Transforming Costuming Design: Costuming for the Actor's Comfort

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TRANSFORMING COSTUMING DESIGN:
COSTUMING FOR THE ACTOR'S COMFORT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores ways to transform costuming concepts for theatre productions that provide a more inclusive and comfortable environment for actors while still maintaining the essence of the characters they are portraying. This thesis examines theatrical bodies of work as case studies to illustrate options for incorporating costume designs that take into consideration the emotional and physical welfare of the actors. The purpose of this study is to inform theatre teachers how to create costumes that aid in psychological comfort of students regarding gender identity and age, as well as for flexibility in casting due to disproportionate gender ratios that are typical in public school populations. For my thesis, I focus on the following productions for my case studies, applying my area of concentration at the middle school level: Guys and Dolls, Jr., Are We Scared Yet? and Wicked. Through these case studies, I answer the following questions: Is it possible to incorporate costumes that provide gender nonconformity, gender neutral identity or swapping genders in casting and still maintain the playwright’s intention and the essence of the character? When applying these concepts to costuming, what elements of the costume are important to keep and what elements can be adjusted? How will reinventing costuming in this manner change the experience for both the actors and the audience members? How can we ensure our costuming choices are fitting the psychological needs of our actors and students? This thesis includes my research on nonconformity in fashion and its key historical impacts on gender, research of the play/musicals including a character analysis, pictures of original, adapted and newly created costume designs transformed for the purpose of the actor’s comfort, and a journal of the process, including self-reflection on the outcome of the designs.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When you watch Cinderella spin on stage and transform into her ballgown, it is a magical moment for the audience to watch the character change before their eyes. She no longer appears poor and plain but instantaneously becomes a princess. They watch the actor stand and move a subservient character to one who is erect, confident, and regal. For most audience members, they have not considered the costume transformation causing the actor any emotional discomfort, insecurities and even dysmorphia. It is their expectation as audience members that a good actor will have them suspend disbelief and make this moment both realistic and fairy-tale like at the same time. Mesmerized by the character’s transformation that progresses the storyline on stage, they watch costuming take the lead in this moment and unfold the story in such an enchanting manner. It has never occurred to us to look beyond the spell of this captivating costume spectacle. How much discomfort must they be willing to accept for the role of a lifetime?

Actors have just accepted costumes as a part of a character they want to play. This part of their role is in the hands of the directors and costumers. The directors convey a vision of a story on stage collaboratively with costumers. We coordinate with the costume designers our visions and selections for the costumes for the characters, taking into account the physical needs and purpose of the character. How tall is the actor? What is the purpose of the costume in that moment? Are they a younger version of the character? Are they going to be performing intensive dance movements or physical actions as a part of their role? Do we want the audience to identify the character immediately as the villain or is it something we want them to discover over time?

As teachers in the public school, we often wear the hats of costumer and director simultaneously. We reveal the costume to the actor and say, “here are your costumes.” The costumer asks if the actor can move their arms, is it snug, can they move in the way and with the
physical requirements of the roles. We provide a generic survey that we ask the actor to complete their height, weight, measurements, and allergies. Generally, the only consideration we have taken for the actor’s well-being is whether they are allergic to any of the materials within the costume. We have created a motto and even an atmosphere of all or nothing without negotiations. We do not say it, but there is a presumption when the costume process integrates the actor well after the conception of the costume design has already occurred. Costumers schedule actors for costume fittings and not consultations, implying here is your costume and we are just going to adjust whether it is fitting correctly on your hips, legs, etc. The actor must accept the prescribed costume regardless of how it may emotionally impact them.

It is understandable that there is a level where the actor needs to accept the costume as part of a role. A costumer must make the costume fit the character and the director’s vision. If “Cinderella” is set in the Renaissance Period, the costumer must create designs and visions that align with this period. If they use a costume design that is way too modern for this time, it will be jarringly obvious to the audience, the director’s and costumer’s visions will seem disconnected, and the actor would create quite a different character. There must be cohesion in the vision to deliver a profound story on stage. Is there room for both creating a costume that authentically represents the character while accounting for the emotional well-being of the actor? The theatre and educational communities are now more educated on the emotional discomforts and dysmorphia that can occur when we ignore factors like an actor’s age, gender identification, and demographics. There is not only room, but it is our responsibility to create a safe space for actors in our theatre programs, including our process of costume designs and decisions, protecting their emotional well-being. Costuming concepts for theatre productions can provide a
more inclusive and comfortable environment for actors while still maintaining the essence of the characters they are portraying.
CHAPTER TWO: ACTOR VS. CHARACTER

As a director and a costumer, I have watched my student actors transform from saying the lines of their characters with emotions to radiating their characters simply by putting on their costumes. Put on a skirt, and actors walk at a different pace. Their steps have more intention, using the flow of their skirt to accentuate a bow, a twist, or an emotional moment. How long and wide that skirt is can determine if the actor can use the skirt to fling it in a character’s angry state as they exit the stage, deepening the character development in that moment. An actor wearing a top hat walks more erectly and stiffly formal in their movements compared to the casual and more free movements an actor wearing a snug baseball cap might display. As an educator and director, it is this delightful moment of satisfaction, watching your visions evolve in front of your eyes.

But what happens when this moment erupts into a moment where the actor refuses to come out on stage, comes out half costumed or mumbling their lines? This thrilling moment evolves into confusion for those who bear witness.

Perplexing moments transpiring where the actors disconnect or flat out refuse to do their part from the outside look precisely like that: the actor is being difficult. The other cast and crew members are negotiating with them to get them back into rehearsal. The reactions around the room range from people angrily shouting at the person because they feel like the actor is having a diva moment to others just sitting down, waiting for the episode to pass. A few cast and crew members will rush to the actor’s side to see if there is something wrong that can be quickly fixed. Most attempts are to appease the actor so the rehearsal can resume. As a director, I have seen this occur for assorted reasons.
A defining moment as a director and a costumer happened when this occurred with our actor cast as Ariel for “Little Mermaid, Jr.” The actor playing Ariel was supposed to come out in a white top, blue skirt, and sash for her “Under the Sea” boat scene. It was an Ariel costume we had bought on Amazon. The skirt was below the knees, the top was a simple button-down, and the sash was adjustable to the actor’s waist. It wasn’t a costume that was fitted or revealed a lot of skin. The actor had been in prior productions with me and was always strong in her approach to her characters. She always dived into any role with passion and without reservation. Ariel was the role she wanted and the only role for which she auditioned. As a director and based upon my history with her, I was surprised by the events that soon transpired. The first time the actor came out in her costume, she stormed out, barely said her lines, and stormed off stage. It all happened so fast and so unexpectedly, I thought something had happened backstage. With middle schoolers, they are experiencing a lot of changes in circumstances of friend groups, body changes, hormonal changes, and responsibilities that these unforeseen emotional displays are normal. Rather than making a big scene about it, I asked if we could run the scene again. This time the actor came out less aggressively angry, but her costume was in disarray. The actor’s shirt hung halfway yanked out of the skirt and the sash was completely missing. I figured she was trying to adjust the costume and was not expecting to be back on stage so soon. I asked if she could take a moment to fix her costume and if someone could bring her the sash. She made a feeble attempt to adjust it, pretending to fight with it and then gave up. Her friend came out and said she could not find the sash. Rehearsal time in middle school is structured around parent pick-up and limited so for time’s sake, so we just moved through the scenes. I asked to talk with her privately after rehearsal to check in to see if everything was okay. She indicated she was fine and seemed a little more like herself. With middle schoolers, they are very self-conscious at this
age and sometimes just need the emotional space to work through whatever they are feeling in the moment. Time and space usually help them reset for the next rehearsal.

The next day was not that case. She came out in the skirt with her regular school shirt instead of the costume’s blouse and sash. I asked her where the rest of her costume was. She replied that it was not on the rack and that she could not find it. I knew at that point that something was amiss. My first internal reaction was not the best. I was angry because I could not understand why she was displaying such diva behavior and wasting everyone’s time with these weird games. My thoughts were reflecting that she wanted this part, and the costuming comes with being this character. The costume was conservative in appearance, so she was not being asked to put on anything that could be potentially revealing, or so I thought. Through the process of rehearsal, I kept these thoughts to myself and decided I would deal with this later. I decided I would talk to her tomorrow before rehearsal when I was calmer inside. This was my third year having this student, and I had never seen her exhibit this behavior in the past, so I wanted time to think about my next steps with her. When I was closing the rehearsal space and straightening the costume closet that night, I found my answer. Stuffed behind a row of costumes, the shirt and the sash were bunched in a ball. I knew at that moment that something with this costume was not fitting right. I was perplexed as to why she did not tell me and chose to hide it instead.

The next day, I met with the student and asked her about the costume and what were her concerns. At first, she told me nothing and that it was fine. I pressed her with the knowledge of me finding the costume pieces hidden in the closet. She broke down in tears. She was a small student except her chest area was growing and felt very disproportionate to her. She felt very self-conscious of her chest area and how big it had grown in comparison to the rest of her figure. She was embarrassed to tell me, so she hid the costume pieces. I instantly understood because I
had undergone the same issue at her age. She felt like the top and sash not only emphasized but
highlighted her chest and her insecurity about it. Together, the actor and I decided how best to
move forward with her costume problem. We simply had her bring in another button-
down white shirt that she felt more comfortable in, have her tuck it into her skirt and got rid of
the sash entirely. It was an easy solution, and from that moment on, the actor was able to
embrace being her character again and focused on the craft of making her character come to life
on stage. She fully could be her character without feeling torn between her character and her own
personal dysmorphia her costume caused her. That was the moment of shift in my philosophy of
costuming as both a director and costumer. There is a line between the actor must just accept the
costume as part of a role and to what cost is that philosophy non-negotiable.

The discomforts and negative emotional impact a costume can have on an actor is not a
unique feeling for only student actors. Anne Hathaway describes her Catwoman suit for the
Batman film, *The Dark Knight Rises*, as “permanently changing her relationship with her body.
"It was a psychological terrorist."” (Newman 2012) In the article she discusses the way fitting
into the costume hijacked her life and how she spent the 10 months completely in the gym. It
appears from the article that she had little room for anything else in her life during that period.
(Newman) As costume designers and directors, we want the costumes to create authentic and
genuine characters that resonate with our stories and audiences. Actors like Hathaway clearly
will do what it takes for the roles of a lifetime. At what point is it our responsibility to think
about the actor’s emotional well-being? If an actor refers to the costume as a “psychological
terrorist,” then we have crossed a line where the costuming designs did not give any thought to
the well-being of the actor. We have allowed the spectacle of the costume to be more important
than the very real eating disorder we have imposed upon the actor who wants to play this role.
Had the costumer thought beyond the marvel of how the costume will look and move on film, they would have realized the high emotional price it will inflict upon the wearer of the suit. As directors, it is our duty not only to create a unifying vision for our productions but to also consider the emotional well-being of our cast and crew.

Costume designer Kaye Voyce describes the importance in her role of collaborating with not just the director and other creative designers but also including the actor.

And often, something just feels right or really wrong on someone’s body. If an actor doesn’t feel comfortable in a garment, it’s really hard to believe it as a costume. Sometimes you want something to be ill-fit or a little strange—but the actor has to make the connection physically. (King)

There is a fine line between a costume purposefully created to limit or enable movement because it is crucial to the actor’s ability to depict that character in its truest form versus a costume that makes an actor physically disconnect from their character. If an actor is so uncomfortable physically or emotionally, their ability to fully realize their character and make them evolve on stage will be hindered. It can be argued that another actor will be able or willing to create the character on stage if the original actor cannot but is that the correct answer to this problem? If you look at Anne Hathaway, she is talented and in great shape. Her ability to perform the role of Catwoman is without question. Her reaction to her costume resembles a body dysmorphia experience to the extent that she was obsessed with going to the gym to a point that it impacted her emotionally. Body dysmorphic disorder is “a mental health condition in which a person can't stop thinking about one or more perceived defects or flaws in your appearance — a flaw that appears minor or can't be seen by others. But one may feel so embarrassed, ashamed, and anxious that they may avoid many social situations.” (Mayo Clinic) An actor out of fear of
losing a role may not tell a director or costumer that a costume is creating body dysmorphic syndrome. In fact, most will not. Anne Hathaway opening up about her experience with her Catwoman costume opens the door for there to be more discussion on the effects a costume can have on an actor’s psyche.

In our zealousness to create authentic characters on stage, we could be inhibiting the very ideals that we feel are vital to our community. There is a line of etiquette an actor needs to exhibit when presented their costume. It is not a matter of whether they like it or do not like. “There is a fine line between compromising for your own comfort and changing a designer’s intention.” (Bobeda) Designers and directors are creating an artistic vision and unified vision for the production. Actors, designers, and directors need to walk that line of personal preferences versus what is an essential element to the construction of the characters and the production. “The beauty of theater is its fluidity. It’s a group effort. The collaboration is always worth it…Think of it as a relationship that has potential to grow into a successful artistic partnership” (Bobeda). As directors, costumers, and theatre community members, creating an inclusive, brave, and safe space for our cast and crew must include how we design, develop, and implement our costuming process. Collaborating with our actors, having active conversations and being flexible to modify the costumes to emotional needs of the actors can not only create that safe space but strengthen the artistic vision of the production.
CHAPTER THREE: COSTUMING CONSIDERATIONS

Creating a cohesive costume vision that connects the set design, technical elements, actors’ portrayal of their roles is fundamental to transcending the director’s conception of a story to the audience. Costumers must fashion their designs to crafting developed characters that are authentic. Often, costumers and directors defend their costume choices, ignoring the emotional effects on the actors for the purpose of creating authentic characters. There is a fine line between making creative choices to push the boundaries of costuming a character and ill-conceived costumes that are physically and emotionally harmful to the actor. A costumer’s design needs to harmoniously consider the actor’s emotional and physical needs that originates cultivated accurate characters aligned with the vision of the production.

Costuming Authentic Characters

Designing an entire show, whether live or film, requires costumers to consider how they create authentic costumes for individual characters but also the ensemble of characters together on stage. What makes a character feel accurate? Costuming factors such as age, personality, time period, gender, societal norms, race and demographics can all contribute to making a character resonate as genuine.

Throughout history, costuming ideology in Western theatre has changed depending upon the period. For Greek tragedies, the playwright, Aeschylus, developed the first idea of costuming concepts. The use of masks and clothing that only would be used for theatre to represent the difference between everyday life and performance was established. There was a sense of sacredness to the costumes. This contradicts Shakespeare’s approach to costumes where the actors sported their own clothing, with a large focus on fashion and not the technique of depicting characters through costuming. The intention was to draw attention to the acting skills
of the actor while spectacle was limited. It wasn’t until the late 18th Century that historical accuracy became significant in the process of costume design. (Blausen) Even Shakespeare’s Lord Chamberlain Company did not costume for historical accuracy. In fact, the actors frequently sported the current fashions of the day. The laws during that time restricted what people could wear based upon their status in society so actors having to play nobility would often have to purchase them from servants who were gifted these garments from their noble masters. The costuming designs during Shakespeare’s performances focused on status and gender only rather than a deeper representation of the character. (Teach Shakespeare: Fact Sheet: Costumes and Cosmetics) As theatre practitioners, Shakespeare is held in high regard for providing quality performances. Costumers go to great lengths to replicate an authentic look from that time when producing a play. The irony is that Shakespeare himself did not go to great lengths to represent his characters accurately for the periods in which his plays were set. This is not questioned by costumers when reproducing a Shakespeare play and in fact invites flexibility to play with the design of the characters’ costumes with more freedom. Shakespeare themes allow his plays to tell the same story but through different cultures, periods, locations, and parts of the world because the costumer can develop the surface of the character to be distinctively divergent while the character’s core remains sacredly genuine. It is important that the costume design represents the character truthfully.

In today’s theatre, historical accuracy in costuming is an expectation of costumers. But can historical accuracy be fully achieved or even practical when portraying a story from another time? Directors and costumers must make decisions to create an accurate costuming look, but they frequently modify costumes for practicality of actor movement, budget, and even for the sake of telling the story. If a costumer wanted to use authentic replicas of an 18th century
pannier for underneath the actor’s dresses, they must determine if it would be sensible for the show’s needs and characters, or if they would need to modify the pannier for it to be pragmatic for actor’s movement space of the stage. A pannier is a widespread oval undergarment that was typically made from metal and whale bone that stretches a skirt out sideways. Adding volume to the skirt, the pannier made the hips look larger while minimizing the look of the waist. Panniers could expand to five feet wide, and some women wore them as wide as seven feet. (Orgianska, 2018) For visual reference, Figures 1 and 2 depict panniers from the 18th century.
An ensemble scene with multiple women in these dresses would inhibit the physical movement of the actors and the size of the ensemble if a costumer kept to an authentic size of the panniers. If a director wanted to stage a large party or social event scene, the costumer would have to make some adjustments to the accuracy of the width of the panniers to accommodate the number of actors on stage. If the director decided not to adjust the ensemble size and keep the authentic size of the pannier replicas, it not only would impact the actors’ physical actions on stage but also could stifle their emotional ability to fully realize their characters since they may
be overly conscious of the congested space on stage. It is often the argument that actors must adjust to the needs of the character, and costumers build the costume for the needs of character authenticity. By minimizing the panniers on the actors’ costumes, costumers and directors provide the audience with a genuine 18th century spectacle without sacrificing the needs of the show. Furthermore, they are intrinsically affording an emotional safe space for the actors to depict their characters uninhibited.

Costuming iconic characters can confine a costumer’s flexibility in designs. When these characters walk on stage, audience members not only recognize them by universally identifiable markers on their costumes but automatically have background knowledge of the characters without it being explained in the script. When Batman appears on stage, audience members recognize him by markers of the bat cowl and bat logo on his chest. The darker colors, gloves, tight suit and cape are other identifiers of his superhero persona. Since 1946, multiple iterations of this iconic superhero’s costumes have evolved, advanced by costumers’ innovative techniques to make each version more awe-inspiring than the previous version. The batman fandom will not accept anything less than an authentic look and feel to this “caped crusader.” It is the unifying aspects of the costume that asks the audience to suspend disbelief that behind each masked costume, this hero is played by an entirely different actor.

As Batman’s story and capabilities progresses, the advancement of the costuming is crucial in telling that story. There is a downside to the actors who have been cast as this “Dark Knight” and there is a direct correlation to the costume itself. Growing up with Batman, many fans would see this as a role of a lifetime. In the article, *Batman Actors Reveal What It’s Really Like to Wear the Batsuit: 'I Couldn’t See Where Anything Was!* some of the previous Batman actors described the emotional and physical discomfort they had with their costumes.
Michael Keaton expressed that his costume played upon his existing struggles with claustrophobia along with the extreme physical restrictions that getting out of the suit to go to the bathroom was not feasible. An actor with claustrophobia, deprived of physical needs, and the obstructed vision is a clear example where costuming design and the vision of the show impeded upon the basic rights of the actor. Michael Keaton was not alone in his perspective how being the role of a lifetime came at an emotional cost because of the costume design. Val Kilmer described his Batman costume as not only physically distressing because it was so difficult to make basic movements in, but it was also “isolating.” Kilmer said, “You also can't hear anything and after a while people stop talking to you.” (Warzburger). Because the costume obstructed his ability to hear other cast and crew, the physical barrier morphed into emotional isolation. He never felt he could evolve his character due to both the emotional and physical barricades. From his descriptions in the article, it seemed abundantly clear that the costumer and the director robbed this actor of his full potential of his role due to the emotional and physical toll of the costume design. Kilmer expressed, “It was just so huge I think it made no difference to what I was doing.” He further explained that he had to “resort soap opera acting” techniques. There is a point where the spectacle should not overtake basic physical and emotional needs of the actor.

Batman fans would argue that we cannot sacrifice the look of the iconic character’s costume, but haven’t they changed and evolved the costume already throughout the years? Adam West’s costume in the 1970’s looks significantly different from Ben Affleck’s costume in 2016. The defining aspects that make Batman recognizable are his bat cowl, cape and insignia on his chest. If those were put on any other costume, the audience would still recognize Batman. His character development and arc has changed and deepened as well as the costumes have become
more intricate. All the former Batman actors after Adam West have complained about both the physical and emotional tolls of the costume.

For a less dramatic adjustment to the Batman costume, I propose some minor changes that will stay a little truer to the original design. In Figure 9, I created a picture of the Batman suit that still uses a more fitted suit. Some simple adjustments of creating the suit into two pieces instead of one would allow the actor to go to the bathroom more easily without the horrifying fear that they couldn’t use the bathroom without a forty-five-minute undressing.

Taking from the inspiration of the veins on a bat’s wings, creating veined seam lines down the top and the bottom would allow zippers to be placed near the waistbands of both that couldn’t keep that fitted appearance. Placing the utility belt over where the two clothes items meet hides the seams. Creating a taller cape that sculpts around the neck can help the cowl fit properly but not so tightly that the actor is having headaches. Creating smaller holes in the areas of the ear can help with better hearing for these actors. Some flexibility in the cowl can allow the actors to mentally feel less confined in their costumes. The slight change to the traditional looking costuming allows the costumer, actor and director to portray the aligned vision of Batman with the expectations of the audience. They are subtle adaptations that to most fans won’t stand out and disrupt their ability to experience the character in his iconic form.
It is possible not only to have the Batman suit comfortable emotionally and physically for the actor, but also to align with the persona of Batman and evolve the character through his costume? Unlike Spiderman, Batman was not bit by a bat to become a batlike creature.
Batman is Bruce Wayne who because of the loss of his parents dresses up in a Bat
disguise to take down Gotham’s criminals. His character has become more complex through
each movie that is released. Robert Pattinson played a Batman that has evolved into more of a
man fighting crime than a man in a bat suit. I took the concept used in the 2022 movie and
decided to replace his costume to have more of a tactical outfit. Replacing the skintight pants, I
created a version with more fitted tactical cargo pants, including pockets for his contraptions.
Robert Pattinson’s heeled boots are aesthetically pleasing but not practical for a crime fighter of
this caliber, so replacing them with combat boots would fit this character’s purpose better.
Replacing the skintight muscled sculpted shirt with a leather or pleather tactical zip up jacket
with zippered pockets will allow more secret areas to pull his contraptions. This also can allow a
design to where the cowl can be created with a more comfortable material under the chin that
snaps into the inside of the jacket’s high neck. The top of the cowl can maintain fitted but allows
more mobility around the neck area. Creating a sculpted cape with a neckline molded high
around the neck can add an interesting design that plays into the mysterious caped crime fighter
while maintaining that crucial costuming piece all audience members will want to see. Since we
have already been evolving Batman’s character, there is room to progress his costume to stay the
role of a lifetime with the actor’s needs a purposefully built into the design.
Iconic costumes can maintain their integrity and essence of the character while still accommodating the actor’s needs. Successful collaborations have been accomplished in the past.
even if we aren’t talking openly about it in the industry. The Marvel character of Wanda Maximoff is as complicated as her relationship with the Avengers. She started off on the opposite side of the Avengers since Tony Stark appears to be responsible for her parents’ deaths. She spent time seeking revenge on the Avengers but would later join them to fight crime and save the world. (Anonymous) Director Matt Shakman collaborated with Elizabeth Olsen in the design process of Wanda Maximoff’s Scarlet Witch costume. In her previous costumes, Olsen commented, “I look around and I’m just like—wow, I’m the only one who has cleavage, and that’s a constant joke because they haven’t really evolved my superhero costume that much.” (Blyth) The Wanda Maximoff’s costume designs which lacked evolution since her costume was stuck in the cliché cleavage and leotard was in complete contrast to the Batman costume where they have consciously redesigned the costume to show the progression of character. Both characters are iconic in their own origins, but Maximoff’s costume design also didn’t represent how her character had changed from the girl who lost her parents to the “not so average woman” of Scarlet Witch. Olsen collaborated with the director and designers to change that. She wanted her character to have more substance, and her character remained genuine and iconic.

She also wanted the costume to be more functional so it was important to her that the corset was higher. (Blyth) It needed to be more like a sports bra that holds the chest in place than aesthetics and showy cleavage. The collaboration not only evolved the character’s own storyline in a functional way but maintained the unified vision of the movie while accommodating the need for the actor not to be unnecessarily overly sexualized in her role.

**Conformity Versus Nonconformity**

How did we get our ideas of what is or isn’t an authentic costume for a character for a period? As costumers and directors, we are conforming to our research of fashions from
different time periods and combining them with our design visions that will create a character that resonates as genuine to our audience. We mix them in a pot of magic and then create what we perceive to be an accurate costume. Fashion is built upon a code established in society. Fashion has been used for us to instantly make ill-conceived judgments of people, create a sense of power over people or classes of people, to classify people, punish people and even to elevate people. “The rules and laws designed to ensure that the social status of individuals is reflected in what they wear.” (Ford) We have formulated our ideas of how a character should be costumed around the idea of conformity. Costumers and directors can allow non-conformity within a production by accommodating the needs of an actor while still creating an overall vision that does obey the rules of fashion.

In history, the rules of fashion have been challenged, and that has transcended into how we costume on stage. Queen Elizabeth I imposed laws of fashion to regulate materials but even more so to create a distinct social class that easily can be identified just by someone’s clothes. People were even fined and jailed for nonconforming to her laws of fashion (Ford). It should not go unnoticed that Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth I’s mother, was known for nonconforming to fashion, creating her own designs and popularizing them. “She was unrivalled in the gracefulness of her attire, and the fertility of her invention in devising new patterns, which were imitated by all” (Rivera). Because of her stature in the court, Anne would break the laws of fashion while her daughter, Elizabeth I, punished those for violating the laws of fashion. Even during these points in history, people disagreed on the authentic dress. So, doesn’t this leave room in our own designs to break the laws of fashion in a way that could still be appropriate for the character and resemble aspects of the time?
Figure 5: Queen Elizabeth I’s Proclamation Against Excess, 1577
In history, there has been a continual movement to rebel against conforming to the social norms and laws of dress. In theatre, making nonconforming costume decisions to accommodate the actor’s needs does not mean the vision is sacrificed. History is full of examples of people of all stations and genders defying the laws of fashion. Furthermore, someone of economic or celebrity status can make a non-conforming dress style popular. Mark Zuckerberg has made sloppy dress fashionable (Puiu). A person of lower economics is judged for sloppy dress while Zuckerberg’s fashion has society trying to imitate it. Zuckerberg was not the first fashion influencer to change stereotypes and traditions. The white wedding dress was not always the trend for brides-to-be. Choosing to be nontraditional on her wedding day, Queen Victoria opted for a white wedding dress, starting a trend amongst the wealthy and other sovereigns. The white dress wedding attire became symbolic of that special day for all economic classes by Hollywood
movies, pictures of Grace Kelle and Princess Diana. (Bass-Krueger) From prison style of saggy pants that became popular in the hip hop culture were later transformed into low riding, skinny jeans by music artists like Justin Bieber. This became a trend that influenced teen boys everywhere and no longer a connotation that this style was only for the criminals. (Maddison)

Fashion history and trends are the basis of many costumer’s designs and director’s visions for creating the world of their production. The musical SIX modernizes the costumes of each of Henry VIII’s six wives. The costume designs were influenced by famous portraits of the wives. If the costumer, Gabriella Slade, were to create historically accurate costumes for the wives, the gowns would look out of place for the performance and the pop style of songs they all sing. Slade was forced to nonconform to the historical standards of fashion to create costumes that were mobile and encompassed the persona of each wife. She had to merge old-fashioned dress with new trends. For Catherine of Aragon’s (also spelled Katherine) SIX costume, Slade appears to draw inspiration from Catherine’s portrait black and gold color, square neckline, and the trim around the chest. Looking at the portrait side by side, it is visible how the designs in Catherine of Aragon’s portrait and a pop star influence are communicated in this modernized portrayal of this historical character. With each wife, Slade encompasses details specifically drawn from their portraits into her costume designs. In SIX, Slade effectively uses non-conformity in her approach to costuming these historical queens while incorporating elemental features from their famous portraits.
Figure 7: King VIII’s Six Wives

Figure 8: King VIII’s Six Wives – *Six* the Musical
Six is not the only modern-day musical not to conform to historical accuracy in the costume designs. Has anyone taken a closer look at the musical *Hamilton*? There is no uproar
about the fact that only King George III wears a wig that is part of the custom at the time. This was a conscious choice by the costumer Paul Tazewell so the actors and ensemble would be free to perform the choreography without the concerns that the wigs may not stay in place.

Additionally, you can see how the ensemble members’ costumes made for their primary role, to help tell the story through movement and dance. Their costume pieces showed historical influence of the period through the vests, bodices, and boots in a tan color to represent the feel of someone you might meet in a tavern. It was necessary to veer from historical accuracy for the practicality of allowing the ensemble to be comfortable and free of restrictions to perform choreography. Tazewell even drew modern inspiration from Jimi Hendrix and Prince when costuming Daveed Diggs as Jefferson. (Robinson) Even looking closer from a make-up perspective, Daveed Diggs and Lin Manuel Miranda both sport facial hair in the show, something that is not evident in portraits of either Thomas Jefferson or Alexander Hamilton.

The fact that King George III’s costume is the only one without modernization reveals a character unwilling to shift with the times. Tazewell conforms enough to the historical accuracy of the costumes while not conforming in ways that are essential for the actors to physically realizing their roles. His characters breathe believability that they live in the 1700s and 1800s despite their costumes not being fully accurate. Tazewell won a Tony for Best Costume Category in 2016, proving that costumes can defy the notion that for costuming concepts to be credible they have to be completely historically accurate. Tazwell’s costume choices show how modernizing costume choices for the well-being of the actor can still make the audience believe the character is historically depicted authentically on stage.
Figure 21: Hamilton Cast Costumes with Leggings – Wigless and Sleeveless

Figure 22: Hamilton’s Daveed Diggs with Costume and Facial Hair

Figure 23: Hamilton’s Jonathan Groff
Sometimes nonconformity in costuming can be used as a tool to represent a significant shift in circumstance or frame of mind. In Paula Vogel’s play, *Indecent*, there is a scene where the Jewish immigrants rip off their payos or side curls. The payos are considered sacred and an expectation to wear to conform to Orthodox Judaism. The fact that Vogel noted in the script directions that the payos are being removed provides a dramatic significance of these immigrants violently ridding themselves of their curls. It is an act of extreme defiance or distancing of these characters from their traditions and roots. The decision is a clear choice that Vogel included using costuming as the means to portray the message of conformity within a culture both visually and effectively to the audience.

The idea that costumers are perfectly conforming to historical accuracy within their designs is arguably a misconception. The truth is that costumers push the boundaries of accuracy in costuming as they re-invent their character designs to look original while still recognizable.
Costumers create their designs to appeal to more modern audiences while still trying to create the feel of a historical costume that is appropriate for the time and place of a story. Often, they want to glamorize or accentuate other aspects of the character so making adjustments to the look or construction of a costume is necessary. Practicality for an actor’s movement, amount of time wearing the costuming, budget constraints and other factors often interfere with a costumer creating a picture of complete historical replication for a character’s look. Nonetheless, if an audience buys into the look and delivery of a character, the costumer’s inaccuracy in representing a period might go unnoticed or easily overlooked.
CHAPTER FOUR: COSTUMING AND GENDER

Costumers often define gender through the look of their costumes. Many stereotypes exist around fashion choices that are too easily represented in costume designs. Our thought process has been locked into concepts of what is normal for a male to wear and what is normal for a female to wear. We make assumptions and judgments when we see people dressed or costumed in ways that defy these ideas. With more awareness on how people do not necessarily identify their gender as our biases see them, it is time for costumers to consider rethinking how we represent gender in our costume designs.

One of the best examples of gender stereotyping is seen in the movie and musical *Grease*. The girls are dressed in skirts and soft sweaters while the guys are dressed in khaki pants, varsity athlete jackets, jeans, and leather jackets. The looks are specifically meant to define gender as well as a good student versus a bad student by the clothing. In fact, in *Grease 2*, a girl makes a snide remark about the character, Stephanie, wearing pants to school because during the 1960’s in America it was considered inappropriate for women to wear pants to school. This time period ignores the reality that a skirt and pants are not gender based clothing, but a dress code society assigned to our perception of their gender. It is an odd period in history where women had to fight to be liberated enough to wear pants when there is evidence that as far back as 3000 years ago both Scythian women and men wore pants. (Bain) In fact, men historically wore skirts, dresses, heels and hosiery in history and the idea of these being feminine apparel is something that transpired through laws, fashion trends, images, and visual character representations on the stage and in video media. Additionally, gender neutral clothing did exist and acknowledges that both gender neutral and nonbinary existed before our recent awareness and public discussions. (Jgin) In the early 1900s, women borrowed more masculine fashions
because it was more practical and to be taken more seriously in the workforce. “The flapper dress’ tubular style” is a notable example how women’s fashion borrowed the masculine style without a correlation to transgender identities or sexual orientations (Oram).

Figure 25: Ancient World – Skirts for All Except Horse Riders
If history’s fashion supports that dress and fashion are not concretely grounded in gender, then our costuming concepts and directorial choice can and should accommodate the needs of an actor’s gender identification while still maintaining the essences of the character.

Historically, in theatre, we have already broken the boundaries of gender norms. Our master of theatre, Shakespeare, already has broken boundaries of gender in dress through his use of characters disguising themselves in clothing to imitate the other sex. The mere fact that his plays in their original performance had men dressed as women to portray female parts is break
from fashion norms of the period. Juliet would normally be played by a younger male who was dressed in what was considered female fashion of the Elizabethan Period. Viola from *Twelfth Night* in Elizabethan’s time was a young male actor playing a female character, who disguises themselves as male in the play, later to return to a female character. When women could take the stage in the 1800’s, famous actress, Miss Ellen Terry, took the stage as Viola.

The originality of a male playing this role in its infancy and the character’s motive to protect female chastity through the means of dressing more masculine shows how gender has been used historically to transcend boundaries through unconventional means. In 1899, Sarah Bernhardt controversially played the role of Hamlet and is proof that costuming and gender flexibility has been an important topic prior to modern society. (McManus) Shakespeare adapted his plays to represent both female and male genders but also provided a space for gender neutrality through the characters’ journeys that necessitated them live as both to tell their complete story. Examples of Shakespeare costumes can be seen below.
With Shakespeare opening the doors for gender fluidity having a place on stage, movies and Broadway shows like *Victor/Victoria* and *Tootsie* developed stories around the need to use costuming and dress to explore how gender fluidity can create opportunities for their characters. In *Victor/Victoria*, the main character is a poor actress who gets her break into the business as she pretends to live life as a man who performs as a woman. The story explores what women discovered in the early 1900s, dressing more masculine provided them more workforce opportunities. *Tootsie* is the story in reverse when a failing male actor pretends to be a woman to get a leading part in a daytime soap opera. Both stories reveal the complexities of characters pretending to be the opposite gender than they identify, regardless of the costumes they wear. It also reveals how through dress the characters evolve internally to a more complete person and can connect with the other characters in a way that would not have been possible had they not undergone their gender transformation.

The Broadway hit *Kinky Boots* takes the concept of costuming and gender identity to represent that costumes can go beyond our fashion biases. The high heel “kinky boots” are costume pieces that become the vehicle to throw away fashion gender concepts entirely when the boot is used to save the factory. The boot becomes nongendered when in the end all the characters reveal and perform their final dance in fancy boots they originally thought to be only for females. It is through the process of acceptance and unity that the boots are a style that all can wear in pride, showing our concepts of characters can be redefined with more consideration for the actor’s comfort. We think of the men wearing these “kinky boots” as something specific to this show, 1980’s pop or rock singers like Prince, or people who are transgender.

The reality is that boots were nongendered in the 10th century as the Persian soldiers used the heels in battle to help them stay on the horses. Heels throughout history were associated with
power and wealth. During the 17th century, “it was fashionable for European aristocrats to adopt heels as a symbol of virility and military prowess.” (Bass-Krueger) Most notably, King Louis the XIV can be seen in portraits showing off his heels. According to Bass-Krueger, Louis XIV perceived “The higher and redder the heel, the more powerful the wearer.” Because he saw heels as a form of power, Louis XIV imposed a law that only aristocracy could wear heels. The 18th century brought about more feminized looks to shoes which resulted in men no longer wearing heels. (Bass-Krueger) But did heels stay feminized for long? When you look at shoes like Cuban heels, cowboy boots, punk rock cult and even 1980’s glam rock bands, they have been nongendered throughout generations in some form or fashion. Consistent with fashion history, the use of the “kinky boots” dispelled gender historically inaccurate rules of dress, which shows there can always be a way to accommodate the needs of our actors to be costumed for their gender identities and not their biological physicality. Examples of gender in Broadway and musicals can be seen below.

www.playbill.com
Figure 31: Victor/Victoria

www.playbill.com
Figure 32: Victor/Victoria
As a director and costumer of middle school-aged actors, sensitivity to approaching topics of gender and comfort must be treated in a delicate manner. Actors and students at this age are just becoming aware of who they are, finding their voice and asserting for what they want. Their need to blend in and fit in with their peers often put them in direct conflict with their own personal journey to be themselves, including identifying their gender. It has been something I have worked in more intentionally when I create costume concepts and designs. Early on I found some student actors of this age would shut down because of body image concerns. Costuming and directorial choices can make this journey more uncomfortable and traumatic if not handled in a way that consciously approaches the actors’ needs when creating and designing costuming.

My first play where I had a student openly reveal to me that they were transgender was my Fall 2020 production of *Are We Scared Yet?* We had cast the character of a very vaguely described creature named Tally-Po. The student cast in this part came to me after the cast list was posted to reveal to me that they were transgender and identified as male. The sticky position was that his mother was not aware and was concerned about how she would react due to her religious beliefs. This was key information as we started to consider costume designs for this role. The play was a comedy, and I originally had a vision of the costume being more cute than scary as play on the scene itself. Because of the delicacy of the situation between the student and his mother, it was crucial we create that less terrifying creature, something more gender neutral and one that would raise not any flags for the actor’s mother. I also wanted to create an original design that didn’t simply mirror cute and cuddly lions, tigers, or other creatures we have already seen on Amazon, movies, and TV. The costume was crucial to bringing this vague creature to life and, in the beginning, I could see the actor struggling to define his role. I decided to throw
away my original vision of a creature in a skirt or dress with leggings. From the start of redesigning the costume, I spoke regularly to the actor on fabrics, how they wanted the costume to shape their body and areas that he might be concerned with for the costume. As I sketched, designed, and created the costume, I regularly collaborated with the actor to make sure as a cisgender person was not overlooking a crucial need for my actor’s comfort. The result was that once the actor started having a vision of his costume, he was able to make his character realized and come to life. His vocal tones and physical movements clearly defined who Tally-Po was in this scene, and he successfully developed this character to create the purposeful comedy and drama of the scene. Creating costume concepts and directorial choices for costuming of the actors’ needs does need to have boundaries in the sense that a student may not like having to wear a superhero costume. If their character is an iconic superhero, there are certain aspects of their costume that is not a choice. I make it clear to the actors that these needs must be something related to mental and physical needs related to body dysmorphia, gender, physical ability to see and move safely, and other concerns of the same likeness.

For the Tally-PO costume, the actor and I discussed both the aesthetic needs and physical needs of the costume to help him feel more comfortable in the role. We discarded the original idea of a skirt or dress-like structure. The actor wanted a more fitted leotard base layer to create more the idea of skin. We both thought adding hair to the legs, chest, back and head created a more masculine feel without taking away from concept that the creature add visual comedy that they are not terrifying, which reveals the other characters’ overreactions to a monster on stage.

We created the tail to be sleek, and it came to a sharp triangular point to create a more masculine and devil like creature. The tail also had to come off during the show to appear it was ripped off by another character. Also horns and black gloves with long sharp nails were added
for an additional touch of sinister quality to the monster’s look. During the production, we did use black boots and not the white sneakers shown in the photo to create the ability to stomp and invoke fear offstage prior to appearing. This successful collaboration resulted in very comical moments when the monster was revealed on stage versus the characters’ fear of the monster. As a costumer and director, collaborative conversations with my student actors while protecting their gender identities lead to the actors being able to focus more on their characters and less on the distraction of having to get used to a costume.

Figure 37: Are We Scared Yet? Taily-Po Costume Created by L. Barrows
Are We Scared Yet? created the groundwork as a director and costumer to work more thoughtfully on how to create a space for actors’ emotional comfort and physical needs to accommodate their gender identities in a production that seems very grounded in gender roles.

But can we provide accommodations for the Broadway actors’ emotional and physical comfort who are portraying iconic characters and maintain the authenticity of the core the character? As a costumer and director, I argue that even iconic Broadway productions can adapt the costumes to meet the needs of their actors’ gender identities while delivering those essential core elements to their characters. The story of “Wicked” is about two best friends who are witches in OZ, Glinda and Elphaba. These roles have been portrayed by women, but the core of two best friends who are faced with paths that will challenge the ethics of their characters and put the friends at odds is not a new story specific to the female gender. The musical “Ain’t Too Proud” tells the story of the musical group, The Temptations. Eddie Kendrick and Paul Williams were childhood friends who sang in church together, formed their original band The Primers, and later added in other members to form the Temptations (Sexton). The story focuses on the group’s successes and challenges but also the friendships formed. These friendships were tested through the rise of fame from how money, popularity, success, and different visions for the groups created different paths, created ethical dilemmas and tests to the friendships. Some of the friendships and members rose to the challenges and some fell to the temptations of celebrityhood. The story has similar threads to “Wicked” with the theme that we all have good and bad in us, friendships have ups and downs, and we are all tested. While the Temptations are real characters, Glinda and Elphaba are based upon realistic human strengths and flaws. Glinda and Elphaba could be gender swapped or nonbinary in gender because the core of the characters is rooted in human qualities that are universal and not specific to gender. One may think this is a
stretch, but Hollywood has already made the decision when Billy Porter performed the role of a nonbinary gendered Fairy Godmother in Cinderella. Porter’s costume incorporated the larger satin ballgown style to maintain the magical fairy godmother elements of the original costume. His costume was adapted with goldish orange color, a split in the center front of the dress and pants to create a more neutral and almost whimsical coat version of the iconic Broadway dress. Porter’s statement, “Magic has no gender” not only applies to Cinderella but also fits the characters of both Elphaba and Glinda. Witches can be either female or male, so Elphaba is a magical character who can have more gender-neutral costume design. In creating a new costume for Elphaba, it would be important to maintain some crucial elements that honor Susan Hilferty’s original designs. Hilferty used the Edwardian Period to represent Elphaba’s character as well as mineral colors, and it not just being a black dress. The character of Elphaba is a witch persona needs to be rooted in the design, but the costumers could give hints that her character is not the destructive and evil character viewed by the Ozians.

For my Elphaba costume, it was crucial to maintain the influence of Hilferty’s Edwardian inspiration and the use of colors to create a more mineral and earthy appeal to the costume. I decided to make the costume have a more magical feel of shades of purple, red, black, and green to the costume to create a more vibrant feel for the character. All the colors represent gender neutral colors. The neckline maintains the high Edwardian neckline. Instead of a dress, I took more inspiration from combining an Edwardian cloak and shawl that represent both genders. The open front with sleek leggings lends a more neutral look. Instead of lace ruffling, I would incorporate a more frayed design to the fabrics that creates a feathery aesthetic to the look of the costume as well as create a flowy look to the fabrics when Elphaba is flying or moving quickly throughout the scenes. To create a bit more glamourization for the costume, I would use clasped
leaf or dragon fly adornments to close the top that would reinforce an earthy magical feel to Elphaba. One last touch I thought was important to incorporate was a brooch in the shape of Glinda’s wand to represent the friendship between the two characters, their connection to the heart of the story and their influence in each other’s lives. Examples of iconic characters’ costumes designed for gender neutrality can be seen below.

Figure 38: Cinderella’s Fairy Godmother by William Ivey
Figure 39: Billy Porter’s Fairy Godmother
Figure 40: Wicked Elphaba and Glinda Costume

Figure 41: Elphaba Costume
At the core of every character, their essence goes beyond gender. There is now more awareness to acknowledging and supporting emotional and physical comfort of our actors’ gender identifications. We are now making sure to create comfortable spaces behind the stage to make sure we are respecting their needs when it comes to bathrooms, dressing rooms and how we recognize their gender identification. It is crucial that as costumers and directors that our visions can also adjust to incorporate their on-stage needs. It can be argued that characters
cannot be transformed to accommodate the gender identifications of our actors but there has
already been a shift in how playwrights create roles in scripts and how celebrities are breaking
the confinements of gender stereotyping. Fashion and costuming have historically been fluid
and constantly changes what is consider feminine, masculine, and unisex, setting the precedence
for costumers and directors to create choices that better serve their actors’ emotional and
physical needs rather than maintaining outdated stereotyping.
CHAPTER FIVE: COSTUMING FOR CASTING CHALLENGES

As a costumer and director of middle school, we have the challenge of more biological girls in theatre who may need to play what are perceived as male roles because of a shortage of biological males in our programs. We also want to include the needs of our physically anatomical females and males who identify as nonbinary, female or male. Our Spring 2022 production of *Guys and Dolls Jr.* posed a challenge from a costuming perspective since most of my cast was biologically female. I chose this production because it provided a platform for my students’ gender identities and not just biological sex. An additional consideration for this show was how the costuming choices also would need to be adapted for the age of my actors. I focused my costume concepts to be purposefully inclusive and appropriate for the actors while preserving the character of the show. I recognized early on that this might not be well-received by those who have studied this musical in detail from a dramaturgical standpoint, so research and being able to see key elements that felt the same was crucial to the success of my costuming designs and choices.

*Guys and Dolls Jr.* is an adaptation of the original 1950’s *Guys and Dolls* Broadway musical written by Frank Loesser and Abe Burrows. The musical is based upon Damon Runyon’s stories including *The Idylls of Miss Sarah Brown*. The story is based upon Nathan Detroit who is a gambler trying to illegally arrange a crap game behind his fiancée’s, Adelaide, back. To raise money for the location of the crap game, he makes a bet with his fellow gambler, Sky Masterson, that Sky will not be able to convince Sarah Brown, a mission girl, to go on a trip to Havana with him. The comedy defines the group of gamblers as “Guys” and the roles of the “Dolls” are defined by Adelaide, “Hot Box Girls” performers, Sarah and the “Mission Dolls.” The 1940’s-based story about love’s twist and turns reveals on the streets of Times Square and
Havana that the biggest gamble in life is love. Throw in a wise uncle, a tenacious cop and a
general for tension in the story to see if these “Guys” and “Dolls” are lucky in love.
(Anonymous) The roles and time period set the stage for specifically gendered actors. For this
reason, this was the perfect musical to test the question as to whether actors’ gender identities
and age can still be accommodated in costuming concepts and designs while maintaining the
integrity of the show and its characters.

From Alvin Colt’s costume design of females on a farm to the 1996 Broadway revival,
this song is often performed in a very gender specific costume. The primary roles of the Hot Box
girls are they are show girls in a gentleman’s club. The costumes are feminized in the Broadway
productions and the 1955 movie. The Hot Box Girls’ costume designs and concepts became a
good area to apply my thesis ideas. I aimed to focus on key concepts of age, body awareness,
and flexibility of gender identity while maintaining unity and character when constructing my
adaptations and variations to the Hot Box Girls’ costumes.

The first challenge I faced is the fact that the Hot Box Girls’ roles were over sexualized in
a way that was not appropriate for my students’ ages. Regardless of age considerations, it is
something I wanted to change. I aspired to maintain a performer role but wanted to elevate the
role to be a little more glamorous without being too revealing or risqué. I also privately surveyed
the actors to find out who would feel more comfortable in a gender-neutral costume versus those
who would be more comfortable in a more feminine look to their costume based upon their
gender identifications. This meant I would create two looks that had to model both and create a
unified feel to the costuming but still meet the needs of my actors.

I took inspiration from yellow chicks on a farm from the William Ivey Long 1992
revival, but I wanted costumes to represent the 1930’s/early 1940’s with the actors more age
appropriately dressed. I found 1930s female style pattern sailor pants and a 1940’s pattern top to create the base of my idea for my design. Material was going to be crucial because we had a small budget to work with for the midsize ensemble we had to costume, and we had two variations of the costumes. Both costumes would have shiny velvet sailor pants that I would create. I would add some black wavy trim with crystal embellishments that stripe down the front of the pants. I used larger black buttons on the waistbands positioned in an angle that is often seen on sailor pants. The pants varied to differentiate between feminine and neutral gendered.

The feminine version of the pants had tassels with crystal accents while the gender-neutral version had a simple sailor cuff at the bottom of the pants. The tops portion of these costumes is where the costume was more specifically defined as feminine versus gender neutral. For the feminine style top, I took the pattern of a 1940s blouse and used the same velvet material to give a consistent and clean aesthetics that made it almost look like a one-piece outfit. I continued the black and crystal trim to give more unity in the outfit. To give a more chick on the farm appearance, I used yellow feathers for the sleeves and used more of the black and crystal tassel trim on the back. For the more gender-neutral version of the costume, the actors wore white button-down shirts, gold suspenders and a gold bow tie. For my Adelaides, I discussed with them the options of a pants versus dress and both Adelaides indicated they would be more comfortable in a dress. If there was one challenge with the variations of the costuming for *Bushel and a Peck*, it was because there was so much movement in the choreography it was difficult to create perfectly balanced staging of the costumes. Overall, I found that costuming variations to accommodate both the age of my actors, their gender identifications and comfort levels with their bodies in the costumes was very successful. All the students seemed to embrace their role more easily knowing they were emotionally supported and part of the collaboration in
their costume preferences. The design, even with the adaptations, accurately portrayed the song and the characters in the song while make the appropriate adjustments for the actors’ ages, gender identifications and creating a costume that supported a positive body image for their age.

Figure 43: Guys and Dolls, Alvin Colvin’s Design - Adelaide’s Bushel and a Peck Original Broadway Concept
Figure 44: Guys and Dolls Bushel and a Peck, 1992

Figure 45: Bushel and Peck Costume Design Concepts by Lisa Barrows – Cast Photo
Another complication of this musical for the age of my students is that most of the cast were biologically female. Nicely Nicely, Benny Southstreet and Rusty Charlie (traditionally played by males) were all females in my cast, as were most of our gambler ensemble members. Some may argue that casting women to play gamblers is historically inaccurate for this time in history. Although substantial depiction of gamblers are traditionally biological males, female gamblers do exist as far back as the Roman period with the god of gambling, Fortuna, being female herself. The 1940’s were no different as the men in America went off to fight World War II, it left an opening for women to fill workforce in the Las Vegas Casinos. (Anonymous) This supports credible historical accuracy that the streets of New York could have been filled with female gamblers just as easily as male gamblers.

For Nicely Nicely, Benny Southstreet and Rusty Charlie, I spoke with my female actors. Two of the three characters wanted a more feminine style to their character while the third wanted a more gender-neutral style. It was crucial I maintain the sense of masculinity of the “Guys” gamblers in these roles and balance how gender was approached for my two actors who
wanted a more feminine look. In addition, it was important to have my Nicely Nicely and Benny Southstreet feminized style support a unified look with my gender-neutral Rusty Charlie. To accomplish this look, I decided that finding a plaid fabric for each character’s jacket would be key. Each character would be unified with black dress pants and black shoes. For Rusty Charlie, I found a plaid boxy style jacket that was typically worn during the 1940’s. For the female version of the jacket, I found a pattern that was a little bulker in style but also accented the waistline and the lower part of the jacket had more of a curve to their edges. All would wear the same hats as the gamblers to create a connection to the ensemble. The jackets were consistent for the period, created an emotional comfort for my actors and kept an authentic approach to the essential core elements of the characters. For the gambler ensemble group, I used all black pants, varied with vests, jackets, black shirts, white shirts and suspenders to create a variety within the groups but also unification.
Figure 48: Guys and Dolls Nicely, Benny and Rusty Costuming Concepts and Designs by Lisa Barrows

Figure 49: Guys and Dolls Nicely & Benny Costuming Concepts and Designs by Lisa Barrows

Figure 50: Guys and Dolls Nicely Costuming Concepts and Designs by Lisa Barrows
As a costumer and director, collaborative conversations with my student actors were a positive way to address costuming concerns of my actors. My design team proactively sent out surveys as well as met with each of the actors individually to create a brave space for the actors to address any costuming considerations and concerns. A challenge of the costuming adaptations to consider is retaining the visual balance of the costumes on stage while choreography is taking place. In the larger ensemble scenes, it is easier to preserve, but communication with your choreographer in the beginning of the choreography process can make it achievable to provide costume variations for your actors’ needs. Preparation, creativity, collaboration, and communication all aided in creating a show the was inclusive, appropriate and mentally safe for the actors. The student actors in my cast still used their costumes to create authentic characters while feeling more at ease in the run of the show. *Guys and Dolls* was a successful example of how costumers and directors can adapt costume concepts and designs to meet the gender identities and ages of their cast members even with a story that seems very rooted in gender and age.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Costume designers and directors’ goal is to provide a unified and genuine production where the actors authentically represent the characters in the stories. Costumers and directors often sacrifice the actors’ comfort and needs for a realistic approach to crafting character development. The need to balance research, historical accuracy, and an original design to embody the characters while accommodating an actor’s emotional and physical comfort is not any easy task. It is necessary to acknowledge that the philosophy where we expect actors to ignore emotional and physical conditions that are detrimental to them for the sake of the show is no longer an acceptable practice. We do not have to make a drastic choice between accuracy and well-being. Rooted in history are examples of fashion alternatives in costuming for gender, comfort, age and demographics.

Even iconic roles embedded in ideals, characters like Catwoman and Batman, have proven that more attention needs to be given to how we as costumers approach these roles with more consideration for the actor’s well-being. The prolonged negative impact the actors endured because of costume construction and design could have been mitigated had more of the costumers used the process of including the actors in the costume design. The collaboration of Elizabeth Olsen in Wanda Maximoff’s costume proves that iconic characters can be achieved while incorporating the actor’s needs. Actor safety means we are required to think beyond the physical aspects to preserve the mental welfare of our cast members while we create legendary, and profound looks for our characters.

Many costumers and directors hold on to the ideals of historical accuracy to justify the reasons why we cannot adapt our approach to costuming choices and designs. But entrenched in history are examples of how fashion has blurred gender lines and social norms not only by the
common citizens but aristocracy as well. As a director and costumer of middle schoolers, approaching costuming faithfully but compassionately is a challenge. *Guys and Dolls Jr.* is a successful example where adaptations of Runyon’s stories can be told truthfully using younger demographics, gender neutrality and actors’ well-being. We have seen historical representation of this story immersed in gender traditional performances. Women wearing pants or even representing gamblers in the 1940’s are both historically accurate. My costume designs approached these concerns while still accommodated for the cast demographics, gender identification and mental well-being. From Anne Boleyn’s famous nonconformity to fashion becoming a fashion trend within the Tudor Court, Louis XIV’s use of heels as an approach to power and Sarah Bernhardt playing Hamlet are just a few examples of how gender, nonconformity and demographic adaptations to costuming can all be supported.

“Great theatre is about challenging how we think and encouraging us to fantasize about a world we aspire to.” (Dafoe) Whether you are a theatre practitioner, educator or professional, the main concern and goal is to be authentic to a show, the writer and the vision in a way that will profoundly impact the audience. Costuming choices and designs are a consequential way in which we deliver our characters and the story. With so many renowned musical characters, it may be argued that changing costuming decisions for the welfare of the actor is not an option, and it is the actor’s job to support the requirements of the role no matter what. But isn’t theatre also about bringing awareness to current issues and challenging the status quo through the artistic choices we make when we put on a production? Directors and costumers do not want to simply replicate the roles and designs of a show that others have done before them. They want to evolve them in a momentous way that shows the artistic value in giving a new perspective on these stories and their characters while staying honest to their essence. As directors and costumers
evolve their shows so must we evolve our philosophies. As we imprint our costume designs in these stories, we must do so with integrity. It is our obligation to challenge our ideals and protect our actors through a more collaborative costuming process that incorporates their physical and mental well-being to build a more compassionate world through theatre.
APPENDIX: PERMISSIONS
From: Lisa Everson
To: Lisa Everson
Subject: Re: Using an image for a thesis

Yes this is fine to use but please credit photographer Pamela Rath.

On Tue, 21 Feb 2023 at 00:47, Lisa Everson <liseverson2106@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Dear Mr. Wilson,

I am a master’s student at the University of Central Florida and am requesting permission to include in my thesis on costuming a picture that is featured in the article, “How Six in the West End took over the world.”

I have included a copy of the picture below that I want to use in my paper. The picture is examples of a costuming designs that took elements from a picture of the original six wives of King Henry VIII and modernized their outfits.

My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work.

You can email me at liiseverson2106@knights.ucf.edu with your consent.

Thank you for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Everson-Barrios
MFA Musical Theatre Candidate, University of Central Florida
liseverson2106@knights.ucf.edu
407-465-7953

Kevin Wilson Public Relations
25 years at the heart of the West End 1995 - 2020
Telephone: 020 8703 9956  Mobile: 07864 390697
E-mail: liseverson2106@knights.ucf.edu
Twitter: @LisaEverson2106
www.kevinwilsonpublicrelations.co.uk
West End Publicist of the Year - Fringe Report Awards

Figure 17
Hi Lisa,

Thank you for getting in touch.

Feel free to use it for your thesis and educational purposes only.

Thank you.

- An Rong

On Feb 19, 2023, at 12:49 AM, Lisa Evenson <lbarrown2106@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Good evening Mr. Xu,

I am a MA Musical Theatre candidate working on my master’s thesis on costuming. I found your pictures from “Skr” the musical in the article, “Velvet, Organza and Vipers. Stage Costumes Dazzle” published by the New York Times on August 12, 2021. I am seeking your permission to use some of these pictures as examples of costumes that have maintained character authenticity while utilizing both historical and modern elements.

My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work. You can email me at lbarrown2106@knights.ucf.edu with your consent. Thank you for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Evenson Barrows
MA Musical Theatre Candidate, University of Central Florida
lbarrown2106@knights.ucf.edu
407-461-7383

Figures 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29
From: Joan Marcus
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2023 11:15 PM
To: Lisa Evinson
Subject: Re: Contact Form Submitted

Hi Lisa, if you have the photos it's fine to use.

Sure from my iPhone

On Feb 16, 2023, at 10:56 PM, Lisa Barrows <costmaster@mccphotofolio.com> wrote:

A contact form was submitted:

Title: Contact Form

subject: Contact Form Submitted

name: Lisa Barrows

e-mail: lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu

phone: 407-461-7553

message:

Good evening Ms. Marcus, I am a MA Musical Theatre candidate working on my master’s thesis on costuming. I found your pictures from Hamilton in the article, “The ‘Hamilton’ costume designer tells us his secrets to dressing the Founding Father.” 13 April 2016. www.businessinsider.com. I am seeking your permission to use some of these pictures as examples of costumes that have maintain character authenticity while utilizing both historical and modern elements. My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work. You can email me at lbarrows2106@ucf.edu with your consent. Thank you for your help and consideration. Sincerely, Lisa Evinson Barrows

Figures 30-33
Re: Request to use a photo for my thesis

Scott Suchman <scott@suchmanphoto.com>
1:00 PM

To: Lisa Evenson

Sure, you may use out for this purpose only.

Scott

SCOTT SUCHMAN - PHOTOGRAPHER
Washington, DC
202.258.1087
scott@suchmanphoto.com
https://www.suchmanphoto.com
Instagram: @scottsuchman

On Feb 18, 2023, at 12:12 PM, Lisa Evenson <lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Dear Mr. Suchman,

I am a master’s student at the University of Central Florida and I am requesting for permission to include in my thesis on costuming a picture that you took that is featured in the article, “Juliet’s A Man!” It was published by NPR and written by Ashley Grashaw on October 2, 2008. I have attached a copy of the pictures I want to use in my paper. The picture is examples of a costuming designs.

My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work. You can email me at lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu with your consent.

<323783D1E60644AA426A9D10FFC0A1B.jpg>

Thank you for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Evenson-Barrows
MA Musical Theatre Candidate. University of Central Florida
lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu
407-681-7853

Sent from Mail for Windows
From: Carol Rosegg  
Sent: Monday, February 20, 2023 12:11 PM  
To: Lisa Evenson  
Subject: Re: Request to use a photo for my thesis

As long as no one is being paid and you can use the image you have downloaded, you have my permission.

Sent from my iPhone

On Sat, Feb 18, 2023 at 2:21 PM Lisa Evenson <lbarrows2196@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Dear Ms. Rosegg,

I am a master’s student at the University of Central Florida and I am requesting permission to include in my thesis on costuming a picture that you took that is featured in the article, “Interview: CINDERELLA costumes by William Ivey Long makes her the belle of the ball” It was published by Broadway World.com and written by Rohan Preston. I am also requesting permission to use two photos you took for the movie, “Victor/Victoria” that were featured in the article, “Look Back on Julie Andrews in Victor/Victoria on Broadway.” The article was published on Playbill.com and written by Marc Franklin. I have attached a copy of the pictures I want to use in my paper. The picture is examples of a costuming designs.

My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work. You can email me at lbarrows2196@knights.ucf.edu with your consent.

Thank you for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Evenson-Barrows  
MA Musical Theatre Candidate, University of Central Florida  
lbarrows2196@knights.ucf.edu  
407-461-7553

Figures 40, 41, and 47
Hi Lisa,

You have my permission to use this.

Let me know if there are any other ways I can help.

Matthew Murphy
He/Him/His
http://www.MurphyMade.com

On Feb 17, 2023, at 12:09 AM, Lisa Evenson <lbarrings106@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Dear Mr. Murphy,

I am a master’s student at the University of Central Florida and I am requesting for permission to include in my thesis on costuming a picture you took for the musical “Kinky Boots” featured in the article “Reviews: What are the Critics Saying About Kinky Boots Off Broadway?” published on Playbill.com by Raven Brunner on August 26, 2022. [https://playbill.com/article/reviews-what-are-critics-saying-about-kinky-boots-off-broadway] The picture is an example of a successful costuming concept that challenges and changes public perception of gender specific boots.

My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work. You can email me at lbarrings106@knights.ucf.edu with your consent.

Thank you for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Evenson-Barrows
MA Musical Theatre Candidate, University of Central Florida
lbarrings106@knights.ucf.edu
407.444.7983
From: Kerry Brown
Sent: Tuesday, February 21, 2023 3:52 AM
To: Lisa Evenson
Subject: Re: Request for Use of Photo for my Thesis

Hi Lisa... thank you for your email. I am happy for you to use the image, though I don’t own the copyright, Sony pictures do... I’m sure they would be ok with you using it.

Regards
KB

On 19/02/2023, at 9:14 AM, Lisa Evenson <lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Good evening Mr. Brown,

I am a MA Musical Theatre candidate working on my master’s thesis on costuming. I found your picture from the “Cinderella” movie that was featured in the article: “Billie Potter explains why he’s playing a genderless Fairy Godmother in ‘Cinderella’ remake: ‘Magic has no gender’”... It was published by Insider.com and written by Ayomikun Adelakun. I am seeking your permission to use the below referenced picture as an example of a gender neutral costume that has maintained character authenticity in support of my thesis.

My thesis will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida. My thesis is for educational purposes. If you consent to the usage of this photo for my paper, please reply with your permission to use this work. You can email me at lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu with your consent. Thank you for your help and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Evenson Barrows
MA Musical Theatre Candidate. University of Central Florida
lbarrows2106@knights.ucf.edu
407-481-7553

Figure 48
Figures 49 – 50
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