* is a wedding and it's just champagne right?

C: Yeah. And it doesn't say he has to act drunk

M: *Les Mis* has some elements of drunkenness, *The Addams Family,* too. How do you direct that? How you talk about that with your students?

C: Same thing as the other topics. I'm clear with them, "this is acting and this is something you should not be doing in high school." I try to reiterate the school rules about it. We talk about it when we're blocking, the physicality of what it looks like, and what it does to you. Usually, the students have seen enough of it in movies and other media that it's not foreign to them. I've never had anyone be weird about it. We treat it as part of the storytelling aspect and how it fits into the plot. Why is it necessary? We sometimes tone it down a little bit, more than an adult production would.

M: Anything with drug use?

C: No

M: A couple of violence related questions in musicals, have you done any with domestic violence or guns onstage?

C: Guns, Yes. I have not directed shows with domestic violence. I was in *Carousel* in high school, so that's where my brain right away. Guns, yes in *Guys and Dolls, Les Mis*, and *Crazy for You*. Those are the big ones. We usually are really careful when using the props, especially in rehearsals. I lock them up. I don't want them floating about the school, or some kid walking in and out of the building with them, especially with gun violence as it is right now in our schools. We haven't really edited it out. I don't know how you could, because it's part of it [the show].

M: In *Guys and Dolls* the weapons are never fired, correct.

C: No, it's just show, like a threat.

M: Is that the same for *Crazy for You*?

C: In *Crazy for You* there's fake shoot outs, but it's a comedic thing. They pretend to shoot each other up and then they're high fiving each other afterwards. It's like a Western scene.

M: Did you use rounds in the prop guns? Are their pops?

C: I think in *Crazy for You,* you could do it either way, you could do it without the noises, we did use a noise.

M: And was that from the prop itself? Or was that something else.

C: I don't remember, in *Les Mis* it was audio. The sound person was running those because there was so much of it, on the barricade scene. In *Crazy for You*, I think we did have one gun that did the popping noise. Here again, we're putting in in the program, and signs in the lobby. Trying not to catch anyone off guard. I have never had a student say, "I'm uncomfortable with the gun noise." If I had, I probably would have changed it even more.

M: Have you directed any musicals with direct religious messaging, where it's telling the story from a religious text? Or with a connection to religion, where religion is a factor in the show, but it's not necessarily a story of that religion, if that makes sense.

C: *Fiddler on the Roof,* and *The Sound of Music*. I haven't done *Jesus Christ Superstar, Joseph,* or *Children of Eden*.

M: Then the other one in that larger category was potentially controversial political messaging, which I lump *The Sound of Music* in with that as well, with the potential presentation of Nazi imagery.

C: We used actual Nazi flags. So that was horrible. I made that choice, and it was horrible. We used them, but horrible. They are sickening to look at. We wanted it to show that that threat. We [the production team and cast] really talked about the history of that.

M: Were there any safeguards? Was there anything else to do with history?

C: We talked a lot about what was happening in Austria at that time. I led some questions with the cast about what they already knew about World War Two. I believe we also had a note in a program for that as well. I don't tolerate if a student is going to be immature. If they were to make a comment, I would shut it down. I haven't had to do that; they take it really seriously. I'm proud of my students for how thoughtful they are when it comes to more sensitive or

controversial elements of shows. They want to do the show justice. They want to tell the story the best possible way they can. I just feel like I haven't had as many issues.

M: We briefly touched on some shows with connection to religion. You mentioned *The Sound of Music*, more at the beginning of that show when she's in the convent, and then *Fiddler on the Roof*. Did you have to do anything special about that?

C: We talked in *Fiddler*, about costuming. "Why are they wearing prayer shawls?" "Why are their heads covered?" That helps the story telling. The importance of their costume and treating those pieces with respect. So that was a cool teaching moment and learning for me. I'm not an expert in those kinds of things either.

M: Anything for *The Sound of Music* on that one?

C: I don't think we did as much, there's just not as much. There are the opening songs, but I'm not going to talk about life as a nun very long.

M: Have you directed any musicals where there are characters with physical or mental disabilities and if so, how did that go?

C: I did *The Secret Garden*. There's a hunchback character, and that was fine. He sings about it, there's lines about it, and it's part of the book. We edited the costume; it had padding in it for that. I feel like I've used wheelchairs, but I don't remember when. We would have used it in *The Secret Garden*. *The Most Happy Fella* has a wheelchair, but he was sick, it's not a disability. So, I guess that's it. *Big Fish*, he's also sick in a wheelchair.

M: I'm trying to think of any that might have any mental illness or neuro divergence?

C: Not really, no.

M: It's okay, you've been directing for 14 years. It's okay if you haven't hit every one of the show topics that I bring up here.

C: That's a topic where there are a lot more modern shows where they're talking about disability or mental illness. We haven't necessarily gotten the high school versions of those shows yet. Or shows with flexible race or gender casting. I think that we're going to see more of it in the next decade.

M: When I think of mental illness in shows I go to *Next to Normal* and *Dear Evan Hansen*. I think *Next to Normal* technically is available for high school. It's a small show.

C: Yeah, six people.

M: Is that something you really want to do? *Dear Evan Hansen*'s not available yet. I suppose *Jekyll and Hyde* you could do, but that's a big undertaking for a high school. There are no right or wrong answers to this. That's all the formal questions I have written. Is there anything else on my wider topic of content of musicals, that you might think it's important for other high school musical directors to know? Maybe think about it from somebody who is in the shoes you were in 14 years ago, stepping up to direct their first show right out of college?

C: I think overall, I feel like musical theater and doing high school musicals is so important. There are so many great shows out there. I like that musical theater is political. I teach a

Broadway History class, and I can watch shows that come along with the different decades and they show stories of America. I think it's fascinating. I feel very privileged to be able to direct musicals, because I think there's so much to unpack. It's not just entertainment, there's so much more to it, and there's so much more teaching that goes into it. Anyone who's just starting out, don't just pick a show because you like the music. There are so many shows that are just done because they're catchy. If you're going to spend a year of your life on something, there's got to be some meat to it, there's got to be some things you can unpack. Don't be afraid just because you don't have the exact genders in your audition pool. I think it's fun that we get to be creative and play with it. I'm glad that we get to celebrate more diversity. I'm hopeful that in the future that's even more of the case, that theater can continue to be a safe place for students. That we can have more options, where we can do shows with LGBTQ relationships. There's only a few right now. I'm excited to see where we go from here.

APPENDIX H:

Interview with Holly-Transcript

Mark (M): Do you direct anything other than high school musicals ever? Do you ever direct adults?

Holly (H): No, not recently.

M: Okay, as we're talking, I'm focusing specifically when we're working with high schoolers.

H: Yes. Absolutely.

M: Then could you give a short version of a biography of yourself?

H: I'm certified, originally, in choral music. That's how I started my career. I started in a south central Wisconsin Junior Central High School back when it was seventh to ninth grade. That's how I began. I taught there for eight years as a choral/guitar/general music teacher. During my time there, I developed lots of different things for kids. We did two musicals a year, we did a madrigal group, and we did a show choir. It was really busy. It was a huge program, we had two choral people. After that, I decided that I wanted to try my hand as a professional actor. I resigned after eight years and got my equity card in Chicago. In Chicago, as an actor, I also did entertaining on the side as a jazz singer and pop singer. Had my child. Stayed out of that business for about seven years, went back when my child was four, got a job at the alternative high school in a southeastern Wisconsin school district with multiple high schools. At that time, there was not a whole lot of musical theater going on in the school district. A private school in the city did a show. Occasionally, one of the other high schools in the district did a show. Another high school in the district was not doing much theater stuff. Even though it's an alternative school, anybody could come to the school for any reason. Children could come part time, full time. That's what the school is. I did two musicals my first year there. Then, my boss said, "Well, why don't you just start doing something for the district in the summer," so I started a summer program. Since that was so successful, the kids started coming during the year to continue doing it. We have a very different model, that's risen from that in our district. Three of the high schools in the district audition across the district for our shows after school, we do not divide schools up. We have students audition as a group, and cast 12 to 16 shows a year, every child that auditions gets accepted, and we see about 150 kids a year and place them in different productions at those three sites. A fourth high school in the district also auditions every child, but they prefer to do that prior to the show. They also accept kids from across the district. So that's how that rose, it kind of grows out of the alternative school. After about six years at the alternative school, the school board was looking at a model for the building I was at that would have less elective classes. That didn't bode very well for my program, so I applied to leave the district. When I did that, the principal at one of the other high schools reached out and said, "No, why don't we just bring you here, and the whole thing can come with you here." They started building a program around that. At that point, we expanded the program when I moved to the new building. We applied for district funding and got great funding. The program has risen since then. That was probably beginning in 1991. So that's kind of the history. I started by teaching choral music, television, and theater at my current school, and eventually morphed into theater because the department grew.

M: Have you had any major controversies with audience members because of the content of the show you directed, where audience members approach you or administration?

H: At times people approach us, but "major" is not a word I would use. We did have one show, *Dreamscape*, that dealt with a young Black woman at a gas station, waiting for a family member to come. It was in a bad neighborhood and she had a gun someplace close to her in the car, either in the seat next to her or in her lap. She falls asleep, and it is very difficult to wake her. A policeman happens upon her prior to her family getting there and ends up killing her, as she wakes and reaches for the gun, even though she's not doing anything wrong. The story is very difficult. It's a difficult story about a difficult time. It's a wonderful play. We were also doing *West Side Story* at the same time, and I reached out to the local police department somehow. I don't remember how that communication came. We put blurbs of both shows up, and the police decided that was a little scary for them. They reached out to the superintendent, and at that point the superintendent had been my boss for many years, so we knew each other very well. Long story short, she sent the Assistant Superintendent over. We had two very top notch Black kids from our program in the show, and they were very invested in it. The Assistant Superintendent thought we should probably shut it down and came and talked to us. The director and I met with her and said, "Look, we understand it's not an easy story, but it's not an inappropriate story. You have to understand that if you shut it down, you're probably going to create more heat than if you don't shut it down. This is the top Black students' and their family. This is a student that plans to continue in theater." And in fact, that student just graduated with an acting degree from DePaul, which is a major acting institution. "So you might want to think about not shutting it down before you create an issue with the Black community." The Superintendent ended up reading the script and allowed it to stand. They preferred that we not to a lot of major publicizing. It was a studio show. It wasn't a main stage. So, we were okay with that. We filled the house every night for the show and had great talkbacks afterwards because when we do the strong literature, we always include talkbacks. As we were reaching out to the police, we would reach out to support people to come in and have a talkback with the community about the content of the show, and how that relates to them.

M: Is *Dreamscape* a play? Play, not a musical?

H: Yeah

M: Okay. I am focusing more on musicals. I was curious about talkbacks. Is that something you, the director, lead? Is that something you ask the students to just be open for? I've always been intrigued by the idea in the past, but it's never something I've done.

H: It depends on the choice. I can tell you about the *Scottsboro Boys,* which is probably the strongest piece of literature we've ever presented. The story of *Scottsboro* is nine young men in the south that are accused of raping a woman on a train. It was the trial of the century. It's written by Kander and Ebb. One of those authors, Ebb died. Susan Stroman, she's probably the most Tony award-winning female, director-choreographer. She's incredible. She worked with Kander and Ebb to put it on Broadway. It didn't have a big run. MTI [Music Theatre International] said this was because possibly it was Christmas. And it just isn't a story for Christmas. But it is a show that is done in minstrel style. If you know the history of musical theater, and the history of minstrelsy, you know that period of our American history and know how crazy that is. The show is done in a minstrel style, it is 11, Black male actors and one White actor. So, when we presented it, it was the first pilot of it with young people. We cast three adult actors—two Black, one who had graduated from our program, another that was an equity actor from Chicago, and a White adult actor who had also graduated from our program years before. Then we had nine Black students that played the roles of the others that were playing characters their age. It was very, very strong. The original production even had blackface, and so to make that doable in our venue, for these kids, and it was a very important story to tell. I hired a Black director-choreographer from Chicago who is now an artistic director of a professional theater

there. He was amazing. What I did to support that production was all the vocal work. I did some of the original acting analysis of the script, under the director's supervision. Before he came with the professional actors, the kids were fully memorized, we looked at all the acting beats and where choices could be made. I think the director was there, maybe three and a half or four weeks with them. Before he came we had them up on their feet. I loosely staged things, just so they get used to listening to being a part of the story. And when the director came, he directed and choreographed it. The music was totally done. We added the equity actors to it. We surrounded that with community people as well. So the director led the talkback as a Black man. The two Black equity actors were also a part of that. So were the kids. So was I. We also had community impact people come. One of the young actor's grandmothers from the 60s who had gone through all of the protests down south in Montgomery was there. She spoke to them about a portion of the Black experience, and the time after the period the show was written in, the period following the Civil War. They were living through Jim Crow, so the show was written in the Jim Crow era. She spoke to us beginning the journey out of that in the 60s. We probably had one person in the audience that asked a very pointed question, and it was brilliantly answered by both the kids and by one of the equity actors. There was not one complaint. We took it to the International Thespian Festival [ITF]. We did in a 1920s venue, which still had the seating for Black people in my balcony, which was insane. Susan Stroman, who originally choreographed and directed the show for Kander and Ebb came to see the production, and then did a talkback with the actors the next day. We were in the final portions of dress rehearsal when she walked in, initially, and talked to the cast prior to the evening. She just had to stop in the lobby, and tears filled her eyes. She sat down to watch the rest of it and told them at a talkback the next day at the festival. It was packed. People came and expressed how they felt during the show. She expressed being a person not of color, writing a show in a culture of color and how that was possible and how she felt about that. People expressed how they felt about that. That was probably the strongest piece of literature we've ever done. It was extremely successful, and it changed our shape of our department, the shape of our lives, forever. It was incredible. We did do the blackface, per our director's direction. The parameters that were set for that were that if any young man walked in at any moment and didn't want to do it, then it would not happen. Every night, the cast made the decision as a whole as to whether they had the strength to do that or not. At the end of the show, the actors put on blackface and then leave the stage, which is crazy strong. Just the idea that they can now walk away from that art form that was so detrimental to Black America. All the images that we've put out, like Aunt Jemima. All of those things that have kept the Black culture down, and they've satirized them in a negative way. At the end of the show, they put on blackface, and then they wipe it off, and everyone leaves. So, the director, as a Black man, felt that it was a good thing for the kids to have the choice to do it. Every night they chose to do it.

M: And this was your Black performers putting on blackface?

H: Well, the point of the show is you can put on blackface, which White people used to do as part of the form. But if they wipe it off, there's still Black, you can't change someone's face. It's layers and layers of stuff. It's extremely strong, and complex, and a beautiful story. I see a lot of theater. I can't say that musical theater is stuff that shakes me to my bones very often. I love it. It's my form. I mean, I'm a great vocalist, I'm a great musical theater entertainer. I love directing. I love doing it. It is very important to me. When I see theater that is not with music, that feels very realistic to me, shows like *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia,* Robert Fall's production of *King Lear* at the Goodman in Chicago. Things that, literally, I walk out of the theater trembling because I'm so blown away by what I just saw. *Scottsboro* is the only musical that's ever done that. I'd actually gone with a director person that I was working with, we were going to do the high school edition of Avenue Q, which was also crazy. But we went to see a staged reading of

that, and I asked one of the people who set it up, "what should I see?" and he said "you have got to go see *Scottsboro."* We got tickets. When you walk out of *Scottsboro,* either in New York or when we did it at the International Festival, you either cry, or you are in shock. As Susan Stroman said, "every time you do a musical, you want your audience to do something. If they're doing *The Producers*, you want them to laugh, and enjoy, and you know that everything's working really well when all of that's going well. When you do *She Loves Me*, you can see the warmth of the show. Or *Sweeney Todd*, the shock of the whole thing, you watch your audience." And she said, "when they did *Scottsboro* people would walk out, very contemplative, but would continue to talk and talk and talk and talk and talk about it afterwards." That's really what happened [for us]. It's an insanely amazing experience. For us to be able to offer educational opportunities for young actors to connect with that is essential. You've got to know your venue. We wouldn't have been able to do *Scottsboro* my first year in my current position, there's no way. Over the years, we've done stronger and stronger literature, introduced language, and all different sorts of things. That kind of led us to that point where, since my district is a majority minority school system, we should be telling stories that reflect who we are. There you go. There's a crazy story.

M: I think you're already starting to touch on some questions that I'll be asking later on, we'll be able to quickly reference back to some of the things that you've hit on. So, my next big question here is the same kind of question. Have there been any controversies with the cast, crew, or potentially orchestra members of a show, because of the content of the show?

H: Yes. I'll tell you another big story. [participant requested this material be redacted, but approved references to the material which may be seen in Chapter 5: Interview Analysis] So anyway, out of that came a series of policies for our department, regarding putting actors of color into White roles and how that feels for them. When you do that, you actually change the culture of the show, which is true. What you look like is what you look like, you can't hide that. The idea that counseling from people of their culture, would always be available to them, and we would make those resources available in the classroom and on Google Classroom. We would discuss culture, maybe not at the first reading, because we said "you guys never even read serious on the first reading, so I don't think that's the day to do it." Some former students agreed that they were kind of goofy, it's more about "all my friends are here, and we're reading through the script without understanding what we're doing," and it isn't really an artistic experience. Someplace in the beginning of the production to deal with any issues that could be difficult for them, in a more formal way. We set up parameters for that.

M: Okay. And I might just be ignorant here. So can you clarify for me what you're talking about? You're now avoiding putting actors of color in White roles?

H: No.

M: You're not avoiding that, just being sensitive?

H: To how it feels for them to be in the role, and how it feels for the rest of the cast to have them in that role. We are quite sensitive to the fact that shows of color should not—I don't know how to explain it in a culturally appropriate way. I'm not going to be doing a White version of *Fences*, which is an August Wilson play. I'm never going to do a White version of the *Scottsboro Boys* ever. It's just inappropriate. I can put a Black actor in the role of Quasimodo from *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, even though historically, that role is not played by a person of color. I think you have to look at history, a bit. Right now, we are actually operating on stronger cultural levels than the Jerry Awards were, when I watched the Jimmy Awards, in New York, I thought "wait a minute, y'all are singing stuff that y'all shouldn't be singing if you're White, in my world right

now." Because we have really gotten into culturally appropriate choices for kids. We've been working on that for years now. I wouldn't be doing a production in *Hamilton* with my kids ever.

M: That's actually a show that I've discussed with friends in regard to this topic.

H: The point of *Hamilton* is has that is being told by people of color.

M: Right, but some of my friend say there is nothing in the words that are being said that imply race. "It's a story of our founding fathers. So race doesn't matter in the show."

H: Oh, but it does.

M: Another one that I will bring up with friends is *The Wiz*. That's another show where there is nothing in the words of the show that states anybody needs to be Black, but it's a Black story.

H: If you look into the professional theater, I understand we're talking about high school, but there's all sorts of controversy surrounding casting.

M: *Hamilton* included.

H: Well, yeah, but people do *In the Heights* a lot. And that shouldn't be done by people not of color, either. Or, well, quite honestly, *Once on this Island*, even though in its licensing, it says it's okay for everybody to do it. It was licensed many moons ago, and right now, in my community, we are definitely mixed culture, it does not work that way anymore. Maybe in a different community it works, maybe that's okay. In my community we need to make sure that you're casting as close to that Haitian culture as possible. Because that's where my culture is right now. You just have to be sensitive to where you work, and you have to listen to kids, their families, leaders of the community, and everybody. That's listening. Listening and hearing. Hearing what stories you should be telling and how you should be telling them. Which we do a lot of, listening.

M: This is why I'm really glad to talk to you.

H: Well, we're crazy because we do a lot of stuff nobody else will do.

M: You're also able to do a lot of shows. Where I am, I will never be able to do *Scottsboro Boys*. I don't have nine Black singers to do it, let alone the culture set up to do *Scottsboro*. I am decades away from the amount of change that needs to happen. I've considered *West Side Story* and I've reached out to Latino leaders in my community. I've said, "if I reach out, but nobody comes, do I have to cancel the show?" I've heard from members of the community, who said, "if you've made the effort, there are fair skinned Puerto Ricans. So go for it." This woman I was talking to said, "I have cousins who are blonde and, you'd never believe them."

H: That's true, just not in my community, I can't.

M: So, when you talk about listening to your community, that's something I'm doing, too. Have you decided against directing any shows? Because of concerns from your team? Or the teams that you work with? Because of the content of the show?

H: That's rare. We did turn down and *Spring Awakening School Edition*. I don't know that you can do sexual repression without the sex, and really tell the story. So that's what I told them. The whole show is about repression, but it is sexual repression, and the other repressions, but that's

kind of the linchpin of the whole thing, and I just told the people at MTI, "I don't think that's going to fly with parents."

M: I'd be curious to look at the high school version of that script. I believe a school in the Milwaukee area did that show.

H: Oh yeah. I'm sure it's been done.

M: You decided against *Spring Awakening*. Was that your decision? Was that a team decision?

H: We talked about it.

M: Any other shows that you proposed that your team pointed out had something you were blind to? It doesn't sound like you would be accidentally blind to something.

H: I could be accidentally blind, we're all blind.

M: Based off of what I've been hearing, you're doing as much homework as you can, so the odds seems unlikely. Has administration ever told you not to direct a show or have they told you to edit a show?

H: No, but we have developed a policy. If we are going to present something that is of mature nature, we have to apply. Nobody reads the script, but we have to delineate what is mature about it, and that goes to the district in a document. Then, in any publicity, all of that [mature content] is stated in advance. And then before the show starts, we state it once more in front of the audience.

M: Have you and administration ever had a differing line of what mature content is? Have you ever missed something, and they come afterwards and say "shouldn't I have gotten an application"

H: No

M: Is it spelled out in your policy?

H: No it's not spelled out, We are going to delineate what it is, and we send it to our fine arts boss. And the district is aware of what's going on.

M: Okay.

H: The only time [administration approached us] was *Dreamscape*

M: The rest of my questions here are about specific elements. Have you directed a musical with BIPOC characters or racism on stage?

H: Absolutely.

M: What do you do? How do you handle it? What are your strategies?

H: Strategies for working with BIPOC characters is number one, making sure that the children are comfortable with it and making sure that you're talking to them. Their families are comfortable with it.

M: How does that look? Is that an email home? Is that a meeting?

H: We talk and email. There's not a form or anything. Mostly just discussions with parents. Nothing formal. Making sure that the community is aware of what it is. Turning in the form to the district, which I explained earlier. The form for BIPOC characters, that would be culturally mature.

M: So any show that has a character of color, you're sending that form in.

H: Most of them need it, if it's good literature, I'll be honest. There's not a whole lot of fluff.

M: I was just in a production of *The Drowsy Chaperone*, and the Aviatrix is listed as Black, and there's a line or two that references it, and then it moves on.

H: Probably not for something like that.

M: Okay. But once we start talking civil rights, if we start talking *Hairspray*, you're talking to administration.

H: Yeah, if there's any of that in the show, we'd turn in the form.

M: People know *Hairspray*, but you're still going to talk to administration?

H: Exactly

M: Anytime you've got racism happening on stage, the same thing? You're filling out the form?

H: We would be filling out the form. You talk to the children, talk to the parents, and make sure there's a talkback after the show, and invite the community to support that, as far as the team that was leading that talkback. We're providing counseling for students of color.

M: You mentioned that already, is that an active thing? There's somebody at rehearsals? Is it "here's the phone number" or, "here's the email?"

H: If it's strong enough, we will bring the people into rehearsal, if it's super strong. If not, then we will say here's the contact information for some of the things—if you don't feel you can talk to us.

M: I've got a lot of topics lumped together. My first one in this category is have you directed any shows with kissing?

H: Yes.

M: Anything special that you do to handle that?

H: Start with the students. What are they comfortable with? If they're not comfortable with that kind of contact, you don't do it. You stage it differently. You can cover it. It can be an embrace if they're okay with hugging, and you can just cover it. You stage it for a child's comfort. If they are comfortable with kissing, you do it in stages. Start with touching hands or with a hug after that. Then make sure there's a private rehearsal and not in front of an entire cast. Just let them figure out their comfort level. And it can change at any moment. If your student's uncomfortable, you don't do it.

M: Do you ever ask before you cast the show about the student's comfort? You've mentioned that a couple of times?

H: No.

M: You cast the show based on acting ability, singing ability, and then once you're in the situation, "I'm not comfortable with this." "Cool." I get creative and we're going to stage it differently.

H: And if you have to reach out to the licensing agency, you reach out to the licensing agency.

M: Is that something you do frequently?

H: We do because we're connected with MTI. Yeah, I talk to them.

M: How about shows that reference sexual activities? So, the example from my experience was when I did *Mamma Mia,* and "dot dot dot," during "Honey, Honey." We're not showing anything. We're not even necessarily saying words about stuff. We're just saying "dot dot dot," and, Donna having three potential fathers show up to her daughter's weddings.

H: We did a form for that show. So you know, "dot dot dot" is enough for us to go, "Hey, this is in the show." You always read the script with the kids. At the read through, if there's anything students aren't comfortable saying, they just don't say it, and we will address it after the read through. We talk to the kids about their comfort levels. We talk to their families. If there are issues at home, please tell us and we'll reach out to the parents and have that conversation.

M: Has your form ever been denied?

H: Nope

M: They've never said, "Nope?" They're just happy to know what's going on?

H: There's little things that arose, once. Well, we did *Cabaret*, and somebody got to us about "Beedle dee, dee dee dee, two ladies" but we did it with puppets and it was different, so it was out of context. I mean, the show itself is a tough show, but it's also about Nazi Germany. It's about decadence and about where we are in our culture now. There are so many great conversations to be had. Anyway, have we had little things happen? Yes. Nothing major where they are shutting things down.

M: Sure. Yeah, I think you and I define "major" different. Because when I have somebody walk out of the show, I'm concerned about what that might do to my reputation.

H: I'm concerned, and see I am past that at this point.

M: I frequently, I blow things out of proportion. That's how I am. But, I like "that parent is now going to now call administration and I'm getting fired because I let the kids say "dot, dot, dot" on stage. I feel like the older I get the more comfortable I get. Then this past weekend, I just did two weekends of *Mean Girls High School Version* with the area community theater. I spent all of opening night on edge, nervous that people were going to walk out

H: And did they?

M: Nobody did. I've heard mostly good things. I've heard a couple people that said that they didn't think that that was right, but nobody's come to me about it.

H: Same with us. I had one moment in the show, where we actually did the vagina joke with the artwork. That's the only complaint I got.

M: We didn't take any language out either. But I was concerned about what Regina writes in the burn book.

H: "Sexy?"

M: No, well, I got a female choreographer to cover that song. So I was more comfortable.

H: Part of the thing with *Mean Girls* though, is it's Tina Fey. It is so ridiculously well written that people get it. It's a fairly strong script, and if your kids own it, and they're comfortable in it, usually you're not going to lose.

M: The thing I kept telling other adults was that the show discusses things you don't want to think about our high schoolers doing, but they're doing these things. They're saying these words, they're living these experiences. Now, I hope never to the extreme that we present on stage. I hope that is for comic effect. There are probably drugs going on, there's probably drinking alcohol going on.

H: Probably? Of course there is.

M: Are we encouraging it by putting it on stage?

H: No, you're not.

M: I agree, I don't think that we are. When we talk about referencing sexual activities, right? Gretchen, just flat out asks Cady," Are you a virgin?" That's not something that adults ask each other.

H: Actually, a lot of kids do ask those questions. That is out there.

M: Sure. The thing that I was most concerned about, talking about comfort with students, was using the word 'dyke' to describe Janis. I checked in with the cast at our first read, and then again two weeks before opening.

H: Is that in the high school version? I don't think it is.

M: The way we got it.

H: I don't remember if we used it or not, right now.

M: I think your production went up two weeks after we got the email that it was available.

H: We did the pilot of it, but it was out before we actually did it.

M: Right. I thought "there's no way that you got that email and performed it two weeks later." What we got was a letter from Tina, saying, "I'm so glad that you're interested in this show," and then three pages of options. So that was an option.

H: We might have taken it out. I don't remember, I honestly don't remember

M: My thing was, I'm an educator, but if I'm allowed to be artistic, Regina would not hold back, she wouldn't edit herself.

H: No, she wouldn't.

M: So, if one person here says "I'm not comfortable with this." We're switching.

H: You know what, I think the kids were not comfortable with it, and we took it out, and that was a student discomfort.

M: We did the same thing with different results. I was familiar with plenty of LGBTQ students in my cast, and I wasn't trying to look at them, or out them in front of everybody. But I asked, "we're good? Everybody's good here?" We kind of talked about this with *Spring Awakening*. You have not directed shows that simulate sex?

H: Someone had sex? Yes, but never in a bed. *West Side Story*, they have sex. So, I don't ever stage sexual scenes in a bed. The strongest one I had, was probably, *Miss Saigon School Edition*. We probably shouldn't have now because we don't have that culture. I put a Latina in the lead role. But we staged it with them hugging and kissing and falling into water. If you've ever seen *Metamorphosis,* it's a straight play, but it's a show with texture. When clothes cling bodies, when they get totally wet, that definitely sends a message, but they're totally clothed, and totally not in bed. I staged the scene after the sexual scene in *West Side Story*, they're sitting on the floor leaning against the bed. But no, I don't direct kids in bed. I take that back. I don't direct kids in bed in an intimate fashion. I think during *Saigon* the other couple was lying in a bed, but they were not in any kind of a sexual embrace. I don't sexually embracing in bed.

M: I'm nervous about *Pippin* because of that sexual scene.

H: (laughs) I've done *Pippin* so many times. Oh my god. But that's funny. That's comedy. If you have good actors, and they're not actually embracing they're just going under covers and that's danced. It's suggestive. Intimacy around the bed tells the story.

M: This is kind of broad, what about shows with the sexualization of characters? Is that another check with a student's comfort?

H: Always check with students. It's something that if they're not comfortable with it, you can't do it. The kid that you cast in the role. Student comfort, cast comfort. If you think it's going to be a problem, you turn in the form, tell the audience before you're doing it. If people know what you're doing—there's a lot of people that don't come to our shows, because it's not their thing. If I put on a matinee for district students, I take all the language out, all the sexual activity out. If I'm going to have other teachers choosing to bring children to something, it has to be G during the school day. Everything is taken out and changed and turned around, because, that is a teacher taking kids someplace, that's not a parent allowing a child to go, and choosing to do something after school. It's student choice that they participate in these shows that's not part of a class. As long as it's not an English class where everybody's had to read this book, and yada, yada, yada. As long as there's a choice there for kids, then the district is fine. Parents can opt out. Great, don't do that show, do something else.

M: You're also providing multiple opportunities a year, where a lot of school in the state do one musical annually.

H: Right. Yeah. Exactly. It's different.

M: You turn in the form, you advertise it, you remind people beforehand. You don't sit on opening night, nervous about whether or not somebody is going to leave.

H: Well, of course we're a little nervous, but I'm not nervous about the leavers. It's okay if they don't approve.

M: You know that if they make a phone call?

H: My administration knows what's going on, we will have a conversation. Now, if they feel they have to close the show down, okay, they close the show. But they know upfront what we are doing. There's no surprise with it. And that way, it opens conversation in your community. How do you meet your community until you hear them complain? How do you know where you should take stories until you have a real conversation with the community? I went to a production of *Once on this Island* at Apple Tree Theatre years ago, and the director actually put out a detailed set of questions about his directing, and the production, and how it was landing, and yada, yada yada yada yada. I thought "that's fascinating," because a lot of us get very hurt by the answers to those questions, but if you don't know what your audience really thinks, how do you really know? I'm a scary person, though. There's a lot of people that won't approach me because I'm this scary.

M: In your community?

H: Oh, yeah. We teachers wield power. We do. It's been such a successful program that I'm sure there are people that would complain, but they just don't. That is a distinct possibility. Even administrators. After doing things for 30 years, I don't put kids at risk very much, and I don't think many of the kids feel that they are at risk. If they are, we talk it through. I can't say there hasn't been controversy, of course there has. But we sit down and we have conversation about it and figure out where we should go. What happened? How do you really feel? What can we do to make you feel better? Because that's not the point. When you have controversy, sit down and structure a meeting and talk about not. Now I never type to a parent, an administrator, anybody on the face of the planet, any kind of an opinion that would be controversial, ever. All of my emails, text, anything is, "I understand that you have a concern with this, when can we talk?" I would say 80% of the time, the whole thing goes away, because they don't want to come and talk to me. But the other 20%, we can have a real conversation, and they always leave the meeting going, "I feel really good about this." "okay, good." You shouldn't be going back and forth this way. As human beings we shouldn't be doing that way. It's great for information. "Show up at seven o'clock" "I'll be there at Blah, blah, blah." Or "here's a list of things we have to accomplish that the meeting" or yada yada yada. Or, "I'm afraid to come and talk to you. I'm typing this and I feel bad." "Okay, great. I understand that you feel bad. Let's get together and talk about this. I'll come to you, you come to me, wherever you're comfortable. It's in your comfort zone. We just need this is a face to face decision." Which is scary. You know, a lot of teachers are scared of doing that. If you're scared, have an administrator sit in with you, or have a counselor sit in with you, or have someone with you to help. Have them bring someone if they're scared. There's all different iterations of sitting down and communicating sensibly.

M: Shows with LGBTQ characters?

H: Yes. I just did, *Trevor the Musical*. Look it up on Disney. It's a middle school based story, but MTI, and the authors wanted to turn it into a high school story, as well. So, we did a pilot of that. We actually did a workshop at ITF just a couple of weeks ago, which I couldn't attend because

my daughter had a baby and I had to come home. That went quite well, but again, we had a talkback. We didn't have talkback after every show, because it was a very small crowd, but we had a day where we had a talkback. Parents were well aware of what it was. To watch kids open themselves through the telling of those stories, and the comfort level that they begin to feel is essential. I mean, it's all essential storytelling, especially for children.

M: There are not a ton of musicals out there either presenting LGBTQ stories, or even having characters. They are out there, but I feel like it's something in the next decade is going to be more and more available.

H: Oh yeah, it is. That's in *Spring Awakening*.

M: You can go back to *Falsettos*. Which I don't know, with such a small show, unless you're doing multiple shows a year. I would never consider *Falsettos* for a high school show because there's eight or 10 characters and finding a way to wedge an ensemble into that, it's not going to work. So, that's an advantage to having multiple shows a year. You're promising everybody roll. Me too. I do the same, but I only do one show a year.

H: A role, not a leading role.

M: So, when we did *Beauty and the Beast* last fall, everybody's a something in *Beauty and the Beast*.

H: That's something I am cognizant of, but at this point, again it's just coming down to comfort. Plus, you can also talk about the fact that if you're going to do *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, which is set in the 60s, that's also a period of time and you can look at it from a historical perspective.

M: I want to do that whole show gender swapped.

H: Oh, fun! They would probably be really cool with that.

M: Nope

H: They said no? Then the author's.

M: Maybe I'll give them call again.

H: When did they say no?

M: Three or four years ago?

H: I'd try again. That sounds like a good time. Call and talk to them. Things change. Just say, "hey, I had this great idea four years ago, has anything changed?"

M: Maybe I will do it. You'd get a whole lot of girls to be able to have roles.

H: Oh, I think it would be hilarious, but it might not MTI saying it. It might be the author's.

M: The Loesser estate, or whoever.

H: That's exactly who it is. It would be Loesser's people. That's hilarious.

M: Part of me thinks, "leave the pronouns, leave the everything." I would have to probably do a ton of work adjusting ranges.

H: Call Cheri Steinkellner, she'd be up for that. She wrote *Sister Act*. Cheri would love that. We did a gender free *1776*. And now there's an all female *1776*.

M: I feel like we are three years away from every community theater ever doing *1776*. When the country's 250 years, I feel like we're going to see so many different productions.

H: It's a great show. A lot of book, but a great show.

M: Yeah, when I was in elementary school, that was what my mom would put on when I was sick. I haven't seen it in forever. I have very few memories of it.

H: It's a great show.

M: Okay. How do you deal with profanity in musicals?

H: Student comfort.

M: Ever cut it?

H: Yes.

M: Even if it's against your artistic vision?

H: Yes.

M: Do you define profanity? If a student's just ever uncomfortable saying a word.

H: Don't say it. Anything you're not comfortable saying you do not have to say.

M: Student comfort is greater than artistic vision. We have talked about some alcohol and drug use portrayal.

H: We do it with student comfort.

M: Is that something that you fill out the form on?

H: Yeah, absolutely. If we feel that it's strong enough, yes. Absolutely every single time? Probably not.

M: I had somebody else talk about the musical *Big Fish*, which, I suppose you probably haven't done, as it's not an MTI show. There's a wedding scene. So toasts. Would send the form in for that?

H: No.

M: We've talked a little bit about some guns on stage and how that's caused some concerns. With other violence, how do you handle the situation?

H: Well, we pulled the gun moment out of *Groundhog Day*. Again, it depends on where your culture is at, at that moment in time.

M: So that's more of a community comfort?

H: Your student's comfort, anybody's comfort.

M: In that instance?

H: Well, yeah. For *Beetlejuice,* my God, they're talking about shutting that down, if we're talking about death. We just did the opening at ITF and did the opening from *Beetlejuice* and they were talking about, "we have to be sensitive because it's the opening and we can't put all these warnings out there because everybody comes to the opening." So we have take all this stuff out of it, and I'm like, "okay, that's fine. You guys tell me where you're level is. I can do anything." Then the guy said "If we had a school shooting then we'd probably not even do it period." So, it was like, "okay." It depends on what's going on in the culture at the school. We also did *Assassins* years ago and used the handguns. We've done all of it, but now things are very sensitive. So, you just have to be sensitive to the people.

M: And what's going on in the community. Is there ever domestic violence or anything that you've dealt with physically? My mind goes to *Little Shop of Horrors?*

H: I've done that. Again, student comfort

M: Yeah. Fill out the form? Make sure everybody's aware?

H: I'm not sure we'd do the form for that. Just student comfort.

M: Because it's more on the comedic side for that one?

H: Yeah, it is. There's things that are comedy.

M: It's not as serious.

H: You just have to be sensitive.

M: Have you done shows with direct religious messaging? Where you are telling a story from a religious text?

H: We had a complaint for a matinee of *Footloose*.

M: I would classify that as a show connected to religion, for these purposes.

H: It's fundamentalist.

M: When I think of direct religious messaging, I think of shows like *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar,* and *Children of Eden*.

H: I've done them all.

M: In a public school setting?

H: Yeah

M: Then, *Footloose* would have a religious connection.

H: That was satirizing fundamentalism, and that was a problem. They didn't want us doing a matinee for school kids. We had a complaint about that. (chuckle) We went, "okay."

M: I've already heard you talk about plenty of shows, with what some might consider potentially controversial political messaging. You mentioned *Cabaret* where we're dealing with Nazi Germany. My mind goes to *The Sound of Music,* also Nazi Germany.

H: We've done that.

M: When you've got political messaging, Again, we're talking about sending in the form?

H: It depends. If it's a show been out there forever, we would not turn in a form. For *Cabaret* we would turn in the form. Because it's got a lot of sexuality and other things.

M: Not necessarily just the politics.

H: I would say, no. If you feel like you can do it in your community, and you feel that there's controversy, have a talkback. Talk about history. Have the audience talk about it.

M: It's not like *The Sound of Music* is glorifying Nazi Germany.

H: No, and neither is *Cabaret*.

M: For me, it was working with those images on stage, which are hard. So, I was checking with the administration making sure that they understood.

H: That's good. Again, just let everyone know what you're doing, and make sure that you can address any issues that come up.

M: In those sorts of situations where we're talking about student comfort a lot, having a Nazi banner is not somebody's line. I can listen to student comfort being a concern, but that's an image on stage, so, I definitely get community comfort there.

H: Right. The kids need to know the history. I think if you do the research with them, it becomes apparent to students why you are doing this, and to their parents. When we did *Scottsboro Boys* we had huge history lessons. Gigantic stuff. We looked at minstrelsy, Jim Crow, and the history of the marginalization of Blacks through law. We looked at all of that. So, the parents were thrilled because their kids were learning all this history that probably isn't done in their history class.

M: And presented in a way that the students are probably eager to learn.

H: Oh, it was visceral.

M: Sure. "You enjoy music theater. Here's some history to go along with it."

H: It's telling stories. You do musical theater to tell stories.

M: Last one on my list here, musicals with characters with disabilities, either physical or mental. How does how does that look? When it comes to casting?

H: As far as casting kids with disabilities? We do?

M: If you've got a character with a disability are you seeking out somebody with a matching disability to play that role?

H: If we can cast a person with it? I think that we did *Children of a Lesser God* with a deaf girl. Yes. If we can do that, yes. And if not, then there needs to be people that come in and can help us explain that disability to us.

M: Anything else about this big, broad topic, the content of musical?

H: We're crazy. We are nutty people. We are crazy people. I guess I've probably taken more risks than almost most directors on the face of the planet have taken. And I'm done after next year, as far as public schools go. Next year's my last. I'm going to be 70. So, I just cast my last show for I'm directing for my district. It's great.

M: So then, you'll be free to do so much more.

H: Well, we'll see how that all shapes up. I've been lucky to have great support. I think you just have to talk to people. If you've got a lot of controversy and it's not going to be a good story to tell with kids, then don't tell the story and find another story.

M: I have a hunch your story will be mostly about student comfort.

H: Well, that and community comfort. If I would decide three years from now to direct a show in the smaller, more south central city in Wisconsin where I live, I would probably do *Beauty and the Beast*. Actually, I think maybe I'll start a summer stock for high school kids. I might do that here. But I'm not going to be doing *Parade* here [where I live], which is a very conservative place. That's not where I'm teaching, though. I'm teaching on a city in the southeast of the state. That's a different place. That's a different world. So, you have to just be very sensitive to the community, and tell stories that will move that community forward and move students forward in that community. For us to do stories like the *Scottsboro Boys,* really moved young people forward. It was a huge, amazing thing. It was amazing. Stressful and scary and all the things because of course we were concerned. I can't say that I'm never concerned. I am concerned. Young people need to talk about how they feel, honestly, and how they relate to the world that's developing around them, honestly. Not in media, but have real conversation about it, face to face. Courageous conversation. Where are we [as a society] going? For me, coming from one phone on the wall in my kitchen, where everybody heard every conversation, to where we are now. I have concerns about the stress that media, and the way that young people change with the world puts on them, especially during the pandemic. I don't know what you saw, but I saw a lot of really apart children. I can say that my seniors were still not normal. Just when they got so isolated, their whole worlds were in that media thing. They had very few people that they would allow safely around them. They did not develop normally. It's frightening to see what would happen in a world where we don't want to have real conversations, that are honest, open, and respectful. Even when we talk about things like—good Lord, violence where I teach. A policeman shot a young man seven times. He was a resource officer in my building at some point. President Trump was in my gymnasium. Kids are affected, and they want to talk, they want a structure that they can have an opinion and be heard, even if it makes the adults around them uncomfortable. To try to make those things happen is what an arts program brings to a high

school. It's why, the arts are more essential than math, written English, or almost anything. It doesn't matter how brilliant we are, what equation we can solve, or what opinion we can write, or any of that. If we are not a community that has the courage to sit down and discuss all the crazy things that these kids are going to go through as they grow through this insane world that's developing? How do we stay safe? That's what we do. That's what you do. That's what I do. We create a place where kids can come together and be safe with one another and reveal more and more of themselves to the people around them. That's what we do. That's why choir, band, athletics, theater, all of these things are more than essential. They are essential to the development of the child. A public system is essential. When that falls, we're in big trouble. Everybody's going to go to their corners again. If we don't have a way to sit down and have a real conversation with another human being, we're in trouble. You're talking about a child hugging on stage. Wow, they've actually broken that wall down between them. They feel safe enough to do that. That's life changing. That changes lives.

M: That's an interesting way to think on it. When I think of the characters, and the actors that have played love interest with each other. I look at them, often afterwards, being some of the closest cast mates because they've had to break down those barriers.

H: Of course. We did *Parade* years ago. The story is a difficult thing to talk about. My kids were so invested in that show that we went to a professional production in Chicago. We're all standing in line and this lady in front of me goes, "Oh, my God, I have to say this with a whole bunch of teenagers." I said, "Ma'am, I hate to interrupt you, but I will guarantee you that this will be one of the most amazing audience experiences you've ever had with these teenagers." We got in the show, and one of my cast members had lost her brother to suicide during the show. So, I looked at her and I said, "you tell me what you want to do" because she was crying all the time. She talked to her parents, and we all sat down and talked. She said, "I really want to be in this." I said "but there's a funeral scene." She said, "I want to do the funeral scene." I said, "can we set up some people supporting you, that if it becomes too much, you can just quietly leave the stage?" "Yes, I would feel very good about that." I was like, "Okay," And some days she stayed, and some days she didn't. When we went to see the show in Chicago, there's just moments that bring you to tears. Here's this group of kids in a small theater with a group of professional actors, and my kids are just like, "wow." The energy between them was just insane. They will never forget the story. They develop relationships with kids in that cast about that shared the story with them, that will never leave their minds. They will have the courage to talk to other people about things that other children that never had these experiences will never have the courage to step out and do because they have done it. It's super important.

M: I don't know if I've ever been able to articulate the way you just did.

H: I'm old, I've been around the block.

M: You do have a little more experience than I do. I think that's why I'm doing this this research. What stories can we tell? What stories should we be telling? What stories are too far for high schoolers to be telling? It's all going to come down to what's your cast comfortable with? What are you as a director comfortable with? What's your community going to be comfortable?

H: That's exactly what it should be.

M: I could have probably told you that before I did any writing. Being able to rest assured in yourself, "I am comfortable. I'm checking in with my students to see that they're comfortable. I'm taking the pulse on my community. I'm checking with administration who's got a different sense of what the community's"

H: You're also leading your community by the stories you choose to tell. You were also leading them through their education. There's a wonderful description of what theater is, by the artistic director of the Public Theater. Basically, he says that theater is the essential form for democracy. They were created at the same time, in Greece. So, when Thespis turned and spoke to another actor on stage instead of just addressing an audience, you created a relationship here. An audience is part of that environment. I can't say it as well as this guy, but this character has an opinion, and this character has an opinion. In great theater, there will be a conflict, a difference of opinion, and that is the democratic process. That is the art of being part of a democracy is to be able to empathize with both sides of the story and come to an agreement. In that sense, when we tell stories on stage, even with musicals, kids are empathizing with the story. When people come into a theater, that's what we are coming to do, we are coming to be part of something that is in front of us and alive. We are part of the process of this democracy that's happening on stage. That's important to who we are. Unlike a movie where you're separated, there's that screen. You decide to go to a movie, you're kind of thrilled when there's nobody else there because you can get your thing and put your feet up and spread out and have a great time. When you come into a theater and it's half full, your heart sinks a little bit because you came to experience this with your community. We , as educators, lead our communities through these stories. That's part of what we're doing. Part of what I realized, as we did more and more in my current position, we can get away with things that other people can't, because we have built an audience that comes to have that experience of watching young people be a part of that communicative process, and a part of that understanding of our culture, and part of storytelling like that. So, you were also leading that in our community.

APPENDIX I:

Administrative Regulation 6810, Holly's "Form"

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION 6810

***Form must be submitted three weeks prior to the presentation.**

Name of Requesting Teacher:

Date Submitted: Date of Presentation:

Representing School: Grade Level:

Name of Course: Size of Group Participating:

Materials Have Been Previewed:__Yes ___No (Required)

Speaker Has Been Interviewed: ___Yes DNA No (Required)

Speaker/Instruction Materials Description:

Reason(s) for Including This Topic of Study:

Alternative Instruction Plans for Students Not Participating: (Parents/Guardians and Students Must Be Notified in Writing at Least Two Days Prior to the Presentation to allow for Alternative Plans.)

Signature of Requesting Instructor: Date:
Approval Signature of Building Principal: Date:
Approval Signature of Executive Director of Instruction: Date