Lust and Disgust:
Reimagining Injurious Representations and Experiences of Black Actresses in the U.K. and U.S.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to the broader discussion of representation within the performing arts industry recently illuminated by the Black Lives Matter and Representation Matters movements popularised in the United States. It is a contemporary analysis of the ways womanhood and the social stigma of blackness influence the representation, and performative nature, of black actresses in the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry. Both the United Kingdom (UK) and the Unites States (US) are examined due to their historical colonial links and reputation. This research uses an interdisciplinary framework that includes reception, feminist, and post-blackness theories, as well as performing arts, and black studies. It highlights the impact that the representation of black women in the performing arts industry has on black actresses, and issues that have arisen for black actresses as a result, with an aim of postulating ways to shift this dynamic in the future.

This thesis begins by examining the colonial history of the UK and US via the transatlantic slave trade, explaining the establishment of the white hegemonic normative system which dominates most institutions, as well as the performing arts industry. Casting norms that perpetuate limited and negative representations of black women are then scrutinised through the analysis of colour-blind casting. Robin DiAngelo's concept of 'white fragility' and Touré's discourse on post-blackness in the twenty-first century guide a pragmatic contextualised approach through a series of four practice-based case studies in the areas of: audience reception, actor perception, theatre making, and immersive black actor training. My contention is that colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade was the impetus for the present-day white hegemonic normative system in the performing arts industry, and the negative representations and stereotypes of black women. As such, black actresses are placed in a precarious position of perpetuating said representations and stereotypes within their drama school training and professional acting jobs. I argue that a dual approach in the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry, divergent of the white hegemonic norm, can provide more authentic representations of black women and less traumatising experiences for black actresses. My objective is to open new avenues of discussion that will lead to possibilities for positive representations of black women in the performing arts industry, and improved performative experiences for black actresses in both actor training and professional working environments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background & Context

I am a black actress and theatre arts practitioner with twenty years of educational and professional experience in the performing arts industry, which has taken place in both the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). This thesis provides an exploration of issues black actresses have encountered in the industry, prompted by an autoethnographic approach. Specifically, it examines contemporary (since 2010) representations of black women in the performing arts including: film, stage, and television. Aspects of black female representation from the mid-twentieth century are mentioned for contextual purposes. However, the primary focus is the representation of black women as it currently stands in the early part of the twenty-first century. The guiding research question for this thesis is: in what ways does womanhood, and the social stigma of blackness, influence the representation and performative nature of black actresses in the educational and professional sectors of the British and American performing arts industry?

Although I started this research at the beginning of 2017, the recent surge of activism and protests related to the Black Lives Matter movement in the UK and US since the summer of 2020 puts into context the pertinence of the subject matter presented in this thesis. White hegemonic systems are being challenged in various ways and in numerous sectors of society. Paramount to my research are the concerns being voiced to drama school training programs from past students in the UK, and professional theatres in the US. This will be touched upon in each of the following chapters. A variety of academic discourse on black female characters written by black women writers and playwrights already exists, as well as examinations of the representation of black women, and the performance of blackness on stage and screen.[1] However, this discourse has failed to thoroughly examine the representations of black women in relation to drama school training and the professional work experiences of black actresses first-hand. In this thesis I aim to take a particular look at how the intersectionality of

[1] See the work of Lynette Goddard and Shirley Anne Tate. Additionally, conceptual artist and academic, Ope Lori's work considers the oppositional gaze, seeking to re-write the conceptions of gendered and racialised identities. Lynette Goddard, *Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Lynette Goddard, 'Side Doors and Service Elevators: Racial Constraints for Actresses of Colour', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress,* ed. by Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 215-232. Cambridge Core ebook; Shirley Anne Tate, *Black Women's Bodies and the Nation: Race Gender and Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2015); Ope Lori, 'Ope Lori', *Ope Lori*, 2020 <https://www.opelori.com> [accessed 2 September 2020].

blackness and womanhood places black actresses in further marginalised positions in comparison to their black, male actor counterparts. As a black actress and theatre arts practitioner, my unique positionality allows me to write based on my own experience, as well as research the experiences of other black actresses.

This research considers racism, the origins of prevalent black female stereotypes, and the social stigma of blackness as it relates to black womanhood in the UK and US through practice-based research methodologies. Representation, perception, and impact are explored via the theoretical contexts of post-blackness, black feminism, and post-colonialism to highlight and counter prevailing white hegemonic epistemologies in the performing arts industry. These theories are applied to various practice-based methodologies including interviews, workshops, and performative theatrical exploration. Interrogation of the research question is approached from multiple angles to produce useful qualitative data in the areas of audience perception, representation of black women, casting, drama school training, and black actress experiences. Data analysis is used to identify the complications presented by the intersectionality of blackness and womanhood for black actresses in the performing arts industry.

I argue that the performing arts industry is driven by a white hegemonic epistemology that perpetuates limiting and negative stereotypes of black women. It creates precarious educational and professional working environments and experiences for black actresses in the UK and US. I further assert that an investigation of the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry from a practice-based approach can provide notable possibilities for improvement. This thesis is not an investigation of black characters written for black women. It is an investigation of how black women are represented in the performing arts, and the challenges they face in professional and training environments as the positioned 'other' within white hegemonic performance spaces. Through the research and case studies presented in the following chapters, I conclude that changes in casting practices and terminology are needed to shift away from negative and stereotypical representations of black women in the performing arts industry. I propose eradication of the term and theory of colour-blind casting and introduce an alternate approach via an original concept I call *global view casting*, which is discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, outcomes of this research support the need for a shift in actor training in drama schools, and in the professional realm of the performing arts industry, that decentralises white hegemonic mindsets and practices.

I am a black woman who was born and raised in the US. I do not recall discussions with my parents about the concept of race or ethnicity when I was young. Like most children growing up in America, I watched a fair amount of television. One of my earliest childhood memories is from when I was five years old. I was acutely aware that I looked different from many of the people in my known environment. At the time we lived in a small, central Californian, farm-based community with a population of less than 20,000. The demographic of most of my town was white people. As an only child, I would play by mimicking the women I saw on television. I had very kinky, coily, dark brown hair, and I would put a white t-shirt on my head and pretend it was my long, straight blond hair. I even asked my mother why she did not marry a white man because then I would have the long, straight blond hair I desired and lighter skin. At five years old, through the repeated images of white people and lack of black female representation I witnessed on TV, I understood that blond hair and white skin were both preferable, and better than being black.

Although the terms race, ethnicity, social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination were unbeknownst to me at the time, the imagery, and narratives I was presented with on television had begun to impress upon me negative views and perceptions of blackness in America. In *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race,* Reni Eddo-Lodge recollects a similar realisation regarding blackness growing up in the UK.[2]

> I am only acutely aware of race because I have been rigorously marked out as different by the world I know for as long as I can remember. […] When white people pick up a magazine, scroll through the Internet, read a newspaper, or switch on the TV, it is never rare or odd to see people who look like them. […] To be white is to be human; to be white is to be universal. I only know this because I am not.[3]

Both my personal insight and that of Eddo-Lodge highlight a subconscious awareness of complex concepts such as race and social stigma, as well as a recognition of an established norm of whiteness in the UK and US from an early age. Subconscious awareness such as this influences the formation of individual identity. Geraldine Harris addresses representation and the politics of identity in her writing. She states that 'due to its increasing ubiquity and importance as a medium across the globe, television is now understood as an important site

[2] Reni Eddo-Lodge is a black British freelance journalist and author with a feminist and structural racism focus. She has written for numerous UK publications including: *The Guardian, The Independent,* and *The Daily Telegraph.* In March 2018 her podcast *About Race with Reni Eddo-Lodge* launched as a further examination of topics discussed in her book.
[3] Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. xvi-xvii.

for the discursive construction and production of identities.'[4] I agree with this assessment and believe this idea extends beyond television into film and theatre also. Therefore, my research focuses on imagery through the representation of black women within the performing arts industry.

Through theories and methodologies previously mentioned I have placed myself at the centre of the research material as: spectator, actor, director, and researcher. This unique, multi-faceted positioning allowed a diverse space for reflexive analysis, examination, and scrutiny of theoretical concepts and methodologies. I conducted practice-based research through the creation of four case studies which include: workshops to explore audience reception and actor perception, directing a play with a majority black cast, attending an all-black intensive acting course, and interviews of black American and British actresses. Donald Schön describes this type of approach as a reflection-in-action research pattern or reflexive conversation.

> The inquirer is willing to step into the problematic situation, to impose a frame on it, to follow the implications of the discipline thus established, and yet to remain open to the situation's back-talk. Reflecting on the surprising consequences of his efforts to shape the situation in conformity with his initially chosen frame, the inquirer frames new questions and new ends in view.[5]

It is important to point out that my implementation of the reflexive analysis approach within this practice-based research negates the possibility of complete objectivity. As a black actress, I acknowledge, to a certain extent, I am both the researcher and the subject of research. However, in this case I argue the absence of complete objectivity strengthens the research due to the dearth of academic inquiry currently available about black actresses in the UK and US. This research will benefit from my unique insider/outsider perspective and positionality as black actress and researcher, which would otherwise be lost with a completely objective inquiry. This type of methodological reflexive insider/outsider perspective allows engagement and examination of the notions and difficulties of blackness, womanhood, and representation in new ways.

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[4] Geraldine Harris, *Beyond Representation: Television Drama and the Politics and Aesthetics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 2. ProQuest ebook.
[5] Donald A Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Aldershot: Avebury Ashgate, 1991; Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 268-269. ProQuest ebook.

As a black woman growing up and/or residing in Western societies where whiteness is the established norm, I have noticed that my identity and those of other black women, and the notion of belonging, are often called into question. In his discourse on identity Jeffrey Weeks explains:

> Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. […] At the centre, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others.[6]

For black women, finding the sense of personal location and stable core individuality Weeks speaks of can be difficult when more differences than commonalities are highlighted within the established white norm. Many factors have a bearing on how a person shapes their identity, which is integral to how we function in the world.

In *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism,* Robin DiAngelo discusses the importance of identity with particular focus on Western culture: 'Identity and perceptions of identity can grant or deny resources. These resources include self-worth, visibility, positive expectations, psychological freedom from the tethers of race, freedom of movement, the sense of belonging, and a sense of entitlement to all the above.'[7] Black women in the UK and US can have difficulty constructing and/or maintaining positive self-identities, because the positive personal perspective they possess is often juxtaposed to the negative ways black womanhood is portrayed in the performing arts. It can be argued that a collective identity is created because of external societal factors, such as media and the performing arts industry, targeted towards and affecting only a specific group of people, such as black women. In *The Urban Review* journal John Ogbu further defines the term collective identity by stating it:

> Refers to people's sense of who they are, their "we- feeling" or "belonging". […] The persistence of a group's collective identity depends on the continuity of the external (historical and structural) forces that contributed to its formation, […] usually develops because of people's collective experience or series of collective experiences.[8]

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[6] Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Value of Difference', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 88-100 (p. 88).
[7] Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2018), p. 25.
[8] John U. Ogbu, 'Collective Identity and the Burden of "Acting White" in Black History, Community, and Education', *The Urban Review*, 36.1 (2004), 1-35 <https://doi.org/10.1023/b:urre.0000042734.83194.f6> (p. 3).

I argue that systemic prejudice and racism in the UK and the US have created a shared collective identity for black women.

Qualitative inquiry provides unique insights that cannot be gained from quantitative inquiry alone. To provide richer qualitative context to my research via ethnographic exploration, I conducted interviews with black actresses in the UK and US.[9] A comparison of other black actresses' experiences to my own potentially highlights issues within the performing arts industry that are specific to black women. My original plan was to obtain interviews from twenty black actresses in total, ten from the UK and ten from the US. As I am a black actress, my network of theatre colleagues and friends assisted me in sourcing the actresses interviewed for this thesis. However, due to my lack of connections to a wide range of black actresses in the UK, the difficulty of coordinating schedules to conduct the interviews, and the unfortunate timing of the COVID-19 pandemic, I did not obtain interviews from as many UK actresses as I would have liked. I was unable to reach my goal of twenty.

Over the course of a year and seven months between 2017 and 2019, I conducted thirteen interviews with a total of fourteen black actresses: six British and eight American. The timeframe of each interview was between forty-five minutes and two hours. Each interview was semi-structured, with the aim of acquiring each actress's definition of their identity as a woman of colour and drawing upon their unique experiences in the performing arts industry in relation to black female stereotypes and representation. I had also planned to use the text of the recorded interview transcripts to create a verbatim play. Due to the amount of time it took to complete all the interviews, and the diminishing time I had to complete other aspects of my research, I decided to forego the verbatim play. Instead, I have used the insight provided from the actresses throughout this thesis to provide an ethnographic framework and further contextualisation to the overall research. I do not suggest that these interviews constitute the whole of the black actress experience; they do, however, suggest discriminative patterns and behaviours present in the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry enacted on black actresses. I will be referring to these interviews throughout the remainder of this thesis. When asked if they have faced social stigma in the industry, all the actresses I interviewed, British and American, were able to recount at least one story where their race

[9] See Volume III of the Appendices for actress interview transcripts.

was an issue or spoke of in a negative manner. This supports my argument that racism and prejudice have created a collective identity for black women. Prevailing external forces such as: white hegemony, systemic racism, and prejudice, oversimplify and derogate black women leading to a collective series of experiences as defined by Ogbu.[10] The UK and US are influenced and fuelled by white supremacist patriarchal ideals. Both nations participated in the transatlantic slave trade, which lasted for centuries and furnished the impetus for demonising people of the African continent and their descendants. This is the root cause of present-day prejudices and stereotypical views of people of the African diaspora. It is also the reason why there is a limited – and sometimes complete lack of – representation of black women in the performing arts industry.

1.2 Derogation of Black Female Bodies & the Social Stigma of Blackness

Before examining issues of representation, identity, and their influence among black actresses in the performing arts industry, it is important to consider how black women are viewed in American and British cultural contexts, and the origin of such views. Many of the current perceptions and stereotypes of black women began during the transatlantic slave trade. The transatlantic slave trade used 'labour from Africa, shipped to the Americas, to cultivate produce destined for European markets.'[11] The development of the transatlantic slave trade began in the fifteenth century in Portugal. Now referred to as the 'Age of Discovery', it was a time when parts of Europe embarked on sea exploration and subsequent colonialization of foreign lands such as Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In the early 1400s, Portugal began the navigation to and exploration of the North and West African coast. By 1445, a trading post and slave market was established at a Portuguese fort in Arguin Bay, a small island off the shore of Mauritania. Slaves were transported from West Africa to Portugal's capital city of Lisbon, then on to Spain and Italy. By the 1530s, Portugal's exploration had expanded across the Atlantic Ocean with the colonialization of Brazil. To colonise Brazil, Portugal

[10] Shirley Anne Tate has written extensively on how slavery and colonialism have shaped the view of black women, particularly the black female body in the UK, US, and Caribbean, which supports the idea of a collective black female identity. See *Black Skins, Black Masks: Hybridity, Dialogism, Performativity* (2005); *Black Women's Bodies and the Nation: Race, Gender and Culture* (2015); and *The Governmentality of Black Beauty Shame: Discourse, Iconicity, and Resistance* (2017).

[11] James Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 33. ProQuest ebook.

transported a free labour force of African slaves with them, and this marked the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade.[12]

The transatlantic slave trade involved the purchase of slaves from African warlords in exchange for arms and textiles from Europe. Via various European ports, those slaves were subsequently taken to colonised areas of the Americas and Caribbean islands, where their forced free labour was used to produce crops such as sugar and coffee. These crops were then exported from the Americas and the Caribbean back to Europe for centuries. In the sixteenth century, Portugal dominated the transatlantic slave trade. By the seventeenth century, the British, Dutch, and French joined the trade, and the demand for African slave labour continually grew. It reached its apex in the eighteenth century with the formation of the United States of America as its own country. Profits derived from African slaves harvesting crops such as cotton and tobacco built the budding US nation from the ground up. Opposition to slavery grew and by the early nineteenth century laws were passed to abolish it, such as: the Foreign Slave Trade Abolition Bill of 1806 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 in Britain, the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 in the US, and the Golden Law of 1888 in Brazil.[13] The transatlantic slave trade came to a close in the late nineteenth century, and although complete accurate records from that timeframe cannot be acquired, an estimated ten to twelve million African slaves were taken over the course of four centuries.[14] The

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[12] A. J. R. Russell-Wood, 'Reviewed Work: A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555 by A. C. De C. M. Saunders', *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids / New West Indian Guide*, 57.3/4 (1983), 247-252 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41849135> [accessed 10 June 2020]; Leslie Hutchinson, 'Nuño Tristão: Early Portuguese Explorer' *Science and Its Times*, 2: 700 -1449 (2001), 43-46 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3408500470/GVRL?u=uce&sid=summon&xid=0ea935d3> [accessed 10 June 2020]; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 'The Transatlantic Slave Trade', *In Motion the African-American Migration Experience*, 2005 <http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/landing.cfm?migration=1> [accessed 7 June 2020]; Alastair Corston de Custance Maxwell Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[13] Vitale Joanoni Neto, 'Abolition and the Brazilian Abolitionist Movement', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 35, 3/4 (2012), 239-249 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43631672> [accessed 11 June 2021]; The Brazilian Report, 'Slavery In Brazil', *Brazil Institute*, (2020) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/slavery-brazil> [accessed 10 August 2020]; The History Press, 'The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833', *The History Press* <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/the-slavery-abolition-act-of-1833/> [accessed 14 February 2020]; U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, 'Transcript of Emancipation Proclamation (1863)', *Ourdocuments.Gov* <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?flash=false&page=transcript&doc=34&title=Transcript+of+Emancipation+Proclamation+%281863%29> [accessed 14 June 2021]; UK Parliament, 'Parliament Abolishes the Slave Trade', *UK Parliament*, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/tradeindustry/slavetrade/overview/parliament-abolishes-the-slave-trade/> [accessed 6 April 2020].

[14] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Abigail Ward, *Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen and Fred D'aguiar: Representations of Slavery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). ProQuest ebook; Walvin.

transatlantic slave trade was a lucrative profit-based enterprise that benefited from African slave labour. The countries involved had to devise a way to morally justify the forced slave labour and terrible treatment of African people for financial gain, and this was the inception of the black social stigma we find in contemporary British and American societies.

European expansion into Africa meant contact with people that greatly diverged from what Europeans were accustomed to. Inhabitants of the African continent possessed vastly different physical features, cultural beliefs, religious practices, and daily habits from their European counterparts. In general, the physical attributes of Africans included darker skin, darker, densely coiled and/or curly hair, fuller lips, wider noses, and darker eye colour. Their clothing also greatly differed from Europeans. Annecka Marshall further explains:

> By the middle of the sixteenth century English people believed that Africans were different in terms of their skin colour and associated this with an unchristian religion as well as libidinousness. […] Partly these impressions were for English people a means to interrogate themselves by means of comparison.[15]

Various written accounts and records of colonial explorations to Africa during the transatlantic slave trade exist in historical archives such as: the UK and US National Archives, the British Online Archives, the US Library of Congress, the Archives Centre of the National Museums Liverpool, and the New York Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.[16]

Europeans, through this interrogation and comparison model, created the ideology of race and subsequently racism. Remnants of this core ideology have persisted through to the twenty-first century and are the base of the systemic racism, prejudice, and stereotypes of black people in the UK and US. Although the concept of race in relation to ethic difference among people is prevalent in modern-day society, it is merely an idea and not scientific fact. Robert Wald Sussman confirms in his discourse on race:

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[15] Annecka Marshall, 'Sexual Denigration to Self-Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality', in *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism*, ed. by Delia Jarrett-Macauley (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 5-35 (p.6).

[16] Archives Centre, *National Museums Liverpool,* <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/archives-centre/about-archive-centre> [accessed 10 January 2020]; British Online Archives, *British Online Archives*, 2006 <https://microform.digital/boa/> [accessed 15 February 2020]; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, *The New York Public Library,* <https://www.nypl.org/locations/schomburg> [accessed 10 November 2019]; UK National Archive, *The National Archives*, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/a/A13530124> [accessed 8 June 2019]; US Library of Congress , *The Library of Congress,* <https://www.loc.gov> [accessed 14 March 2019]; US National Archives, *National Archives*, <https://www.archives.gov> [accessed 24 July 2020].

> In 1950, UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] issued a statement asserting that all humans belong to the same species and that "race" is not a biological reality but a myth. […] Today the vast majority of those involved in research on human variation would agree that biological races do not exist among humans.[17]

The ideology of race started in the fifteenth century with the Spanish inquisition. Initiated in Spain in 1478, Spanish monarchs backed by the Catholic church actively sought to reinstate Christian orthodoxy and penalise heretics. The Spanish targeted Jews and Muslims and prevented their assimilation and integration into mainstream society unless they converted to Christianity.[18] It later expanded to discriminate and separate other conquered groups and individuals the Spanish deemed minorities because they did not adhere to Christian beliefs. These 'other' groups included, but were not limited to: Native Americans, Asians, and Africans. With colonial expansion 'new rationalizations had to be made to justify mistreating the people Europeans encountered and new theories formed to explain their place in the universe.'[19] Although the notion of race cannot be scientifically proven, it is an established cultural concept and system of beliefs cultivated as a legitimate political means to amass wealth and power from colonised lands and people.

The black female body was particularly troublesome during colonialization because of the juxtaposition between European notions of pure delicate femininity and the perceived propensity of animalistic barbarism in Africans. In the 1600s Englishman Richard Lignon wrote about his first encounters with African women, as well as many other early European colonists. Jennifer L. Morgan states that the writings of these colonists played a large role in shaping the perception of black women's bodies in comparison to European women's bodies:

> The struggle with perceptions of beauty and assertions of monstrosity such as Ligon's exemplified a much larger process through which the familiar became unfamiliar as beauty became beastliness and mothers became monstrous, all ultimately in the service of racial distinctions. Writers who articulated religious and moral justifications for the slave trade simultaneously grappled with the character of the female African body – a body both desirable and repulsive, available and untouchable, productive and reproductive, beautiful and black.[20]

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[17] Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p.1. Kindle ebook.
[18] Sara Tilghman Nalle, 'Inquisition, Spanish', in *Europe, 1450 to 1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*, ed. by Jonathan Dewald, 3rd edn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), pp. 272-275. Gale eBook.
[19] Sussman, p. 12.
[20] Jennifer L. Morgan, "Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 54.1 (1997), 167-192 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2953316> (pp. 169-170).

Differing from their male counterparts, the African female body was not only effective in executing the physical labour slavery demanded, but it could create an endless future slave workforce through pregnancy. There was a fascination, yearning, and desire for the characteristics of the black female body as 'other'. In her play *Venus,* Suzan-Lori Parks describes the allure of black women by comparing them to chocolate:

> While chocolate was once used as a stimulant and source of
> nutrition
> it is primarily today a great source of fat,
> and, of course, pleasure.[21]

Colonialization and the transatlantic slave trade spread white supremacist ideologies around the world. Having a peculiar fascination with the black female body, European colonists used black women as an antithetical comparison to anglicised European female bodies, which held higher value. Morgan further explains:

> Femaleness evoked a certain element of desire, but travelers depicted black women as simultaneously un-womanly and marked by a reproductive value dependent on their sex. Writers' recognition of black femaleness and their inability to allow black women to embody "proper" female space composed a focus for representations of racial difference.[22]

These racial differences were highlighted by focusing on the physical differences in the black female body such as larger gluteal regions. This will be explained further in the subsequent discussion of the 'Hottentot Venus', who is the inspiration for Parks play *Venus* mentioned earlier.

Black women living in a society where 'whiteness' and European physical attributes are prized above those of the African diaspora has the potential for detrimental ramifications on the way black women view themselves and constitute their identity. Based on this sort of value system, some black women may seek to minimize their blackness when encountering white hegemonic systems. This was demonstrated in my interview with black American actress LaTanza Brits. She spoke about colourism in the performing arts industry and what she does to look more castable in auditions.

> Generally, when you see black women who are a love interest, they're Kerry Washington. Light skinned. Small. […] I literally think they take a brown paper bag

[21] Suzan-Lori Parks, *Venus* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997), 3. p. 156.
[22] Morgan, p. 168.

> and be like, 'Oh, you're too dark.' I think sometimes I just squeak by, and I think I know that. I do. […] If I know I'm gonna go to an audition, and I've been in the sun a lot, I generally avoid it so I can look, I can pass more. I know it's disturbing. I know, but I have to. I just know that the lighter I am, the more castable I am.[23]

Brits goes on later to admit that 'I always keep a weave in when I'm auditioning because it gives me a more ethnically ambiguous look. I've always been told I look a lot Native American. So, it just makes it more…It's easier for them to digest, I guess.'[24] In order to get cast, Brits has essentially created an alternate version of herself that she presents in the audition room. She is concerned about not being considered for roles if she gets too much of a tan during the summer or walks into the audition room with her natural curly hair, rather than a pin straight weave.

The Hollywood film and television industry is recognised and held in high esteem worldwide. It is a big part of contemporary popular culture which 'is influential. Its images and messages teach individuals how to think, act, believe, and perceive the world around them.'[25] I argue that the images and narratives represented in the performing arts industry, mainly film and television, operate as a main avenue for which people create their identity and assess how they fit into society. Black American actress Yhá Mourhia Wright spoke about the importance of images in our interview. 'The mind thinks in images. We recall in images. Everything's images. All the more reason why what we see on stage and what we see on film and television is so important. Because this is actually, literally imprinting what we think.'[26] Imagery presented in magazines, media, and the performing arts in the UK and US help us shape ideas about ourselves, others, and society as a whole. In *Slay in Your Lane* Yomi Adegoke explains how this can affect our interactions with and perceptions of others:

> Being black and British people know our parents are from somewhere else before we even open our mouths. Or if not our parents, our grandparents. Or great grandparents. We are tattooed with our otherness. We are hypervisible in predominantly white spaces, but somehow, we often remain unseen. Growing up, I felt keenly the dearth of black British women in the stories our society consumed and it made me feel all sorts of things. It made me feel as if I was invisible too. It made me feel frustrated. It made me feel annoyed, upset, and most of all, restless.[27]

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[23] Appendices, Volume III, LaTanza Brits transcript, p. 87.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Adria Y. Goldman and others, *Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015). p. 1.
[26] Appendices, Volume III, Yhá Mourhia Wright transcript, p. 155.
[27] Yomi Adegoke and Elizabeth Uviebinené, *Slay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible* (London: Harper Collins, 2019), p. 4.

This ‘racial difference’ assigned by Europeans is what lies at the core of black social stigma. When this intersects with the struggles of womanhood in a patriarchal society, black women are placed at the bottom of an imposed racial hierarchical system. Christophe Konkobo writes about the construction of this hierarchy and states that: ‘A Western imagination thus established a hierarchy of values where Europe was viewed in rational and cognitive terms and its Other as abject bundles of muscles devoid of cognitive and spiritual capacities.’[28] One of the most startling and famous cases of the devaluation of the black female body is that of Sara Baartman, also known as the ‘Hottentot Venus’.

The ‘Hottentot Venus’

 [29]

Sara ‘Saajartie’ Baartman, also known as the ‘Hottentot Venus’, was a South African woman of the Khoikhoi tribe born in 1789. Khoisan women were known for their visibly large backsides or steatopygia, the scientific term for large amounts of fatty deposits in the gluteal region. The physique of the Khoisan women, particularity the buttocks, were an obvious dissimilarity to the less ample backsides of European women, and therefore a source of fascination to the point of revulsion for white people. The derisive nickname ‘Hottentot’ was ‘the derogatory European term for the Khoikhoi people of the Cape, […] bestial and

[28] Christophe Konkobo, ‘Dark Continent, Dark Stage’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 40 (2008), 1094-1106 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934708325379> (p. 1095).
[29] Travs S.D., *Sara Baartman*, digital photograph, Wordpress, 29 April 2017, <https://travsd.wordpress.com/2017/04/29/the-ongoing-saga-of-the-hottentot-venus/> [accessed 14 December 2017].

objectively ugly examples of humanity; in Britain the word 'Hottentot' was by extension used as an insult to describe a rude, uncultured or stupid person.'[30]

In 1810, Baartman was working as a domestic servant for a Dutch family in South Africa. Intrigued by her bulbous bottom, Hendrik Cesar and English surgeon William Dunlop 'hired' her to travel with them to England and France to be put on display for the entertainment of European audiences. They promised she would return to South Africa in five years with enough money to support her family. Sara agreed and accompanied them to Europe, but the promise of money and her return to South Africa never came to fruition. Baartman's large buttocks and dark skin made her an enthralling oddity in freak shows and exhibitions that toured England, Ireland, and France. Additionally, she was featured in human zoos, appearing almost completely naked, and was displayed in a cage next to animals. In a biography on Baartman entitled *African Queen: The Real Life of the Hottentot Venus,* Rachel Holmes vividly describes what the experience of seeing the 'Hottentot Venus' in the flesh at an exhibition for European audiences must have been like at that time:

> *Venus* was simply a synonym for sex; to behold the figure of Venus, or to hear her name, was to be prompted to think about lust, or love. At the same time, the word Hottentot signified all that was strange, disturbing, alien, and possibly sexually deviant. […] And here she was, a fantasy made flesh, tinted gold by the stage light, elevated above them, uniting the full imaginary force of those two powerful words: *Hottentot* and *Venus*.'[31]

Baartman became the subject of scientific research for various sectors of the scientific community, primarily for the well-known French naturalist Georges Cuvier, and other European zoologists, autonomists, and physiologists. They believed she was the living link between humans and animals. In *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and Biography,* the following is noted about what the scientific study of Baartman came to signify:

> Europeans created the Hottentot Venus as the living missing link separating beast from man, the drives from the intellect, the anxious space between our animal and human selves. Sara entered Europe's psyche, modernity's psyche, not as a woman, a

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[30] Alison E. Wright, 'The Hottentot Venus: An Alternative Iconography', *British Art Journal*, 12.1 (2013), 59-70 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A343363965/AONE?u=uce&sid=AONE&xid=3ed4e39c> [accessed 6 December 2019] p. 59.

[31] Rachel Holmes, *African Queen: The Real Life of the Hottentot Venus* (Westminster: Random House, 2009), p. 4.

> living, breathing person with emotions and memories and longings, but as a metaphor, a figment, a person reduced to a simulacrum. That figment subsumed the person.[32]

The way Baartman was manipulated, exhibited, and studied further perpetuated false Western ideas of the exoticized 'other' through the site of Baartman's black female body. She died in France in 1816 of uncertain causes and following her death the exploitation of her black body continued to satiate European curiosity. 'It is notable that nude, anatomical profile studies of Baartman were also made in the same period, at the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, in 1815; she was later dissected at the same institution, making her a crucial early specimen for racial comparative anatomy.'[33] Georges Cuvier studied Baartman extensively before and after her death. Within his studies of anatomy and the human species, he made comparisons of Baartman's body to that of monkeys and helped develop the scientific categorisations of race wherein he describes the black race as barbaric.[34] Cuvier made a plaster cast of Baartman's body before it was dissected for scientific research. Her brain and genitalia were placed in jars and displayed along with her skeleton and plaster body cast at the Museé d'Histoire Naturelle. Baartman's remains were eventually returned to South Africa in 2002, where her body was finally laid to rest following a ceremony held in her honour.[35]

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The tragic story of Baartman is a dark part of European history and echoes of her legacy reverberate today. In the nineteenth century a large backside like that of Baartman was a

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[32] Clifton C. Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011), p. 6.
[33] Wright, p. 59.
[34] Sussman, pp.14-25; Polo B. Moji, 'Un/Known Bodies: Dissecting Sara Baartman in the Francophone Autobiography, 53Cm (Bessora, 1999)', *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 11.2 (2017), 183-194 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2017.1375656>.
[35] Phillip McEvansoneya, "Hottentot Venus": The Exhibition of Sara Baartman in Dublin in 1812', *History Ireland*, 21.1 (2013), 26-28 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23343557> [accessed 4 October 2017]; South African History Online, *South African History Online*, 2013 <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sara-saartjie-baartman> [accessed 8 October 2017]; Dr. Y., 'Sarah Baartman: The Black Venus', *African Heritage*, 2017 <https://afrolegends.com/2017/07/19/sarah-baartman-the-black-venus/> [accessed 22 November 2017].
[36] Justin Parkinson, digital photograph, BBC News Magazine, 7 January 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35240987> [accessed 16 October 2017].

source of fascination and disgust for European audiences. The irony is that in contemporary British and American societies, possessing a large, round bottom is no longer a peculiar site of revulsion, but rather a desired physical trait. White people have a long history of being curious about aspects of black bodies and culture to the point of cannibalising and repackaging them as their own, also known as cultural appropriation.

Today women go to great lengths to make their backsides look bigger, including but not limited to the use of exercises targeted to enlarge the gluteal region, butt pads inserted into undergarments, and surgical alteration of their bodies with gluteal implants. Shirley Anne Tate observes that 'cultural industries are engaged in global commodification of this body part which runs the risk of the affirmation of both patriarchal and white power over Black women's bodies.'[37] Non-black celebrities like Kim Kardashian and Jennifer Lopez are praised for their large backsides, whereas black women, who naturally tend to have a physique that lends itself to an ample derrière, are rarely admired for this attribute outside of their own black culture, therefore I am inclined to agree with Tate. In the UK and US cultural appropriation has allowed the black female body to be commodified and used in degrading ways. In addition to butt pads and gluteal implants, other aspects of the black female body are appropriated through lip fillers and tanning. However, black women are still mocked and teased for having fuller lips and darker skin. In the poem *My Blackness,* Natreema A. Adjaye recounts the pain and ridicule she endured as a dark-skinned black British woman and their profound effect on her identity, which ultimately marred her ability to have a positive sense of self.

> A hue as deep as its roots. / Reminiscent of the darkest chocolate and the ripest aubergine. / I can't imagine why? / Once upon a time / It defined my value and self-worth / My name at birth? / Was replaced with ridicules: / Blackie, Blick, Burnt toast, Midnight, Black attack. / There were more insults hurled at me. / Too many to remember. / Words used interchangeably, / With ugly! / I heard them so often. / I believed no one loved me. / I didn't see my Blackness on TV positively / Or on magazines with faces considered pretty.[38]

The teasing and name calling due to her dark skin combined with a lack of positive representations of black women in magazines and on television led to feelings of invisibility.

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[37] Shirley Anne Tate, *Black Women's Bodies and the Nation: Race Gender and Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2015), p. 67.
[38] Natreema A Adjaye, *Melanin Monologues: A Black British Perspective* (London: The Wordsmiths Workshop, 2015), p. 77.

Adjaye's self-worth diminished because her looks did not meet the accepted white hegemonic beauty standards. Later in the poem Adjaye conveys that despite the devaluation and derogation of her character, she found a way to overcome the hate and self-deprecation, thus leading her to discover pride and power in her blackness:

> The Blackness I used to despise, / Makes me wise. / Imagine. / The cause of self-hate, / Makes me great. / Life challenged me. / A choice between the bleaching creams, / Or a search for my self-esteem. / I choose my Blackness. / Why wouldn't I? / It's the core part of me.[39]

Many black women in the UK and US have experienced similar circumstances and feelings about themselves and how blackness is represented, or absent from the world around them. What can be viewed as seemingly harmless teasing of a young black girl's skin tone, hair texture, physical traits, or name, can cause potentially harmful outcomes for those on the receiving end of the ridicule, leaving deep emotional scars that can follow these young girls into adulthood. Female blackness is often viewed as a barrier, stain, or problem within British and American societies. In a poem about racism and reproductive issues in the US, Cheryl Glittens-Jones writes:

> Walking into a room / My blackness goes / My blackness goes / Goes before me / Those of the majority / Not all / Not few / But many / Still do not see / See me as / human / woman / Only / Black[40]

Both Adjaye and Glittens-Jones' poems articulate a unifying theme of feeling invisible as black women. In the next section, I interrogate the notion of invisibility as a component of black female identity in the UK and US.

Invisibility of Black Women

In March 2010, the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* published 'Prototypes of Race and Gender: The Invisibility of Black Women', by Amanda K. Sesko and Monica Biernat. The article includes findings from two psychological experiments exploring the invisibility of black women. The 'studies address whether Black women go "unnoticed" and their voices "unheard", by examining memory for Black women's faces and speech contributions. […] It investigates whether, in fact, Black women are "invisible" to White

[39] Ibid., p. 77.

[40] Cheryl Glittens-Jones, 'My Blackness Goes Before Me: A Poem and Commentary on Racism and Reproductive Justice', *Rewire News*, 4 May 2011 <https://rewire.news/article/2011/05/04/blackness-goes-poem-commentary-racism-reproductive-justice-0/> [accessed 3 October 2019].

people.'[41] For the purpose of their experiments, four categories of people were taken into consideration: black women, black men, white women, and white men.

The first study contained 131 white undergraduate student participants in America; of whom 50 were female and 81 male. The study had two phases. In phase 1, each participant was shown a series of faces in the form of headshot photos. They viewed 32 photos in total, comprised of 8 photos from each of the aforementioned categories. In phase 2, the participants were again shown a series of faces in the form of headshot photos. However, this time, additional faces they had not previously viewed were mixed in with some of the faces they had already seen in phase 1. In total they were shown 24 photos: 6 photos from each of the four categories. The participants were then instructed to indicate which of the faces they saw in both phase 1 and 2. The results revealed that participants could accurately recognise a face from the photos they had seen before 78.3% of the time. Yet, 'study 1 provided evidence that White participants are less able to distinguish "old" and "new" Black female faces compared to those of any other group. That is, photos of Black women appeared to be the least memorable, a symptom of "invisibility".'[42]

The second study contained 65 participants who were predominantly white undergraduate students (81%); of whom 40 were female and 25 male. In this study participants listened to a recorded conversation of students discussing what their plans were after graduation. The conversation contained 16 statements. As each statement in the conversation was played, a photo of the person who spoke the corresponding statement was shown to the participant. After listening to the entire conversation and viewing the photos of the individuals that spoke each statement, the participants were shown a total of 32 statements. 16 of the statements were heard in the audio recording, and the additional 16 statements were not included in the recording. The participants were asked to identify which statements were spoken in the recording and match the statements with the photo of the individual who spoke the corresponding statement. The aim of the study was to 'investigate whether spoken statements made by Black women are less likely to be correctly identified compared to those of Black men, White women and White men.'[43] Findings of the study showed that participants were

[41] Amanda K. Sesko and Monica Biernat, 'Prototypes of Race and Gender: The Invisibility of Black Women', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46.2 (2010), 356-360 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.10.016> (p. 257).
[42] Ibid., p. 358.
[43] Ibid.

more likely to incorrectly attribute statements made by black women to other targets than they were to misattribute white women's, black men's, or white men's statements. The follow are the findings of Sesko and Biernat's studies:

> Study 1 indicated that White participants were least likely to correctly recognize Black women in comparison to the other groups. They were relatively unable to distinguish a Black woman they had seen before from a "new" Black woman. In Study 2, Black women tended to be implicated in every error type. Their contributions were confused with those of other Black women, and of every other group. Overall then, Black women were seen as relatively interchangeable, […] and their contributions were misattributed to others and others' comments misattributed to them. […] These effects cannot be attributed to particular features of the targets, as careful pre-testing was conducted to ensure equal age, attractiveness, facial expression, and distinctiveness. Instead, these studies provide evidence of Black women's relative invisibility, at least among college-aged White samples on a predominantly White campus.[44]

Another facet of the invisibility of black women was explored in the journal of *Psychology of Popular Media Culture.* The article, 'Gendered Race in Mass Media: Invisibility of Asian Men and Black Women in Popular Magazines'*,* presented a 2015 study examining 6 popular magazines of varying genres targeted toward men and women. Joanna Schug and others investigated how frequently photos of black women and Asian men were displayed amongst the pages in comparison to their counterparts of other races and genders. Referencing both intersectional invisibility and gendered race theory, the study explained that people are 'more likely to explicitly and implicitly associate common stereotypes about Blacks with masculinity and common stereotypes about Asians with femininity.'[45] This common view has fostered the invisibility of both black women and Asian men within popular media culture because they do not adhere to the stereotypes of their respective racial group. The study coded 8,124 people shown in 5 issues of 6 magazines of varying genres. The highest circulation rates and 'the results indicate[d] that proportionally, Asian men and Black women were represented less in both magazines marketed to men and magazines marketed to women […] provid[ing] evidence that Asian men and Black women are rendered invisible in mass media.'[46] Although conducted with a small number of individuals and magazines, the results are representative of a startling trend of the invisibility of black women. I argue that these

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[44] Ibid., p. 359.
[45] Joanna Schug and others, 'Gendered Race in Mass Media: Invisibility of Asian Men and Black Women in Popular Magazines', *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 6.3 (2017), 222-236 <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000096> (p. 223).
[46] Ibid., pp. 228-229.

findings support the possibility that black women are not only invisible, but additionally they are ignored and misrepresented in both American and British cultures. Both psychological studies serve as evidence to endorse the invisibility that Adjaye and Glittens-Jones reference in their poems as not a singular or random life experience, but rather a collective sense of invisibility for black women, reinforced in various areas of their lives in the UK and US.

I have also experienced a sense of invisibility as a black woman. In 2017, I met a white American drama student that had come to the UK to study acting. I introduced myself to him and we had a brief conversation about the difficulty of moving from America to England. Two days later, I saw the same student in a corridor of the university and started a conversation with him. Shortly into the conversation he said, 'I don't think I've met you yet,' and proceeded to introduce himself. Although we had met and had a face-to-face conversation two days prior, he did not recognise my face. In August 2017, I travelled to Ashland, Oregon, in the US, to interview three black actresses in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's (OSF) company that season. OSF operates nine months of the year producing multiple shows in repertory, including Shakespeare, musicals, and new works. In the interviews, each actress touched upon the idea of being invisible as black women during their time at OSF. They were mistaken on a regular basis for other black actresses within the company by audience members. Actress Nemuna Ceesay shared her thoughts on this phenomenon:

> I'm one of maybe like four young-ish, say, like thirty-five down, black actresses here. All of us look very different. […] And it's like everyday somebody thinks I'm another one. […] You really, you sat there and watched me for three hours, or watched this person for three hours, and looked at my face and yet, you know, you can't differentiate?[47]

Black actresses in OSF's company are being mistaken for each other even though they have no physical resemblance to one another beyond being black women. Their individuality is going unnoticed, therefore rendering them invisible. It should be mentioned that the demographic of OSF audiences is predominantly white. The demographic of the entire state of Oregon is predominantly white as well. Upon my visit to Ashland to conduct interviews, I too was mistaken as one of the members of OSF's acting company by audience members. I was approached on more than one occasion and congratulated on my performance in a show, even though I was not part of OSF's acting company that season. The individuality and

[47] Appendices, Volume III, Nemuna Ceesay transcript, p. 93.

uniqueness of the black actresses is not recognised. In her book *Black Feminist Thought,* Patricia Hill Collins points out that 'the dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination.'[48] In the following section I will explore some historical controlling imagery of black women, and the ways in which this pervasive imagery of black women persist today.

1.3 Stereotypes of Black Women

Lisa M. Anderson has written about how audiences read race when it is presented on the screen and stage. She posits that representations of black women on screen and stage often override representations of black women witnessed in real life. 'The stage or screen image stands for black women in a way the token blacks in the office, or down the street, cannot. Thus, the white American interpretation of the black woman, as she is projected onto stage and screen, becomes the so-called real black.'[49] Anderson is referencing American interpretations, but this statement can be applied to the UK as well. The UK is an ethnically diverse country, but the highest concentration of the ethnically diverse demographic is in densely populated cites such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Coventry. The rural areas of the UK still have higher populations of white residents. Besides the token black person or family they may encounter from time to time, their understanding of blackness, and more particularly black women, is most likely derived from screen and stage representations.

In 1998, the advocacy group Children Now published findings from a study entitled 'A Different World: Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in Media'. At that time, the recognised racial demographic of America was rapidly changing and becoming more diverse. Increased conversations about race and the role that media plays in it were happening. Rather than focus on adult perceptions of media race messages, Children Now commissioned a ground-breaking study to explore children's perception of what they witnessed in the media, primarily through television shows and the news. A focus group of 1,200 children was used for the study, with 300 children from each the following designated racial groups: black, white, Asian, and Latino. The study discovered that:

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[48] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 10th edn (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 72.
[49] Lisa M. Anderson, *Mammies No More: The Changing Image of Black Women on Stage and Screen* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 1.

> Children – of all ages and all races – recognize the power of media in their lives. They look to the media for role models – […] And beyond superficial messages about style and appearance, children are getting more formative messages from the media. The characters they admire – and the news stories they watch – send both subtle and explicit signals about their value, their families, and their race.[50]

As explained earlier in this chapter, whiteness is the established dominate norm, placing blackness in the position of the non-dominate 'other' at the opposite end of the spectrum. This binary structure is constantly reinforced by the imagery, narratives, and representations presented in the performing arts industry.

In the 1980s, in the US, there was a paucity of black female representation in film and on syndicated television shows. Transitioning from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, black representation on television increased. The two shows I fondly recall watching as a kid along with my parents are *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*.

 [51]

The Cosby Show was an American sitcom that aired from 1984 to 1992. The comedy centred around the daily life of the Huxtables, a black family living in Brooklyn, New York. The Huxtable family included the father Cliff (played by Bill Cosby), who was a doctor, the mother Claire (played by Phylicia Rashad), who was a lawyer, and their five children: Theodore (Malcom Jamal-Warner), Denise (Lisa Bonet), Rudy (Keshia Knight Pulliam), Vanessa (Tempestt Bledsoe), and Sondra (Sabrina Le Beauf). In her book *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor*, Robin R. Means Coleman analyses black sitcoms in the US. In her discussion on *The Cosby Show,* she states that: 'The

[50] Children Now, 'A Different World: Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in Media', *Readwritethink.Org*, 1998 <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson96/different_world.pdf> [accessed 15 January 2020].
[51] NBC via Getty Images, *The Cosby Show – Season 6,* digital photograph, USA Today, 28 September 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/life/tv/2014/09/19/the-cosby-show-where-are-they-now/15903173/> [accessed 14 July 2020].

series broke ground by presenting the life of an upper-middle-class family, who just happened to be African American, through a lens of normalcy rather than the dysfunction and ridicule often associated with Black sitcoms.'[52] Although I come from a working class, rather than middle-class family, I identified with the show because it depicted a black family that I felt, in some ways, was similar to my own. The Huxtable household life exemplified my personal ideals of what my family was, as well as what my family could strive to be; by that I mean the upper middle-class status. *The Cosby Show* aired for eight seasons and had a total of 202 episodes. Unfortunately, in the early 2000s, the show's creator and star, Bill Cosby, was accused and charged with multiple counts of sexual assault.[53] However, the success and popularity of *The Cosby Show* in the 1980s and 1990s was the beginning of much more black representation in film and television in the US at the end of the twentieth century.

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A Different World was a comedy series spin-off from *The Cosby Show* that aired from 1987 to 1993. The premise of the show was centred around the second oldest daughter of the Huxtable family, Denise (Lisa Bonet), and her experience leaving home to attend the fictional HBCU (historically black college and university), Hillman College. Actress Lisa Bonet left the show after the first season due to a pregnancy, but the show and its popularity continued to grow after her departure. *A Different World* portrayed positive representations of black people and introduced America to HBCUs. A black higher education environment had not

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[52] Robin R. Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Routledge, 2012) p. 189. ProQuest ebook.
[53] Matt Giles and Nate Jones, 'A Timeline of the Abuse Charges Against Bill Cosby [Updated]', *Vulture*, 15 December 2015 <https://www.vulture.com/2014/09/timeline-of-the-abuse-charges-against-cosby.html> [accessed 24 October 2020].
[54] Gary Null, *A Different World – Season 1,* digital photograph, NBC News, 24 September 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/different-world-still-key-cultural-force-30-years-later-n804336> [accessed 14 July 2020].
[55] NBCU Photo Bank, *A Different World,* digital photograph, Entertainment Weekly, 12 April 1991, <https://ew.com/article/1991/04/12/evolution-different-world/> [accessed 14 July 2020].

been shown on television before, and the show inspired more black Americans to apply for and attend HBCUs. The show had a total of six seasons with 144 episodes. *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World* were the beginning of a plethora of black television shows in America.

The 1990s to early 2000s saw an influx of black shows with more black female representation on sitcoms such as: *Family Matters* (1989-98), *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-96), Martin (1992-97), *Living Single* (1993-98), *Sister, Sister* (1994-99), *Moesha* (1996-2001), *The Parkers* (1999-2004), *Girlfriends* (2000-08), and *One on One* (2001-06). Although a few more black women were being represented on TV, they were primarily situated on shows that were male character driven, with one or two token black female characters. Furthermore, the black representation on American television was mainly relegated to the genre of black sitcoms. Black characters, particularly black female characters, were rarely integrated into popular television dramas.[56] Additionally, there was a narrow scope of the types of black women being represented. For example, there was the mother. Either portrayed as a fiercely independent single mother who was overworked and overwhelmed with the responsibility of taking care of her children, or as a married mother, with unrelentless devotion to her family to the point of her own detriment. Another example of the common type of black female representation was the sexy woman, who always wore tight, sexually suggestive clothing and was chased by men who were merely interested in her body. She only engaged in sex and fleeting romantic encounters, never a committed loving or long-term relationship. Lastly, there was the sassy friend with an attitude. She was constantly annoyed and/or angry at anyone for any reason. She was usually the butt of the joke for the major and supporting characters, and portrayed as 'less attractive', ugly, fat, or less intelligent than her counterparts. I struggled to identify with the sparse representations of black women on stage and screen. I did not see a reflection of myself within the limited, stereotypical portrayals of black female characters. This is the kind of representation I saw of black women, and by extension myself, growing up.

When I got older and began my actor training, the representation of black women in the performing arts had not advanced much from my childhood, the only difference was now I would potentially play the narrow scope of these character types. Since I made this observation about the representation of black women in the performing arts, it stood to reason

[56] Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 77-88. ProQuest ebook.

that other black actresses had done the same. Some of the actresses I interviewed for this thesis had indeed made similar observations. Black British actress and Olivier Award nominee Josette Bushell-Mingo noticed the following about the representation of black women in the performing arts: 'In terms of the portrayal of blacks, the portrayal of women was almost non-existent really. And then we fell into those clichés, particularly from the United Kingdom. I'm thinking in the United States of you know, the mammy. The mammy, the mulatto.'[57] Black British actress Kimisha Lewis had this to say about her observations of the representation of blackness in film and television in the UK:

> It's almost like we appeared for slavery. Disappeared. Came back in the 50s to help [this refers to the Windrush generation in the UK]. Disappeared again. Came back in the 70s and were prostitutes and drug addicts. […] Then that disappeared, and then we came back in the 2000s as gang lovers and gangsters. […] Yeah, and we're all into knife crime and guns.[58]

Based on my observations and the insights of the actresses I interviewed, this kind of representation of blackness, and black women, has been going on for some time in the UK and US and needs to be addressed. As explained when discussing colonialization and the transatlantic slave trade in section 1.2 of this chapter, the UK and US have profited – and continue to profit – from the perpetuation of white supremacist ideologies. These ideologies are reinforced through multiple forms of institutional and systemic racism which are reflected in the representation of the 'other' in the performing arts industry.

Section 1.2 spoke of the categorisation of black bodies as subhuman during the slave trade. Amid colonization, African people and their descendants were believed to be the living biological bridge between the animal kingdom and the established dominate white human form, as demonstrated with the example of Sara Baartman. She is not the only example of the inhumane treatment of people deemed 'other' by dominate European forces. 'The widespread practice of displaying indigenous peoples in colonial fairs contributed to the creation of a sense of radical difference between colonizer and colonized, between European and non-European, between familiar and strange.'[59] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was not uncommon to find black, and other indigenous peoples from non-European lands,

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[57] Appendices, Volume III, Josette Bushell-Mingo transcript, p. 4.
[58] Appendices, Volume III, Kimisha Lewis and Aimee Powell transcript, pp. 65-66.
[59] Walter Putnam, 'Please Don't Feed the Natives': Human Zoos, Colonial Desire, and Bodies on Display', *French Literature Series; Leiden*, 39 (2012), 55-68 <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/docview/1352857718/fulltextPDF/CAE84175862443FFPQ/1?accountid=10749> [accessed 4 January 2020] (p. 55).

exhibited in freak shows. They were often displayed in cages next to animals in traveling carnivals and human zoos. Exhibiting black and indigenous people in this manner altered their existence into curious objects to be displayed, which further informed and perpetuated European racialised assumptions, perceptions, and stereotypes of the exotic 'other'.[60] Additionally, black slaves were not considered people, but rather the legal property of their slave masters, in the same category as cattle and other livestock. Black female bodies were especially problematic amongst colonisers and slave owners because of the duplexity of their African physiology. On this subject, Tate writes: 'African women were described as promiscuous, able to cope with the pain of childbirth, bestial, savages, anti-motherhood, naked, without shame. […] *The* Black woman's difference was constructed as psychological, cultural, moral, and physical.'[61] These kinds of distorted ideas about black women's bodies have persisted and laid the groundwork for the stereotypical archetypes of the black female representation present in the performing arts industry today.

There has been a dearth of 'compelling representations of Black femaleness' on stage and screen.[62] Black women are frequently portrayed stereotypically as servants or hypersexualised beings. Earlier in this chapter, I also discussed how colonialism and slavery created a lust and disgust dichotomy for black women's bodies. In 'Dark Continent, Dark Stage', Konkobo explains the active effort to disseminate these ideas:

> Racial and cultural propaganda aiming to reify Africans derives its success from a sustained effort made by the colonial system to stage the Other in very peculiar ways. That ideology has left enduring effects of fascination and fear of the Black body even to this day.[63]

These systems would initiate the limited negative stereotypes of black women currently found in the performing arts industry.

The word stereotype is common vernacular. Because I refer to stereotypes repeatedly throughout this thesis, the following is a working definition of the word for the purposes of this research: 'A social *stereotype* is a mental association between a social group or category

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Tate, pp. 1-2.
[62] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, Mass: South End, 1992), p. 119.
[63] Konkobo, p. 1098.

and a trait. The association may reflect a statistical reality, but it need not.'[64] Stereotypes can be based in fact or fiction. They can have either positive or negative connotations. Colonial ideology and pervasive racist beliefs have led to the propagation of negative influential imagery of black people in the performing arts. For the purposes of my research, I will only focus on the negative stereotypes of black women in the UK and US, and their historical connotations. In *Young, Black, and Female,* Heidi Mirza explains how black female characters have been written on the page, and I ascribe this sentiment to current black female characters on the screen and stage as well. 'In the past and depending on who held the pen, black women have almost exclusively been portrayed in terms of negative and regressive stereotypes: "Sapphire", the overbearing, domineering matriarch; "Aunt Jemima", the homely, loyal mammy; "Jezebel", the erotic, sensual temptress.'[65] The following is a more comprehensive exploration of each of the three stereotypes. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term 'Mammy' in lieu of 'Aunt Jemima'.

The 'Mammy'

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Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

During slavery, black female slaves worked in the fields harvesting crops, as well as bore the responsibility of domestic work within their slave master's homes. They handled the cooking and cleaning of the home, and often helped raised their master's children. After the abolition of slavery, one of the few sectors black women could find work was domestic service in white households: cooking, cleaning, and minding the children. From this historical context

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[64] Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger, 'Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations', *California Law Review*, 94.4 (2006), 945-967 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20439056> (p. 949).
[65] Heidi Safia Mirza, *Young, Female and Black* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 146.
[66] NAACP Paris TX, *Hattie McDaniel, Gone with the Wind,* digital photograph, NAACP Voices from Paris TX, 12 February 2011, <http://paris-tx-naacp.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/help-stereotypes.html> [accessed 13 October 2017].
[67] Brent Staples, *Gone with the Wind*, digital photograph, The New York Times, 11 February 2011 <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/opinion/sunday/black-characters-in-search-of-reality.html> [accessed 6 February 2019].

the 'mammy' stereotype was born. *Mammies No More: The Changing Image of Black Women on Stage and Screen* provides a detailed explanation of what characterises this stereotype:

> As the "Negro wench" she is typified visually by the kerchief tied around her head, her apron, and her large size, as well as her racial markers of big lips and wide nose. […] The mammy is also a symbol of motherhood as perceived by whites. In the mythic construction, the black woman "mammy" is the caretaker of the whites' home and children first, and her own second. […] In essence then, the mammy is a black woman who focuses her time, love, devotion, and attention on whites, particularly her "adopted" white family, rather than on her own black family.[68]

Collins further describes the 'mammy' as 'obese, dark, and with characteristically African features […] an unsuitable partner for White men. She is asexual and therefore is free to become a surrogate mother.'[69] The establishment of this type of depiction of black women serves to reassure white people of the benefits black women can provide in the society, while simultaneously presenting them as non-threatening entities who seek and find comfort in carrying out subservient roles for white people. The continual depiction of the 'mammy' stereotype aids in influencing black maternal behaviour and perpetuates the racial oppression of black women.[70]

The most notable example of the 'mammy' stereotype is Hattie McDaniel, literally playing a character called Mammy in the award winning 1939 film *Gone with the Wind.* McDaniel won the Best Supporting Actress Academy Award for her portrayal of Mammy the following year, making her the first African American to ever win the prestigious award. At that time, there were fewer roles available for black women to play on screen, and McDaniel considered her win a great honour. This role helped pave the way and open doors for the black actresses of today. She said the following in her Academy Award acceptance speech, 'This is one of the happiest moments of my life, and I want to thank each one of you who had a part in selecting me for one of the awards, for your kindness. […] I sincerely hope I shall always be a credit to my race and to the motion picture industry.'[71] McDaniel was a film actress at a time where racial tension was rife in America. Less than a century after slavery was abolished, legal segregation was in effect via Jim Crow Laws. It would be another

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[68] Anderson, p. 10.
[69] Collins, p. 92.
[70] Ibid., p. 73.
[71] Margaret Herrick Library, *Academy Awards Acceptance Speech Database*, <http://aaspeechesdb.oscars.org/link/012-2/> [accessed 16 October 2017].

twenty-five years before the US would see major changes in legislation, outlawing the unfair treatment of black people; namely, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968.[72] The presence of the 'mammy' stereotype is fathomable when viewed through an early/mid-twentieth century context, but, unfortunately, this stereotype has persisted into twenty-first century representations of black women as well.

A more recent and notable depiction of the 'mammy' stereotype is from the 2011 film *The Help.* The film takes place in the US state of Mississippi during the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The premise of the film involves Eugenia 'Skeeter' Phelan, a young white woman and aspiring writer, who returns from college and interviews black maids so she can write a book about their real-life experiences working for high-society white families. There are numerous black actresses in the film playing roles of domestic servants in white households. However, considerable focus is given to a black servant named Aibileen Clark, played by black American actress Viola Davis.

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Viola Davis as Aibileen Clark in *The Help* (2011)

When the film debuted, Davis commented about playing the character of Aibileen Clark in an online video interview about the film called *Making Of*:

> For me, it felt like a movie where it wasn't just a chance for me to create a character that was interesting and complicated, but it was also a chance for me to be in a movie that made a statement that illuminated a part of our history that we have a tendency to be silent about. I see Aibileen as being a reluctant hero. And I think she enters the

[72] Office of the Historian, 'The Civil Rights Movement and the Second Reconstruction, 1945 – 1968', *History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives,* 2008 <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Keeping-the-Faith/Civil-Rights-Movement/> [accessed 7 October 2019].
[73] Kevin C. Johnson, *The Help,* digital photograph, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 7 August 2011, <https://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/movies/viola-davis-had-concerns-about-playing-maid-in-the-help/article_534676f1-be7d-53e0-ab4c-a46f30927555.html> [accessed 15 October 2019].
[74] DarkSarcasm, *Still from The Help,* digital photograph, Fanpop, <https://www.fanpop.com/clubs/the-help/images/43234955/title/aibileen-mae-mobley-photo> [accessed 14 July 2020].

> story a grieving bitter woman after her son dies, her only son. Her only child, and she loses her purpose. […] So now she is just tapped into duty, just getting by, just being invisible. Until Skeeter enters the picture, and what Skeeter stimulates in her is the seed, the excitement of having a purpose, something else drive her life.[75]

Although the character of Aibileen in many ways is a stereotypical 'mammy' role, Davis saw more than a stereotype in the character when she read the book and screenplay. She viewed Aibileen as a fully developed, layered, and realised person, rather than a trivial 'mammy' trope typically represented in films. In an article published online further discussing *The Help,* Kevin C. Johnson interviewed Davis and asked her about previous roles she played before the role of Aibileen. He writes: 'Davis says those film roles were fantastic opportunities and is thankful for that time on screen. But she says she's sometimes limited to four or five scenes in a movie, which isn't enough to present a fleshed-out character.'[76] Later in the article Davis is directly quoted as saying, 'I don't always get a chance to go on a journey and interact and create, and ("The Help") was an opportunity to do so. […] At the end of the day, I didn't see her as a maid. I saw her as a person, and that's important to emphasize.'[77]

Davis may have viewed Aibileen as a fully fleshed-out character, more than a mere maid, and from her interviews it sounds like she did her best to emphasise that. Yet by the time the film was edited and went to cinemas some audiences were not convinced, including myself. Sara Jeanpierre, one of the British actresses I interviewed, mentions an experience in drama school where she was cast in a servant role and the school wanted her to reference *The Help* in the development of her character for the production.

> So, when I was in Bruford, I got cast as a house servant. The way that they sold it to me was that 'You are going to be like the women in *The Help*.' When I first saw *The Help,* I was in Texas. Myself, and I think there might have been one other person in the cinema, the whole cinema, that was not white. And I just remember feeling so uncomfortable watching.[78]

The association of Black Women Historians (ABWH) considered the book and the film *The Help* to be a distorted representation of black women working in the domestic service

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[75] Making Of, *Viola Davis on 'The Help'*, online video interview, YouTube, 31 January 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YW_gZcmJ-w> [accessed 2 May 2018].
[76] Kevin C. Johnson, 'Viola Davis had Concerns About Playing Maid in "The Help", *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 7 August 2011 <https://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/movies/viola-davis-had-concerns-about-playing-maid-in-the-help/article_534676f1-be7d-53e0-ab4c-a46f30927555.html> [accessed 15 October 2019].
[77] Ibid.
[78] Appendices, Volume III, Sara Jeanpierre transcript, p. 46.

industry in 1960s Mississippi. They published an open statement about the film on their website in 2011 to provide more accurate historical context, as this was missing from the film.[79]

> *The Help* distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic workers. […] *The Help's* representation of these women is a disappointing resurrection of Mammy – […] The popularity of this most recent iteration is troubling because it reveals a contemporary nostalgia for the days when a black woman could only hope to clean the White House rather than reside in it.[80]

It has been nearly a decade since *The Help* debuted in cinemas, and Davis' performance as Aibileen Clark earned her a second Academy Award nomination for Best Actress in 2012. Davis received her first Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress in 2009 for the role of Mrs. Miller in the film *Doubt* (2008), an adaptation of John Patrick Shanley's 2004 play by the same name. Since 2012, Davis' acting career and celebrity status has grown tremendously. She is the star of the hit American TV series *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020), which had six successful seasons. She also won her first Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 2017 for the role of Rose Maxson in the 2016 screen adaptation of August Wilson's play *Fences* (1985). Davis is *the* face of black female representation in the performing arts industry right now.

Seven years after the debut of *The Help,* Davis changed her views about the film and playing the role of Aibileen. In 2018, *New York Times* journalist Mekado Murphy asked Davis if she had ever passed on a role and regretted it. Her reply was:

> Almost a better question is, have I ever done roles that I've regretted? I have, and "The Help" is on that list. But not in terms of the experience and the people involved because they were all great. […] I just felt that at the end of the day that it wasn't the voices of the maids that were heard. […] And I know that if you do a movie where the whole premise is, I want to know what it feels like to work for white people and to bring up children in 1963, I want to hear how you really feel about it. I never heard that in the course of the movie.[81]

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[79] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix A for complete ABWH statement, p. 4.
[80] Ida E. Jones and others, 'An Open Statement to the Fans of The Help', *Association of Black Women Historians,* 2011 <http://abwh.org/2011/08/12/an-open-statement-to-the-fans-of-the-help/> [accessed 16 July 2020].
[81] Mekado Murphy, 'Viola Davis on What "The Help" Got Wrong and How She Proves Herself', *New York Times*, 11 September 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/11/movies/viola-davis-interview-widows-toronto-film-festival.html> [accessed 15 September 2019].

Although Davis initially believed that Aibileen was a fleshed-out character, in the end, she realised the representation of Aibileen, and the other black women in the film, had been reduced to 'mammy' stereotypes. They lacked the nuance and depth she had envisioned when first taking on the project. In the July/August 2020 issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine*,* Davis further reflects on her involvement in the film.

> 'There's no one who's not entertained by *The Help.* But there's a part of me that feels like I betrayed myself, and my people, because I was in a movie that wasn't ready to [tell the whole truth],' Davis says. *The Help,* like so many other movies, was 'created in the filter and the cesspool of systemic racism.'[82]

Jeanpierre and Davis' views support my claim that 'mammy' stereotypes are still being portrayed in the twenty-first century.

The 'Jezebel'

 [83]

Pam Grier as Foxy Brown in *Foxy Brown* (1974)

Whereas the 'mammy' stereotype depicts a nurturing asexualised black woman, the 'jezebel' stereotype is quite the opposite. During colonialization the 'jezebel' 'was constructed through the initial European encounter with Africans. They associated their nakedness (which was due to the high temperature) to their lewdness and their polygamy practices to them not being able to control their libidos.'[84] As colonialization paved the way for slavery, black women were distinguished as bawdy and salacious. They were considered manipulative and sexually

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[82] Sonia Saraiya, 'Viola Davis: "My Entire Life Has Been a Protest"', *Vanity Fair*, 14 July 2020 <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/07/cover-story-viola-davis> [accessed 16 July 2020].
[83] Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc., *Foxy Brown,* digital photograph, IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071517/mediaviewer/rm2672985344> [accessed 20 April 2017].
[84] Stephanie Keyaka, 'The Fetishization of Black Women in Mainstream Culture: Exploring the "Jezebel" and "Mammy" Black Female Stereotypes', *Stephanie's Civic Issues Blog*, (2016) <https://sites.psu.edu/mycivicissuesblog/2016/04/07/the-fetishization-of-black-women-in-mainstream-culture-exploring-the-jezebel-and-mammy-black-female-stereotypes/> [accessed 7 May 2019].

aggressive, therefore the rape and sexual assault they endured from their masters and other white men was justified. The black female body was viewed as a site specifically designed by nature for manual labour, reproduction, and administering sexual services.[85] Collins further illustrates that 'the jezebel, whore, or 'hoochie' – is central in this nexus of controlling images of Black womanhood. Because efforts to control Black women's sexuality lie at the heart of Black women's oppression, historical jezebels and contemporary 'hoochies' represent a deviant Black female sexuality.'[86]

American Blaxploitation films of the 1970s gave rise to the film and title character *Foxy Brown* (1974).

> Blaxploitation films feature a black hero or heroine who is both socially and politically conscious. They also illustrate that blacks are not monolithic by depicting the films' protagonists in the roles of police detectives, vigilantes, and pimps, among others. The characters are strong because they possess the ability to survive in and navigate the establishment while maintaining their blackness.[87]

The Blaxploitation era was very popular among black Americans. It was one of the first times that black characters were represented on screen as lead characters and heroes rather than sidekicks or victims. Although these films helped raise awareness of the shifting cultural and political consciousness in America following the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, the Blaxploitation genre failed to reject certain established stereotypes of black people, the 'jezebel' being among them. Actress Pam Grier playing the role of Foxy Brown is an example of the 'jezebel' stereotype. In *Foxy Brown,* Grier poses as a prostitute and teams up with a group of neighbourhood vigilantes to avenge the murder of her undercover cop boyfriend, who was killed by the mafia.

Novotny Lawrence provides the following description of the 'jezebel' in *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre:* 'a salacious, alluring temptress with a voracious sexual appetite, amoral, and often us[es] sex to manipulate.'[88] By posing as a prostitute, Foxy Brown

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[85] Tate*;* Johanna M. Collier, Matthew J. Taylor and Zoe D. Peterson, 'Re-examining the "Jezebel" Stereotype: The Role of Implicit and Psychosexual Attitudes Citation Metadata', *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 41.3 & 4 (2017), 92-104 <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=uce&id=GALE%7CA554787914&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon> [accessed 4 October 2019].
[86] Collins*,* p. 81.
[87] Novotny Lawrence, *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 25. Google ebook.
[88] Dr. David Pilgrim, 'Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia: The Jezebel Stereotype', *Ferris State University*, 2012 <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/index.htm> [accessed 2 January 2018].

uses her body and sex to manipulate men, acquire information, and gain access to the men that murdered her boyfriend, therefore I typify her as a 'jezebel'. Growing discourse in sex-positive feminism, which is 'the notion of women using sex as a source of pleasure, expression and resistance to restrictive norms', aims to promote the sexual liberation of woman.[89] It further challenges and resists the patriarchal domination of sexuality.[90] It could be argued that by taking control of her sexuality, becoming a prostitute, and using it to her advantage, Foxy Brown is rejecting the patriarchal control over her body and sexuality, wielding her own sexual agency as she sees fit. However, since the definition of a 'jezebel' is a woman that uses her sexuality to manipulate rather than elicit her own pleasure, I am inclined to disagree with a sex-positive feminist analysis of this particular stereotype.

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Thandie Newton as Maeve Millay in *Westworld* (2016)

In October 2016, HBO debuted *Westworld,* a television series based on the 1973 film with the same name written by Michael Crichton. On this critically acclaimed show, black British actress Thandiwe Newton plays Maeve Millay, a contemporary version of the 'jezebel' stereotype. The show is set in the future, where technological advancements have allowed for the creation of themed amusement parks populated by humanlike android hosts. The elite and wealthy visit these parks to interact with the android hosts, and play out their fantasies in

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[89] Ummni Khan, 'Let's Get it On: Some Reflections on Sex-Positive Feminism', *Women's Rights Law Reporter*, 38.3/4 (2017), 346-354 <https://heinonline-org.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/worts38&id=360&collection=journals&index=> [accessed 8 October 2020] (p.346).

[90] See the following for views on black female stereotypes with a sex-positive feminist approach: Bryana H. French, 'More Than Jezebels and Freaks: Exploring How Black Girls Navigate Sexual Coercion and Sexual Scripts', *Journal of African American Studies*, 17.1 (2013), 35-50 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9218-1>; Treva B. Lindsey, 'Complicated Crossroads: Black Feminisms, Sex Positivism, and Popular Culture, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 6.1 (2013), 55-65 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2012.739914>.

[91] Angela Dickens, *Maeve Westworld,* digital photograph, Pinterest, 2016 <https://www.pinterest.com/angiedickens5/westworldwhoa/> [accessed 14 July 2020].

[92] Vanessa Cole, *Westworld Season 1 Episode 2,* digital photograph, Westworld Watchers, 2016 <http://westworldwatchers.com/2017/06/10/westworld-rewind-episode-2-chestnut/> [accessed 14 July 2020].

various capacities, ranging from violent, to adventurous, to sexual. The first season of the show focuses on the old American West themed side of the park, Westworld. Newton's character, Maeve, is one of the android hosts that populate the park. Maeve is the madame of a brothel located in the Mariposa Saloon. Historically, madams were older women who had retired from the sex work profession and managed the younger sex workers in the saloons. Maeve, however, does not fit the profile of an older retired madame, and she regularly participates in sexual acts with park guests in addition to running the brothel and managing the sex workers. Maeve begins to question her reality and searches for the truth behind her existence in Westworld, always using her body and sexuality to manipulate men along the way. The character of Maeve is more nuanced than other contemporary 'jezebel' representations in film and television, and towards the end of first season, more of her backstory is revealed. Having viewed only season one of *Westworld,* Maeve appears to be a regurgitation of the 'jezebel' stereotype. Both Foxy Brown and Maeve are black female characters that have the potential to be fully fleshed-out, and since *Westworld* is still in syndication, the possibility exists for Maeve to blossom into something beyond the 'jezebel' trope. During my research into the 'jezebel' stereotype, I have observed that the potential to play a flesh-out character for black women often presents itself if the black actresses playing the roles are willing to exploit their flesh. In an uncanny way, life imitates art, as black actresses are placed in the position of becoming real-life 'jezebels', by using their sexuality to advance, or get notoriety in the performing arts industry. Halle Berry is a good example of this.

Halle Berry is the first black actress to win the renowned Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role in its ninety-three-year history. Although she has been acting in film since the early 1990s and has played Academy Award worthy roles in films like *Losing Isaiah* (1995) and *Things We Lost in the Fire* (2007)*,* she was not nominated and did not win an Academy Award until she played the role of Leticia Musgrove in 2001's *Monster's Ball.* In this film *Berry* appears completely nude and engages in a long explicit sex scene with white male co-star Billy Bob Thornton. In the film, Berry's character, Leticia, has a husband in prison on death row. She struggles to take care of their son on her own, and she is very verbally abusive towards him. Leticia's husband is executed. The newly widowed single mother faces eviction from her home and takes a job at a diner to make ends meet. While working, she meets a white retired death row corrections officer, Hank (played by Billy Bob Thornton). Hank, unbeknownst to her, assisted with her husband's execution. Hank is also dealing with the

recent loss of his son. Leticia's son dies not long after her husband is executed. Hank and Leticia seek solace from their grief with each other, which leads to them engaging in sexual intercourse. Leticia eventually finds out that Hank was involved with her husband's execution, and although she is upset by this discovery, she is seated next to him eating ice cream at the end of the film.

Monster's Ball is most remembered for the explicit sex scene between Berry and Thornton. In section 1.2 of this chapter, I present and examine the lust and disgust dichotomy white people, and in particular white men, have with the black female body. During slavery and colonization black women's bodies were the proverbial 'forbidden fruit'. They were physical sites that white men could enact their basest sexual desires upon, because black women were viewed as lascivious and amoral, even to the point of animalistic. Berry played the drama and lived experience of Leticia in *Monster's Ball* well. Her dramatic performances in *Losing Isaiah* and *Things We Lost in the Fire* were of equal calibre, and yet she was not nominated for an Academy Award for either of those films. Eleven other black actresses have been nominated for the Best Actress in a Leading Role Academy Award. None of them appear nude or engage in a graphic sex scene in the roles they were nominated for. This suggests the possibility that Berry winning the Academy Award for Best Actress in 2001 for *Monster's Ball* may have been influenced by the explicit sex scene. In the film, the character Hank gets to act on his sexual desire for the 'other'. The sex scene is not approached in a loving or gentle way. On the contrary, it takes place in a living room setting on the floor, as opposed to a bed. Leticia begs and pleads for Hank to 'make her feel good' as their clothes are taken off in a rough manner. There is no emotional connection or intimacy, and they are not facing each other for most of the time that the intercourse is taking place. As of 2020, Berry remains the only black woman to ever win the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role.

The depiction of black women as hypersexualised and manipulative is harmful to the identity and reputation of black women in the UK and US because:

> Not only did the jezebel present black women as sexually aggressive, but the values inherent in the characterization of blacks as uninhibitedly sexual also would lay the foundations for the later notion that blacks were amoral. […] The sexual black woman is deemed dangerous because she appears capable of undermining the patriarchal notions of family on which the country was based.[93]

[93] Anderson, pp. 87-88.

The continued portrayal of the 'jezebel' stereotype will only derogate black women further and reaffirm the false narrow scope of who they are.

The 'Sapphire'

 [94]

Ernestine Wade as Sapphire in *Amos and Andy* (1951)

The 'jezebel' stereotype is viewed as dangerous because of the way sexual prowess is used to manipulate. The third and final common stereotype I will discuss is the 'sapphire'. The 'sapphire' is often considered the most intimidating of the three stereotypes of black women.

> The Sapphire image, which was the antithesis of the Mammy representation, […] was often depicted as a large, but not obese, woman of brown or dark brown complexion. Her primary role was to emasculate Black men with frequent verbal assaults, which she conducted in a loud, animated, verbose fashion.[95]

Rarely referred to as 'sapphire' anymore, the modern-day equivalent of this stereotype is better known as the 'angry black woman'. This stereotype was named after the character Sapphire Stevens from the popular 1950s American TV show *Amos 'n Andy*. *Amos 'n Andy* was the first all-black TV sitcom to air in the US from 1951 to 1955. In this radio comedy turned television sitcom, Sapphire Stevens was married to George 'Kingfish' Stevens. George was portrayed as lazy and ignorant, thus inciting Sapphire's anger. 'The Sapphire caricature, from the 1800s through the mid-1900s, popularly portrayed black women as sassy, emasculating and domineering […] this trope depicted African American women as

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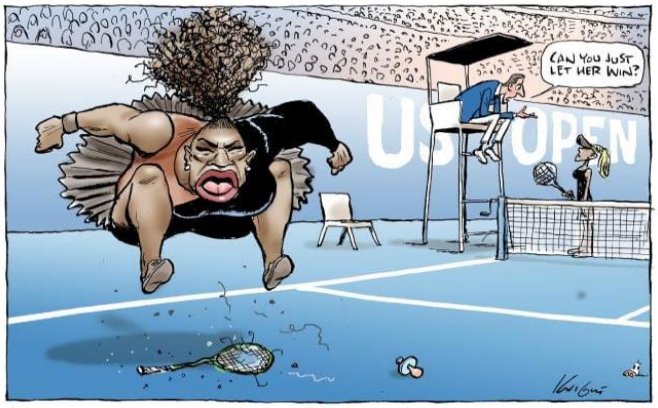
[94] Greg Reese, *Sapphire From 'Amos 'n Andy',* digital photograph, Our Weekly Los Angeles, 3 October 2013, <http://ourweekly.com/photos/2013/oct/03/35262/> [accessed 5 June 2017].

[95] Carolyn M. West, 'Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical Images of Black Women and their Implications for Psychotherapy', *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 32.3 (1995), <458-466 https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.32.3.458> (p. 461).

aggressive, loud, and angry – in direct violation of social norms.'[96] This trope of black women as aggressive, loud, and angry is not only present in the 'sapphire' stereotypical characters in the performing arts, but it is one of the most common stereotypes ascribed to black women in their everyday lives. The 'angry black woman' has been particularly emphasised by news syndicates and social media outlets. One the most recent examples is from the 2018 US Open final tennis match between Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka. During the match Williams was issued code violations which led to her breaking her racket and calling the umpire a thief. Amidst the media storm that followed, cartoonist Mark Knight, of the Australian newspaper *Herald Sun,* drew the following controversial cartoon.



[97]

The cartoon caused a massive uproar online and in social media for a couple of reasons. First, Williams is depicted as a large 'angry black woman'. Secondly, Williams' opponent, Osaka appears to be drawn as a petite white woman with blond hair, even though she is of Hattian and Japanese descent, has brown skin similar to the skin tone of Williams, and a physical frame only slightly smaller than Williams.

[96] Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture*, 'Popular and Pervasive Stereotypes of African Americans'*, 2019 <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-african-americans> [accessed 18 January 2020].
[97] Mark Knight, cartoon, Herald Sun, 12 September 2018 <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/herald-sun-backs-mark-knights-cartoon-on-serena-williams/news-story/30c877e3937a510d64609d89ac521d9f> [accessed 18 January 2020].

 [98]

Serena Williams Naomi Osaka

After his cartoon went viral, Knight received backlash for what many considered a racist and sexist illustration of what took place at the US Open match. The *Herald Sun,* however, backed Knight, who said:

> I drew this cartoon Sunday night after seeing the US Open final and seeing the world's best tennis player have a tantrum and thought that was interesting. […] The cartoon about Serena is about her poor behaviour on the day, not about race. The world has just gone crazy.[99]

Many others took to social media in support of Knight saying the world is too PC (politically correct) and claimed that Williams acted with poor behaviour. They called her names such as: petulant, tennis brat, spoiled, and a bully. Critics of Williams' behaviour refused to acknowledge the fact that, in the past, white male tennis players had behaved in the same manner and/or worse during matches and suffered little or no penalty. This is in stark contrast with Williams, who was docked points which ultimately caused her to lose the match, as well as the US Open title that year. This situation illustrates how pervasive stereotypes of black women can be, because people can automatically ascribe prejudiced stereotypical characteristics to black women in real life and not realise the inherent and systemic racism behind it.

There are countless iterations of the 'sapphire' trope present in film and television today. The reality TV shows *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (2008-present) and *Love and Hip Hop: New York* (2010-present), as well as the popular musical TV drama *Empire* (2015-2020) are prime examples.

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[98] Rachelle Hampton, digital photograph, Slate, 7 September 2018 <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/09/naomi-osaka-serena-williams-opponent-in-the-u-s-open-final-is-evidence-of-the-williams-sisters-huge-influence-on-tennis.html> [accessed 16 July 2020].

[99] Aleks Devic, 'Herald Sun Backs Mark Knight's Cartoon on Serena Williams', *Herald Sun*, 12 September 2018 <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/herald-sun-backs-mark-knights-cartoon-on-serena-williams/news-story/30c877e3937a510d64609d89ac521d9f> [accessed 18 January 2020].

 [100]
Taraji P. Henson as Cookie in *Empire* (2015)

Black American actress Taraji P. Henson plays the role of Cookie Lyon in *Empire.* It is an American musical drama television series that aired for six seasons. The show follows the fictional music industry tycoon, Lucious Lyon. He is a hip-hop artist turned CEO of Empire music company. Diagnosed with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), he attempts to protect his legacy by pitting his sons against each other for future control of the company. Cookie is Lucious' ex-wife, who was imprisoned for seventeen years for illegal acts she carried out to help Lucious start his music career and the company. After serving her time, she is released from prison and returns to Empire to claim her share of the company now that it is successful. In nearly every scene of the first season, Cookie is brazen, aggressive, angry and/or extremely demanding of other characters. She is portrayed as a selfish woman, only displaying a miniscule amount of warmth or maternal qualities towards her sons for her own personal gain.

These stereotypes of black women have been around for over a century, and all three are prevalent and popular today. Characteristics of the 'mammy', 'jezebel', and 'sapphire' exist amongst black women in modern American and British societies, but I argue that these representations of black women are but a small portion of the full spectrum of black womanhood. There are not enough examples of black female representation on stage and screen to counter the pervasive 'mammy', 'jezebel', and 'sapphire' stereotypes. Because of this, the antiquated racist white hegemonic depictions of black women are continually perpetuated. My exploration of the three prevailing stereotypes and their current incarnations suggests that only a minor shift in the representation of black women has taken place. I asked the actresses I interviewed for this thesis if they noticed a shift in how black women are represented in the performing arts industry. Bushell-Mingo thinks:

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[100] Chuck Hodes, *Taraji P. Henson's Cookie,* digital photograph, NPR, 23 September 2015 <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/09/23/442523806/the-tao-of-cookie-behind-the-empire-characters-many-layered-persona> [accessed 16 July 2020].

> In terms of how black women are being portrayed, it has changed. I don't think you can ask that question without noting the change. And it *is* changing, and how is it changing? […] I think that the African descent communities, diaspora are galvanizing much more. I think social media has helped immensely. […] Netflix has helped. […] I think that's changed shape. That has changed the playing field, of course. *Black Panther* shifted it again. […] In terms of women particularly, and girls? I don't think it's changed enough.[101]

A post-blackness ideology can aid the progression away from the outdated, racist, and limiting tropes of black women, because post-blackness theory challenges 'a homogenizing media culture that makes all of us [black people] more alike than we might like to suggest.'[102] Touré writes about the application of post-blackness theory in the twenty-first century. In *Who's Afraid of Post-blackness? What it Means to be Black Now,* the idea of the uniqueness of each individual within the African diaspora is explored. Within post-blackness theory, 'there is no dogmatically narrow, authentic Blackness because the possibilities for Black identity are infinite. To say something or someone is not Black – is to sell Blackness short. To limit the potential of Blackness.'[103] Post-blackness supports the belief that there are as many ways to be black as there are black people in the world. Working from this premise would allow space for deviation from current negative stereotypical representations of black women, and grant access to a full spectrum of fleshed-out, well-rounded, authentic representations of black womanhood within narrative construction, and characterisation in the performing arts industry. Michael Eric Dyson further asserts: 'That's why post-blackness is so suggestive a term: It clearly doesn't signify the end of Blackness; it points, instead, to the end of the reign of a narrow, single notion of Blackness.'[104] A post-blackness theoretical approach to the representation of black women can lead to more compelling artistic outcomes because of the depth and variety it encourages.

Section 1.2 of this chapter outlined how colonialization and the transatlantic slave trade laid the groundwork for the racist ideologies towards black people, and more specifically black women. To justify the exploitation of what Europeans deemed 'exotic' lands for its resources and potential slave workforce, race as a scientific ideology was created, also known as race science. 'Race science […] came to establish cultural norms and legal rulings that legitimized

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[101] Appendices, Volume III, Josette Bushell-Mingo transcript, p. 4.
[102] Touré and Michael Eric Dyson, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it Means to be Black Now*, (New York: Free Press, 2012) p. 7.
[103] Ibid., p. 6.
[104] Ibid., p. xvii.

racism and the privileged status of those defined as white.'[105] The development of the scientific ideology of race is one of the main contributing factors to the narrow definitions of what constitutes 'blackness'. Not only did race science constitute legal grounds for the privileged status of white people, but it also established systems and institutions that codified white as the norm and supreme race. This created a base line for all to be compared. The more an individual deviates from this white base line, the more odd, exotic, amoral, or undesirable they are. This also means that white people inherently disregard issues or problems concerning race, because as members of the norm they are not viewed in racial terms. This structure has caused what Robin DiAngelo calls 'white fragility'.

DiAngelo is a white American academic, author and lecturer. She holds a doctorate in multicultural studies and has done extensive research in the fields of critical discourse analysis and whiteness studies. In her book, *White Fragility,* she explains that:

> White people in North America live in a society that is deeply separate and unequal by race, and white people are the beneficiaries of that separation and inequality. As a result, we [white people] are insulated from racial stress, at the same time that we come to feel entitled to and deserving of our own advantage. Given how seldom we experience racial discomfort in a society we dominate, we haven't had to build our racial stamina, […] we become highly fragile in conversations about race. […] The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable – the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. […] The responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy. I conceptualize this process as *white fragility.*[106]

Although DiAngelo is writing from the personal experience and perspective of a Caucasian American woman, she also asserts that 'white fragility' is found in the general context of countries considered the West, which includes the UK. Considering the concept of 'white fragility' and the colonial history that has formed the institutionalised and systemic racism in the UK and US, it makes sense that the representation of black women in the performing arts is so narrow and limiting, because it reinforces white dominance within the racial hierarchy that DiAngelo speaks of. In her discourse on the representation of black women in film Lola Young writes:

> Africa as a "blank" space, a "dark continent" waiting for Europeans to illuminate its furthest reaches, allowed "white" people to conceptualize and interpret the land and

[105] Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, p. 16.
[106] Ibid., p. 1-2.

> its people according to their projective fantasies. As the embodiment of these fantasies, Black people have been expected to behave, respond and experience in particular ways: we are "obliged" to play particular roles. In the case of most "white" authored fictional narratives this means being confined to specific spheres of action.[107]

Systemic and institutionalised racism continue to perpetuate the ideals of white supremacy and hegemony to protect and retain white privilege and power at the expense of the 'other'. Racialised controlling images in the form of negative stereotypes are a successful way to retain that power and privilege. This may potentially be the cause of resistance to the elimination of negative stereotypes found in the representation of black women in the performing arts industry.

[107] Lola Young, 'The Rough Side of the Mountain: Black Women and Representation in Film', in *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 175-201 (pp. 175-176).

Chapter Two: Casting

2.1 Casting Conundrum

In chapter one I gave historical context for the social stigma of blackness and examined how that influenced the stereotypical representations of black women in the performing arts industry, namely television and film. I also identified and explained the three dominant stereotypes of black women and how they have persisted from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries. This chapter will explore the ways that casting can influence the performative nature of black actresses in the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry, particularly theatre, although some references will be made to television as well. This will be further explored in chapter three through a series of research case studies I conducted. In 'Rough Side of the Mountain: Black Women and Representation in Film' Young explains that:

> Most mainstream cinema perpetuates the naturalness of both "white supremacy" and Black people's outsider status in the dominant social order. […] The stigmata of class and "race" are identified and re-created in representation. Blacks of low social and economic status are characterized by physical/anatomical signifiers of their cultural distinctiveness such as rolling eyes, wide grins, Black vernacular and body movements because they are poor: thus Blackness and poverty become interchangeable terms with a naturalized, inevitable coexistence.[108]

Considering mainstream cinema's depiction of the naturalness of 'white supremacy' and black people's outsider status as Young describes, I was curious about possible reasons why the performing arts industry continues to bolster stereotypical depictions of 'otherness', particularly because both the UK and US are rapidly shifting away from a majority white demographic. According to the University of Oxford's Migration Observatory, 'more than half (56%) of the increase of the UK population between 1991 and 2018 was due to the direct contribution of net migration. The UK's population is projected to grow to approximately 70 to 75 million by 2043.'[109] The growth of migration to the UK means there is an escalation of ethnic and minority populations, therefore, as immigration continues, so will the demand for increased and more authentic representations of those groups in the performing arts industry. The US has an even faster growing ethnic demographic. Based in Washington D.C., the Pew

[108] Young, p. 193.
[109] Dr. Alessio Cangiano, 'The Impact of Migration on UK Population Growth - Migration Observatory', *Migration Observatory*, 2020 <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-impact-of-migration-on-uk-population-growth/> [accessed 20 January 2020].

Research Center's 'U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050' report highlights the following key projections:

> Between 2005 and 2050, the nation's population will increase to 438 million from 296 million, a rise of 142 million people that represents growth of 48%. Immigrants who arrive after 2005, and their U.S.-born descendants, account for 82% of the projected national population increase during the 2005–2050 period. […] In 2050, 47% of the U.S. population will be non-Hispanic white, compared with 67% in 2005.[110]

Table 1
U.S. Population, Actual and Projected:
2005 and 2050

	2005	2050
Population (in millions)	296	*438*
Share of total		
Foreign born	12%	*19%*
Racial/Ethnic Groups		
White	67%	*47%*
Hispanic	14%	*29%*
Black	13%	*13%*
Asian	5%	*9%*
Age Groups		
Children (17 and younger)	25%	*23%*
Working age (18–64)	63%	*58%*
Elderly (65 and older)	12%	*19%*

Note: All races modified and not Hispanic; American Indian/ Alaska Native not shown. See "Methodology."
Source: Pew Research Center, 2008

[111]

The burgeoning immigration, coupled with the growing non-migrant ethnic population, will soon displace white people from the majority demographic they have held.

Although the focus of my research is on black women, systemic racism and white supremacy have led to negative and limited stereotypical representations of numerous groups of people that deviate from the white patriarchal hegemonic baseline of normalcy. These groups are often referred to as marginalised groups. Marginalised groups are not only categorised by ethnicity, but they can refer to other identifiers including sexuality, gender, and physical and mental abilities. Since about 2010, there has been an increased demand of decision makers in the industry for more inclusive and diverse casting of members of marginalised groups.

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[110] DeVera Cohen and Jeffrey S. Passel, 'U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050', *Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project*, 2008 <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2008/02/11/us-population-projections-2005-2050/> [accessed 20 January 2020].
[111] Ibid.

Through the hashtag #representationmatters trending on numerous social media outlets, and the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests that erupted in June 2020 after the murder of George Floyd in the US, BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) actors in the UK feel more empowered to speak out about the racism and abuse they endured in their drama school training. Members of the American BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) community of theatre makers penned an open letter to 'white American theatre' (W.A.T.) calling out the industry on its racist and discriminatory treatment and practices.[112] Many of the shows produced, on stage and screen in the UK and US continue to star white protagonists and heroes, or feature narratives portraying and reinforcing white normalcy. Because of this, the hashtag #representationmatters has been gained recognition and momentum, initiating slight shifts within the performing arts industry. Examples include London's Globe Theatre, which has hosted a Shakespeare and Race Festival once a year since the summer of 2018. This will be discussed further in chapter three, as well as the development of the Cultural Coordinator™; which will be discussed in chapter four. Marginalised groups in the industry, namely BIPOC, the LGBTQI community, and performers with disabilities, are demanding more representation on screen and stage. The following are examples of shifts that have taken place in the industry for other marginalised groups.

There has been a considerable increase of new work on screen that includes LGBTQI representation of characters and/or narratives that are more authentic and connect to members of that community. *Black-ish* (2014-present), *Moonlight* (2016), *Stranger Things* (2016-present), *Call Me by Your Name* (2014), *Love Simon* (2018), *Pose* (2018-2021), *Booksmart* (2019), and *Sex Education* (2019-present), are a few of the many mainstream examples of LGBTQI representation in films and television shows produced since 2014. Although taking place at a slower rate, representation for performers with disabilities are starting to advance also. Ali Stoker made history in 2019 by becoming the first performer in a wheelchair to win a Tony Award. She won the award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical as Ado Annie in

[112] Matthew Hemley, 'Drama School Racism: Students Call Out Top Schools and Reveal Stories of Abuse', *The Stage*, 5 June 2020 <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/drama-school-racism-students-call-out-top-schools-and-reveal-stories-of-abuse?fbclid=IwAR0W0Hr_DhRbhXmqiDXIAPC-aQczndY4wyDazS92IFus3s-f2epWbN1ngck> [accessed 7 June 2020]; The Ground We Stand On, 'We See You W.A.T.', *We See You W.A.T.*, 2020 <https://www.weseeyouwat.com> [accessed 10 June 2020].

the Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*.[113] Apple TV+ launched in November 2019 with the original series *See* as part of their premier programming. The show takes place 'far in a dystopian future, the human race has lost the sense of sight, and society has had to find new ways to interact, build, and hunt to survive. All of that is challenged when a set of twins is born with sight.'[114] Both sighted and visually impaired actors were hired to fulfil the roles. Additionally in an interview about the filming process, black American actress Alfrie Woodard said:

> We trained in blindness navigation, to be able to have the language that people who are visually impaired have. […] We did it for a month, all of us, everybody. And we had an advocate for the blind community on set. […] He was like a guru, […] he introduced us to the fact that there is a language, there's a way of navigating.'[115]

A slight increase in representation of the deaf community is taking place as well. Millicent Simmonds is a young, up-and-coming, actress in Hollywood who is deaf. Since debuting in the film *Wonderstruck* in 2017, she has gone on to play pivotal roles in the 2018 film *A Quiet Place*, as well as the sequel *A Quiet Place 2* (2021). In addition to film, I have noticed inclusion of deaf characters in television and theatre as well, particularly since 2017. Deaf actor and comedian CJ Jones appeared in the film *Baby Driver* (2017) and the first season of American horror TV drama *Castle Rock* (2018). Katie Leclerc and Sean Berdy, both deaf, were in the American family TV series *Switched at Birth,* which aired from 2011 to 2017, and had 105 episodes. Up-and-coming British actor, Jamal Ajala, who is deaf, won Best Actor in a Play at The Stage Debut Awards in 2019 for his performance in debbie tucker green's *ear for eye* (2018). Additionally, Sophie Stone was the first deaf person to receive actor training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in London, and the first deaf actor to appear on an episode of the popular British television series *Doctor Who.* Stone also performed in Morgan Lloyd Malcom's play *Emilia,* which debuted at the Globe Theatre in London in 2018, and later transferred to the West End in 2019.

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[113] Clémence Michallon, 'Ali Stroker Becomes First Person in a Wheelchair to Win a Tony Award', *Independent*, 10 June 2019 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/ali-stroker-tony-awards-2019-wheelchair-oklahoma-winners-speech-a8951566.html> [accessed 19 January 2020].
[114] IMDb, 'See (TV Series 2019–)', *IMDb*, 2019 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7949218/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1> [accessed 29 November 2019].
[115] Huw Fullerton, 'How See's Cast Convincingly Went Blind for the New Apple TV+ Series', *Radio Times*, 1 November 2019 <https://www.radiotimes.com/news/on-demand/2019-11-01/see-cast-act-blind-apple-tv/> [accessed 24 November 2019].

Although there is a rise in the representation of marginalised groups in the performing arts industry, there is still work to be done regarding less stereotypical, and more diverse, authentic representation of black women. Black men have been afforded more opportunities than women, to play fleshed-out, nuanced characters beyond the negative and limiting stereotypes. The acting careers of Idris Elba, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Samuel L. Jackson are prime examples. Black women, however, continue to be relegated to reincarnations of adverse stereotypical tropes. The research case studies presented in chapter three will postulate potential ways to initiate a shift in this type of representation. The examples of increased representation of other marginalised groups show advancement, albeit meagre, in the representation of some marginalised groups in the performing arts industry, but there is a long way to go. The change is slow because white people still hold most of the decision-making positions within the industry. The rising demand for more inclusive and diverse representation is causing a shift in the centrality of white characters and narratives, however, white fragility is an invisible force constantly at work to maintain the current white hegemonic status quo.

2.2 Colour-Blind Casting

The problematic nature, and origins, of stereotypical representations of black women is discussed in section 1.3 of chapter one, however, it is important to point out that all representation in the performing arts industry starts with the casting of actors into specific roles. As white people are the ones with the most decision-making power in the industry, they are also usually the same individuals who cast actors in screen and stage productions. Colour-blind casting is commonly used in theatre, more so than in film and television, as a compromise and solution to the problem of the lack of ethnic diversity in productions.

Joseph Papp started the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1955 and is credited for creating the concept of colour-blind casting. As a child, in 1936, he saw two different performances of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* One starring English actor John Gielgud, and the other featuring English actor Leslie Howard. Both practiced a declamatory style of acting which involved grand physical movements and gestures, as well as intense voice projection. After seeing those productions, Papp was dissatisfied with the declamatory style, and favoured a more naturalistic approach to acting in Shakespeare productions. Colour-blind casting was an intrinsic component of his more naturalistic approach. Furthermore, he wanted a reflection of

mid-twentieth century New York to be represented in his Shakespearean stage productions.[116] In 1965, Papp cast black American actor Robert Hooks as Henry in his summer production of *Henry V*. This was the first time a non-white actor was cast in the New York Shakespeare Festival. In an interview about his decision to cast a black actor Papp stated:

> Whenever you do a classic, you recreate life in terms that now exists, both politically and socially. If you try to reproduce a play the way it was done originally […] it becomes a museum piece. You have to draw from what exists. What exists in New York, and all throughout the world are different colored people. And you can't deny their existence.[117]

In *Colorblind Shakespeare*, Ayanna Thompson defines colour-blind casting as follows: 'The idea behind colorblind casting was that neither the race nor the ethnicity of an actor should prevent her or him from playing a role as long as she or he was the best actor available.'[118] In theory, the concept of colour-blind casting appeared logical because it 'sought to create an environment in which actors were judged not on their "personhood" or their "own face" but on their talent.'[119] However, the practical application of this concept is deeply flawed because art, and more specifically the performing arts, is, to a certain extent, subjective. Subjectivity is the 'x factor' that plays a role in discerning an actor's talent beyond measurable components such as: experience, training, and preparation. I believe that subjectivity is one of the biggest problems in the implementation of colour-blind casting. There are certain benchmarks actors must hit to be believable in a role, but when it comes to determining who is 'best' at embodying a character during the audition process, subjectivity is an aspect that weighs heavily on the decision-making. I argue that the first flaw with colour-blind casting is how the 'best' actor is ascertained.

Determination of the 'best' actor is influenced by multiple factors, talent being one among them. Another factor is how the presence and performance of the actor is received; not only by casting directors in the audition room, but by audiences watching a production. In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* Susan Bennet discusses

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[116] Ayana Thompson, 'Practicing a Theory/Theorizing a Practice: An Introduction to Shakespearean Colorblind Casting', in *Colorblind Shakespeare* ed. by Ayanna Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-26 (p. 6).
[117] Floyd Gaffney, 'In the Dark: King Henry V', *Negro Digest*, 18.6 (1969), 36-41 <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=2LIDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 3 March 2016] (pp. 39-40).
[118] Thompson, p. 6.
[119] Ibid.

reception theory and speaks of the power dynamic that exists in relation to actors and audiences during the performance of a show. Reception theory is important here because it explores 'the affirmation of the power of the one who sees and the necessary subjection of those who make themselves, willingly or otherwise, there to be seen.'[120] Although Bennet's discourse concerns the power dynamic in reaction to the actor and audience, I argue the same can be applied in relation to actors and casting directors as well.

In an audition room, the relational dynamic is such that the casting director, and others on the audition panel, have the decision-making power, whereas the actor only has power over how they deliver their performance of the audition, not how it will be received. The actor auditioning for the role is 'there to be seen' and can never truly know the criteria, or barometer, of the 'one who sees', the casting director. Within my analysis of colour-blind casting and choosing the 'best' actor for the role, I became curious about how the 'best' actor for the role is determined, and the definition of 'best' actor. The answers vary depending on who is in the position to make the decision, therefore proving the idea of subjectivity mentioned earlier. Because of this, the colour-blind basis of 'hire the best person for the role' is nearly impossible. When analysing a play, the reader mentally paints a picture of the characters and events that take place in the narrative. Some characters and elements are clearly described by the playwright, others are not. Herein flaws of the colour-blind casting concept are even more evident. A person's imagination can only extend as far as their personality, identity, personal perspective, and lived experience will allow. Factors such as white hegemony, prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalised and systemic racism deeply influence how an actor is assessed for the capability of being the 'best' actor for a specific role.

The second flaw in the concept of colour-blind casting is that it ignores how implicit bias affects decision-making. In 'Implicit Bias in the Courtroom' Jerry Kang and others explain that implicit bias 'is driven by attitudes and stereotypes that we have about social categories, such as genders, and races. […] Although interconnected, attitudes and stereotypes should be

[120] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2009) pp. 190-191.

distinguished because a positive attitude does not foreclose negative stereotypes and vice versa.[121] The article further clarifies that:

> Attitudes and stereotypes may also be implicit in the sense that they are not consciously accessible through introspection. Accordingly, their impact on a person's decision making and behaviors does not depend on that person's awareness of processing these attitudes or stereotypes. Consequently, they can function automatically, including in ways that the person would not endorse as appropriate if he or she did have conscious awareness.[122]

Extensive research into implicit bias has proven that a person may not be consciously discriminatory but still unconsciously discriminate against certain types or groups of people. Furthermore, Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger assert that they 'do not always have conscious, intentional control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgment that motivate their actions.'[123] Studies also suggest there is a rise in implicit bias against people of colour, particularly black people. The California Law Review reported: 'The Race IAT [Implicit Association Test], when administered to White American subjects, predicts […] presumed indicator of fear or other negative emotional arousal in response to photographic images of unfamiliar African American faces.'[124] This finding refers to white American subjects, but I argue that the same kind of implicit bias exists in the UK because of its shared colonial history with the US. Since implicit bias is an omnipresent force at work in our assessment of others a truly 'colour-blind' approach to casting is unattainable. Implicit bias influences the extent which black actors are considered the 'best' choice to play a specific role. Colour-blind casting's tenet that one should hire the 'best' actor to play a role regardless of their race or ethnicity is a theoretical utopia nearly impossible to manifest.[125]

The third flaw in the concept of colour-blind casting is the literal application of the term. It asks the audience to be 'blind' to, or completely ignore, the ethnicity and/or skin tone of the actor. It rejects the cultural richness that is an innate part of their being. In *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* Thompson states that within this casting

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[121] Jerry Kang and others, 'Implicit Bias in the Courtroom', *UCLA Law Review*, 59.5 (2020), 1124-1186 <https://heinonline-org.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/uclalr59&id=1138&collection=journals&index=> [accessed 29 July 2020] (pp. 1128-29).
[122] Ibid., p. 1129.
[123] Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger, 'Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations', *California Law Review*, 94.4 (2006), 945 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20439056> (p. 946).
[124] Ibid., p. 962.
[125] Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

technique 'the onus of being "blind" to race is completely on the audience. In other words, the casting agents, directors, and producers who employ this approach assume that blindness to an actor's race is not only desirable but also possible.'[126] This simply is not true. A person's skin tone and physical features are not a mask that can be removed or ignored, nor should audiences be expected to be 'blind' to it. The fourth flaw in the concept of colour-blind casting is what I call *mental gymnastics*. *Mental gymnastics* is the confusion and fatigue caused by mental obstacles the audience member encounters while trying to disregard the dissonance between the ethnicity of the actors onstage, versus the relationships between the characters being played out in front of them within a particular narrative, especially if there is some sort of familial relation. In our interview, black American actress Nemuna Ceesay shared her experience being cast as female lead, Estella, in a production of *Great Expectations* at OSF. The description of her experience demonstrates some of the colour-blind casting flaws I have discussed.

> Last year, I was in *Great Expectations*, and I played the female lead, Estella, who is the love interest of Pip. The guy who was playing Pip, […] is this beautiful, what society would consider a very attractive white man. Right? And I was his love interest, and people could not, it was like, "How could he be in love with her?" […] I heard it in ways that weren't that blunt. Like, "Oh, well, that's so interesting. You wouldn't really be in that time period. So how did you figure out how to get there?" Then some of my other colleagues would do talk backs and people would literally be like, "I don't understand why Estella was black." Right? […] So, lots of things like that in terms of, we really do have to work so much harder to just be believable. I knew stepping out onto the stage for the first time as Estella, that the immediate reaction of the audience was going to be, "What? She's black?", and they were going to be taken out of it, right? Then I would have to work, work, work, work, in order to get them back into the story by being the best actress that I could be.[127]

As shown via Ceesay's illustration, colour-blind casting is never truly blind to colour. My thesis research questions the ways that womanhood and the social stigma of blackness are influenced in the representation and performative nature of black actresses. For Ceesay, her performative nature was influenced in a manner that resulted in, as she described, a large expenditure of extra work. Her presence in a role that is assumed to be portrayed by a white actor is challenged from the moment she steps on stage. It is further challenged in relation to her counterpart, a very attractive white male love interest. It is challenged not only because of their racial differences, but more so, because, as discussed in chapter one, black women are

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[126] Thompson, *Colorblind Shakespeare*, p. 6.
[127] Appendices, Volume III, Nemuna Ceesay transcript, pp. 93.

either hypersexual to the point of animalistic, like the 'jezebel' stereotype, or asexual, like the 'mammy' stereotype. The fact that a black woman can be represented as something in-between on the spectrum is unbelievable for audiences, as demonstrated by the types of remarks and comments made about Ceesay playing the role of Estella. In this case, both Ceesay and the audience experienced *mental gymnastics.* To further scrutinize the flaws of colour-blind casting in practice, the next section will closely examine a production of *Coriolanus* I saw at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon.

2.3 Royal Shakespeare Company's *Coriolanus*

To better illustrate *mental gymnastics*, as well as the other flaws inherent in colour-blind casting, I will analyse the 2017 RSC production of *Coriolanus,* which was part of their Roman-themed production season that year. *Coriolanus* takes place in Rome during a time of civil unrest between the powerful and wealthy aristocrats and the starving citizens. Caius Martius is a highly decorated and renown soldier who has won many victories for Rome, but he also despises its citizens and government officials. Following his most recent victory over the Volscian leader, Tullus Aufidius, the Roman senate grant him the surname Coriolanus and a councilship if he humbles himself before the people to gain their support. He reluctantly does so. Two officials within the Roman council, Sicinius and Brutus, dislike Coriolanus and successfully conspire to turn the citizens against him. Following the citizens' riots and protests, Coriolanus is exiled from Rome, goes to the Volscians and Aufidius, and requests to become his ally, or be killed by him. Aufidius allies with Coriolanus, gives him command over the Volscian army, and together they plan to overthrow Rome. Rome receives word of Coriolanus' plans, and his friends meet with him before he arrives and beg him to spare Rome. He ignores their plea. As a last resort, Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia, his wife, Virgilia, and his son, Martius make the same appeal to him. Unable to deny his family, Coriolanus withdraws the Volscian troops. Because of this decision, Aufidius accuses Coriolanus of treachery and demands his death. Coriolanus is killed by Aufidius and his men and is given a noble memory.

The RSC utilized colour-blind the casting for this production. The title role of Coriolanus was played by black British actor Sope Dirisu, with the role of his mother, Volumnia, played by white British actress Haydn Gwynne.

 [128]

Sope Dirisu & Haydn Gwynne

Coriolanus' wife was also played by a white British actress, named Hannah Morrish.

 [129]

Hannah Morrish

The audience first sees both Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia, and his wife, Virgilia, at the same time, in Act One, Scene Three of the play. As an audience member, I first encountered *mental gymnastics* in relation to this production when watching this scene.[130] Volumnia opens the scene by saying, 'I pray you, daughter, sing, or express yourself in a more comfortable sort.'[131] An audience member who is unfamiliar with the plot, and seeing the play for the first time, would likely assume the relationship between the two actors on stage was biological mother and daughter based on the line spoken, and the presence of two white actresses onstage with a visible age difference between them. The following is a picture of Act One, Scene Three of the RSC *Coriolanus* production.

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[128] Anne Marie Feld, *Haydn Gwynne*, digital photograph, WBUR, 14 December 2016 <https://www.wbur.org/modernlove/2016/12/14/two-decembers-modern-love> [accessed 1 February 2020]; Dan Wooller, *Sope Dirisu,* digital photograph, Dan Wooller Photography, 2016 <https://wooller.com/sope_dirisu_9789?id=93893> [accessed 1 February 2020].
[129] Curtain Call, *Hannah Morrish*, digital photograph, Curtain Call, <https://www.curtaincallonline.com/profile/hannah-morrish/17039> [Accessed 1 February 2020].
[130] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix B for the beginning of Act I, Scene 3 text of *Coriolanus*, pp. 7-8.
[131] William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Folger Shakespeare ed. by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, Rebecca Niles, (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library) I. 3. 1. Folger Shakespeare Library online ebook.

 [132]

It is evident from the photo, that both actresses are fair-skinned white women. The lighting combined with their beige and cream costumes further enhance the fairness of their skin. Based on their appearance, the physical position of the women in relation to each other on stage, and the first line of text spoken by Volumnia, it is easy to see how the audience might assume that Virgilia is Volumnia's biological daughter at the opening of this scene. Volumnia goes on to say, 'if my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love.'[133] At this point, based on the text, the audience would discern that Virgilia is not the biological daughter of Volumnia, because Volumnia has referenced to 'her son winning an honour'. This line refers to Caius Martius, soon to be named Coriolanus, being honoured by the Roman senate in an earlier scene. In Act One, Scene One, Caius Martius returns to Rome after defeating the Volscians and is honoured for the victories he has gained for Rome. Based on this and the spoken text by Volumnia at the beginning of Act One, Scene Three, it is clear that Volumnia is Coriolanus' mother, at which point the audience may start to wonder if Virgilia is Coriolanus' sister, because Volumnia calls Virgilia 'daughter'. Later in the scene Volumnia says to Virgilia, 'Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum', thus clarifying the fact that Virgilia is Coriolanus' wife, and not the biological daughter of Volumnia. [134] Therefore, when Volumnia calls Virgilia daughter at the beginning of Act One, Scene Three, it is meant as a term of endearment, because Virgilia is her daughter-in-law.

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[132] Helen Maybanks, *Haydn Gwynne as Volumnia and Hannah Morrish as Virgilia in Coriolanus,* digital photograph, RSC, 2017 <https://www.rsc.org.uk/coriolanus/angus-jackson-2017-production#&gid=1&pid=13> [accessed 1 February 2020].
[133] *Coriolanus,* I. 3. 2-5.
[134] Ibid., I. 3. 31.

The next picture is a production photo of Coriolanus and Volumnia from a point later in the play. Note the stark difference in skin tone between 'mother and son', and how the lighting choices and costumes of each actor further exaggerate that difference.

 [135]

Volumnia & Coriolanus, RSC's *Coriolanus* 2017

At the beginning of the play when Dirisu comes on stage, the audience would have registered that Coriolanus is a dark-skinned black man. Hearing Volumnia reference Coriolanus as 'her son' a couple scenes later, and seeing Gwynne, a fair-skinned white actress, the audience may start to wonder, from a practical and biological viewpoint, how a fair-skinned white woman, like Gwynne, can have a dark-skinned black son, like Dirisu.

For this casting choice of *Coriolanus* to make sense, two possibilities come to mind. One, Volumnia copulated with a black man, creating a mixed-race son. Upon further examination, mixed-race people, particularly mixed with black and white, usually have a skin tone lighter than Dirisu's. Therefore, the possibility of someone with Gwynne's complexion producing a child with a dark complexion like Dirisu is unlikely. The second possibility is Volumnia adopted Coriolanus. This circumstance is the most plausible. However, Volumnia says the following line in Act One, Scene Three: 'When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb', therefore the possibility of Coriolanus being the adopted son of Volumnia is immediately nullified.[136] This section of text clearly states that Volumnia is the biological mother of Coriolanus because she carried him in her womb. At this point the casting is no longer believable unless the audience makes an active choice to ignore Dirisu's skin colour and the implications it has on the text. This is the problematic outcome of employing colour-

[135] Helen Maybanks, *Haydn Gwynne as Volumnia and Sope Dirisu as Coriolanus in Coriolanus,* digital photograph, Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald, 9 October 2017 <https://www.stratford-herald.com/76836-interview-rsc-coriolanus-actress-haydn-gwynne.html> [accessed 14 November 2017].
[136] *Coriolanus,* I. 3. 5-7.

blind casting. Thompson explains that within the colour-blind casting 'approach the audience is expected to make a distinction between the actor's appearance and the character's position, just as the audience would differentiate between a mask and a face, or even more fundamentally between the sign and the signified.'[137] Making this type of mental differentiation proves difficult when considering the skin tone of actors. Dirisu is a dark-skinned black actor. An audience member does not simply envision him as a white man when he is onstage conversing with his white mother in the play. His blackness is not a mask that can be put on or removed at will. Case studies presented in chapter three will further explore how placing an actor of colour in roles traditionally played by white actors shifts reception.

This process of excessive mental energy expenditure to make sense of the characterisation and narrative being presented on stage, the physical attributes of the actors playing the roles, deciphering the clues provided by the text, and the resulting effort exerted to reconcile all these elements, is an example of what *mental gymnastics* looks like in action. *Mental gymnastics* are further exacerbated later in the production. The text mentions, on more than one occasion, that Coriolanus and Virgilia have a son named Martius. In this production, he is not physically present on stage until Act Five, Scene Three when Volumnia and Virgilia are trying to dissuade Coriolanus from invading Rome with the Volscian army. Unfortunately, I was unable to find the name of the child actor who played the role of Young Martius, or any production photos from Act Five, Scene Three of this production. But since I attended this production, I can attest to the fact that the child actor who played Young Martius looked mixed-race, as though he could have legitimately been the result of an interracial union between a dark-skinned black man, like Dirisu, and a fair-skinned white woman, like Moorish.

[137] Thompson, *Colorblind Shakespeare*, p. 6.

 [138]

Coriolanus & Virgilia, RSC's *Coriolanus* 2017

With this casting choice, the audience is now expected to ignore the fact that a fair-skinned white woman, Gwynne, gave birth to a dark-skinned black son, Coriolanus. Yet simultaneously accept that Coriolanus, a dark-skinned black man, and Virgilia, a fair-skinned white woman, have a son that looks mixed-race. As a member of the audience, I found this casting decision particularly distracting and confusing, and it hampered my ability to enjoy the show. This casting conundrum could have been easily fixed by simply hiring a black actress to play the role of Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia.

In section 2.1, I state that black men, in comparison to black women, have been afforded more opportunities to play a wider variety of characters beyond negative stereotypes, using Idris Elba, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Samuel L. Jackson as examples. This production of *Coriolanus* further supports that assertion. Coriolanus is the lead character and usually played by a white actor, but, in this case, Dirisu was given the chance to play the role. Coriolanus, although an unlikeable lead character at times, is a more fleshed-out, nuanced, and meaty role. Not a black stereotype. By comparison, the character of Volumnia is a supporting character who is also usually played by a white actress, and though she is a mother she does not fit into the 'mammy' stereotype discussed in chapter one. She too, is a more fleshed-out and respected character in the play. However, a black actress was not given a chance to play the role, like Dirisu was, thus supporting my assertion that black men are able to play less stereotypical roles more often than black women. There were three dark-skinned black women in the ensemble of this production of *Coriolanus.* They played a mixture of small ensemble roles, and two of them looked like they could be the same playing age of Gwynne.

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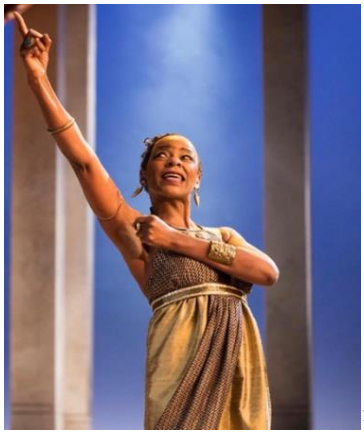
[138] Helen Maybanks, *Sope Dirisu as Coriolanus and Hannah Morrish as his wife, Virgilia,* digital photograph, The Times, 22 September 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theatre-review-coriolanus-at-the-royal-shakespeare-theatre-stratford-upon-avon-qmt2wnzqw> [accessed 1 February 2020].

The RSC does not have the names of the ensemble members in that production readily available, so I was unable to ascertain the acting experience or training of the black actresses in the ensemble. The RSC is considered to have one of the highest calibres of actors perform on their stages, so it is safe to assume that the black actresses I am referring to in this ensemble have a decent amount of training and/or professional experience. Furthermore, it is clear that black actresses were available to audition for the role of Volumnia had they decided to cast a black actress. Section 1.2 substantiated the problem of invisibility of black women with the presentation of two psychological case studies. The RSC's choice to relegate the black actresses in this production to non-speaking or one-line ensemble bit parts, rather than allowing them to play the role of Coriolanus' mother, enhances that invisibility. Because of this, the only substantial representation of blackness onstage in this production is that of black men, not black women, once again rendering them invisible.

I attended most of the RSC's productions during their 2014 to 2017 seasons and noticed a considerable scarcity of black actresses on stage. When they were present in the productions, they usually played small ensemble roles with little to no lines, much like the black actresses I mentioned in *Coriolanus*. This is in stark contrast to the number of black actors in the RSC productions, who played a full spectrum of roles from ensemble to lead. In 2017, however, the RSC did have a couple of black actresses playing lead roles in two of their productions.

 [139]

Josette Simon as Cleopatra, RSC's *Antony & Cleopatra* 2017

In 1985 Josette Simon was the first black actress to play a lead role at the RSC, as Rosaline, in *Love's Labour's Lost.* She returned in 2017 to play Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra.* I

[139] Helen Maybanks, *Josette Simon as Cleopatra in Antony & Cleopatra,* digital photograph, RSC, 2017, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/antony-and-cleopatra/past-productions/iqbal-khan-2017-production/production-photos#&gid=1&pid=21> [accessed 2 February 2020].

did not attend this production, however, the reviews about Simon's performance as the infamous Egyptian queen were overall positive. Theatre arts blogger Amy Stutz on Simon's performance:

> Josette Simon is superb as the feisty Cleopatra. […] Completely commanding the audience with her eccentric personality, […] *Antony and Cleopatra* is a compelling performance centred around Josette Simon's electrically entrancing portrayal of Cleopatra which is entirely striking and exudes sexuality.[140]

The *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald:*

> Simon, […] is sublime – born to be Cleopatra and hotter than a horde of cats on a particularly hot tin roof […]: from playful kitten to lacerating lion, delivered in a variety of voices – from Eartha Kitt to a semi-Brian Blessed. […] By her death scene, with her fury chilled, she is nakedly demure and utterly stunning.[141]

The *Guardian:*

> It is impossible to predict how Josette Simon's Cleopatra in the RSC's *Antony and Cleopatra* will react to anything. […] Simon's feline grace – this is an extraordinarily physical performance – is a match for the Egyptian cat that is part of Robert Innes Hopkins's design. […] If Antony's death was bloody, Cleopatra's is beautiful as she strips to nothing and is then dressed in royal trappings. This is death as coronation – as crowning glory.[142]

 [143]

Chipo Chung as Dido, RSC's 2017 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

[140] Amy Stutz, 'REVIEW | Antony and Cleopatra | RSC - Amy Stutz', *Amy Stutz*, (2017) <https://amystutz.com/2017/04/10/review-antony-and-cleopatra-rsc/> [accessed 29 July 2020].
[141] Gil Sutherland, 'REVIEW: Antony & Cleopatra, RSC', *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald*, 7 April 2017 <https://www.stratford-herald.com/68677-review-antony-cleopatra-rsc.html> [accessed 29 July 2020].
[142] Kelly Kellaway, 'Antony and Cleopatra Review – Josette Simon is a Cleopatra to Die For', *The Guardian*, 2 April 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/apr/02/antony-and-cleopatra-stratford-review-josette-simon> [accessed 29 July 2020].
[143] Topher McGrillis, *Chipo Chung in Dido, Queen of Carthage at the Swan Theatre,* digital photograph, The Stage, 22 September 2017, < https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/dido-queen-of-carthage-review-at-the-swan-theatre-stratford-upon-avon--rich-performances> [accessed 2 February 2020].

In addition to Simon, Chipo Chung, who is of mixed black and Chinese descent, played Dido in RSC's production of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* that same year. Chung also received positive reviews. Michael Billington of the *Guardian* wrote:

> Chipo Chung plays her with a volatility and sense of contradiction that anticipates Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Chung brings out all of Dido's rhapsodic fervour for Aeneas but is at her best in the great speech where she is torn between sabotaging his ships to prevent his departure and expressing her undying love.[144]

With such positive reviews of Simon and Chung's performances in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage,* I would assume that there would be more black actresses in prominent roles on the RSC stage. Furthermore, if the RSC cast black actresses in high profile roles for those two plays, it suggests that they had the means to also cast a black British actress to play Volumnia in *Coriolanus*. Comparing the reviews of Simon and Chung's performance to that of Dirisu, I questioned if he was truly the 'best' actor for the role. According to reviews of his performance, he may not have been. Ann Treneman of *The Times* wrote, 'This Coriolanus, played by Sope Dirisu, excels at swordplay. You can't but admire his *Die Hard* look, his uniform soaked with blood until it is like a second skin. […] Dirisu needed to be more contemptuous because he often seems just confused.'[145] A review from *The Telegraph* was far more scathing:

> What oil is to the Chippendale torso, so grimy gore is to the killing-machine bod of Sope Dirisu's Caius Martius in Angus Jackson's sinewy but intellectually flat-footed modern-dress revival. […] What's required, though, is sharper-edged psychological detail, and more sympathy-testing pride before our hero's fall, […] here's much useful clarity without the propulsive fluency of urgent, do-or-die thought.[146]

Both reviews mention Dirisu's physique, skill, and implementation of stage violence before his acting abilities in the role of Coriolanus. Both reviewers express that Dirisu's performance was lacking, and I agree. Although this is the only production of *Coriolanus* I have seen, my years of experience as an actor, and theatre practitioner, lead me to believe that there was potentially another actor who could have more successfully embodied the role of

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[144] Michael Billington, 'Coriolanus/Dido, Queen of Carthage Review – Shakespeare and Marlowe do Battle', *The Guardian*, 23 September 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/sep/23/coriolanus-dido-queen-of-carthage-review-rsc-stratford> [accessed 18 January 2020].
[145] Ann Treneman, 'Theatre Review: Coriolanus at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon', *The Times*, 22 September 2017 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theatre-review-coriolanus-at-the-royal-shakespeare-theatre-stratford-upon-avon-qmt2wnzqw> [accessed 16 October 2017].
[146] Dominic Cavendish, 'A Grimy, Gory Coriolanus with Thrilling Hand-To-Hand Combat – Review', *The Telegraph*, 24 September 2017 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/grimy-gory-coriolanus-thrilling-hand-to-hand-combat-review/> [accessed 18 October 2017].

Coriolanus. This production was directed by Angus Jackson, who shared his vision of the character of Coriolanus as the following: 'He's more akin to a prize athlete or a rockstar than what we might think of as a soldier. […] But then it's as if he returns from the Olympics with twelve gold medals, becomes an overnight sensation and goes into politics.'[147] In an interview about playing the role of Coriolanus, Dirisu stated the following:

> We are likening him to an athlete, […] these people that are at the foremost of their disciplines on an international level, so within the world of the play this guy is internationally renowned for being one of the greatest soldiers alive. […] Also, despite being such a valiant soldier and the epitome of masculinity, he is a real mummy's boy and will do whatever she asks.[148]

The fact that Jackson viewed Coriolanus as 'more akin to an athlete or a rockstar', and cast Dirisu, provides evidence of implicit bias, and a colonial mindset of the black male body. Chapter one discussed the transatlantic slave trade, and the use of black bodies to execute the physical labour of harvesting crops for the profit of the US and other European countries. It also discussed the development of limiting and negative stereotypes of black women as a result. Numerous stereotypes of black men also emerged. Unlike the negative stereotypes of black women, some of the stereotypes of black men have evolved into positive contemporary views. Alexander M. Czopp, Aaron C. Kay, and Sapna Cheryan discuss how negative stereotypes of black people shifted to positive serotypes in 'Positive Stereotypes are Pervasive and Powerful':

> Black slaves were stereotyped as animals with little intellectual capacity for whom menial physical labor was appropriate and beneficial. After slavery, […] new stereotypes of athleticism and musical ability also emerged and strengthened as society permitted, acknowledged, and celebrated the participation and achievements of Black Americans within certain domains of sport and entertainment.[149]

Taking this into consideration, it is easy to see how implicit bias could influence a white male director, such as Jackson, to cast Dirisu as Coriolanus, particularly if he envisions the character as an athlete or entertainer, without him being conscious of it. This reinforces the

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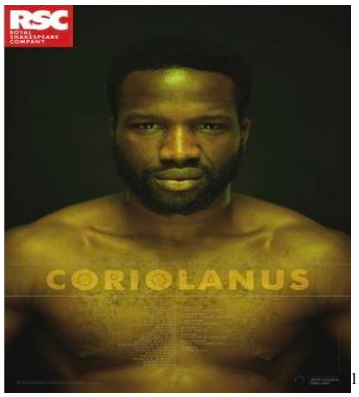
[147] RSC, 'Q&A With Coriolanus Director Angus Jackson | Royal Shakespeare Company', *RSC*, 2017 <https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/archive/qanda-with-angus-jackson> [accessed 2 February 2020].
[148] Amy Stutz, 'INTERVIEW | Sope Dirisu on His Title Role in the RSC'S Coriolanus', *Amy Stutz*, (2017) <http://amystutz.com/2017/08/31/interview-sope-dirisu-on-his-title-role-in-the-rscs-coriolanus/> [accessed 2 February 2020].
[149] Alexander M. Czopp, Aaron C. Kay and Sapna Cheryan, 'Positive Stereotypes are Pervasive and Powerful', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10.4 (2015), 451-463 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615588091> (p. 452).

stereotypes in a couple of ways. Athleticism and barbarism were repeatedly demonstrated throughout RSC's production of *Coriolanus* via the animalistic and bloody stage violence. Additionally, oversexualised eroticism of the black body was repeatedly exhibited. Dirisu's strapping physique was regularly on display while executing the stage combat. This was achieved via the exposure of his bare muscular arms, and his wearing a tight-fitted shirt that clung to his torso, which was often covered in blood. Furthermore, most of the promotional material for the show, including trailers and posters, featured Dirisu's bare arms and/or torso.



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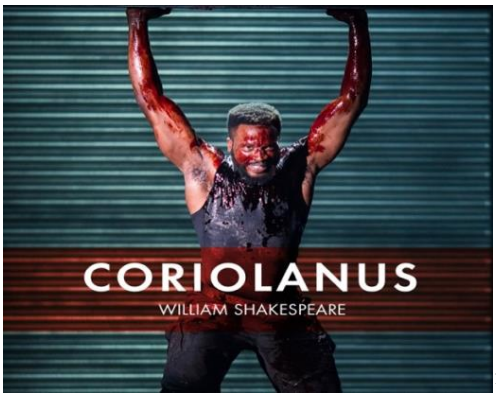
RSC Coriolanus Poster 2017



[151]
RSC Coriolanus Production Photo 2017

Taking this into consideration, it is plausible that a subconscious rationale for casting Dirisu as Coriolanus was the exploitation of his toned, dark-skinned physique to attract larger audiences, over his ability to effectively portray the role. Placing Dirisu in the lead role of Coriolanus, and subsequently surrounding him with a cast of majority white actors, heightens his position of 'other', making his presence on stage a visual exotic treat for white audiences to enjoy. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* bell hooks explains the benefit of this type of positionality for white people through the commodification of the 'other':

> The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than the normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.'[152]

bell further explains:

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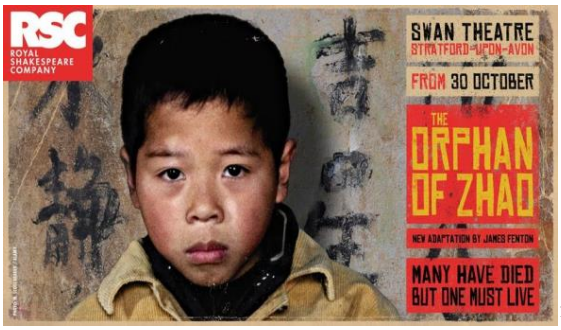
[150] RSC, *Coriolanus Poster 2017,* digital photograph, 2017, <https://rscprints.org.uk/collections/2010s> [accessed 21 December 2017].
[151] Helen Maybanks, *Sope Dirisu as Coriolanus in Coriolanus,* digital photograph, RSC, 2017 <https://www.rsc.org.uk/coriolanus/> [accessed 21 December 2017].
[152] hooks, p. 21.

> When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power – over intimate relations with the Other.[153]

bell concludes: 'The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.'[154] I argue that the utilisation of colour-blind casting in this production reduced Dirisu to a mere 'spice', appropriated as a means to 'liven up' what would have otherwise been a dull production. Although conceptualised with good intentions, colour-blind casting is not useful in its practical application because it has 'required [the character] to be simultaneously visible and invisible in its ethnicity, [which] is especially exposed within the context of classical theatre.'[155] My examination of the 2017 RSC production of *Coriolanus* demonstrates this.

The casting practices of the RSC have been called into question on a larger scale before. A production of the renowned Chinese play *The Orphan of Zhao*, set in China, translated by James Fenton, and directed by Gregory Doran, was produced during their 2012 'A World Elsewhere' season. The RSC utilised a colour-blind casting approach with this production and placed white British actors in most of the roles, which are written as Chinese characters.



[156]

RSC *Orphan of Zhao* poster 2012

As shown, the promotional poster for the show featured a young Asian boy, yet the cast of eighteen included only three east Asian actors playing the roles of: a demon dog, a ghost, and a maid. In addition to white actors playing all the lead roles, the cast featured a Moroccan

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[153] Ibid., p. 23.
[154] Ibid., p. 39.
[155] Peter Holland, *English Shakespeares: Shakespeare on the English Stage in the 1990s* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 182.
[156] Peter Collins, *RSC Orphan of Zhao poster,* digital photograph, Pinterest, 2012 <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/179299628887252090/> [accessed 23 July 2020].

actor, and two black British actors, who had supporting roles, and a black British actress, who played neither a lead nor supporting role. Instead, she played the role of the demon dog along with the other east Asian members of the cast. Many were angered by the casting of the play and flooded social media with complaints. East Asian actor Daniel York, who was the vice chancellor of Equity's Ethnic Minority Committee at the time, petitioned an apology from the RSC. During 2012, the RSC chose one acting ensemble for all three plays produced that season, *The Orphan of Zhao* being among them. This was the excuse used to defend their casting choices for of the show. The following statement was later released by the artistic director of the RSC, and director of the play, Gregory Doran:

> We understand that the casting of our World Elsewhere season of three plays has led to much concern and are sorry that this is the case. We do recognise that the lack of visibility for Chinese and east Asian actors in theatre and on screen is a live and very serious issue. We are beginning the process of talking to industry colleagues, representing employers and actors, to set up a forum for wider debate, which we hope will make a meaningful difference.[157]

In a 2018 interview about diverse casting at the RSC Doran said, 'I would like us to reflect the nation. […] If as a young Asian kid in Coventry or a black kid in Tottenham, you can't see your image in the mirror, why should you engage?'[158] As of 2020, Gregory Doran remains the artistic director of the RSC. After the 2012 *Orphan of Zhao* debacle, the RSC still hires one acting ensemble to fulfil the roles for an entire season of shows. Many of the ensembles hired remain white actors, with the occasional minor exception, such as Iqbal Khan's ground-breaking 2015 production of *Othello,* starring black British actors Hugh Quarshire and Lucian Msamati in the lead roles of Othello and Iago. Based on my assessment of the 2017 production of *Coriolanus*, I argue that Doran, and the RSC, are still missing the mark in diverse casting in terms of reflecting the nation.[159] The problems of colour-blind casting not only occur in the professional sector of the performing arts industry but on the educational side as well. In the next section, I offer my personal experience with colour-blind casting while undertaking master's actor training.

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[157] Matt Trueman, 'East Asian Actors Seek RSC Apology Over Orphan of Zhao Casting', *The Guardian*, 31 October 2012 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/oct/31/east-asian-actors-rsc-apology> [accessed 23 July 2020].
[158] Ben Lawrence, 'RSC's Gregory Doran on Diverse Casting: "I Want Us to Reflect the Nation", *The Guardian*, 10 September 2020 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/rscs-gregory-doran-diverse-casting-want-us-reflect-nation/> [accessed 23 July 2020].
[159] Further insight on Shakespeare productions and colour-blind casting is explored by Jami Rogers.
Jami Rogers, 'The Shakespearean Glass Ceiling: The State of Colorblind Casting in Contemporary British Theatre', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 31.3 (2013), 405-430 <https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2013.0039>.

The Rivals

I have discussed the flaws in colour-blind casting and the resulting *mental gymnastics* the audience goes through when it is employed. Now I will discuss how colour-blind casting, and by extension *mental gymnastics,* can influence the performative nature of an actor in the position of 'other' while working on a production. As an actor of colour in a colour-blind production, there is a constant negotiation between the positionality of the character in the play, who is assumed white, and the non-white cultural identity of the actor playing the role. When in character, the actor places themself within the given circumstances of the play and reacts to the narrative as that character. I was curious about how the actor factors in their own ethnic identity while in performance when they are playing a character that is presumed white, and they are not. The actor is juxtaposed between playing a character who exists as part of the white hegemonic norm, versus being a person of colour, who exists as the 'other' within the white hegemonic context. Thompson describes the performance anxiety an actor of colour may have while grappling with this issue onstage:

> Thus the performance of the other is painful not only because the potential exists to be "transformed" into the other through the erasure of one's own identity, but also because the mimetic nature of performance highlights the performative nature of all identities.[160]

I experienced this when receiving actor training for a master's degree. There was a total of nine students in my cohort on my master's course. There were five males and four females, and I was the only person of colour. The focus of the master's acting program was the British tradition, and each term centred on a specific style of British play. On the first year of my master's acting course, during the term concentrating on the restoration play genre, we put on a production of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. I was cast as Mrs. Malaprop, who is aunt and guardian to her seventeen-year-old niece Lydia, so there is a familial relation. The actress playing Lydia was white, and I am a brown-skinned black woman. For the familial relationship to make sense, as an actor, I made the decision that Mrs. Malaprop was Lydia's aunt by marriage, and not by blood. In so doing, the first mental hurdle was easily negotiated. Act One, Scene Two is the first time Mrs. Malaprop appears onstage, and she speaks with her niece, Lydia, who has been onstage since earlier in the scene. Mrs. Malaprop insults Lydia about her naïve ideas of love and marriage, and requests that she marry a man of Malaprop's

[160] Thompson, *Colorblind Shakespeare*, p. 15.

choosing. Malaprop makes a brief speech about her experience with marriage, and within it the use of the derogatory racist term *blackamoor*.

> MRS. MALAPROP What business have you, miss, with *preference* and *aversion*? They don't become a young woman; and you ought to know, that – as both always wear off – 'tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little *aversion*. I am sure I hated your poor dear uncle before marriage as if he'd been a blackamoor – and yet, miss, you are sensible what a wife I made! And when it pleased heaven to release me from him, 'tis unknown what tears I shed! But suppose we were going to give you another choice, will you promise us to give up this Beverley?[161]

The Rivals premiered at London's Covent Garden Theatre in 1775, during the height of colonialism. Orientalism and exoticism of the 'other' from the 'dark continent' (Africa) encouraged the creation of blackamoor decorative art. The word *blackamoor* refers to 'a hybrid of the African black and the Muslim Moor.'[162] When Mrs. Malaprop says the line, 'I am sure I hated your poor dear uncle before marriage as if he'd been a blackamoor – and yet, miss, you are sensible what a wife I made!', she is saying that she hated her husband before marriage as she hated dark-skinned African men in lowly servile positions. In the European context, a *blackamoor* is:

> A stereotypical imaging of the racialized and gendered Black body. […] The servitude of the Blackamoor both in narrative content […] and in artistic form […] fixes its presence in courtly spaces as a foreign body redeemed only through the implied submissiveness of a servile posture.'[163]

Blackamoor decorative art and jewellery was popular during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was mainly manufactured in Italy. It was often displayed within homes and amongst European elite.

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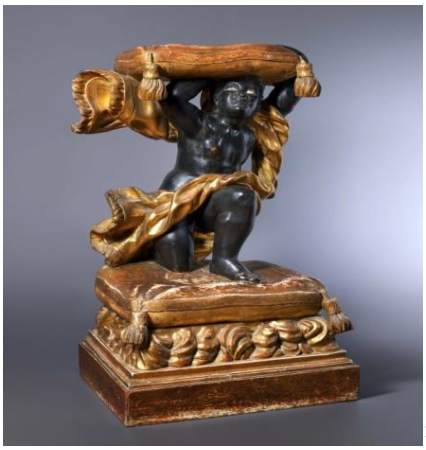
[161] Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals,* ed. by Tiffany Stern 2nd edn (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014) I. 2.
[162] Ella Shohat, 'The Specter of the Blackamoor: Figuring Africa and the Orient', *The Comparatist*, 42.1 (2018), 158-188 <https://doi.org/10.1353/com.2018.0008> (p.158).
[163] Ibid.

 [164]
North Italian Blackamoor Tabouret

 [165]
Blackamoor Brooch

'The ornamental domesticity of the Blackamoor reflects a Eurocentric imaginary that binaristically posits "the West" as imperious "mind" and theoretical refinement, and "the non-West" as servile "body" and unrefined raw material.'[166] Black bodies scantily clothed and placed in subservient positions reinforces a white hegemonic elitist narrative, and although the term *blackamoor* is rarely used today, it, along with the art, is widely viewed as racist.[167]

As a black woman first, and actor second, I was very conflicted playing a white character in a play who uses an antiquated racial slur that specifically referred to my ethnic group. I mentally grappled with numerous questions when considering Malaprop's use of the slur such as: Was I to play Mrs. Malaprop and ignore my own ethnicity when speaking negatively about black people? How would the audience interpret a black actress using a racial slur about black people in her performance, particularly when she is the only representation of blackness onstage? Would the audience ignore the obvious discrepancies in the spoken text

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[164] Richard Redding, *Unknown, A Baroque Style North Italian Blackamoor Tabouret, North Italian, Date Circa 1700-50*, digital photograph, Richard Redding Antiques Ltd <https://www.richardreddingantiques.com/artworks/categories/14/9716/> [accessed 3 February 2020].
[165] Ruby Wang, *Cartier Paris Diamond Ebony Turquoise Blackamoor Pin,* digital photograph, Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.com/rubyduoduo/blackamoor/> [accessed 23 July 2020].
[166] Shohat, p. 161.
[167] Princess Michael of Kent wore a blackamoor brooch to a Christmas banquet at Buckingham palace in 2017 where she was to meet Prince Harry's then fiancée, Meghan Markle. Markle is an American of mixed black and white heritage. This caused much controversy because of the racist history of blackamoor of jewellery. Berthan Holt and Hannah Furness, 'Princess Michael of Kent Prompts Controversy after Wearing "Racist" "Blackamoor" Brooch to Lunch with Meghan Markle', *The Telegraph*, 22 December 2017 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/people/princess-michael-kent-prompts-controversy-wearing-racist-blackamoor/> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Patrick Greenfield, 'Princess Michael of Kent Apologises for "Racist Jewellery" Worn at Lunch with Meghan Markle', *The Guardian*, 23 December 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/22/princess-michael-apologises-wearing-racist-jewellery-meghan-markle-christmas-lunch> [accessed 23 July 2020].

of the play, and the visual representation of the actress speaking said text, or would it also leave them confused? Lastly, and perhaps most important, did I possess the emotional strength necessary to speak adversely, if only once, about an element so integral to my identity and being? My blackness.

During the initial read-through of the script in rehearsal, I made a request for the portion of the line that made use of the term *blackamoor* to be cut, because it made me feel uncomfortable. I suggested rather than saying, 'I am sure I hated your poor dear uncle before marriage as if he'd been a blackamoor – and yet, miss, you are sensible what a wife I made!'[168], that the line be changed to read, 'I am sure I hated you poor dear uncle before marriage – and yet, miss, you are sensible what a wife I made!' Removing the racially derogative portion did not change, or lessen, the overall meaning or intent of the line in any measurable way. The director of the show had never worked with us before. He was a white British man, and UK professional theatre director, hired by the drama school to come in and direct the show. His response to my request for the change was, he did not have a problem with the line. Rather than engage with me further about the reason for my request, he proceeded to ask the rest of my cohort, the other eight white members of the cast, if any of them had a problem with the line. The room fell silent, and they gave no response. The director then explained that he wanted to keep the original integrity of the play intact, and without any further discussion, the line remained the same, and rehearsal continued.

There were numerous relational power dynamics displayed in that brief, yet impactful exchange. There was the student/teacher power dynamic because this took place while I was still in drama school. The actor/director power dynamic, the male/female power dynamic, and most importantly, the black/white power dynamic. The intersectionality of all four of these relationships created an extensive power differential, all of which placed me in the least powerful position. Additionally, these power dynamics created an environment where my voice was silenced, rendering me invisible, much like the black women in the psychological study covered in chapter one. By asserting his dominance, and avoiding the introduction of a racial concern, the director effectively placed all the onus on me to reconcile the issue. This exchange concurrently reinforced institutional structures of white supremacy and racism. Within this scenario, it was more important to keep the original integrity of the play intact,

[168] *The Rivals*, I. 2.

rather than challenge the racially offensive mores the play trivialised in that scene. Furthermore, there was more value placed on an over 200-year-old script, an inanimate object, than there was for the thoughts, feelings, and identity of a living, breathing human being. *White Fragility* discusses the importance of the need for white people to protect their dominance and the pushback that ensues when trying to broach issues of racism.

> White fragility punishes the person giving feedback and presses them back into silence. It also maintains white solidarity – the tacit agreement that we will protect white privilege and not hold each other accountable for our racism. When the individual giving feedback is a person of color, the charge is "playing the race card", and the consequences of white fragility are much more penalizing.[169]

Black actors encounter, and endure, these kinds of scenarios in rehearsals and/or performance, and colour-blind casting can exacerbate the problem, although it may not be as overt as my experience in *The Rivals.*[170] Black American actress Margaret Ivey shared the sentiments of one of her actor friends, and the mental challenge he faced as an actor of colour playing a real-life historical white character that owned slaves, even though it is never directly addressed in the show.

> I know someone who is in one of the companies of *Hamilton*. And this actor talks about the challenge of being a person of colour and playing people who own slaves every night. Even though we are doing this great diverse cast. Even though we are rewriting the American story through the bodies of people of colour, you're still knowing that these people owned other people. It's a heavy burden. Even when you're making bank in one of the most successful musicals ever.[171]

Since Papp's conception of colour-blind casting in the mid 1950s, there has been much discussion around ways to deviate from whitewashed casting practices, like the idea of colour-blind casting, but with slight variations. Equity, the actor's union in the UK, coined the term 'integrated casting' in 1967, which had the same basic definition of Papp's colour-blind casting, but just used a different term. Since then, Equity UK has transitioned from the term 'integrated casting' and currently uses the term 'inclusive casting'.[172] In 1986 the Actor's Equity Association in the US conceived the term 'non-traditional casting' and

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[169] DiAngelo and Dyson, p. 125.
[170] Four actors shared their experiences with *The Stage* about the racism they endured in some of the UK's top drama schools along with the school's responses to the allegations in an article published in June 2020. See Hemley.
[171] Appendices, Volume III, Margaret Ivey transcript, p. 105.
[172] 'Equity - Play Fair', *Equity.Org. UK*, 2020 <https://www.equity.org.uk/getting-involved/campaigns/play-fair/> [accessed 25 September 2020].

subsequently the Non-Traditional Casting Project. They defined 'non-traditional casting' as 'the casting of ethnic, minority and female actors in roles where race, ethnicity or sex is not germane to character or play development'.[173] In addition to 'integrated casting', 'inclusive casting', and 'non-traditional casting', the evolution of the colour-blind casting concept has adapted with the use of the terms: 'cross-cultural casting', 'multi-cultural casting', and 'diverse casting' used in the UK and the US.[174]

Due to the problematic nature of colour-blind casting, it is time to retire that term in exchange for a new one that better encapsulates the spirit of which it was envisioned. We are not, and should not, be blind to people of colour. To show solidarity, and/or prove they are not racist, many white people assert that they 'do not see colour, just the person.' Anderson explains that 'while they deny that they see color, they do in fact see it; it is a part of their cultural ontology to see race and to assess people according to race. […] By saying that "I don't see color," one is affirming of and sometimes *granting others the freedom* which they deserve to make their skin color invisible.'[175] There is a need for visibility and acknowledgment of people of colour, particularly within the performing arts industry, which is why people of colour, and more specifically black people, say that representation matters.[176]

In an unexpected way, the colour-blind casting concept reinforces the white hegemonic perspective, however a shift towards an expanded holistic worldview demographic is potentially more beneficial, for a couple of reasons. First, the demographic of the UK and US

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[173] Clarke Taylor, 'Non-Traditional Casting Explored at Symposium', *LA Times*, 29 November 1986 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-11-29-ca-16057-story.html> [accessed 13 February 2020].
[174] Much has been written about various colour-blind casting adaptations. See the following for some of the existing scholarship: Clinton Turner Davis, 'Non-Traditional Casting (An Open Letter)', *African American Review*, 31.4 (1997), 591-594 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3042324>; Ralph Berry, 'Shakespeare and Integrated Casting', *Contemporary Review*, 285.1662 (2004), 35-39 <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=uce&id=GALE%7CA120722354&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon> [Accessed 14 April 2019]; Angela Pao, 'The Red and the Purple: Reflections on the Intercultural Imagination and Multicultural Casting', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 24.4 (2014), 467-474 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2014.946926>; Sita Thomas, "The Dog, The Guard, The Horses And The Maid": Diverse Casting at The Royal Shakespeare Company', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 24.4 (2014), 475-485 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2014.946923>; 'Equity - Equity Inclusive Casting Policy', *Equity.Org. UK*, 2015 <https://www.equity.org.uk/getting-involved/campaigns/play-fair/equity-inclusive-casting-policy/> [accessed 25 September 2020]; Rogers.
[175] Lisa M. Anderson, 'When Race Maters: Reading Race in Richard III and Macbeth', in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* by Ayanna Thompson (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006) p. 91.
[176] National Research Group, *#REPRESENTATIONMATTERS: Content as a Mirror to Culture* (Los Angeles: National Research Group, 2020) <https://assets.ctfassets.net/0o6s67aqvwnu/59RCflKXRC6P6JYxba07tt/af575c2cc81e4fc5601acd02bcc2ce09/NRG_RepresentationMattersReport.pdf> [accessed 12 October 2020].

is rapidly expanding due to immigration from people all over the world. Second, a holistic worldview debunks the idea of a 'white majority' because when considering the complete world demographic, white people are not the majority, people of colour are. The performing arts industry could meet the growing demands of performers and audiences by implementing more global, varied, diverse narratives and characters. Chapter one covers how perception, race, and ethnicity, are an integral part of the formulation of an individual's identity. People want to see themselves represented on screen and stage because, again, representation matters. In 1996, black American playwright August Wilson gave a speech at the Theatre Communications Group National Conference in which he said:

> I believe that race matters – that is the largest, most identifiable and most important part of our personality. It is the largest category of identification because it is the one that most influences your perception of yourself, and it is the one to which others in the world of men most respond.[177]

Although race is a manufactured construct, it is woven into the fabric of the UK and US, perpetuating the ideology of white hegemony and supremacy.[178] DiAngelo asserts that: 'White is a false identity, an identity of false superiority. In that sense, whiteness isn't real. […] Thus, white identity depends in particular on the projection of inferiority onto blacks and the oppression this inferior status justifies for the white collective.'[179] Therefore, creating an environment that resists oppression, and by extension white supremacy, is necessary. This is why the term colour-blind casting should be relinquished.

Rather than use the term colour-blind casting, I suggest the term *global view casting* as an alternative. The concept of colour-blind casting is 'neither the race nor the ethnicity of an actor should prevent her or him from playing a role as long as she or he was the best actor available.'[180] *Global view casting* would seek to first consider the various cultures and demographics present around the world, and cast an actor that truthfully embodies the character utilising their own unique culture, identity, skill set, and abilities, while demonstrating a high performance standard. This terminology effectively diverts from the white/coloured binary, and encourages thought towards the representation of people worldwide, including various ethnicities, nationalities, and skin tones. Furthermore, it takes

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[177] August Wilson, 'The Ground on Which I Stand', *American Theatre*, 2016 <https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/06/20/the-ground-on-which-i-stand/> [accessed 26 January 2020].
[178] Sussman.
[179] DiAngelo and Dyson, p. 95.
[180] Thompson, *Colorblind Shakespeare*, p. 6.

into consideration other distinctive and unique aspects that actors possess and utilise to enhance their characterisation of a role. Finally, it widens the perspective of casting beyond skin colour, and creates space for much needed consideration of other marginalised groups such as: the deaf and LGBTQI communities, as well as performers with disabilities. *Global view casting* seeks to embrace, acknowledge, and celebrate the richness that the prescribed 'other' can provide, rather than ignore or stereotype them. Implementation of this concept has the potential to broaden the performing arts industry's capacity for more inclusive and authentic representation, as well as more diverse and nuanced narratives about collective human experiences that many can relate to.

2.4 Casting Backlash

There are some within the performing arts industry that are already using a *global view casting* approach and have received backlash because of it. The first example is the American drama series *How to Get Away with Murder,* created by Peter Nowalk with executive producer Shonda Rhimes.

 [181]

Viola Davis as Annalise Keating, *How to Get Away with Murder*

Shonda Rhimes is known for creating and producing TV dramas with diverse casts such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*. *The Washington Post* praises Rhimes' casting because her:

> Freshness rests in her desire to explore this truth of being human through the lens of more than white men, but through all of the rest of us simultaneously, thrown together in one big stew. Women, and men, white, Asian, Latino, black, straight and gay, all get to be fully human, […] complicated, full of contradictions and driven by all the craziness that can be the motivation behind our quiet and sometimes not-so-quiet desperations.'[182]

[181] Clover Hope, *How to Get Away with Murder*, digital photograph, Jezebel, 10 October 2014, <https://jezebel.com/objection-a-real-lawyer-fact-checks-how-to-get-away-wi-1644750449> [accessed 10 April 2017].

[182] Lauren McEwan, 'How Shonda Rhimes Gets Away with Changing the TV Landscape', *The Washington Post*, 27 September 2014 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2014/09/27/how-shonda-rhimes-gets-away-with-changing-the-tv-landscape/> [accessed 24 January 2020].

How To Get Away with Murder follows criminal defence lawyer, and law professor, Annalise Keating at the fictional Middleton University Law School. Keating teaches a course called 'How to Get Away with Murder', and five law students from that course are selected to be interns at her personal law firm. The group of student interns get involved with a real murder and must figure out how to get away with it. In a 2014 interview with *Variety,* creator Peter Nowalk spoke about the show's diverse cast:

> I've grown up in the Shondaland world where you don't write anything into your scripts and [casting director] Linda Lowy brings you actors of all shapes and sizes and you say "yes, yes, no." There's no other way to do it, to me. It's a law school at an elite university; it's going to be freaking diverse, it's just a vast world and it makes it more fun to tell stories. […] We're not colorblind to who these people are; their identities and their sexuality and everything about them will become potential story and so why would you want everyone to be the same?[183]

Nowalk's sentiments align with the concept of *global view casting*; however, when the announcement of Viola Davis in the lead role of Annalise Keating was released, it was met with backlash.

Davis received actor training from Julliard, one of the top drama schools in the US. She has worked professionally in the performing arts industry, both on stage and screen, for over thirty years, and has been nominated and won numerous awards for her craft. Although she possesses superior training and experience, when she was finally given the opportunity to play a leading role on a television drama series, the focus was on her skin colour and age, rather than her talent and abilities. *New York Times* writer Alessandra Stanley wrote an extensive piece highlighting the work of executive producer, Rhimes, and mentions *How to Get Away with Murder* and the casting of Davis. At the beginning of the article, she refers to Rhimes and the 'sapphire' stereotype:

> When Shonda Rhimes writes her autobiography, it should be called "How to Get Away With Being an Angry Black Woman." On Thursday, Ms. Rhimes will introduce "How to Get Away With Murder," yet another network series from her production company to showcase a powerful, intimidating black woman. […] She has also introduced a set of heroines who flout ingrained television conventions and preconceived notions about the depiction of diversity. […] Ms. Rhimes has embraced

[183] Laura Prudom, "How to Get Away with Murder" Creator Peter Nowalk on Working with Shonda Rhimes, Diversity on TV', *Variety*, 25 September 2014 <https://variety.com/2014/tv/news/how-to-get-away-with-murder-creator-peter-nowalk-shonda-rhimes-viola-davis-diversity-1201313779/> [accessed 22 January 2020].

> the trite but persistent caricature of the Angry Black Woman, recast it in her own image and made it enviable. She has almost single-handedly trampled a taboo even Michelle Obama couldn't break.[184]

In the same article, Stanley later describes Davis' character in the show:

> As Annalise, Ms. Davis, 49, is sexual and even sexy, in a slightly menacing way, but the actress doesn't look at all like the typical star of a network drama. Ignoring the narrow beauty standards some African-American women are held to, Ms. Rhimes chose a performer who is older, darker-skinned and less classically beautiful than Ms. [Kerry] Washington, or for that matter Halle Berry.'[185]

Although there was doubt about the prosperity of a show starring a forty-something, dark-skinned, black actress, *How to Get Away with Murder* far surpassed pessimistic expectations. The show was a success, airing from 2014 to 2020 for six seasons with a total of ninety episodes. It has been nominated and won numerous awards, primarily for Davis' portrayal of lead character, Annalise Keating. Having only viewed the first two seasons of the show at this point, I strongly disagree with Stanley's assertion that Keating is a recast image of the 'angry black woman'. At first glance the character may appear so, but I argue it is only because the 'angry black woman', or 'sapphire', stereotype is so common and pervasive in film and television that it clouds the ability for some white viewers to see anything beyond that stereotype. At the time the article was written, Stanley was a white woman in her sixties, and the chief television critic for the *New York Times.* It is possible that her opinions about Rhimes, and subsequently the shows she produces, are unconsciously influenced by her white privilege and fragility.

My initial reaction to viewing the character of Keating was that she is unlike other portrayals of black women I have seen on television. She is multi-layered, nuanced, and complex like real black women, not a caricature or misrepresentation. Black American actress Kimberly Scott shared reasons for her love of *How to Get Away with Murder*, and Davis in the lead role of Keating, when I interviewed her in 2017 at OSF.

> Viola is killing it. She is showing the full range for a change. […] I get to see her be in charge. I get to see her be pissed. I get to see her be a villain, […] Because they're never the villain. You're either a victim, or you're a victim. […] You're either the Madonna victim, or you're the whore victim. It's very rare that you get to be a villain,

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[184] Alessandra Stanley, 'Viola Davis Plays Shonda Rhimes's Latest Tough Heroine', *New York Times*, 18 September 2014 <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/arts/television/viola-davis-plays-shonda-rhimess-latest-tough-heroine.html?_r=3> [accessed 1 August 2015].
[185] Ibid.

> you know. Sometimes they let you be a perpetrator that gets their comeuppance, […] but you see this person in their full, with all their warts. Good, bad, otherwise. Seriously. She's breaking the ground like nobody's business. […] Its glorious. She's allowed to be flawed. That's new ground for black women on TV, which is kind of amazing.[186]

As I mentioned earlier, Rhimes is executive producer of the show, and created the popular and successful American TV shows *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal.* She has created more opportunities for non-stereotypical representations of black women on screen. In an interview with *Huffington Post*, Davis spoke about how Rhimes has shifted the representation of black women: 'She redefined us as something bold and strong. […] We're no longer supporting, we're not necessarily nurturing, we're not asexual. We're none of it. […] So the viewer simply forgets [the black female stereotypes], and we can all get on with the story.'[187] I agree with Scott and Davis' sentiments about Keating. Despite the popularity and success of the show, there are still some who disagree with the representation of Keating. Shamar Toms-Anthony published a paper in *The National Black Law Journal* arguing that:

> Annalise Keating is not a progressive or revolutionary representation of Black women. Instead, Keating's portrayal as a Black attorney is primarily based on the same traditional negative stereotypes of Black women that date back to slavery […] and suggests that negative television portrayals may affect real world perceptions of Black women.'[188]

The traditional stereotypes that Toms-Anthony refers to are that of the 'sapphire' and 'jezebel' because Keating comes across stern in the classroom with her students, and in the courtroom when arguing a case. However, that is the likely demeanour of defence lawyers in general, and Keating happens to be one.

In addition to Stanley's assessment in the *New York Times*, I also disagree with Toms-Anthony's assessment. Although, Keating does come across austere at times, her character also demonstrates kindness, love, pain, and vulnerability in other instances. For example, at the end of season one, episode four we see Keating at the end of her workday, in her

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[186] Appendices, Volume III, Kimberley Scott transcript, p. 132.
[187] Caroline Frost, "How to Get Away with Murder" Star Viola Davis Explains Why Annalise Keating's Wig Has to Come Off', *The Huffington Post UK Edition*, 19 October 2014 <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/10/29/viola-davis-how-to-get-away-with-murder_n_6068486.html > [accessed 27 April 2017].
[188] Shamar Toms-Anthony, 'Annalise Keating's Portrayal as a Black Attorney is the Real Scandal: Examining How the Use of Stereotypical Depictions of Black Women Can Lead to the Formation of Implicit Biases', *The National Black Law Journal*, 27.1 (2018), 59-78. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6wd3d4gk#main> [accessed 4 February 2020] (p. 78).

bedroom, in a dressing gown, seated in front of her vanity mirror. She takes off her jewellery, removes her wig, and make-up. This is one of the first times viewers are given a glimpse of what lies beneath the literal, and metaphorical, mask Keating presents to the world daily. Seeing this side of Keating was a vast contrast to the stern, confident, and composed persona regularly displayed in the courtroom and classroom. Keating's husband enters the bedroom later in the scene, and with make-up off, wig removed, holding back the emotional pain of betrayal she is feeling, Keating asks her husband, 'Why is your penis on a dead girl's phone?'[189] This is one of the various nuances, levels of emotion, and personality facets that Keating expresses in the show. Due to this scene and others presented in the show, I do not see her as being stuck in the limiting tropes of black female stereotypes. Toms-Anthony is a black man who, at time of writing the paper, was himself a law student at UCLA's School of Law. He is not a black woman and cannot write from the position of black women in law school. He cannot testify to that specific lived experience. However, he does have the advantage of writing from the perspective of a law student, in which case, some of his insights about how law schools operate are valid. With that being said, the performing arts are often a heighten state of reality, therefore not everything presented will be one hundred percent accurate. Some things are added for entertainment value, otherwise it would be a reality TV show or documentary, rather than a scripted television drama. Even when there is a shift in the representation of black women, not everyone will be satisfied.

 [190]

Noma Dumezweni as Hermione, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*

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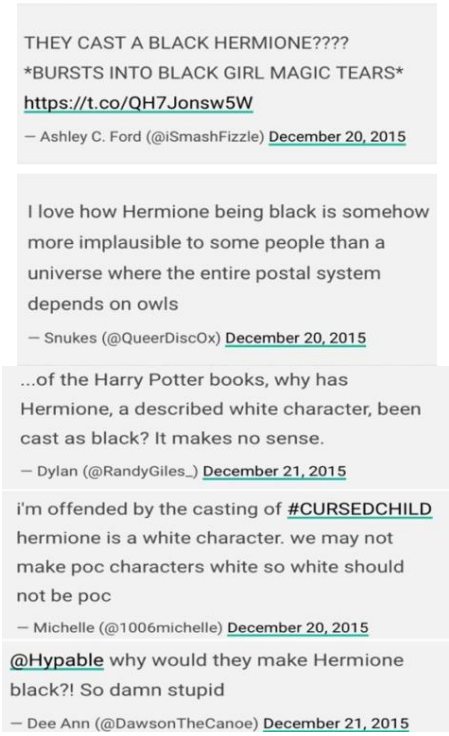
[189] 'Let's Get to Scooping', *How to Get Away with Murder*, (Netflix UK, 2016) <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80024057?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2Cb706e4cf2e98d7f08dabb3df0c3a78d526560de9%3A740db2e0d7ae6664b4dbfd0f369e7b628a1b96a2%2Cb706e4cf2e98d7f08dabb3df0c3a78d526560de9%3A740db2e0d7ae6664b4dbfd0f369e7b628a1b96a2%2Cunknown%2C> [accessed 15 March 2017].

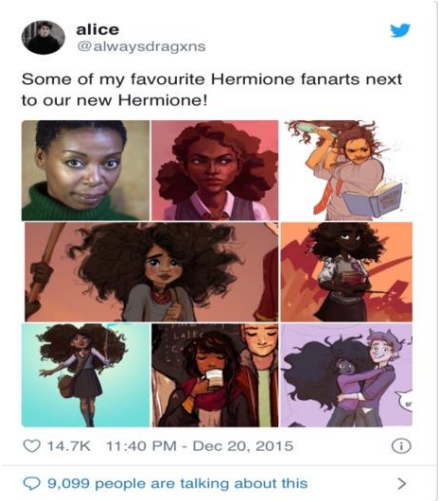
[190] Carl Greenwood, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child's Noma Dumezweni's Hermione Revealed*, digital photograph, Mirror, 1 June 2016 <http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/harry-potter-cursed-child-noma-8094860> [accessed 4 January 2018].

The second example of a shift towards *global view casting* is the hit play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child.* It opened on London's West End in 2016 and transferred to Broadway in New York in 2018. The script was written by Jack Thorne, and based on an original short story by himself, J.K. Rowling, and John Tiffany. Set twenty years after the final book in the *Harry Potter* series, characters Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger are all grown up with children of their own attending Hogwarts. The plot follows Harry's son, Albus Severus Potter, and his friend, Scorpius Malfoy, on their quest to save Cedric Diggory. The role of adult Hermione was cast with black British-raised actress Noma Dumezweni, who originally hails from Swaziland. Like Davis, before landing the role of Hermione, Dumezweni was already a well-established actress in the UK. She is an Olivier Award winning actress with extensive radio, screen, and theatre experience. She has performed on some of the most notable stages in the UK including: the National Theatre, the RSC, the Royal Court Theatre, and the Young Vic. Announcement of Dumezweni as Hermione caused much controversy. *Harry Potter* fans were both enraged and excited about the casting decision and flooded social media outlets with their reactions.



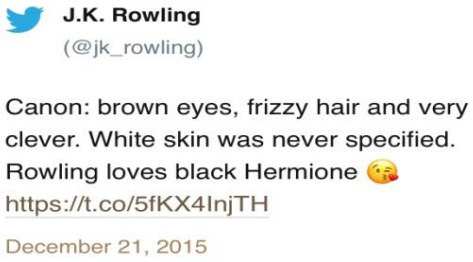
[191]

[191] Nadya Agrawal, digital images, Huffington Post UK Edition, 21 December 2015 <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/some-people-are-pissed-off-about-the-casting-of-a-black-hermione-granger_n_5678486fe4b06fa6887e188a?ri18n=true> [accessed 14 September 2018].



[192]

In the first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* Hermione is introduced as a girl with 'a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth.'[193] The backlash was so extensive that Rowling posted on Twitter to show her support and defend the casting decision.



[194]

Based on this description Hermione could have been any ethnicity. *Harry Potter* is a world-wide phenomenon, and viewers are accustomed to a white portrayal of Hermione because white British actress Emma Watson played the role in the films. The first book in the *Harry Potter* series was released four years before the first film debuted in cinemas. Those who read the book prior to the film's release had free license to ascribe whatever physical attributes, including ethnicity, to Hermione they could imagine, given the information from the text. Hawwa, a teen opinion piece writer for *The Guardian* asserts:

> Hermione Granger is not black. Hermione is not white, or mixed-race, or any other ethnicity. Hermione is a blank canvas for the reader to draw upon, to project

[192] Ibid.
[193] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 112.
[194] Hawwa, digital image, The Guardian, 23 December 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/dec/23/hermione-is-not-black-or-white-or-any-ethnicity-harry-potter> [accessed 4 February 2020].

> themselves on, to reflect their own appearance if they so wish. To me, Hermione was never a certain race or ethnicity. She is described as having brown eyes and bushy hair; she is smart, precocious, loyal and determined. If an artist had only that description and was commissioned to create a portrait, the end-result would be entirely subjective – and that is the whole point.[195]

The character of Hermione Granger may have been portrayed as white in the films, but it does not mean that every other iteration of her needs to be white as well. Considering that the world of the *Harry Potter* series has magic and mythical creatures, a black actress playing the role of one of the main characters seems more than plausible, given the circumstances. *Harry Potter* fans accustomed to seeing a white Hermione in the films was not the only reason for the angry backlash against Dumezweni. The problem of white fragility was also present. Seeing a black portrayal of Hermione subconsciously triggered a fear of the loss of something presumed their own. A loss of inherent entitlement, white privilege, 'white racial control and the protection of white advantage.'[196] Since premiering in London, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* has been a huge success with sold out audiences months in advance. Dumezweni received her second Olivier Award for the role of Hermione and was nominated for a Tony Award when the show transferred to Broadway in 2018.

I have explored how colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade led to the development of racism and consequentially the social stigma of blackness in chapter one. I have also examined the construction of negative and oversexualised perceptions the black female body, and further discussed complications that have emerged in the performing arts industry when casting black actresses. Film and television are major forces that fortify the ideals of white superiority and representations of the 'other'. How black women are portrayed in the performing arts greatly affects the shaping and maintenance of their identity through imagery. Imagery is a source that can be used to empower and influence or oppress individuals. Black actresses grapple with being on the receiving end of negative and stereotypical imagery, and narratives of black women in the performing arts, as well as creating and perpetuating that same imagery in their profession. The side effects and/or repercussions for black actresses existing in this duality warrants more exploration. The next chapter will present a series of practice-based case studies that culminate the issues and ideas previously discussed. I aim to

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[195] Hawwa, 'Hermione is not Black, but She's not White Either...', *The Guardian*, 23 December 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/dec/23/hermione-is-not-black-or-white-or-any-ethnicity-harry-potter> [accessed 4 February 2020].
[196] DiAngelo and Dyson, p. 2.

postulate ways to create a shift in the performing arts industry that positively influences black actresses.

Chapter Three: Practice Research

In the UK and US, black actresses are rarely given roles that deviate from a stereotype, as discussed in section 1.3 of chapter one. The three pervasive black female stereotypes of 'mammy', 'jezebel', and 'sapphire' are still present in the performing arts industry, and a colour-blind casting approach gives rise to other problems, such as those discussed in the last chapter. The beginning of this thesis asked the question: in what ways does womanhood, and the social stigma of blackness, influence the representation and performative nature of black actresses in the educational and professional sectors of the British and American performing arts industry? Considering what has already been discussed, the crux of the issue lies between injurious stereotypical representations of black women, and the backlash that ensues when black actresses are cast in roles that resist such representations. To further understand and explore this dichotomy, I crafted a series of four practice-based case studies to explore specific aspects that influence the representation of black women, as well as the performative nature of black actresses. Case study one views audience reception of characters in terms of casting. Case study two explores the actor's personal perception and constraints on their capabilities. Case study three considers the development of a stage production, and possible modes of shifting away from stereotypical representation. Case study four explores what can happen when a black actor is removed from the position of racialised 'other' and placed within the majority.

3.1 Case Study 1 – Audience Perception

In case study one I explore audience perception. The negative reactions to *How to Get Away with Murder* and *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* due to the casting of black women, made me wonder if the assumption of whiteness in characters could be negated. Upon examination of both the character of Annalise Keating and Hermione Granger, I was unable to ascertain anything from the original *Harry Potter* books or viewing the first two seasons of *How To Get Away With Murder,* that definitively specified the ethnicity of the characters beyond the white hegemonic baseline of normalcy discussed in chapter one. In her writings about black women and representation in film Young explains that:

> It is crucial within textual analyses to examine the assumptions of "white" supremacy as manifested in visual culture such as television and film as well as in literature and history. In carrying out such analyses, the objective is not just to expose that which

> was previously concealed, but also to recast the terms on which theoretical positions are constructed.[197]

I assert that theatre lies within the realm of the visual culture that Young speaks of, and her notion aligns with my deductions. The problem is an assumption of whiteness in characters exists within the performing arts industry. I set up case study one in the form of two separate workshops to test, and evaluate, audience perception and reception of characters when the presumption of whiteness is confronted and/or removed. The guiding question for case study one is: to what extent does the perception and reception of a character change when a black woman plays the role? Utilising scenes from the plays *Closer* by Patrick Marber and *Gethsemane* by David Hare, an exploration of audience perception and casting preference was explored via workshops in a controlled environment.

Drawing upon the work of Terry Eagleton, and how reception theory can be revolutionary, Mark Fortier explains that works of art have the potential to be revolutionary. Particularly when they are viewed through a theoretical lens of resistance, such as feminism, therefore justifying the art in and of itself in fresh new ways.[198] With this case study, I attempt to create a space for the revolutionary reading and exploration of audience perception in new ways as Eagleton and Fortier have written about, by attempting to deconstruct the default assumption of white casting through the lens of my unique positionality as a black woman, theatre arts practitioner, and researcher . Utilising plays without ethnically specific character descriptions that are usually cast with white actors, I seek to gauge shifts in character perception and reception when diverse casting is implemented.

***Closer* & *Gethsemane* Workshops**

Chapter one laid out the how colonialization and the manufactured construct of race solidified white homogeny in the UK and US, thus creating a hierarchy of normalcy and supremacy, positioning whiteness at the top. Insights presented by DiAngelo, and her concept of white fragility corroborate my interrogation of the established white patriarchal hegemonic baseline of normalcy. In terms of casting, this structure displaces actors of colour, and more specifically black actresses. Because of this, there is an established norm and assumption of whiteness in the UK and US. In most plays, all characters are assumed to be white, unless otherwise specified. I offer that this is one of the key problems in the limited representation

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[197] Young, p. 198.
[198] Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 112. Kindle ebook.

of black women in the performing arts industry. Case study one was conducted to challenge audience perception and the assumption of whiteness in characterisation. The following question steered the workshops: to what extent does the perception and reception of a character change when a black woman plays the role?

My original plan was to conduct one workshop using one scene that featured two female characters from the following plays: Shakespeare's *As You Like It,* Patrick Marber's *Closer,* and David Hare's *Gethsemane.* Each scene would be performed for an audience twice, with a variation in cast for each performance. The first time with the traditional all-white cast, and a second time with one of the characters replaced with a black actress. However, in utilising both white and black actors, I wanted to present the audience with all variations of cast alternatives possible. This meant presenting each scene three times, instead of two, so the audience could view the scenes with an all-black cast as well. Adding a third performance of each scene, would increase the length of time for the overall workshop. I wanted the duration of the workshop to be no more than two hours. This would allow the audience to keep their engagement and focus. I did not want the audience, or actors involved in the workshop, to get fatigued or overwhelmed from repeated performances of various scenes. Because of this, I decided to use scenes from two plays rather than three. Additionally, I decided to have two separate workshops instead of one, one workshop for each play. With this new structure, I was able to keep each workshop within the desired two-hour timeframe, and not overwhelm the audience with too much information at one time.

I conducted two workshops on the 10th and 24th of May 2018 at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire drama school (RBC – Acting). As mentioned, I focused on one play for each workshop. Scenes from the play were presented with three alternative casts: an all-white cast of actors, an all-black cast of actors, and a mixed cast, including black and white actors.
I decided to forgo the use of Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* Although originally Shakespeare's plays were performed by white actors, currently his plays are often produced with a wide range of actors from various ethnic backgrounds all over the world. I chose to work with scenes from Patrick Marber's *Closer* in the first workshop for a few reasons. Number one, I really enjoy the play and the complexity of the romantic relationships between the characters, as well as the complicated internal life of each character. Number two, the text does not indicate the ethnicity of the characters. Number three, due to the assumption of whiteness, in production, the play has always been cast with all white actors; until recently, which will be

discussed later. For the second workshop I chose to work with scenes from *Gethsemane* by David Hare, for different reasons. Number one, only one of the nine characters in the play has their ethnicity explicitly stated. This operates to signify an assumption of whiteness for the eight remaining characters. Number two, *Gethsemane* is a fictional play based on the Labour Party and the real political structure present in the UK. Knowing that in real life most members of parliament in the UK are white, I was curious to see if audiences would be receptive to viewing a shift of that ethnic demographic play out onstage. Therefore, the second workshop challenges the ethnic designation of the one character, as well as the assumption of whiteness for the other eight.

Students from RBC – Acting participated as actors in the scenes, which I directed. To conduct a controlled experiment, I kept as many possible elements as possible the same for each scene with each alternative cast. This was achieved in the following manner: all actors worked with the same cut of the scene, I assigned the roles to each actor, the actors used the same props in performance, and were given the same blocking. Each alternative cast for each scene had a total of five, one-hour long rehearsals with me as director. When working with each group of actors, as much as possible, I used the same language when giving direction. These elements were controlled to minimise variables, making it easier for the audience viewing the scenes at the workshop to focus on perception and reception of the actor's physical presence on stage, ability to embody the character within the scene, and unique style, understanding, and implementation of the direction given to them.

As mentioned earlier, the first workshop engaged with *Closer* by Patrick Marber, an English playwright, director, and screenwriter. *Closer* premiered in 1997 at the National Theatre in London with a successful transfer to the West End's Lyric Theatre in 1998. In March of 1999, it transferred once again to Broadway, New York. It won the Olivier Award for Best New Play in 1998, and the New York Critic's Award for Best Foreign Play in 1999. It was adapted to a film in 2004 and received Academy Award nominations for Best Supporting Actress and Actor. Set in 1990s London, *Closer* spans the course of about four years following the lives of four people: Dan, Alice, Larry and Anna, as they come together, break apart, swap partners, and eventually separate irrevocably in the midst of 'romantic turmoil

[…] involving overlapping relationships and betrayals'.[199] As stated, the characters in the play are not ethnically specific, but professional productions of the show have always included only white actors, until 2017. Section 2.2 discussed colour-blind casting and its flaws. In section 2.3 I introduce the term *global view casting* as a possible replacement for the colour-blind casting concept. The 2017 production of *Closer* is a good example of how the *global view casting* concept can be applied in the educational sector of the performing arts industry, namely drama schools.

In December 2017, twenty years after its debut, RBC – Acting produced the first production of *Closer* with a BAME cast and director. Two of the actresses used in my workshop, Mara Huf and Muyiwa Ibe, were a part of this production. In an interview with *Asian Voice,* the head of undergraduate studies at RBC – Acting, Danièle Sanderson said:

> *Closer* is traditionally considered a play for white actors, but there is nothing in the play which directly suggests this requirement. The characters are described as a dermatologist, a photographer, a journalist and a stripper. It's a play about sexual politics, about communication between men and women in contemporary society, it's gender specific, not colour or race specific.[200]

Sanderson's interview highlights that I am not the only one questioning the assumption of whiteness in plays. It proves an awareness exists, and efforts, although slow, can and are being made to shift this norm. In addition to myself, Sanderson via RBC – Acting, and the Globe Theatre in London are beginning to push the envelope and question the white hegemonic norm, specifically in relation to Shakespeare and the production of classical works. Since the summer of 2018, the Globe Theatre has hosted the Shakespeare and Race Festival which addresses this issue in various ways. I will discuss it later in this chapter.

In her interview, Sanderson points out that *Closer* is considered a white play, but nothing in the text indicates it must be so, which is true. The description of the characters is:

> **Alice**, *a girl from town. Early twenties.*
> **Dan**, *a man from the suburbs. Thirties.*
> **Larry**, *a man from the city. Late thirties/early forties.*

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[199] Holly Williams, 'Come Closer: Playwright Patrick Marber on the Revival of His Shock Nineties Play', *Independent*, 14 February 2015 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/come-closer-playwright-patrick-marber-on-the-revival-of-his-shock-nineties-play-10044457.html> [accessed 10 February 2020].
[200] Asian Voice, 'New Production of Closer Gets its First Fully BAME Cast and Director', *Asian Voice,* 30 November 2017 <https://www.asian-voice.com/Culture/Theatre-Dance/New-production-of-Closer-gets-its-first-fully-BAME-cast-and-director> [accessed 5 March 2018].

Anna, *a woman from the country. Mid-thirties.*[201]

Their professions are, as Sanderson says, a dermatologist, a photographer, a journalist, and a stripper. Given those descriptions nothing signifies definitive ethnicity for any of the characters. The play is set London, which is a very ethnically diverse city, particularity compared to other parts of England. This is another reason why I chose to explore scenes from this play.

The scenes used for the workshop were the beginning of Act One, Scene One, and the end of Act Two, Scene Nine.[202] Act One, Scene One opens the play and takes place in a hospital. Dan has brought Alice there after watching her get injured by a taxi while crossing the road. Act Two, Scene Nine takes place nearly three-and-half years later in a museum. Since Act One, Scene One, Alice has been in a relationship with Dan and subsequently broken up with him. Dan has now become involved with Anna, a photographer, who took photos of Alice, and used them in an art exhibition. In Act Two, Scene Nine, Alice has set up a meeting with Anna to get the negatives of her photos from the exhibition, and confront Anna about her romantic involvement with Dan.

The *Closer* workshop was held at RBC – Acting in one of the drama school studios. Due to the limited timing and assistance I had to assemble the workshop, I sent an email blast invitation for audience members to all postgraduate students of the Arts, Design, and Media Faulty of Birmingham City University (BCU), of which RBC – Acting is located. I used word-of-mouth to advertise the workshop, invited friends, and encouraged the actors involved to invite their friends, family, and fellow classmates. Additionally, I emailed past drama school tutors and other local theatre colleagues I was familiar with and invited them to attend. On the day of the workshop, the audience in attendance consisted of mainly RBC – Acting students and tutors.

At the beginning of the workshop the audience was informed they would watch two scenes from *Closer* with a total of three alternative casts, back-to-back, for each scene, followed by a discussion session. Additionally, the audience was given information sheets and consent

[201] Patrick Marber, *Closer* (London: Methuen, 1997) p. 4.
[202] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix C for text and scenes used from *Closer*, pp. 10-15.

forms to sign which allowed me to use their feedback.[203] At the start of the workshop I briefly mentioned my research topic, provided an introduction of the play that would be the focus for the evening, and followed with a few facts and brief production history. Since the opening scene of *Closer* was being used, the names of the actors in the first cast presenting Act One, Scene One were given, along with the characters they were playing in the scene. This was followed by their performance. After the completion of the scene, the stage was reset for the second performance of Act One, Scene One, and the names of the next set of actors and the roles they were playing were introduced. The re-setting and introduction of actors took place once more, totalling three versions of Act One, Scene One, with three alternative casts. Following the performances of Act One, Scene One, a brief break was taken for the set-up of Act Two, Scene Nine. After the break, a synopsis of the plot after Act One, Scene One leading up to Act Two, Scene Nine was shared to give the audience context. Afterwards, Act Two, Scene Nine was presented in the same format as Act One, Scene One, with three alternative casts. Following the completion of Act Two, Scene Nine, there was another break in which the audience was given time to complete the questionnaires.[204] After the second break, I led the audience in an hour-long discussion about the scenes presented that evening. I encouraged them to speak freely and share their honest thoughts and opinions about the scenes, especially regarding race and representation. An acknowledgement of the sensitive subject matter was made, reiterating the fact that the workshop was a means to explore, and possibly unearth, a deeper understanding of the how the audience perceived the performance of the various casts on stage. A video recording of this workshop was made and can be found in the digital appendix.[205]

The play chosen for the second workshop was *Gethsemane. Gethsemane* was written by British playwright, screenwriter, and director David Hare, which premiered in 2008 at the National Theatre in London. It is a fictional political play that emphasises, and dramatizes, potential methods the UK Labour Party employs to raise party funds. Hare uses faults within the public and personal lives of the characters to highlight the cynicism, self-interest, and expediency of the leading political party in power. Although the play has some resemblance to the Labour Party in the UK during the Tony Blair years (1994-2007), Hare says

[203] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix G and H for audience information sheets and consent forms, pp. 38-62.
[204] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix J for completed *Closer* questionnaires, pp. 67-97.
[205] See Digital Appendix, Closer Workshop Video file.

Gethsemane is purely a fabrication. The *Closer* workshop aimed to challenge the white default casting norm for characters that are not ethnically specific, whereas the *Gethsemane* workshop aimed to challenge a character designated as black by the playwright via the stage directions, despite additional spoken text or stage directions in the play to support that designation.

I first encountered *Gethsemane* during the final year of my master's acting course when my cohort performed a production of the play. Each term the play we were to perform was announced days before we were assigned our roles in the play. A member of my cohort on the same master's acting course, had previously read *Gethsemane*. She was excited about the play even though our roles had not been announced. In a conversation about the possible roles each member of our cohort might be assigned she said, 'I wonder how they are going to cast the play? Because there are a lot of different ways they could go, except for you. I know what part you're going to get. You're going to be Monique.' I had not read the play at this point. So, I responded, 'Why do you think I'm going to play Monique?' She replied, 'Because she's the black one.' When the casting was finally announced, I had indeed been placed in the role of Monique.

Monique's first appearance in *Gethsemane* is in Act One, Scene Four. Hare wrote the following about the character in the stage directions: '**Monique Toussaint** *is black, from the French West Indies, in her late twenties*, *also suited.*'[206] There is nothing in the spoken text or subsequent stage directions that explains, or justifies, this designation. Furthermore, Monique is the only character with an ethnically specific description. The other eight characters have physical descriptions with no mention of ethnicity or skin tone.

> **Lori Drysdale** *stands alone. She is in her thirties, well dressed, with dark hair.*[207]
> **Frank Pegg** *appears. He is thin, willowy, ginger-haired, in his late twenties.* […]
> **Mike Drysdale***,* […] *is thickset, in his early thirties, a rugby player.*[208]
> **Otto Fallon** *appears. He is in his sixties, his hair in a ponytail, cufflinks flashing, with an air of unforced wealth.*[209]
> **Meredith Guest** *is close to fifty, smart and well-tailored.* **Suzette** *is sixteen, sitting on a desk in dark tights and a micro-skirt.*[210]

[206] David Hare, *Gethsemane* (London: Faber, 2008) I. 4. p. 14.
[207] Ibid., I. 1. p. 3.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid., I. 1. p. 4.
[210] Ibid., I. 4. p. 14.

> **Geoff Benzine** *is nursing a beer. He is handsome, in his thirties, with an expensive haircut.*[211]
> **Alec Beasley** […] *is tall, good-looking, in his forties, toned by squash, in blue jeans and sweatshirt.*[212]

Monique's ethnicity is mentioned, but the remaining character's ethnicities are not, therefore supporting a presumption of whiteness for the remaining eight characters. Being that *Gethsemane* delves into the public and private lives of fictional Labour Party members, it is understandable that most of the characters would be white, based on the real-life demographic of most members of British government. However, the non-white members of the UK government are slowly increasing. Therefore, it is possible that more than one character in the play could be non-white as well. The *Gethsemane* workshop challenged these assumptions. For instance, in the play, the character of Lori Drysdale is not directly involved with the British government, but rather an old schoolteacher of Suzette, the daughter of Meredith Guest, who is a Labour Party MP (member of parliament).

Due to the lengthy scenes in *Gethsemane* and the heavy political subject manner, only one scene was performed during the second workshop, with alternative casts.[213] As with the *Closer* workshop, I used RBC – Acting students to perform the scenes and served as director. Due to a lack of actor availability, I performed in one of the scenes, which was not the case in the first workshop. Rather than reprise the role of Monique that I played on my master's course production of *Gethsemane*, I chose to play Lori to experience playing a different character in the play. As before, each alternative cast had a total of five, one hour-long rehearsal sessions with me, and the actors received the same text, props, blocking, and direction whenever possible. The second workshop had the exact same format as the first, including audience questionnaires and a discussion session at the end.[214] Due to technical difficulties there is no video footage of the *Gethsemane* workshop. However, I did capture audio footage of the discussion session in the second half of the workshop, which can be found in the digital appendix.[215]

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[211] Ibid., II. 11. p. 62.
[212] Ibid., II. 13. p. 80.
[213] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix D for text of *Gethsemane* workshop scene, pp. 16-24.
[214] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix K for completed *Gethsemane* questionnaires, pp. 98-109.
[215] See Digital Appendix, Gethsemane Workshop Discussion Session file.

Analysis & Outcomes

Before the workshops I put together a questionnaire to gather audience feedback.[216] The questionnaire asked for basic demographic information from each respondent including gender, age, ethnicity, and nationality. This was done to assess any parallels between certain demographic criteria and the types of responses. Next, the questionnaire asked each respondent to rate each version of the scenes they watched based on their enjoyment level on a scale of one (not at all) to ten (very much). This was set up to gather the audience's gut reactions to each version of the scene. The rating scale was followed by two questions. The first question asked the respondent to think about the version of the scene they rated highest for level of enjoyment and explain why. The second question asked the respondent to describe the difference in their experience of watching the scenes with the same ethnicity casts (all-white cast and all-black cast), versus watching the mixed cast (black and white). The questionnaire was set up in this manner to assess what types of cast composition is preferred, as well as gauge thoughts about how race influences the impact of what is received on stage for the audience. Completion of the questionnaire was not compulsory, and some audience members chose not to complete and submit it.

There were 20 people in the audience at the *Closer* workshop, and 12 in the *Gethsemane* workshop. 15 questionnaires were received for the *Closer* workshop, and 9 for the *Gethsemane* workshop. Of the questionnaires received, I calculated the statistical information of the respondents. The following is a breakdown of the audience demographic data.

Gender	***Closer***	***Gethsemane***
Female	33%	44%
Male	**66%**	**56%**

Age	***Closer***	***Gethsemane***
21-29	**73%**	22%
30-39	13%	22%
40-49	0%	0%
50-59	7%	**34%**
60-69	7%	11%
Over 70	0%	11%

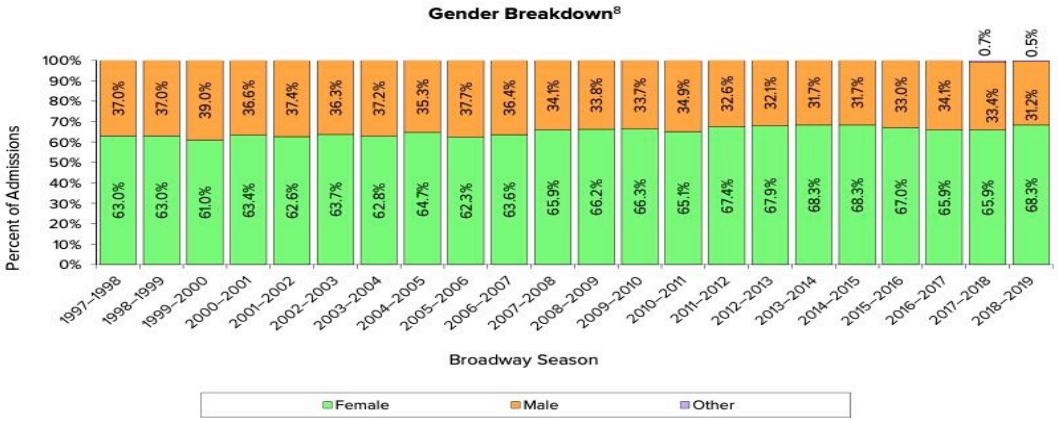
[216] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix I for *Closer* and *Gethsemane* questionnaire template, pp. 63-66.

Nationality	*Closer*	*Gethsemane*
American	26%	11%
Belgian	0%	11%
British	**53%**	**45%**
Chinese	1%	11%
Irish	7%	0%
South African	7%	11%
Spanish	0%	11%

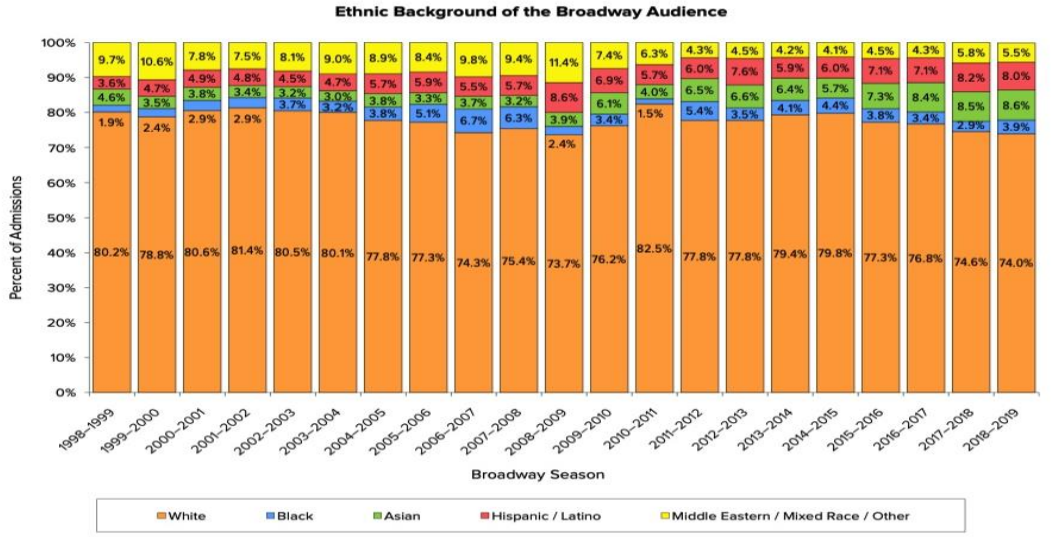
Ethnicity	*Closer*	*Gethsemane*
Black	13%	11%
Chinese	13%	11%
Hispanic	17%	0%
Jewish	7%	0%
Mixed	7%	0%
West Indian	0%	11%
White	**53%**	**67%**

One of the main priorities of theatres is their audience. Productions are often chosen, and cast, based on an assumed spectator demographic. Spectator demographics are obtained via the assessment of theatre membership and season ticket holders, as well as analysis of past theatre audience demographics. In her discourse on theatre spectatorship and representation Jill Dolan states: 'Historically, in North American [and British] culture, th[e] spectator has been assumed to be white, middle-class, heterosexual and male.'[217] Examination of the statistical demographic charts show that most of the audience for both the *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops were white British men, along with a mix of other ethnicities and nationalities. I assert that this is comparable to the audience demographics of major theatres in the UK and US. The Broadway League annually publishes a report that includes the demographics of Broadway audiences. The following charts and demographics were published in their report of the 2018-2019 season.

[217] Jill Dolan, 'The Discourse of Feminisms: The Spectator and Representation', in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance,* ed. by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 288-294 (p.288) ProQuest ebook.



[218]



[219]

Gender	Broadway Audience	U.S. Population[9]	Audience/Census Index
Female	68.3%	51.0%	133.9%
Male	31.2%	49.0%	63.7%

[220]

[218] Karen Hauser, 'Broadway Admissions by Gender', *The Demographics of the Broadway Audience 2018-2019* (New York: Broadway League, 2019), p. 16.
[219] Karen Hauser, 'Ethnic Background of the Broadway Audience', *The Demographics of the Broadway Audience 2018-2019* (New York: Broadway League, 2019) p. 22.
[220] Hauser, 'Broadway Admissions by Gender', p. 17.

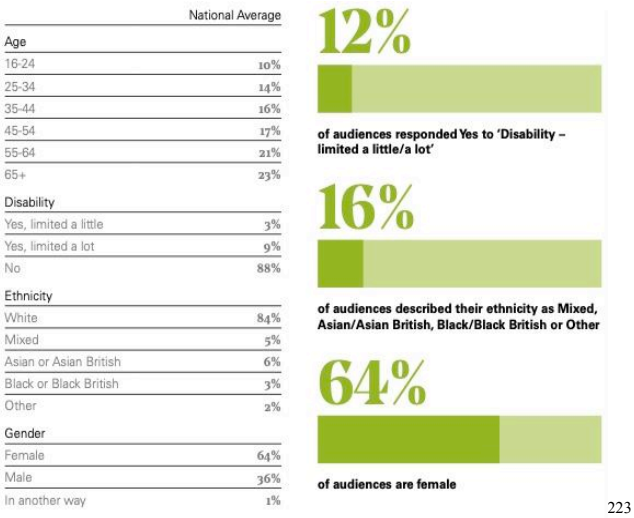
Ethnicity	New York City	NYC Suburbs	Domestic Visitors	International Visitors
Asian	11.0%	7.5%	6.1%	15.0%
Black	7.0%	3.9%	3.6%	1.9%
Hispanic/Latino	9.7%	7.3%	6.2%	11.9%
Middle Eastern / Mixed Race or Other	7.4%	6.2%	3.9%	8.2%
Caucasian	69.1%	78.4%	82.9%	66.1%

	Broadway Audience	U.S. Population[1]	Audience/Census Index
Asian	8.6%	5.7%	151.4%
Black	3.9%	12.3%	31.7%
Caucasian	74.0%	61.0%	121.3%
Hispanic/Latino	8.0%	18.0%	44.2%
Mixed Race or Other	5.5%	3.0%	183.3%

[221]

The Arts Council of England recently published their strategy for increased diversity for the decade spanning 2020-2030 entitled, *Let's Create*. *Equality, Diversity, and the Creative Case: A Data Report 2018-2019.* As one of the first reports published to kick off the decade-long strategy it acknowledges that 'the long-standing issue of under-representation in both the Portfolio and the Arts Council has to be recognised and addressed.'[222] The report is a collection of detailed statistical analyses of diversity across various sectors of the arts in the UK including: dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, visual arts, and theatre. I was unable to locate a chart with the specific demographics of theatre audiences in the UK like I did for Broadway audiences in the US. The *Equality, Diversity, and the Creative Case: A Data Report 2018-2019* does, however, provide a statistical demographic breakdown of audiences within the arts collectively across the aforementioned mentioned sectors, which is shown in the next chart.

[221] Hauser, 'Ethnic Background of the Broadway Audience', p. 24.
[222] Arts Council England, *Equality, Diversity, and the Creative Case: A Data Report 2018-2019* (Manchester: Arts Council England, 2019), p. 3 <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_DiversityReport_Final_03032020_0.pdf> [accessed 2 September 2020].



	National Average
Age	
16-24	10%
25-34	14%
35-44	16%
45-54	17%
55-64	21%
65+	23%
Disability	
Yes, limited a little	3%
Yes, limited a lot	9%
No	88%
Ethnicity	
White	84%
Mixed	5%
Asian or Asian British	6%
Black or Black British	3%
Other	2%
Gender	
Female	64%
Male	36%
In another way	1%

223

The total number of audience members in both workshops I conducted was modest in comparison to the millions of patrons that comprise theatre audiences in the UK and US. However, considering the information provided in the charts for Broadway and UK arts audiences, the demographic and statistical breakdown of the audience for my *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops were similar, except for gender. Women comprise most audiences in the UK and US, whereas in my workshops, men constituted most of the audience.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to demographic information, the questionnaire contained questions about the performances. The respondent was asked to rate how much they enjoyed each version (alternative cast) of the scene on a scale of one (not at all) to ten (very much). They were also asked to respond to the following prompts: considering the version of the scene you most enjoyed, please explain what made it more enjoyable than the other versions. How did your perception/enjoyment of the scene change whilst watching it with same ethnicity casts versus mixed ethnicity casts? On the questionnaire I did not initially use language that referred to the ethnicity of the actors on purpose. Inquiring about which version of the scene they enjoyed the most, and why, provided an opportunity to receive more open and honest feedback before bringing the respondents' focus to the ethnicity of the actors performing in the scenes, and evaluating from that aspect. The questionnaire was structured this way with the aim of uncovering potential invisible systemic, discriminatory, and prejudice beliefs held by members of the audience, akin to the implicit bias discussed in

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223 'Audiences', in Arts Council England, *Equality, Diversity, and the Creative Case: A Data Report 2018-2019* (Manchester: Arts Council England, 2019), p. 86 <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_DiversityReport_Final_03032020_0.pdf> [accessed 2 September 2020].

section 2.2. The discussion session following the performances at each workshop furnished a platform to identify and examine these beliefs in relation to representation. The following charts show a statistical breakdown of the average ratings of the scenes performed in each workshop.

***Closer* Workshop Average Ratings**

	Scene One	Scene Nine
Black Cast	5.5 out of 10	**8.2 out of 10**
White Cast	7.4 out of 10	6.5 out of 10
Mixed Cast	**7.6 out of 10**	7 out of 10

***Gethsemane* Workshop Average Ratings**

	Scene Eleven
Black Cast	8 out of 10
White Cast	7.2 out of 10
Mixed Cast	**8.7 out of 10**

In the *Closer* workshop, the mixed cast from Act One, Scene One received the highest average rating of 7.6 out of 10, and the all-black cast of Act Two, Scene Nine received the highest average rating of 8.2 out of 10. In the *Gethsemane* workshop, the mixed cast received the highest average rating of 8.7 out of 10. Except for Act One, Scene One of *Closer,* the all-white casts received the lowest average rating for the scenes performed in both workshops. This result was unanticipated. Since whiteness is an established norm in the performing arts industry, and most casts and theatre audiences are white, I hypothesised that the all-white casts in both workshops would score the highest average rating. This was a naïve assumption.

As a black woman and actress, I conducted this research because I recognised a lack of black female representation in the performing arts industry. I would like to see more representation of black actors on stage and screen, but I am not solely interested in the representation of only all-black casts. I am interested in seeing an increase of black representation beyond negative stereotypes, and inclusive of all ethnicities. Taking that into consideration, it would follow that white people could also feel the same way regarding white representation, and the responses from the workshop questionnaires reflect this sentiment.

The data collected from both workshops show a preference for scenes that include people of colour in theatre. I was curious about whether the same assertion could be made for the film and television side of the industry as well. University of California Los Angeles' (UCLA) College of Social Sciences annually publishes the *Hollywood Diversity Report*, which examines 'relationships between diversity and the bottom line in the Hollywood entertainment industry. It considers […] the degree to which women and people of color are present in front of and behind the camera.'[224] Since 2014, the report has reviewed the following: actor demographics in film and television shows, global box office numbers, audience demographics, and the overall demographic of the US. UCLA social psychologist and co-author of the report, Ana-Christina Ramón wrote:

> Our findings reveal that regardless of race, audiences want to see diversity on the screen. […] Our reports have continually shown that diversity sells, but the TV and film product continues to fall short. So audiences are left starved for more representation on screen that reflects the world they see in their daily lives.[225]

Based on this report, the findings of my workshops are on par with the outcomes of other audience studies.

The findings of the *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops, and the *Hollywood Diversity Report*, show that whitewashed narratives are perpetuated in the performing arts industry and rarely include people of colour. Between the discussions held at the end of the *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops, and the feedback given on the questionnaires, there was a consensus of audience members wanting to see more of the everyday world demographic, which is quite ethnically diverse, reflected on the stage. On some level, the performing arts industry, including stage and screen, recognises this. The fact that UCLA received funding for the *Hollywood Diversity Report's* research from Sony Pictures Entertainment, Time Warner Inc., and The Walt Disney Company, provides evidence that some major networks are willing to financially support an investigation into representation in the performing arts industry. Unfortunately, the implementation of diversity has taken the form of tokenism and ticking boxes, rather than a carefully considered invocation of non-white actors in non-stereotypical

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[224] Dr. Darnell Hunt and others, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2020: A Tale of Two Hollywoods*, (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2020), p.2 <https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2020-Film-2-6-2020.pdf> [accessed 3 February 2020].
[225] Marina Fang, 'Audiences Want Diversity in Hollywood. Hollywood's Been Slow to Get the Message.', *Huffington Post US*, 27 February 2018 <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hollywood-diversity-study-black-panther_n_5a954898e4b0699553cc3cc8> [accessed 3 April 2020].

roles, as discussed in chapter two with the *global view casting* concept. The same sentiments were expressed by some of the workshop audience members. The following is feedback from one of the *Closer* workshop questionnaires: 'I feel personally the mixed casts added a dynamic which is more realistic, showing a correct reflection of the diverse society I identify with. (Male, 30-39, British, Mixed-race, *Closer* workshop)'[226] A more realistic and correct reflection is key. In the *Closer* discussion session, a member of the audience recounted the 2016 production of *Beauty and the Beast* at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, England. A black actress was cast as Belle, while the remaining roles were played by white actors. This was a colour-blind casting situation like RSC's 2017 *Coriolanus* discussed in section 2.3. The audience member said, at the time, the Belgrade Theatre were applauding themselves for their forward thinking in diversity in theatre by casting a black actress as Belle, but they could have done more. I agree. The role of Belle's father, Maurice, could have been played by a black actor as well, especially because there is a familial relation. This could have opened the possibility for deeper exploration of layers and nuances present within the narrative and themes of the play, through a purposeful implementation of black actors in the production. Rather than ignoring the racial dynamics that are introduced by having a black actor onstage, which the colour-blind casting concept does, implementing the black actors into the play, and considering how their presence can add to the production in unique and new ways – like the *global view casting* concept suggests – is far more beneficial.

Data from my workshops, and the *Hollywood Diversity Report,* show that white audiences want an idealised representation of the world reflected in the performing arts industry via more mixed casts. White fragility could potentially be a subconscious reason behind this preference. Young explains:

> Representations of Black people on screen function as comforters, helping to maintain "white", middle-class identity as synonymous with power, control and autonomy. The illusory identity needs constant reassurance of its imagined supremacy and centrality, and cultural narratives which perform this function.[227]

I argue that although Young's assertion is about film representation, the same can easily be applied to theatre. The white audience members' preference of mixed casts in both of my workshops is potentially driven by their need to maintain, and reinforce, their white normalised status, thus exposing white fragility. DiAngelo discusses the unspoken

[226] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix J for completed *Closer* questionnaires, p. 95.
[227] Young, p. 182.

advantages whiteness has on the lives of white people, including herself: 'Another way that my life has been shaped by being white is that my race is held up as the norm for humanity. Whites are "just people" – our race is rarely if ever named.'[228] The workshops' audiences recognised the demand for increased black representation. However, there may be a fear of losing *their* visibility and representation because as it stands 'virtually any representation of *human* is based on white people's norms and images – "flesh-colored" makeup, standard emoji, depictions of Adam and Eve, Jesus and Mary, educational models of the human body with white skin and blue eyes.'[229] Therefore, as a means of preservation of their own identity and understanding of the human experience, white people need to see some representation of whiteness onstage, even though people of colour are often denied that privilege.

Along with a desire for realistic reflections of diverse societies, feedback from both workshops expressed that race barely affected their viewing or enjoyment of the scenes. Instead, acting ability, objectives, and stakes employed by the actors were paramount to their enjoyment. The following is some of their feedback:

> My perception/enjoyment did not change watching it with same ethnicity cast versus mixed ethnicities cast. (Female, 50-59, White, Belgian)[230]
>
> I think when it comes to ethnicity, I didn't let it affect the scene so much because I was more fixed on thoughts the actors had rather than colour. Being a woman of colour, I can see why I enjoyed a mix of the scene [mixed cast] because diversity is much more interesting. Also, I was more fixed on physicality of the characters, and stakes, and objectives being played. (Female, 21-29, West Indian, American)[231]
>
> It doesn't [the ethnicity of the actors]. My enjoyment has more to do with how deep the actor invests into the character, and how they find the internal life of the character during the scene. (Male, 30-39, Chinese)[232]
>
> I also see many plays – with students and professionally, with mixed race colour and I feel (maybe I am failing myself) that I accept and listen and look and do not get affected by it. (Female, over 70, White British)[233]

Although audience members of various ages, ethnicities, and nationalities recognised there was a difference in the actor's ethnicities, it was difficult for them to acknowledge that skin

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[228] DiAngelo and Dyson, p. 56.
[229] Ibid., p. 57.
[230] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix K for completed *Gethsemane* questionnaires, p. 100.
[231] Ibid., p. 103.
[232] Ibid., p. 99.
[233] Ibid., p. 108.

colour influenced how they receive, perceive, and ultimately judge their enjoyment of the scenes. DiAngelo clearly points out that 'in a society in which race clearly matters, our race profoundly shapes us. If we want to challenge this construct, we must make an honest accounting of how it is manifest in our own lives and in the society around us.'[234] Film and theatre are ideal venues where the construct of race can be challenged. Some workshop audience members were able to identify that they may have had some racial bias when watching the scenes. During the discussion session of the *Closer* workshop, one of the white actors that performed in the scenes shared a revelation he experienced while watching Act Two, Scene Nine. This scene involved two women discussing their romantic involvement with two men. The second version of the scene was performed by a mixed cast (one black, and one white actress), whereas the third and final version of the scene was performed by an all-black cast. He shares his thoughts about watching that switch:

> An interesting switch that I realised in myself. The two actresses got up for the second scene, the last performance, Muyiwa and Mara. I realised in my head, without, before they'd even begun speaking, before they'd referenced any of the men, in my head, the men had switched race as well. And it became black men that they were referring to, the offstage unseen men became black men for some reason, in my head.

A female audience member of Irish descent spoke up after his comment with her thoughts:

> Really interesting because in my head they were white. But I don't know whether that's because I'm white, but they were definitely just like two white men in my head. Even though I've seen it with obviously a BAME cast before [referencing the RBC – Acting 2017 production].[235]

Implicit bias appeared in the questionnaire feedback as well:

> I find myself making assumptions based on their ethnicity. E.g., Black = more promiscuous/confident, White = more reserved/shy. (Male, 21-29, White British)[236]

> The only time race appeared more dominant was the final scene with the two black women – they appeared more "fierce" with each other. Perhaps it is because these actors were more comfortable with each other from doing the scene more. Another time, the "American" accent x-factor made the scenes more fierce because of the bolder nature of America. (Female, 21-29, White, Jewish, British)[237]

These statements provide evidence that even though the audience thinks the ethnicity of actors does not affect their enjoyment of a performance, it, in fact, does, if only on a

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[234] DiAngelo and Dyson, p. 73.
[235] See Digital Appendix, Closer Workshop Video file, 1:03:42-1:04:43.
[236] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix J for completed *Closer* questionnaires, p. 79.
[237] Ibid., p. 77.

subconscious level. In section 2.2 I discussed how the implementation of colour-blind casting is affected by implicit bias. The examples given of audience responses from the workshop show that implicit bias is a factor in audience reception as well. Chapter one explained how negative stereotypes of black women, and the social stigma of blackness, were constructed. Stereotypes, racism, and prejudice are woven into the fabric of American and British societies, making them difficult to isolate and identify. This was demonstrated by the comment about the black actresses appearing 'fiercer' than their white counterparts in performance. The terms: *strong black woman, fierce, bold,* and *loud* in reference to the black female characters and actresses in the scenes were used multiple times in the workshop's feedback. In their discourse on gendered and racial microaggressions towards black women, Jioni A. Lewis and Helen A. Neville state: 'In contemporary society, the stereotype of the dominant and emasculating Black woman as the matriarch has been transformed into the "strong Black woman" stereotype, the independent Black woman who is self-sufficient and can take care of herself.'[238] People use the term *strong black woman* as a positive affirmation without realising the microagressive undertones it carries.

Lewis and Neville define the term microagession as 'subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges, which are "put downs" toward people of color.'[239] They conducted a study entitled 'Construction and Initial Validation of the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black Women', which concludes that 'findings from qualitative research suggest that people of color experience common types of racial microaggressions related to […] being made to feel invisible, and having assumptions made about their cultural ways of being and communication styles.'[240] The *Closer* workshop provided a rare opportunity for me to address microagressions such as the use of the word 'fierce', and comments about the enjoyment of watching strong, bold, black women onstage, and in particular, Americans. In my acting experience, I have often been characterised as a 'strong black actress' and encouraged to display those attributes while performing. I brought this up in the *Closer* workshop discussion, and explained that, as a black actress, I was tired of playing the 'strong black woman' because that is what is expected when people look at me. I would prefer the challenge of playing a different type of character. I reflected on the comment about enjoying

[238] Jioni A. Lewis and Helen A. Neville, 'Construction and Initial Validation of the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black Women', *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62.2 (2015), 289-302 <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000062> (p. 291).
[239] Ibid., p. 289.
[240] Ibid., p. 290.

watching strong black women, especially Americans, because they are fierce and bold, and identified that as a stereotype. Not all black women are strong, fierce, and bold, and we should not expect all of them to be. For a moment the room was silent as some of the audience contemplated this notion for the first time. When considering the ways womanhood and the social stigma of blackness influence the representation of black actresses, data collected from this case study suggests that white audiences believe that race does not affect the reception of their performative nature. However, white audiences possess implicit bias and unsubstantiated assumptions about black women in performance, thus inadvertently encouraging stereotypical representation of black actresses in performance.

The *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops were performed on a small scale with miniscule budgets. Nonetheless, they served as a helpful tool that provided practical insight into audience reception. The preparation of the workshops presented a few challenges, and the execution was a bit flawed. The biggest challenge I faced was finding actors to participate. Since I was unable to pay actors, I utilised acting students from RBC – Acting who volunteered to participate. As mentioned earlier, the two black actresses used in the *Closer* workshop were also in the full-length RBC – Acting production, therefore their performances were innately stronger, because they were more familiar with the play than the other actors. I used a mix of final year bachelor's students and master's acting students; some British, some American. This further affected the reception of performance due to the difference in skill level, and the actors' ability to perform in non-native accents. I requested feedback from the actors involved in the workshops, and although it is not addressed separately in this section, their feedback, combined with the feedback from the audience, helped inform my overall assessment of this case study.[241]

The rehearsals and workshops took place during the final term of the school year, so the actors had end-of-year performances and assessments to contend with, in addition to the workshops. There was a total of five hours of rehearsal, which was spread out over a course of two weeks for each scene, and each alternative cast. The split focus of the actors between their coursework and workshop rehearsals more than likely affected the calibre of their performance in the workshops. There were very few black actors in the RBC – Acting drama

[241] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix L, pp. 110-115, and Digital Appendix Maggie Workshop Reflections and Miyuwa Workshop Reflections files for actor's reflections on being involved in the workshops.

school, and due to lack of availability, I had to perform in one of the scenes in the *Gethsemane* workshop. This caused more difficulty in my direction of the scenes for second workshop because my attention was divided, which may have slightly affected the success of the workshop as well.

A pitfall in the execution of the workshops in this case study was the audience size and demographic. Most workshop attendees were affiliated with RBC – Acting in the capacity of tutor, director, or student. Due to time constraints and limited resources, I was unable to market the workshops on a larger scale. Only a few audience members were members of the community. I would have appreciated a larger audience with a more diverse demographic. This workshop template would be even more beneficial if applied in a professional setting with proper funding, professional actors of similar skill level, and marketed to a broader audience. It is a simple tool professional theatres can utilise to gauge practical ways to promote authentic, diverse, and inclusive casting practices, increase their audience demographic, and create positive and helpful community engagement.

In August of 2018, I attended the Globe Theatre's Shakespeare and Race Festival in London. It included a two-day symposium entitled *Shakespeare & Race: Across Borders a Scholarly Symposium,* and a research-in-action workshop called *Staging Race and Diversity in the Shakespearean Theatre*. The aim of the Shakespeare and Race Festival was the following:

> Theatre practitioners, educationalists and academics will reflect on the intersection of performing race with religion; eroticism and exoticism; stagecraft; acting and directing; and other subjects. We aim to build on the success of the Globe's 'Shakespeare and Race' season [summer 2018] and expand the range and diversity of our understanding of the dramatic canon.[242]

The goals of *Staging Race and Diversity in the Shakespearean Theatre* workshop were shared in an information sheet given to attendees.[243] The background for the action workshop was stated as the following:

> This workshop examines the relationship between staging practices and racial diversity. To what extent do choices about costume, set and lighting either privilege

[242] Shakespeare's Globe, 'Shakespeare & Race | Shakespeare's Globe', *Shakespeare's Globe*, 2018 <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/whats-on/shakespeare-and-race/#maincontent> [accessed 5 July 2018].
[243] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix M for the Shakespeare & Race: Across Borders a Scholarly Symposium itinerary and Staging Race and Diversity in the Shakespearean Theatre workshop information sheet, pp. 116-120.

> white actors or place actors of colour at a disadvantage? Does staging Shakespeare in historical dress present a challenge to directors and designers when it comes to racial diversity?[244]

The *Staging Race and Diversity in the Shakespearean Theatre* workshop was a practice-based seminar that was very similar to the workshops I conducted for this case study. They presented scenes with diverse casts from three different Shakespeare plays: *Titus Andronicus, Richard II,* and *Macbeth.* There was a different area of focus for each play. Like my workshops, after the scenes from one play were performed, a moderator led the audience in a discussion about the chosen area of focus. The *Titus Andronicus* discussion, examined cross-casting and race as a signifier. The *Richard II* discussion focused on the challenges of lighting actors of colour in the theatre, specifically in a dim candle-lit space like the Sam Wanamaker Theatre at the Globe. Finally, the *Macbeth* discussion explored the objectification of actors' bodies, and the impact being an actor of colour has from that perspective. Each discussion session was guided by specific questions outlined in the information sheet, and certain aspects were highlighted depending on the play being explored.

As an audience, we were challenged to think about elements such as: acting, casting, lighting, and costuming, in relation to how they affect actors of colour in performance. Provocations were made regarding the ways actors may be at a disadvantage during performance in areas such as: lighting, costuming, make-up, and accent. Considering the challenges and pitfalls of my workshops, in comparison to the Globe, I affirm that they were beneficial because they provided insight on the ways that the perception and reception of characters change when black actors, and more specifically black women, play roles that are traditionally assumed to be white characters. Upon completion of this case study, I conclude that administering the *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops, and attending the Globe's Shakespeare and Race Festival, provides evidence for the implementation of more opportunities, and creative spaces, for inclusive discussion about race and representation in the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry. Practical exploration of audience perception through workshops has been the focus of the first case study. The following section will examine actor perception.

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[244] Appendices, Volume II, Appendix M, p. 119.

3.2 Case Study 2 – Actor Perception

Case study two focuses on actor perception. Discussing the role of the performer in *Performance,* Julian Hilton states that 'at the level of the individual performance, the performer pleases, and through pleasure instructs, intensifies feeling and advances the cultural consciousness. In a wider sense, performance may stimulate, promote and celebrate community.'[245] Hilton points out that the actor's performance goes beyond simple entertainment, it creates an impact that boosts awareness of social behaviour, ideas, and views in society. Building on Hilton's idea that performance can advance cultural consciousness, I was interested in examining if it can also advance the personal consciousness of the actor.

There are many aspects of a production that actors cannot control, such as the costumes they wear, and how they are lit in a show. Drama schools and other actor training courses place great emphasis on the importance of actors 'knowing their casting'. This means that actors should know the type of characters/roles they will be considered for in the professional industry. This is based primarily on their physical appearance, and secondly on their acting ability and talent. Actors usually determine their 'type' by soliciting the thoughts and opinions of others such as friends, acting instructors, and agents, rather than seeking the answer within themselves. Expanding Hilton's notion that actors advance the cultural consciousness of the audience, the focus of case study two explores potential avenues for the expansion an actor's personal consciousness via the following question: in what ways can an actor be enabled to disregard negative personal views, and limiting cultural stereotypes, to bolster positive personal consciousness?

Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance (Rose Bruford) in the greater London area, has a Bachelor's American Theatre Arts (ATA) course with the following focus:

> Theatre in Britain and in Europe was heavily influenced in the twentieth century – […] by the development of various performance practices in the United States of America. […] Furthermore, theatrical performance in the United States over the past two centuries particularly demonstrates the role of theatre in negotiating and questioning national, regional and cultural identities and in exploring the relationship between the individual and society. The richness of this interchange and the

[245] Julian Hilton, *Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 142.

> opportunities it offers the dynamic theatre practitioner of today lie at the heart of the American Theatre Arts programme.[246]

Because this thesis is a comparative analysis of the performing arts industry in the UK and US, Rose Bruford was a good location to conduct the second case study, utilising acting students from the ATA programme. Expanding on the workshop model from case study one, I moved past audience reception and focused on actor perception of themselves, and their abilities to play certain roles. My aims for this case study were the following: help students identify perceived limitations they face in the performing arts industry, push the boundaries of students' perception of their performative self, challenge white casting norms, and increase students' ability to 'think outside the box' in all aspects of their artistry.

Similar to the workshops in case study one, scripts with non-ethnically specific characters that are traditionally cast with white actors were used. Since I was working with students on the ATA course, and my research considers the UK and the US, I chose one play written by a playwright from each nation. I continued to work with *Closer* by Patrick Marber because he is a British playwright. For the second play, I chose *The Shape of Things* by American playwright, film director, and screenwriter Neil LaBute. I chose this play for reasons similar to my choice of *Closer,* which I mentioned in the previous section. Number one, the play is an interesting examination of art, love, and manipulation, and the extremes people go to, to literally and figuratively, change the shape of things and to gain their desired result. Number two, the students on the ATA course were in their early twenties, and I wanted to give them a chance to work with characters that were similar to their age and experience. The characters in *The Shape of Things* are also in their early twenties and university students. Number three, as with *Closer,* none of the character descriptions in the play are ethnically specific, yet there is an assumption of whiteness.

The Shape of Things is set in an American midwestern college, in the early 2000s. 'After a chance meeting in a museum, Evelyn, a sexy, aggressive artist, and Adam, a shy, insecure student, become embroiled in an intense affair. Before long, it veers into dangerous, seductive territory as Adam, under Evelyn's steady influence, goes to unimaginable lengths to

[246] Rose Bruford College, 'Bachelor of Arts (Honours) American Theatre Arts Programme Specification', *Rose Bruford College*, 2017 <https://www.bruford.ac.uk/media/documents/Prog_Spec_ATA_RBC.pdf> [accessed 16 February 2020].

improve his appearance and character.'[247] Directed by LaBute, *The Shape of Things* premiered in May 2001 at the Almeida Theatre in London, and later transferred with the original cast to off-Broadway's Promenade Theatre in New York later that year, followed by a film adaptation in 2003.

The workshop I conducted at Rose Bruford involved textual analysis of the two plays, along with an investigation of the students' perceptions of what a character can look like in terms of casting, and their personal beliefs about their ability to play certain roles. As mentioned in chapter two and case study one, there is an assumption of whiteness in characters because of the established white hegemonic norm. I posit this assumption is made for a couple of reasons. First, the performing arts industry is part of a white supremacist system, and within that system whiteness is the established norm, therefore every character is assumed to be white unless otherwise stated. Second, a majority of plays professionally produced are written by white male playwrights from a white male perspective. So, it follows that most of the characters written by white playwrights would be assumed white, unless otherwise specified. A bulk of drama school's curriculum is the study of white male playwrights. Drama schools provide the perfect place to confront the issue of stereotypical representation of actors of colour because they are educational environments that encourage risk and experimentation. Rather than reinforce the professional casting standards of the performing arts industry, there are opportunities within drama schools for innovation.

The workshop at Rose Bruford took place in December 2018. It was conducted over the course of four days, for five hours a day, over a two-week period. I worked with a group of twelve final year students from the ATA programme. The focus of the workshop was actor perception, and all the discussions and exploration took place during normal school hours in the confines of studio spaces at Rose Bruford. The following chart is a demographic breakdown of the twelve students I worked with.

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[247] 'The Shape of Things by Neil LaBute', *Gale OneFile: News,* 3 October 2013, <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=STND&u=uce&id=GALE%7CA344656735&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon> [accessed 4 September 2020].

Women	Men	Non-Binary
2 Black British	2 Black British	1 Black British
1 Cuban American	2 White British	
1 Mixed (black & white) British	1 Italian American	
1 White British		
1 White European (Macedonian)		

The students were given copies of the scripts and assigned scenes before the workshop began. Parts of Act One, Scene One, Act Two, Scene Nine, and Act Two, Scene Ten were used from *Closer*. Scenes in *The Shape of Things* are tilted by location rather than scene number, so a portion of 'The restaurant lobby' scene and the entirety of 'The living room' scene was used.[248] Day one of the workshop began with introductions. The students shared where they were from, how they started acting, and why they chose to study on the ATA course. Although they had been on the course for over two years at that point, they had never shared their acting origin stories or reasons for choosing ATA with each other. I believe revealing these personal anecdotes at the start of our time together established an open space where new insights could be contributed and gained. Numerous students said they chose the ATA course because it grants them access to a range of practices within the performing arts beyond acting, such as writing, and directing. Additionally, ATA allows students to study abroad in America, which exposed them to a diverse range of playwrights beyond the typical white British male curriculum provided through traditional drama school BA acting courses in the UK. Based on these responses, I identified that the students had a desire to acquire a more comprehensive and diverse drama school education to become better theatre practitioners in the professional world.

In the workshops conducted in case study one, it was important for me to establish a safe space for the audience to share their observations and understanding of what was presented in the scenes. I achieved this by making an open statement at the beginning of each discussion session that highlighted the rare opportunity they had to discuss representation and race in a group setting. I encouraged a respectful, non-judgemental space of openness and sharing, and it proved successful. It was important for me to establish that same type of environment with the Rose Bruford students. As in the *Closer* and *Gethsemane* workshops presented in the

[248] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix N, for Rose Bruford workshop scenes used, pp. 121-136.

previous section, I also made an open statement to the Rose Bruford students, that the time spent in the workshops was meant to be a safe space. I mentioned that due to the nature of what would be discussed during my time with them, some sensitive issues may arise, and that personal information might be shared. Because of this, I requested that everyone in the room remained respectful of each other, and that what was discussed in the room stayed in the room. With one exception, I would use the data gleaned from the workshop for my PhD research. Each student gave permission for the use the data I gathered from this workshop via signing a consent form.[249]

To encourage a safe space and open sharing amongst the students, I recounted personal anecdotes about difficulties experienced with my drama school education due to my race and gender, and how I overcame them. I also empathised with the students when they shared their issues and concerns. I did not want the non-black students to feel alienated within the group because they did not identify with that particular lived experience. So, I invited all the students to focus on personal difficulties each of them had faced up to that point in their actor training, dealing with race or otherwise. This shifted the focus of the workshop to each actor individually, and their personal perception of their perceived challenges, thus fostering a more inclusive environment. I did not minimise or place higher value over one student's experience as compared to the another. I did not pressure any of them to share more than they wanted. Most importantly, I listened to what all of them had to say and did not shut them down as they spoke their truth. I believe that this approach was successful because I am a woman of colour that encouraged open discussion about racial issues while genuinely listening, empathising, and sharing experiences of my own, from the position of a marginalised individual. I suppose this helped the students foster trust in me, and therefore they were able to open up and share their thoughts and experiences with each other.
Once their interests had been established, I asked them to share the perceived challenges and/or obstacles facing them in the performing arts industry. I expected the students of colour would have more input than the white students due to their marginalised status, but this was not the case. Various issues arose such as being pigeon-holed into playing certain roles (i.e., 'the angry black woman', the black 'intellectual' in the white family, East London drug dealer), and being overlooked and denied prominent/leading roles which were given to those they perceived as the 'favoured' actors on the course. The black students voiced concerns

[249] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix O for signed Rose Bruford Student Consent forms, pp. 138-150.

about playing roles that only pertain to black trauma. The example of being a slave or a servant, rather than characters that have a more common human experience, such as being unlucky in love, was given. One of the black British students expressed why the lack of representation is a problem for them.

> So, like, the lack of representation is a huge issue that I think I'm facing. And I guess that's the limitation of the types of stories that are out right now, and what stories they want to perpetuate. Which is kind of scary in a way because there's so much more. There's so much that we're not talking about that is actually more interesting, that we can find out about. So that's my main issue. So, I'm questioning myself. Whether I want to be in this industry [where] there's like a lack of representation of myself, and within the people higher up who have been doing it for ages. And the lack of conversation because there's been a lack of representation. So, they wouldn't know how to handle someone like me, who doesn't really like football, but is really into music, and is not your stereotypical anything, but I may look like it.[250]

Black students in educational environments outside of drama school have difficulties with the lack of black representation as well. In 'Creative Space?: the Experience of Black Women in British Art Schools' Juliette Jarrett writes about the difficulties of being one the few black British women in art school. 'It is difficult to resist the pressure to conform to the predominant ethos of the art school environment, particularly when a refusal to do so could leave one further isolated by the mainstream.'[251] Although the student in the Rose Bruford workshop was speaking about drama school, and his prospects in the performing arts industry, I argue that he, and many other black actors in the UK and US, are grappling with feelings of isolation from the mainstream like Jarrett mentions.

Another student in the workshop spoke about the lack, limitation, and false representation of black and mixed-race women in the industry:

> I feel like people don't understand how much seeing like, a representation of you, what I'd say is false representation of you, affects you internally. […] So, I think if you're constantly seeing you're the thug, or black men cheat, or all that shit, then it's kind of like, 'Everybody's got this attitude of me.' Some people will stay there. […] So, it's not only the lack of representation that fucks me off. Sorry. It's the false representation because identity. Like, people are so different, and in some ways, you might be similar to these characters, but not in all ways, because everyone's different.[252]

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[250] See Digital Appendix, Rose Bruford Workshop Opening Discussion file, 38:30-39:37.
[251] Juliette Jarrett, 'Creative Space?: The Experience of Black Women in British Art Schools', in *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism* ed. by Delia Jarrett-Macauley (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 121-135 (p. 131).
[252] See Digital Appendix, Rose Bruford Workshop Opening Discussion file, 39:42-40:48.

Due to the open, non-judgemental, safe space I created for the students, some of their deep-seated issues and concerns about their drama school experience, and the performing arts industry, were able to be addressed. Although much of the discussion focused on race, through their sharing, the students recognised that each one of them was struggling in their own way, and I believe this brought them closer as a cohort. What was meant to be a brief discussion about challenges and obstacles in the industry, lasted more than a couple of hours. The students spoke with a deep passion and fervour, which indicates they had a dire need to unburden themselves to me, and each other. All but one of the students identified with one or more marginalised group, whether it was being a woman, a person of colour, an immigrant, or part of the LGBTQI community. Although my research focuses on black actresses, the first day of the Rose Bruford workshop, and particularly the discussion about challenges faced in the industry, illuminated the broader applications, and implications of my research. Because my research addresses the intersectionality of womanhood and blackness, this workshop proved that tools such as the workshops conducted in section 3.1, as well as this one, can be applied to other marginalised groups as well to gain valuable insights.

Once their challenges had been discussed, the rest of day involved a read-through and textual analysis of *The Shape of Things.* All twelve students got a chance to read for one of the characters in the play. As mentioned before, the characters in *The Shape of Things* are not ethnically specific. However, an argument can be made that Evelyn's character is because she says the following line, 'No, I asked for it. I had this terrible hook. "The Jewish Slope," we called it in Lake Forest…the only ski run around!'[253] I argue the comment that her nose has a 'Jewish Slope' does not necessarily mean that character is white. Evelyn never states outright that she is Jewish, and even if she did, she could still potentially be cast with an actor of colour. Many believe Jewish people are white, but a 2019 article published in *The Times of Israel* highlights this false assumption.

> So far, population studies, designed by and for a Jewish community that largely expresses as "white," have generally neglected to ask systematic and reliable questions about race and ethnicity. As a result, numerous important studies contain either inconsistent data on the racial or ethnic identities of American Jews […] or in the aforementioned undercounting of Jews of Color in general.[254]

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[253] Neil LaBute, *The Shape of Things* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 2011) p. 41.
[254] Ilana Kaufman and Ari Kelman, 'Jews of Color and Who Counts in the Jewish Community', *The Times of Israel*, 21 May 2019 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jews-of-color-and-who-counts-in-the-jewish-community/> [accessed 5 September 2020].

Considering the systemic erasure of Jews of colour in the US, it is possible for the character of Evelyn, as well as the other characters in the play, to be cast with non-white actors.

During the workshop we read through the play one scene at a time, stopping after each scene to analyse the text. Since the characters are not ethnically specific, I had the students pay particular attention to ways the subtext of the narrative might shift if a person of colour spoke certain lines of the text versus a white person. This is illustrated at the beginning of the play in the 'The museum' scene. The stage directions at the top of the scene read:

> *(The museum. Silence. Darkness)*
>
> *(Large white box of a room. Wooden floor polished to a high shine. Several hallways feed off in different directions.)*
>
> *(A young woman stands near a stretch of velvet rope. She has a can in one hand and stares up at an enormous human sculpture. After a moment, a young man [in uniform] steps across the barrier and approaches her.)*[255]

The woman holding the can is Evelyn, a post-graduate art student, and the young man in uniform is a security guard named Adam, who is also an undergraduate English literature student. At the beginning of the scene, Adam approaches Evelyn and asks her to step back from the statue because she is standing too close. Rather than comply, she starts a conversation with him. During that conversation the following text is spoken:

> EVELYN: Truthfully? I'm building up my nerve, and if I go back over, I'll probably be a big wuss about it and take off…
>
> ADAM: About what? The "wuss" part, I mean…
>
> EVELYN: I was going to deface the statue.
>
> ADAM: Oh. Oh… *(Pointing)* Is that paint?
>
> EVELYN: Yes.
>
> ADAM: Great…from across the room, I thought you were maybe one of the cleaning people, I was hoping that was Lemon Pledge or something…

[255] LaBute, p. 1.

(They share a smile.)[256]

Within that portion of text, Evelyn admits her plan to deface a museum statue with spray paint, and Adam makes a light-hearted comment about hoping the can of spray paint was 'Lemon Pledge', a popular dust cleaning product in America. The two 'share a smile' and continue with the conversation. The students identified this section of the scene as problematic because the subtext can shift drastically if Evelyn is played by an actress of colour, and Adam is white. The students pointed out the prejudiced belief that most Jamaicans and Hispanics have a cleaning occupation. Therefore, Adam telling Evelyn that he thought she was a cleaning person quickly switches from a witty joke to a biting microagression, so sharing a smile then proceeding with the conversation seems inappropriate given the context. The students discussed how a director, or actors, could easily address this issue without changing the text by simply adding a brief exchange of looks. A look from Evelyn that expresses that Adam has offended her with his prejudiced presumptive comment, followed by a look from Adam that recognises his mistake, and conveys an apologetic sentiment before they share a smile and move on with the conversation. This exchange could happen on stage within a matter of seconds. Instead of ignoring the racist undertones now present because of the historic colonial context, and the difference in the ethnicity of actors onstage, like colour-blind casting would, it has been carefully considered and acknowledged in a way that does not drastically affect the narrative unfolding before the audience. We read through the entire play in this manner.

After the read-through and text analysis was complete, the students separated into their assigned scene groupings and rehearsed their scenes. The scenes were subsequently performed in front of class for each other. Like case study one, there were variations in the types of casts: an all-black cast, an all-white cast, and mixed ethnicities. After the scenes were presented, we discussed how and if the perception of the characters and narrative changed based on the ethnicity of the actors playing the roles. Rehearsal, scene sharing, and discussions of *The Shape of Things* occupied the first two days of the workshop. At the end of the second day, I gave the students a writing assignment. They had to think about a time in their life when someone prejudged or misunderstood them and write a monologue or poem in response to that person. It had to be a minimum of one-minute long and address who the individual that prejudged them thinks they are, versus who the students *know* they are. Their

[256] Ibid., p. 4.

pieces were shared with everyone on the final day of the workshop and submitted to me in written form. Additionally, I participated in the assignment and wrote a piece that I shared with the students via email. Not all the students considered themselves writers, but all of them showed excitement about the assignment, even if they were nervous about writing their own piece. In *Who's Afraid of Post Blackness: What it Means to be Black Now* Touré interviews Dr. John Jackson from the University of Pennsylvania who shares the following insight on modern racism and discrimination:

> Part of what we're dealing with now is a scenario where you recognize that the public discourse has been sanitized of all those earlier forms of racial animus and hatred but at the same time, just because people talk a good game and the letter of the law is such that people are purportedly equal, you're still recognizing the reproduction of social difference. And there's no way to easily reconcile those things except to recognize that what you see is never what you get in the contemporary moment.[257]

Artistic exploration is a possible way to work towards reconciling the juxtaposition of the purported equality, and reproduction of social difference that Dr. Johnson speaks of. The aim of the writing assignment was to provide an artistic avenue for the students to channel their frustrations about the prejudices and discrimination they silently endured, while encouraging them to think 'outside the box' through the confrontation and interrogation of their own perceived identity.

Day three of the workshop, and most of day four, explored *Closer* by Patrick Marber in the same format as the first two days. At the end of day four the students performed their written assignments for the class.[258] Although many doubted their writing ability when the assignment was introduced, the pieces they wrote showed wonderful insight and passion.[259] Sociologist and historian Jeffrey Weeks writes about the challenge of defining personal identity within the context of personal belief and community influence:

> Identities are not neutral. Behind the quest for identity are different, and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict, not only between different communities but within individuals themselves.[260]

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[257] Touré and Dyson, p. 120.
[258] See Digital Appendix, Rose Bruford Workshop Monologue Assignment file for audio recording of students performing their written pieces.
[259] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix P Rose Bruford Monologue Assignment, pp. 151-166.
[260] Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Value of Difference', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) pp. 88-100 (p. 89).

The writing assignment I gave the students was an attempt to help them navigate the conflict that Weeks speaks of. The following is an excerpt from one of the students' pieces:

> Who am I? Really? What kind of fucking question is that, like I hate questions like that, they are so ambiguous, do you know who you are? I don't think anyone really knows to be honest, you know those people that can just sum it up it in one word or a sentence, I think they're full of shit, […] I am several different people, and all those different perceptions of me are true. So how about you tell me because I only exist in your perception, so who am I?[261]

This excerpt illuminates that the perception of this student's identity has been questioned, and it has deeply affected them. The student also plainly illuminates that the way they perceive themselves is not static but flows through various kinds of representation. Who this student is cannot be summed with one simple definition, but several. All of them different. All of them valuable. The time spent with the students at Rose Burford gave me insight on how fluid and traumatic the establishment of personal identity can be for actors of marginalised groups. I conclude that the implementation of increased representation of marginalised groups in the performing arts industry should be carefully considered. By doing so, actors are fostered with a healthy and positive sense of identity, rather than a damaging one. Application of the *global view casting* concept discussed in section 2.3 can help accomplish this.

The aims of this workshop were: to help students identify their perceived limitations in the industry, expand the boundaries of students' performative self, challenge white casting norms, and increase the students' ability to 'think outside the box'. By the end of the workshop the students admitted that their view of casting, and approach to reading and analysing plays, had changed. They had a heightened awareness about the way casting actors of colour can affect the narrative of a play because of the racist patriarchal history of the UK and US. They also stated that they felt empowered to challenge traditional white casting norms by actively seeking out scripts with non-ethnically specific roles, rather than looking for roles that specifically ask for their ethnicity. For those that sought to become directors or start their own theatre companies, they stated that they would challenge themselves to find innovative ways to have more ethnically inclusive casting. The writing assignment gave a voice to their silenced trauma and pain, and helped them see their own identities, rather than the identities other have placed upon them. Ultimately, the students said they had a better

[261] Ibid., p. 152.

understanding of themselves, and the workshop gave them tools that will greatly assist them once entering the professional industry after they graduate. The student feedback suggests that all the objectives for this actor perception case study were met.

3.3 Case Study 3 – Theatre Making

Case study one focused on audience reception of black actors, and case study two centred on the actor by examining identity and the personal perception of the actor's performative self. Chapters one and two established that the performing arts industry operates under a presumption of whiteness, places black bodies in the position of 'other', and further alienates black female characters via stereotypical representations, or complete invisibility. My objective for case study three was to assess how a director might influence a shift in stereotypical representations and influence positive expansion of the actor's performative self to produce more balanced, and authentic, representations of blackness and womanhood. I employed a practice-based approach for the objective of this case study by directing a play.

In chapter one I mention the lust and disgust dichotomy Europeans had with the black female body, and present Sara Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus', as an extreme example of that dichotomy. To further examine this, my original plan for this case study was to direct a production of Suzan-Lori Parks play *Venus*. *Venus* was first produced at the Public Theater in New York in 1996. It is a conceptualised fictional narrative about Baartman based on the limited information known about the period she was brought to Europe and exploited as the 'Hottentot Venus'. The play explores the following subject matter: racial objectification, colonization, as well as the lust and disgust dichotomy and sexualisation of the black female body. I speculated directing a production of *Venus* would provide a unique practice-based approach to further contextualise my research. I was given the opportunity to direct a play for the 2019 Barn Season at Rose Bruford but based on the other shows that were being produced, the number of actors needed for the play were not available, so I had to forego directing *Venus*. I did want to explore how a director could shift stereotypical representations, so building on the actor perception workshop conducted at Rose Bruford in 2018, and working with six of the twelve students from that workshop, I continued my work with ATA students at Rose Bruford by directing a production of *In the Blood* by Suzan-Lori Parks instead.

In traditional white hegemonic performance spaces actors of colour may feel pressured to play or represent the entirety of their race, rather than be themselves, and bring their personal uniqueness to their characters. Touré asserts that 'for artists the freedoms of post-Blackness seems to expand what's possible and give them more power to create to the edge of their imaginations.'[262] It is the sense of freedom that post-blackness provides that I tried imparting upon the cast in my production of *In the Blood*. During the process of working with the cast, I sensed an underlying issue stifling their work, but was unsure of the cause. Through the course of our work together, some members of the cast disclosed to me that they had learning difficulties, as well as some mild mental health issues. The biggest problem that most of the cast battled with was anxiety. In one-on-one conversations with me, they shared the prejudice, stereotyping, and racism they endured at the school since their first year on the course. When attempting to bring these issues forward to their tutors, or higher members within the school's administration, they were challenged, ignored, or shut down completely.

The issue of racism and discrimination within education systems is not new. The Pew Research Center surveyed black Americans about discrimination within the educational system of the US and published their findings.

> A majority of black adults say they have been discriminated against because of their race, but this varies by education. Roughly eight-in-ten blacks with at least some college experience (81%) say they've experienced racial discrimination, at least from time to time, including 17% who say this happens regularly.[263]

Black students in drama schools throughout the UK have dealt with the same issues that the cast of *In the Blood* spoke to me about. Due to the recent Black Lives Matter protests worldwide, black students in the UK feel more empowered to speak out against the racist incidents they have withstood. Numerous news publications in the UK have published articles with first-hand accounts from black students about the racism they have experienced in school. In an article from *The Stage* journalist Matthew Hemley writes:

> Many of the UK's drama schools have been called out by current and former black students for systemic and institutionalised racism, prompting calls for urgent action to

[262] Touré and Dyson, p. 188.
[263] Monica Anderson, 'For Black Americans, Experiences of Racial Discrimination Vary by Education Level, Gender', Pew Research Center, 2019 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/02/for-black-americans-experiences-of-racial-discrimination-vary-by-education-level-gender/> [accessed 7 April 2020].

> address the abuse suffered by minority ethnic pupils. […] Students identified experiences including:
>
> - Being subjected to racial slurs, including being called "slaves".
> - Being denied opportunities to play leading roles, instead being restricted to minor characters.
> - Curriculums being weighted in favour of white students, with texts by black playwrights dismissed.
> - Suffering attacks on their appearance, including their hair.
> - Not having their voices heard when trying to raise complaints, with multiple cases of incidents being brushed aside.
> - Drama schools failing to take their complaints seriously.[264]

The online platform British Blacklist facilitated a conversation with former black students of the Royal School of Speech and Drama (RADA), who graduated between 2015 and 2018, about their racist experiences at the school.[265] As a former black student in drama school, I could identify with all the issues the cast spoke of, and I shared some of my experiences with them as an act of solidarity. In his discourse on post-blackness Touré makes an important assertion: 'Who I am is indelibly shaped by Blackness, so I have to examine Blackness to know who I am. But I am much more than a repository for Blackness.'[266] I instilled this sentiment, to the best of my ability, through my work with the cast on the production of *In the Blood*.

This case study does not seek to craft new innovative directing techniques; therefore, each step of the rehearsal and production process will not be discussed. Only the components of the process that were integral to the aims of the case study will be mentioned. This case study does, however, examine how directing a play with a feminist and post-black approach can aid in dismantling stereotypical representations. In 'Reception Theory, Gender and Performance' Stephen Regan speaks about how a feminist approach to spectatorship can foster change:

> I maintain that the materialist feminist approach to criticism and spectatorship has the most to offer in the effort toward radical cultural change. Feminism at least acknowledges the varied responses of spectators mixed across ideologies of gender, sexuality, race and class. […] [W]hich will inevitably demand new forms and provoke new meanings when they are inscribed in representation.[267]

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[264] Hemley.
[265] The British Blacklist, *TBB Talks…My Racist Drama School Experience - Royal Central School of Speech & Drama Under Fire!,* online video recording, YouTube, 7 June 2020, <https://youtu.be/WFtCvj0zHZk> [accessed 7 July 2020].
[266] Touré and Dyson, p. 17.
[267] Stephen Regan, 'Reception Theory, Gender and Performance', in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance,* ed. by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 295-298 (p.294). ProQuest ebook.

Within the importance of a feminist approach, Regan mentions its acknowledgment of varied spectator responses due to the intersectional mix of ideologies. This means that the typical approach is anti-feminist, and I argue white supremacist, therefore making it challenging to create new intersectional meanings regarding representation. Because the UK and US are white hegemonic patriarchies, there is an imposed 'lens of whiteness' through which representation within the performing arts industry is viewed. Sara Ahmed writes about whiteness as a phenomenon, how it has come to orient the world, and the people that exist within it: 'Whiteness could be described as an ongoing and un-finished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space.'[268] Applying this idea to theatre, when directing a play that has black actors in the cast, or deals with black subject matter, this 'lens of whiteness', or whiteness as a presumed basis of orientation, can skew a white director's approach to working with actors of colour, or their interpretation of the text.

Touré states that 'throwing off the burden of representation can give an artist space to discover who they are really apart from the dictates of the community and the past and the confining strictures of worrying about the white gaze.'[269] Creating new meanings of black representation separate from the 'lens of whiteness', or white gaze, within the rehearsal and production of *In the Blood* was my specific goal. A shift away from the white gaze requires what bell hooks calls the oppositional gaze. As the oppositional gaze is utilised, avenues of agency for non-dominate and oppressed groups can be accessed:

> Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency. […] Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally.[270]

The presence of a black female director in the rehearsal room removed the white gaze, replaced it with an oppositional gaze, and served to disrupt, if only in a small way, the traditional white hegemonic structure. Furthermore, agency and space were created, which expanded text and character exploration. It granted the possibility to supersede limiting kinds

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[268] Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory*, 8.2 (2007), 149-168 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139> (p. 150).
[269] Touré and Dyson, p. 30.
[270] bell hooks, p.116.

of black representation in the play, particularly in a play whose narrative could easily reinforce negative stereotypes of blackness instead of negating them, if approached from a typical white male hegemonic perspective.

In the Blood premiered in November 1999 at the Public Theatre in New York. It is a tragedy inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and particularly the character Hester. *In the Blood* follows Hester, who is a black single mother living in poverty, under a bridge, in an unspecified area of the present-day US. She has five children, by five different men, none of whom are present in her life. She is illiterate and can only write the letter 'A' of the alphabet. Having gained the reputation of a 'slut', she does all she can to provide for her children, but eventually cracks under the pressure of broken systems and broken promises from those she placed her trust in. In the playwright's notes, Parks states:

> This play requires a cast of six adult actors, five of whom double as adults and children. The setting should be spare, to reflect the poverty of the world of the play. […] This is a place where the figures experience their pure true simple state.[271]

The character breakdown is as follows:

Hester, La Negrita
Chilli/Jabber, her oldest son
Reverend D./Baby, her youngest son
The Welfare Lady/Bully, her oldest daughter
The Doctor/Trouble, her middle son
Amiga Gringa/Beauty, her youngest daughter[272]

Amiga Gringa/Beauty is the only character in the play who is not black, and based on her monologue at the end of Act One, Scene Six, Parks intended Amiga Gringa's character to be white:

> In my head I got it going on.
> The triple X rated movie:
> Hester and Amiga get down and dirty.
> Chocolate and vanilla get into the ugly.
> […]
> Do you have any idea how much cash I'll get for the fruit of my white womb?![273]

[271] Suzan-Lori Parks, *In the Blood* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000), p. 4.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid., p. 43.

The following chart is a list of the characters, and the ethnicity of the student actors playing them:

Character Name	Actor Ethnicity
Hester, La Negrita	Black British
Chilli/Jabber	Black British
Reverend D./Baby	Black British
The Welfare Lady/Bully	Mixed (Black and White) British
The Doctor/Trouble	Black British
Amiga Gringa/Beauty	White European (Macedonian)

Rehearsals for *In the Blood,* and the final production period, spanned the course of four weeks from the 18th of February to the 16th of March 2019. Due to the short rehearsal period, I met with the cast once at the end of January for an initial read-through of the play. I also gave cuts of the script to the cast so they could get an early start on memorising their lines. *In the Blood* is a play steeped with American systems and culture. As an American director working with non-American actors, I felt it was imperative that they had an informed understanding of the systems at work within the play, to craft more authentic representations of their characters. This served to avoid any stereotypical approximations based on portrayals of America they may have seen in film and television. A week before the first rehearsal, each cast member was assigned a topic to research that pertained to the show, and the character/s they were playing. The following chart is a list of the research topics assigned to each actor according to their character in the play.

Character	Research Topic
Hester, La Negrita	Illiteracy
Chilli/Jabber	Homelessness
Reverend D./Baby	Christianity & Megachurches
The Welfare Lady/Bully	Welfare Benefits System
The Doctor/Trouble	Planned Parenthood & US Healthcare System
Amiga Gringa/Beauty	Prostitution

They each were to prepare a five to ten-minute presentation including: a brief history of their topic, present day statistics, and how the topic directly related to the play and their character. This was shared with everyone during the first week of rehearsal. I contributed by providing a 1996 interview between Shelby Jiggetts and Parks so the cast could gain a better

understanding of Parks' perspective as a playwright. In the interview Parks' writing style is discussed:

> JIGGETS: I mean we've talked about how preoccupied black people are about race, and what's exciting about your work is that you have black people preoccupied with each other. In really wonderful ways, history is there. History obsesses them, but not a "this one did this to me" kind of history. […]
>
> PARKS: It looks at the bigger picture. It's not only trying to tell the story of your people, or put the blame on somebody. […] For example, it's black out there, so that's like a black hole. It becomes more of a powerful thing than putting the blame on somebody else. […] These bigger things resonate on our daily lives like quantum theory. That resonates – the atomic theory and all that – resonates in our daily lives, as does "The Big Bang Theory." So it's the bigger thing that makes for more interesting relationships between things.[274]

Although Parks is a black playwright, I did not want *In the Blood* to be categorised as a 'black' play, so I used this concept of blackness being represented on stage with the preoccupation of interpersonal relationships guided by history, instead of a preoccupation with race, when directing this production.[275]

Except for Hester, all other cast members played two different characters, a child and an adult. One of the biggest challenges the actors faced during rehearsal was the embodiment of their adult characters without judgement. As mentioned earlier, *In the Blood* is a tragedy that leaves the protagonist, Hester, behind bars with the blood of her first-born literally on her hands because of the unfair treatment and actions of the other adult characters in the play. All the actors, except for Hester, viewed their characters as 'bad people', which prompted shallow and stereotypical portrayals from the actors. To rectify this character prejudice, I encouraged the cast to view their adult characters as real people with a specific reality and lived experience, rather than an archetype or representational system enacting itself upon Hester to bring about her demise. To facilitate this, I instructed each actor to find a song that encapsulated the emotional journey of their adult character in the play. I implemented their song choice into acting exercises which I worked on with them individually at various points in the rehearsal process. Dolan discusses the power of the feminist spectator critic:

> By displacing his hegemonic position and stealing his seat, as it were, for a feminist spectator who can cast an eye critical on dominant ideology, representation can be

[274] Suzan-Lori Parks and Shelby Jiggetts, 'An Interview with Suzan-Lori Parks', *Callaloo*, 19.2 (1996), 309-317 <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.1996.0053> (p. 314).
[275] See Digital Appendix, In the Blood Rehearsal Clips file for video clips of the rehearsal process.

> analysed more precisely for the meanings it produces and how those meanings can be changed.[276]

I had adopted a position of feminist spectator critic as director of *In the Blood* and utilised the song exercise to produce new meanings for the actors in the evaluation of their adult characters. The actors chose an interesting range of song genres including R&B, pop, hip-hop and country. The actors said this approach was crucial to their transition away from the negative and prejudice mindset about their adult characters.

Like the rest of the cast, the actress playing the role of Hester struggled with her character. As a dark-skinned black woman in drama school, she had never been given a lead role, nor much opportunity to play roles outside of the stereotypical slave or servant. This was her first time playing a lead, and she was nervous about the line load because she is dyslexic. She had doubts about her ability to undertake a large and challenging role like Hester at the beginning of the process. She did not have a negative mindset about the character of Hester, but rather a fear of the resemblance Hester had to herself, and other black women in her life. She also struggled with Hester's vulnerability and loss of control at the end of the play, for fear of becoming the 'angry black woman', or worse, eventually becoming a version of Hester in real life. In 'Sexual Denigration to Self-Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality' Marshall declares the following:

> As the notion of identity is fluid there are a range of possibilities for change beyond the realm of imagery. This includes our incorporation into systems of power. […] Thereby we change our identities as victims of oppression so that we actively resist our subordination. By challenging such images Black women are empowered to define and to be ourselves.[277]

Listening to the concerns of the actress playing Hester, I recognised that she had internalised some of the negative ideas and representations of black women perpetuated by British and American cultures. Working with solely white tutors and directors on her course up to that point had reinforced those negative images and concepts about black womanhood. Therefore, in my work as a director, and black woman, I sought to aid her in challenging the negative perceptions and social stigma she held about her identity and encouraged her to resist her perceived weaknesses. *In the Blood* had a successful run.[278]

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[276] Dolan, p. 292.
[277] Marshall, p. 27.
[278] See Digital Appendix, ITB Production Photos Slideshow file for photos of the show.

The week after the show closed, I met with the cast to debrief about their experience working with me on the show.[279] Friends and family members of the cast were deeply affected by the production and continued to engage in conversations about the narrative and themes of the play nearly a week after it closed. The cast expressed that it was the most challenging and mentally taxing work they had done, and they appreciated all the hard work, as well as the result of the production. They all felt comfortable coming to me with questions or concerns about their characters and the play during the rehearsal process. They particularly enjoyed my collaborative directing approach, and the fun and safe environment I created through open communication. This differed from previous directors they worked with, whose approach was less collaborative and more prescriptive. They also pointed out that all their previous directors had been majority white and male, so working with a black woman was refreshing and brought a different perspective that they enjoyed.

Ultimately, in their work with me the cast did not feel stifled because of their 'otherness' as they had in previous productions. The actors were able to stretch their acting muscles in an open and safe environment and learn and grow as artists. The cast expressed that working with me renewed their hope and belief in their acting abilities, as well as inspired them to implement some of my techniques in their future artistic endeavours. One cast member disclosed the fact that *In the Blood* was the first time a show was produced at Rose Bruford with a black female protagonist, written by a black female playwright, with a black female director. They explained that the work I did at Rose Bruford, on both the four-day workshop discussed in section 3.2, and directing *In the Blood*, was very impactful. The following are some of the sentiments they shared with me:

> I guess what I have to talk about is what we lack. What we lack in school is black teachers. Black teachers that can relate to the black students. That understands the institutionalised racism that happens in the way that it does in Rose Bruford. For the past couple of years, a lot of us feel like we're crazy. A lot of us feel anxiety. […] Having someone that isn't a student and is able to talk about that in the way that they do. […] It teaches us. […] Seeing you and the way that you navigate around things educates me. […] But for us, it's huge. It's really, really profound. It's something that we've been hoping for. […] So, there's so much that you provide.[280]

[279] See Digital Appendix, ITB Cast Debrief file audio recording of my debrief with the cast.
[280] See Digital Appendix, ITB Cast Debrief file, 41:18-43:51.

In 'Racism in Higher Education: "What Then, can be Done?" Mirza explains: 'Though it is claimed we live in "colour-blind" post-race times, […] new patterns of insidious racism are evolving which can be mapped in the micro-institutional practices of recruitment, retention and progression that mark the life cycle of a student's journey.'[281] This fact was evidenced by the students' disclosure of the anxiety they have suffered due to the racism and discrimination experienced in their drama school training. Furthermore, in her essay 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference' Audre Lorde asserts that 'we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within ourselves.'[282] Working with a black woman for the first time on their acting course provided something for the cast that was desperately needed; representation and understanding. I am not suggesting that only black people can understand black people. However, this case study exposes the importance of working with instructors of colour in an educational environment to remove the imposed 'lens of whiteness', as well as decentralise white hegemonic ideologies. As white educators researching ways to disrupt whiteness in educational spaces, Kristin D. Stewart and Daniela Gachago observed that:

> We still underestimate the pervasiveness of whiteness and the skill set that is required to disrupt its existing patterns in our professional lives. We are hardwired to promote and protect whiteness in our classrooms, and we must constantly work against this conditioning in an effort to decolonise and disrupt educational spaces.[283]

As a black female theatre arts practitioner taking on the role of director for *In the Blood* at Rose Bruford, it was possible for me to disrupt the existing pervasive patterns of whiteness that Stewart and Gachago speak of by using my oppositional gaze. I was able to foster the development of tools for understanding, and use human difference as Lorde mentions, in ways that white practitioners, who are accustomed to the benefits of their position within white hegemony, are unable to do.

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[281] Heidi Safia Mirza, 'Racism in Higher Education: 'What Then, can be Done?', in *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness, and Decolonising the Academy*, ed. by Jason Arday and Heidi Safia Mirza, (Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 3-23. (pp. 12-13). ProQuest ebook.
[282] Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, by Audre Lorde, (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), pp. 108-117. (p. 109). ProQuest ebook.
[283] Kristian D. Stewart and Daniela Gachago, 'Step into the Discomfort: (Re)Orienting the White Gaze and Strategies to Disrupt Whiteness in Educational Spaces', *Whiteness and Education*, 2020, 1-14 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2020.1803760> (p. 8).

This type of approach is needed in the higher education system overall, as evidenced by *The Stage's* 'Drama School Racism' article, and the Pew Research Center study mentioned earlier. One of the cast members of *In the Blood* reached out to me a year after the production to thank me for: allowing them to be transparent with their battles during the rehearsal process, my receptiveness to everything they shared with me, and for valuing their feelings. As a student it is paramount that you are being heard and understood by your instructors. The cast's positive reactions to their work with me helped me realise that I had never worked with black instructors, or directors, in my actor training. I had not experienced anything near what I provided for the students at Rose Bruford. I was almost always the only black student/actor in my drama classes. Completion of this case study highlights the importance of representation in the classroom, as well as on stage and screen, which I had not previously considered. Chapter two examined the representation of black women in the performing arts industry. Thus far, this chapter has gauged audience reception, explored actors' perception of themselves and characters, and challenged 'white' casting norms. Case study four will consider what happens to an actress' experience of blackness and womanhood if she is removed from the position of minority to majority, via an immersive black actor training experience.

3.4 Case Study 4 – Immersive Black Actor Training

The case studies presented earlier in this chapter, and methodological contexts presented in chapter one, highlight the estrangement black actresses might encounter in traditional white hegemonic performance spaces, including drama schools. In *Space Invader: Race, Gender, and Bodies Out of Place,* Nirmal Puwar explains that:

> Social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. Over time, through processes of historical sedimentation, certain types of bodies are designated as being the "natural" occupants of specific spaces. […] Some bodies have the right to belong in certain locations, while others are marked out as trespassers who are in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined, politically, historically, and conceptually circumscribed as being "out of place".[284]

I am usually one of a few, or the only, black woman in traditionally white hegemonic spaces in my performative, professional, and personal life. I have never lived or worked in predominantly black environments. The area of California that I grew up in is very ethnically diverse, and moving to Birmingham, UK, has also placed me in an area that is rich in ethnic

[284] Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) p. 51.

diversity. Additionally, my acting and educational background has placed me in spaces that cater to, and privilege white performers, which has often left me feeling 'out of place' as Puwar describes. I am so acclimated to being part of the minority, that I never considered placing myself in a performing arts space where blackness is the majority. I was accustomed to being the marginalised 'other' and struggled silently, on a regular basis, within this imposed position. My experience is not uncommon. This occurs among many black actors, black students in higher education, and black educators in academia in the UK and US.[285] The research I conducted at Rose Bruford for case studies two and three demonstrate how impactful learning from, and working with, black instructors and directors can be for black actors because it decreases the 'out of place' feeling they experience. To gain first-hand experience and interpret the impact that this type of encounter can have, I attended an all-black actor training course. This is the basis for case study four. I argue that exposure to an environment that encourages the exploration of varied facets of blackness, while simultaneously rejecting the limiting and negative representations and stereotypes of blackness, decreases the social stigma black actors feel, thereby fostering positive growth of the actor's unique performative self.

In my interview with American actress, Brenda Tellu, she spoke about her experience in a traditional predominantly white master's acting program, versus her experience in a week-long intensive black acting course she took through the Black Arts Institute (BAI) in New York, which is part of the Stella Adler Acting Studio:

> The funny thing is, I had friends that were in graduate school, and they were always one of the only [black students]. So, I went in expecting to be like, the only black woman in my program, or to be like one of two. And when I walked into orientation and saw twelve other black people I was like, "Oh, this program is about to be lit! They took thirteen of us. Oh, this is great. We're going to be…Oh. Oh. So, it's just thirteen of us marginalised instead of two. Got it." So, I was disappointed in the fact that they…We were the largest class of African Americans they've ever taken, but they didn't prepare for us. You know? I guess you were trying to step out and actually take people based on talent, and not this, "We need…", you know. Not Noah's Ark. We need one dark skin. We need one light skin. We need one man. We need one woman. So, I appreciate that, but you didn't prepare for us in the work. You didn't prepare for us in the faculty. They had several opportunities while I was there to hire a staff person of colour. Never. Never even tried. Never attempted. Nothing. So, it's just very disappointing. What made it interesting is I took a Black Theatre Arts intensive

[285] See Deborah Gabriel and Shirley Anne Tate, *Inside the Ivory Tower: Narratives of Women of Colour Surviving and Thriving in British Academia* (London: Trentham Books, 2017); Jason Arday and Heidi Safia Mirza, *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness, and Decolonizing the Academy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

> with Stella Adler. […] Girl, we got our whole entire lives. Whole. That week changed my life. And I remember sitting there thinking, 'This is what white people feel like in a graduate program.[286]

The Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York launched the Black Arts Institute in 2017 which:

> Offers both a one-week winter and five-week summer comprehensive exploration of the history of the contemporary Black theatre tradition, led by a world-class faculty. […] Both programs highlight certain key historical moments like the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Power Movement and the genesis of the Negro Ensemble Company, as well as many Black theatres that emerged during the Black Arts Movement. Students will leave with an understanding of the aesthetic, socio-cultural and historical components involved in bringing contemporary black theatre to life.[287]

BAI provides a vehicle for black actors to explore facets of contemporary black theatre that is not covered in traditional white colonialised drama school training.

My master's acting drama school training was emotionally taxing, because as the only person of colour in my cohort I constantly felt that I had to prove that I deserved to be in the program. My work in the classes seemed to be under more scrutiny than my white counterparts. I was pressured to conform to white hegemonic institutionalised ideas of black womanhood, rather than be allowed the freedom to explore all facets of my identity and utilise my skill and talents to embody the emotional truth of characters. Nearly every day of class felt like a battle to overcome the social stigma and stereotypes of black women. Bombarded by microaggressions and inequitable treatment, I struggled to convince myself that prejudice and discrimination were not a factor, when I knew they were. Jarrett writes about the difficulties women face being in positions like what I experienced.

> But often the greatest problem faced by many Black women in arts schools, as in other areas of higher education, is isolation. As solitary people, each woman knows she must assert herself and express her point of view to survive. Yet, that same freedom of expression may jeopardize her sense of security and make her more vulnerable. It is always a question of maintaining a delicate balance.[288]

Participation in an all-black acting course would curtail that feeling of isolation. My objectives for this case study were the following: play a non-stereotypical black female role,

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[286] Appendices, Volume III, Brenda Tellu transcript, p. 144.
[287] Stella Adler Studio of Acting, 'Black Arts Institute', *Stella Adler Studio of Acting*, 2017 <https://stellaadler.com/classes/black-arts-theater/> [accessed 14 November 2018].
[288] Jarrett, p. 132.

quantify the experience of learning from black theatre arts practitioners in predominantly black spaces versus with white theatre arts practitioners in predominantly white spaces, and lastly, harness my acting skills and talent as informed by blackness rather than defined by it.

Based on Tellu's BAI experience, and the program's online description, I decided to attend BAI's five-week summer intensive acting program. I chose to participate in the five-week summer intensive, rather than the week-long winter intensive course, to experience a prolonged immersion in an all-black performing arts training environment. The course spanned from the 8th of July to the 9th of August 2019. Classes took place five days a week for six to seven hours a day. Classes were led by well-established black performing arts practitioners, and activists from the Black Arts Movement, like Sonia Sanchez. Some of the instructors included Stephen McKinley Henderson**,** Ruben Santiago-Hudson**,** and Michele Shay, all of whom knew and worked closely with one of the most revered black American playwrights, August Wilson, before his death. The curriculum included: voice, dialect, movement, script analysis, scene study, music, dance, and historical lectures. The focus of the curriculum was on the African diaspora, influenced by the Black Arts Movement, and taught by black instructors. There were twenty-nine black students on the course, originating from Alabama, Atlanta, Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Nevada, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Antigua and Barbuda, and Ghana.

Before the start of the course, we were given reading material about the Black Arts Movement from *SOS – Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*. Additionally, we had to memorise and prepare a monologue from a list of approved black plays, to be performed on the first day of class. This was my first time working on a piece written by a black playwright for an acting course. Since my previous actor training took place in predominantly white institutions, I was never given the opportunity to work with black pieces.

The course took place in a studio space in Restoration Plaza, near the Billie Holiday Theatre in Brooklyn, New York. When I arrived at the studio on the first day of class I was met with nothing but friendly and welcoming energy. The space felt very safe, loving, and supportive. It was one of the first times I have been in a room full of actors and did not feel the nervous, competitive energy I am accustomed to. There was a brief welcome and introduction of the

faculty, followed by a West African libation ritual giving acknowledgement and gratitude for the ancestors, African ancestral Gods, and everyone that was in the room. A man sang in an African language I am unfamiliar with and poured libations, while giving thanks and blessings to the ancestors. It was a very powerful, spiritual, mesmerising, and beautiful encounter, unlike anything I had experienced, and I was moved to the point of tears. I speculated that my mind, body, spirit, and needs as an actor would be impacted greatly, based on the manner the course was initiated.

During the programme, I was assigned two different scenes to work on for the scene study class. The scenes I was assigned were, part of Act One, Scene Two from August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* (1996), and part of Act Two from Cheryl L. West's *Before It Hits Home* (1990).[289] In the *Seven Guitars* scene I played Vera Dotson, the female lead of the show, and love interest of male lead character Floyd Barton. Set in 1948 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Vera's boyfriend, Floyd Barton, leaves her to go to Chicago with another women in pursuit of his music career. Vera is heartbroken but manages to go on without him. After spending some time in Chicago, and recording a hit record, Floyd returns to Pittsburgh to attend his mother's funeral. He plans to retrieve his guitar from the pawn shop, reunite with his former girlfriend and love, Vera, and take her and a couple of his friends back to Chicago with him to build his music career. In Act One, Scene Two, Floyd plays Vera his hit song while trying to win her back and convince her to return to Chicago with him.

This was my first time playing a love interest, and I found the role of Vera very challenging. I was unfamiliar with playing a character that was the object of desire, and had great difficulty exuding vulnerability, femininity, sensuality, and desirability as a woman. I was acclimated to playing the stereotypical black female 'mammy' and servant roles. In her writing, Young provides an explanation for why I had this difficulty:

> In the past – particularly in North American [and British] cinema [and arguably theatre as well] – as coons, servants, and mammies, Black women were socially marginalized accessories to the dramas and intrigues of "white" people's lives, the textual strategy being to downplay their existence as sexual beings.[290]

[289] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix R for full text *Before It Hits Home* and *Seven Guitars* scenes, pp. 170-177.
[290] Young, p. 188.

It was not until I was given the opportunity to play the role of Vera in *Seven Guitars,* a love interest, that I realised my capability of playing a sexual being had almost been completely diminished, therefore stifling my confidence and ability to play roles outside of the black female stereotype of 'mammy', or servant.

Before It Hits Home is set in 1992, and I played Reba, mother of jazz musician Wendel. In Act Two of the play, after being gone for a long time, Wendel returns to his parent's home for a visit, hiding the fact that he is sick from his family. There is an awkward family dinner that concludes with Wendel and his father, Bailey, getting into a fight. Later that night, Reba gets up to check on her son. In the scene assigned to me on the BAI acting course, Reba has a conversation with Wendel attempting to ease tensions between him and his father. Within the course of the conversation, Wendel tells Reba that he sleeps with women and men, and he is dying of AIDS. Unable to accept the news, Reba disowns her son.

Although I have played numerous maternal roles in the past, the role of Reba was no comparison. The other mothers I played were, for the most part, incantations of the 'mammy' stereotype. Reba, on the other hand, was multi-layered, nuanced, and complicated. Working on this scene gave me the chance to stretch my acting skills to a new level due to the overall complexity of the character, and nature of the scene. At the end of the five-week course we performed the scenes, as well as a music presentation and African dance, we learned in our classes for an invited audience.[291]

The BAI summer intensive acting course also included a few sessions on wellness. Visualisation techniques utilising chakra work were explored, which I had never done before. I found these techniques to be some of the most profound and impactful sessions on the course. Led by Michelle Shay, we learned how visualisation and chakra work can unlock the power and energy within. We were shown how to use these techniques to transition from emotionally uncomfortable spaces, which is a very useful practice and tool actors can invoke when playing emotionally taxing roles, such as Hamlet, or Lady Macbeth. Additionally, Shay utilised visualisation and chakra work to empower us. Using those techniques, she showed us that we are not lacking as actors, and we are enough. In this moment, we possess all the tools we need to do the job of acting.

[291] See Digital Appendix, BAI Invited Showing Clips file for video footage of *Before It Hits Home* and *Seven Guitars* scene, and the musical and African dance numbers.

The scene work on *Seven Guitars* and *Before It Hits Home,* coupled with all the other lectures and work in classes from a black perspective, enabled me to unlock artistic skills and abilities I was unaware I possessed as an actor. The ease and comfort I found during BAI's five-week intensive was unlike any other I had experienced. Daily at least one of the instructors would tell us, 'You are enough.' Hearing that sentiment frequently, over the course of five weeks, from black instructors I highly respected, and my fellow actors on the course, was extremely uplifting and inspirational. I no longer felt the isolation that Jarrett writes about, because I was in an environment with other black people that had an intimate understanding of the social stigma of blackness, and the struggle for existence in a racist and prejudice society.

In 'Spaces and Places of Black Educational Desire: Rethinking Black Supplementary Schools as a New Social Movement', Heidi Mirza and Diane Reay write about the importance of black educational spaces that exist outside of the traditional white centralised educational system. 'In black supplementary schools can be found a blackness neither vulnerable nor under threat: rather a blackness comfortable with itself. The sense of community evoked by black supplementary schooling aspires to a positive sense of blackness.'[292] They further assert:

> Black supplementary schools provide spaces in which counterhegemonic discourses of blackness can be created; discourses which construct blackness as a positive and powerful identification in contrast to mainstream schooling where, regardless of how many anti-racist policies are written, blackness is still constructed, at best marginal, at worst as pathological.[293]

Although not officially classified as such, I argue that the Black Arts Institute is a type of black supplementary school. Their five-week summer intensive acting course strengthened my identity and character as a black woman and actress. I discovered a new pride in my black womanhood that eclipsed the negative stereotypes that white hegemonic educational spaces, and society, had forced upon me. Being in a safe and nurturing acting environment where blackness was the norm, I gained confidence in my power, my femininity, and my true transformative ability as an actor. My experience with BAI changed my life through the acknowledgement of my unique person, which is inspired by my blackness and womanhood,

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[292] Heidi Safia Mirza and Diane Reay, 'Spaces and Places of Black Educational Desire: Rethinking Black Supplementary Schools as a New Social Movement', *Sociology*, 34.3 (2000), 521-544 <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0038038500000328> (p. 532).
[293] Ibid., p. 533.

but not defined by it. This concept is missing from mainstream white educational spaces. Racial difference is either ignored, or viewed as a weakness, rather than a strength. In her discourse on human difference and the forces that divide us, such as racism and sexism, Lorde asserts: 'It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living at the same time as we recognize, reclaim, and define those differences upon which they are imposed.'[294] BAI's acting intensive programs aim to do that.

Tellu describes her experience attending BAI compared to other actor training she has received:

> You look around, all the professors look like you. The work you're studying reflects you. You see yourself in everything. And we left there feeling like superheroes. […] The thing is that you get to explore. We got to explore the work in the context of our own background, our own history. […] They don't teach that in programs, but they need to. They need, the same way you teach Shakespeare, August needs to be taught for us. Because you don't just walk out and do August. […] But we need to learn this, it's not osmosis, you know. […] August is being done everywhere all the time. You've essentially not prepared us for the world that we're going to be auditioning in. Because nobody's gonna to cast me in Chekhov. […] I'm never getting cast in Ibsen. I'm never getting cast in Strindberg. Ever.[295]

Curious as to whether Tellu's experience and my own were rare reactions to the program, I contacted the actors who were on the BAI five-week intensive course with me during the summer of 2019, to get their opinions about the program. Identifiers for those who shared their opinions are anonymous except for gender. The following are responses from three black actresses who took the course with me:

> One thing I am happy to highlight is the benefit of learning in a space of your cultural peers. The freedom to communicate in a way that is exclusive to your culture is an opportunity I feel is severely underrated in our everyday learning experience. […] It gave me the tools, the experiences, the wealth of a very specific, very craved knowledge, wrapped in a style and space that felt safe and digestible to me. Free of the code switching, and the competition, and the constant need to navigate a plight we'd often rather leave at the door. Being an actor is emotionally exhausting. Being a black actor compounds that fatigue for reasons that reach far beyond scene study. Being in a space where nobody needs to explain, that gives us the freedom to just do the work. And then we're limitless. - BAI Alum Summer 2019 (female)

> I didn't realize how long I'd been holding my breath until I got to the Black Arts intensive. There's something to be said about being in a community that you can consciously and subconsciously recognize as your own. Being in a space where you know that no matter what, they will see you only as a human first. And they will

[294] Lorde, p. 109.
[295] Appendices, Volume III, Brenda Tellu transcript, pp. 144-145.

> know you intimately without ever having said a word. On the first day of the Black Arts Institute, I felt safe like I never had before. It was an almost overwhelming culture of kindness, care, generosity, curiosity, and love. […] I've never been part of a majority […] And I now feel like I have an actual support system, a family that follows me everywhere I go and who I can go to for anything. - BAI Alum Summer 2019 (female)
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> I received, what felt like, very cultural relevant instruction, that was rooted in Black personhood, and that *also* used Black literature and art. I have never been in an artistic space where my Blackness was the foundation, the first step in understanding the approach. This approach to instruction made me feel freer, more authentic; it made me more confident in my choices as an actor, which in turn made everything more organic. I left feeling, […] "You are enough". I walk into audition spaces now knowing that I don't have to act differently as a person. I can have the freedom to only tell the stories I'm being asked to retell from my perspective, and I finally feel as though that perspective, though different from mainstream culture, is beautiful, valid, artistically relevant, and enough. - BAI Alum Summer 2019 (female) [296]

My objectives at the beginning of this case study were the following: play a non-stereotypical black female role; quantify the experience of learning from black theatre arts practitioners in predominantly black spaces versus with white theatre arts practitioners in predominantly white spaces, and harness my acting skills and talent as informed by blackness rather than defined by it. As evidenced by the discussion and analysis of attending BAI's five-week summer acting intensive, all my objectives were met. I played non-stereotypical black female roles that challenged me. I occupied a predominantly black space which allowed artistic exploration and discovered characterisation indicative of the human experience informed by blackness, not defined by negative social stigmas of blackness. Lastly, I learned about my distinct uniqueness as an actress. White hegemonic spaces rarely afford these experiences for people of colour. Based on my experience, and the responses from other members of the 2019 BAI five-week summer acting intensive, I conclude that immersion in an environment that acknowledges and celebrates cultural backgrounds as a strength, rather than a weakness, is imperative to the removal of stereotyping and misrepresentation of black women and other marginalised groups.

[296] See Appendices, Volume II, Appendix S for full collection of BAI Summer Intensive Student Feedback, pp. 179-185.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

4.1 Overview

For most of my actor training, and performance experience, I have been one of few, if not the only, black person. I was always the only black woman. The performing arts spaces I was exposed to were saturated with whiteness. White teachers, white directors, white actors, working on white material written by white people. As the only black woman occupying traditionally white performance and educational spaces, I often felt as though my actions were not my own but perceived as indicative behaviour of all black women. I have been labelled as loud, scary, and aggressive on more than one occasion by virtue of my presence in a room before I have spoken, but I did not understand why. When I went to the theatre, or watched film and television, I rarely saw women on the stage or screen that looked like me. This made me question what type of career a dark-skinned black woman could have in the performing arts industry. In my observations, the black women I did see on stage and screen were primarily placed in small and/or stereotypical roles. As a result, I questioned why black women were not represented in more lead roles. Furthermore, when I walked into an audition or rehearsal room, and received notes from directors such as, 'Can you be more urban?', and 'Can you be more angry?', I felt increased pressure to act like a stereotypical black woman. In my hunt to find research specific to black actresses' experiences with these matters, I found a few writings from an outsider perspective, primarily focused on black women writers and black female characters, but nothing that spoke from the position of black actresses playing the stereotypical black representations presented in the performing arts industry. Although the UK and US are different nations, black actors from both places experience similar kinds of negative representation and stereotyping. This is how I arrived at the decision to explore the research material presented in this thesis.

In chapter one, I presented the following research question: in what ways does womanhood, and the social stigma of blackness, influence the representation and performative nature of black actresses in the educational and professional sectors of the British and American performing arts industry? A brief historical overview of colonialization and the transatlantic slave trade in section 1.2 proved there is a social stigma of blackness because 'the church, the sciences, […] and the government fully contributed expertise to effectively construct and convey images of Black as evil, animal, and uncivilized.'[297] Furthermore, through the

[297] Konkobo, p. 1096.

dissemination of white supremacist beliefs, the black female body was oversexualised, devalued, and exploited for the use of slave labour, and the enactment of unwarranted sexual acts from white men. Conversely, black women were asexualised, as they were often separated from their own families and children so they could raise the children of their masters, and other white slave owners. Konkobo's writings about the colonization of the 'Dark Continent' explain:

> The racial and cultural propaganda aiming to reify Africans derives its success from a sustained effort made by the colonial system to stage [the] Other in very peculiar ways. That ideology has left enduring effects of fascination and fear of the Black body even to this day.[298]

In addition to stigmatising blackness, this period in history solidified white supremacist ideologies and established whiteness as the norm. The concepts driving these adverse ideals and practices have prospered beyond colonialization, and the slave trade of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. The continual perpetuation of negative standards and views of black women, as represented by prevailing stereotypes in the performing arts industry, is among the most notable enduring effects previously mentioned. As shown in chapter one, the 'mammy', 'jezebel', and 'sapphire' are three of the most prevalent representations of black women, particularly in film and television. Celebrity actors such as Viola Davis are demanding more roles for black women that are less stereotypical. However, as demonstrated by the examples given in section 1.3, it appears the industry is regurgitating existing stereotypes rather than eradicating them.

Since the mid-twentieth century the concept of colour-blind casting has been employed to create more opportunity for actors of colour. Rather than acknowledge actors of colour for their acting abilities, and provide more roles regardless of race, colour-blind casting flagrantly disregards integral parts of non-white actors' identities, thus re-inscribing the white norm as discussed in chapter two. Efforts have been made to decentralise this norm on a small scale, and a few black actresses have been cast in prominent roles. These are often met with unfavourable response, as demonstrated by the examples of *How to Get Away With Murder* and *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* in section 2.4.

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[298] Ibid., p. 1098.

Assessment of the current state of the performing arts industry regarding black women facilitated the development of four practice-based research case studies to gauge how the social stigma of blackness and womanhood are rooted within the industry, and postulate ways to shift white hegemonic views and practices. Case study one explored the question: to what extent does the perception and reception of a character change when a black woman plays the role? Although there is an underlying assumption of whiteness within casting practices, results of this study suggest that audiences prefer casts with a mix of ethnicities represented rather than the white norm. There was a preference for a more authentic reflection of the demographics present in modern British and American societies. Case study two posed the question: in what ways can an actor be enabled to disregard negative personal views, and limiting cultural stereotypes, to bolster positive personal consciousness? Outcomes of this case study imply that actors of marginalised groups, and more specifically black actors, are not satisfied with the limited representations and negative cultural stereotypes of themselves in the performing arts industry. Furthermore, white heteronormative casting norms impede an actor's ability to disregard their 'perceived casting' (roles they can play based on their outward appearance) and explore a wider range of roles that are not ethnically specific.

Case study three was an assessment of the possible ways a director might shift stereotypical representations of black women when working on a show, to produce more balanced and authentic representations of blackness, and womanhood, through a production of Suzan-Lori Parks' *In the Blood.* This case study produced evidence confirming that a detailed directorial approach with an oppositional gaze – that appropriately addresses issues of marginality, discrimination, and race directly — in a safe and supportive environment, can aid in the production of authentic representations of marginalised groups. Case study four utilised first-hand experience to demonstrate the impact attending an all-black acting course can have on black actors that have been relegated to white educational environments, and performance spaces. The study verified that attending an all-black actor training course has substantial and life-changing effects on black actors. The completion of the four case studies rendered the following outcomes. First, across the board, people want to see more ethnic diversity represented on stage and screen. Second, black actors are heavily impacted by the way they are represented in the industry, and they struggle with ways to confront this disadvantage. Black actresses, in particular, acknowledge that the intersectionality of the social stigma of blackness and womanhood is palpable, and they are eager to reduce its negative effects. Finally, representation of blackness is needed in the educational sector as much as the

professional sector of the performing arts industry, because it has the same potential power to shift views and create new meanings in the representation of black women, and positively influence the performative nature of black actresses.

4.2 Vehicles For Change

To reiterate, the overall guiding question of this thesis was: in what ways does womanhood, and the social stigma of blackness, influence the representation and performative nature of black actresses in the educational and professional sectors of the British and American performing arts industry? Based on the exploration and analysis provided in this thesis the consequent question is: what modifications can be employed in the performing arts industry to open further discussion to address this problem? The case studies discussed in chapter three show that both the professional and educational sectors of the performing arts industry play an integral role in the perpetuation of the problem. Therefore, I argue that a dual approach, targeting both the educational and professional sectors of the performing arts industry simultaneously, would be the most beneficial. I will first examine the professional sector.

Viola Davis expressed this sentiment in a 2016 interview on the *Today* show after winning an Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series:

> You have to separate opportunity from talent. People feel like if the roles aren't there that means there's no talent out there. That's not true. What's true is, that if you create those narratives, then those roles can open up to people who are waiting in line. Listen, I always say that Meryl Streep would not be Meryl Streep without *Sophie's Choice,* without *Kramer vs. Kramer,* without *Devil Wears Prada.* You can't be a Meryl Streep if you're the third girl from the left in a narrative with two scenes. So you write it, and we will come. We'll show up.[299]

Davis affirms that both audiences and actors want to see dynamic narratives and talent, and that should include actors of colour. There has been increased public vocalisation about the lack of roles for black actresses. Davis regularly uses her popularity and celebrity status as a platform to speak openly about the need for less stereotypical representations of black women, and more role availability in the industry. In my interviews with black actresses for

[299] Today, *Viola Davis on Diversity in Film: Lack of Opportunity Not Due to Lack of Talent*, television broadcast recording online, YouTube, 24 February 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74uJibtpMvI> [accessed 12 July 2017].

this research, I asked them what they would like to see in terms of representation of black women in the performing arts industry. Across the board, they all said they would like to see something other than stereotypical roles. British actress Aimee Powell said, 'I would like to see more period drama stuff. Because hello, we existed. […] Black people. Mixed-race people. Do you know what I mean? Stop whitewashing history. Seriously! […] We weren't all slaves.'[300] American actress Yhá Mourhia Wright said:

> We need to see them be people. Not these goddesses who are just here to entertain you and give you a suspension of disbelief. They need to still be able to live and be people. […] What is hurting us, and what has hurt us, is the lack of being able to be a person. To be human.[301]

New narratives featuring a wide range of black female representation is key. Bushell-Mingo spoke on this subject in our interview, and it echoes that of Davis.

> The stories being told. I think this is crucial. The black British stories being told. […] And this I think is very important, is that black richer stories are lifted up. And you will find if you give enough space to them, that it's not all about racism. We have other stories to be told. But these people are not giving us the chance to do it.[302]

The commentary from these actresses proves that more diverse narratives and representations of black people and experiences, in performance, are warranted.

In her 2016 appearance on the *Today* show, Davis does not only speak about the need for more roles for people of colour in the industry, but she also comments on those who are in positions of power as well:

> It's the people in positions of power. People who have the greenlight vote. People who can "yea" or "nay". That's it, and they're out there. They have the imagination. The thing that stops us a lot of times is fear, you know. Fear of doing anything different. But I have to tell you, I think that when you put talent out there and narratives that are dynamic people lean in. They want to see it. They want to be moved. They want to feel less alone. That's why I'm an actor. […] My whole thing is, step up to the plate. If you are in the position of power, do something with it. You have that one dash, that moment in time. Put it out there.[303]

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[300] Appendices, Volume III, Kimisha Lewis and Aimee Powell interview transcript, p. 65.
[301] Appendices, Volume III, Yhá Mourhia Wright interview transcript, pp. 155-156.
[302] Appendices, Volume III, Josette Bushell-Mingo interview transcript, p. 6.
[303] Today.

Those in positions of power that can make decisions and greenlight productions as Davis mentions, like film, television, and stage producers, are concerned with audience reception of mounted productions, because ticket sales are a major source of revenue, and that influences the types of future content. A fear of placing black actresses in lead roles exists due to the potential revenue loss because of disinterested audiences. As demonstrated in case study one, section 3.1, audiences have expressed the desire for more diversity. With the vast expansion of the non-white demographic in the UK and US, that diversity should include far more representation of people of colour. Actors of colour, and in particular black actresses, would appreciate increased diversity in the roles they play. This was also evidenced by the previous comments from my interviews with actresses in this section.

Those in positions of power can enact change. Although the performing arts industry cannot completely change overnight, denormalization of white heteronormative characters and narratives can be achieved through incremental shifts, which may be easier to sustain over time. Inciting this change requires one essential component: education. Bushell-Mingo was adamant that the focus should be on the educational sector:

> For me, one of my big concerns is education. I think that there is a terrible, if not terrifying, lack of education in the school systems. I think there is an equally disturbing lack of education support for teachers. They are our second ally in the movement of change. All academia is, I believe. […] Clearer education for teachers in terms of diversity, and issues of inclusion. […] But when I'm speaking to black women, […] there's so much going down. That I realise what actually needs to happen is there needs to be much, much more lifting up on what is being achieved. This, I think, is something that is really lacking at the moment. […] We are still almost 80% white institutionally led in this country. This is United Kingdom, 2018. This is a huge factor in terms of data. If you go from the top, work your way through in terms of theatres, run by white men, or white liberal women, and these are equally dangerous. […] I'd like to see more black leadership in these theatres. How that happens is a much bigger question.[304]

Considering black leadership, and increased education in the areas of diversity and inclusion, there are supplementary schools in London catering to Afro-Caribbean community school children that focus on this notion. In their research into black supplementary schools, Mirza and Reay assert that traditional white school systems place children of African and Caribbean descent at a disadvantage, but supplementary schools do the opposite.

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[304] Appendices, Volume III, Josette Bushell-Mingo interview transcript, pp. 4-5.

> Supplementary schools provide a context in which whiteness is displaced as central and blackness is seen as normative. […] Through their strategies of reworking notions of both community and blackness, their creation of new "types" of professional intellectuals and their commitment to social transformation, black supplementary schools represent the genesis of a new social movement.[305]

They further explain that this kind of 'new social movement', black woman-led, without the implementation of radical, overt, and extreme measures, tactfully subverts the derogatory traditional school curriculum that devalues blackness. This approach leads to the potential success and longevity of such schools. Having attended BAI's summer intensive acting course, I see parallels between the work achieved there and the Afro-Caribbean supplementary schools in London, because as Mirza and Reay further explain: 'The discursive constructions of community and blackness within these schools contribute to the formulation of collective black identities which work against the hegemony of whiteness and individualism within wider society.'[306] Seeking types of new social movements in the form of supplementary courses and/or elective classes for actors of marginalised groups, like the Black Arts Institute, is one example of an incremental step that can be taken towards dismantling established discriminatory and racist white norms. I am not suggesting that these types of schools or courses be created with the intent to revive segregation. I suggest their development to provide additional artistic, educational, and performative spaces for black actors to hone and develop skills, specific to a component of their personhood that is overlooked in traditional white hegemonic educational realms.

Post-blackness theory highlights how the Black Arts Movement provided context for individualised views of blackness in new ways:

> As artists and creative intellectuals, they [members of the Black Arts Movement] determined to rid themselves of the vestiges of inherited attitudes and ideas about Blackness, which they found limited, limiting, antiquated, and necessarily false. The art they were making and the ideas they expounded would establish that the problem was not (their) Blackness. The problem was white racism.[307]

More research needs to be conducted by performing arts practitioners to craft new and sustainable systems of inclusion, thus lessening systemic racism and discrimination in the industry. In addition to the concept of *global view casting* introduced in chapter two, the

[305] Mirza and Reay, p. 528.
[306] Ibid., p. 525.
[307] Touré and Dyson, p. 111.

implementation of more black women in teaching, directing, and decision-making positions can foster an oppositional black feminist view to existing white patriarchal structures, because, as Lorde expresses in her writing, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.'[308] The current white hegemonic system is not working for people of colour. As Lorde posits in her writing, it will take those positioned outside of the white norm to develop more beneficial and inclusive ways to relate to our human differences.

Since the worldwide eruption of Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020, black actors are speaking out, and finding new ways to enact change within oppressive white hegemonic systems. The Black Arts Institute has expanded their course offering, and teamed up with New York University (NYU) to offer a semester-long course that will explore 'the history of the contemporary Black theater tradition, highlighting key historical moments, including the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Power Movement and the genesis of the many Black theaters that emerged during the Black Arts Movement.'[309] Collaborating with a major US university, like NYU, shifts BAI from the position of fringe special interest program to a necessary inclusive area of artistic interest, open for black actors to explore if they so choose. Rather than being isolated and stuck in the position of racialised 'other' in their actor training, black actors now have a choice to lessen that positionality by taking a semester-long course focused on black theatre arts.

Black American actress and singer Tavia Riveé took the initiative to enact change in the professional sector of the performing arts industry in the US. As a member of the BIPOC Broadway acting community she writes:

> As we move forward in building tactics for a more equitable space, it is necessary to provide a consultant that can not only identify potential blind spots on the ground floor of the creative process, but also provide the insight, mediation and perspective to soothe potential cultural barriers for all throughout the production.[310]

To meet this need, she has created the position of Cultural Coordinator™. 'A *Cultural Coordinator™,* is an assigned, essential role within an entertainment production that operates

[308] Lorde, p. 115.
[309] New York University, 'THEAUT 367 - Black Arts Institute Transfer Track at New York University', *Coursicle*, 2020 <https://www.coursicle.com/nyu/courses/THEAUT/367/> [accessed 10 September 2020].
[310] Alicia Samuel, 'Cultural Coordinator', *Tavia Riveé*, 2020 <https://www.taviarivee.com/culturalcoordinator> [accessed 10 September 2020].

on a multi-dimensional level to serve as an advocate, educator, liaison and mediator to ensure cultural equality throughout each stage of a theater production process.'[311] The examples I mentioned are taking place in America. However, I believe that the development of British counterparts to the Black Arts Institute and Cultural Coordinator™ could be equally beneficial in the UK. This would require the professional and educational institutions to overcome their white fragility, and an openness to decentralise Eurocentric curriculum, for the implementation of these tactics to be successful.

Black actresses specifically, are in the unique position of being the target of negative stereotypical imagery of black women, as well as the creators and perpetuators of said imagery as a requirement of their job. The repercussions and side effects of black actresses existing in this duality influences their identity, and ability to perform their jobs as actors. There is a need for more research on this subject which involves more comprehensive exploration beyond what is covered in this thesis. Based on the information and evidence presented by my research, I argue that the impact of the social stigma of blackness and womanhood in the performing arts industry has left black women searching for a true sense of self outside of negative stereotypical representations. In her discourse on the resistance of images of black female sexuality Marshall indicates that:

> Identity marks the conjecture of our past with the social, cultural and economic relations we live within. […] Making our identities can only be understood within the context of this articulation, in the intersection of our everyday lives with the economic and political relations of subordination and domination.[312]

As demonstrated in chapter one, the 'mammy', 'jezebel', and 'sapphire' stereotypes persist as contemporary reincarnations, therefore affecting how black women formulate their identities. Black actresses are left in the precarious position of taking on oppressive stereotypical roles or waiting for the chance to play more authentic well-rounded characters, of which opportunities are scarce. In an occupation with scant professional roles for black women to begin with, facing this dilemma makes it even harder for black actresses to make a living working in the performing arts industry.

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[311] Ibid.
[312] Marshall, p. 24.

The underlying problem is threefold, which includes: the limited number of roles available for black actresses to play, the lack of roles being written for black actresses, and the narrow consideration of black actresses for existing non-ethnically specific roles. As a black woman, actress, director, and academic that has lived in the UK and the US, I see a potential vehicle for change by building a bridge between the black American and black British performing arts practitioners. This could be achieved via black theatres, and interest groups focused on the black acting community, such as Talawa Arts (black touring theatre company in the UK), and Blacktress (network and support group for black actresses in the UK), connecting with the Black Arts Institute in the US to start a conversation. Further research into the ways black American and black British performing arts practitioners can engage with each other's unique cultural experiences artistically, can lay the groundwork for the definition and creation of new black identities. Black identities that are divergent from the distorted white hegemonic views of blackness, but inclusive of all aspects of the African diaspora. The convergence of black performing artists in the UK and US through various performing arts practices can possibly generate original, varied, authentic, informed, and nuanced representations of blackness and womanhood. Furthermore, it will potentially reduce the traumatic experiences of black actresses in the professional sector of the performing arts industry.

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