

# Journal of Consent-Based Performance

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Field

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## **Front Cover:**

*Uncle Vanya* (2021) at Pasadena Playhouse: Pasadena,  
California.

Brandon Mendez Homer as Astrov (left) and Chelsea  
Yakura-Kurtz as Elena (right).

Intimacy Choreography by Amanda Rose Villarreal.  
Photo: Jeff Lorch.

*Call for Papers: Consent and Cultural Competency*  
*Deadline: Feb 28, 2023*

Despite longstanding requirements for informed consent, human racial and cultural biases still frequently affect the communication of consent in medicinal and educational fields (Feyi 2022; Vyas et al. 2021). In these settings, it becomes clear that implicit, conscious, and subliminal preconceptions of one another's identities impact clear and effective communication regarding, as well as the respecting of, boundaries. It behooves scholar-artists to consider the ways in which our biases and cultural competencies affect the communication of consent within performance practices, as well. The *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* invites artists, educators, and scholars engaged with consent-based performance—in theory or in practice—to interrogate the role and importance of cultural competency in consent-based performance. We invite authors to analyze the roles of consent and cultural competency in existing theatrical texts, performance works, and approaches to crafting performance. We invite interdisciplinary theorizing that can inform intimacy professionals in developing more equitable, ethical, anti-oppressive, and effective consent-based performance philosophies and approaches. Furthermore, we invite reporting on the broad range of practices emerging throughout the world that focus on consent and performance, broadly conceived. We invite contributions that consider:

- The ways in which consent is, or is not, represented (historically or now) in written theatrical texts—in scripts; in stage directions; in dramaturgy; in reviews
- The ways in which cultural competency can (or should) inform the tools, practices, and effectiveness of, consent-based performance practices
- Theories and philosophies that should guide performance practitioners seeking to establish consent in more equitable and inclusive ways
- Intersectionality in consent-based performance; what complicates our capacity to ask for, give, and clearly communicate, consent?
- Approaches to communicating consent within performance practices and genres outside of the United States and outside of *theatre*

Olukanni, Feyi. 2022. "Henrietta Lacks Black History Women's History." Black Students of California United. February 22, 2022. <https://www.blackstudentscu.us/the-unknown-life-of-henrietta-lacks>.

Vyas, Darshali A, Leo G Eisenstein, and David S Jones. 2020. "Hidden in Plain Sight — Reconsidering the Use of Race Correction in Clinical Algorithms." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 9.

### Planting Our Feet: Editor's Comments

In our first issue's "Welcome to the JCBP" (2022), Laura Rikard, Chelsea Pace and I wrote that we wanted to create a "groundswell" (2) of thoughtful people to critically consider and propose existing and emerging practices in the field of consent-based performance. We also stated that we wanted to stand "with one foot planted in theory and scholarship, and the other foot planted in public knowledge generation" (3).

In this issue, the second in our first volume, we are acting on what we say by planting our feet and featuring authors from throughout the industry—current students in undergraduate, graduate, and terminal degree programs; practicing artists working with their local communities; and faculty scholars alike. Public knowledge generation requires gathering the thoughts from individuals at all levels of the theatrical and educational industries, rather than imposing approaches that worked in one setting upon all others. And at this formative stage in the foundation of the intimacy profession, it serves scholars and practitioners of consent-based performance to welcome public knowledge generation, rather than forming apostolic followings of individuals within our fields and their philosophies. If we say that we want to disrupt power imbalances in the performance fields, we owe it to ourselves and our artistic community to listen to a variety of voices, critique our current practices, and create a new way forward, together.

In the pursuit of growth in the field of intimacy specializations within performance, we must consider the the thoughts, research, and newly-developed practices being introduced from a variety of perspectives. This issue, and the calls to action included herein, seek to provoke deeper inquiry into the current state of consent-based performance and the ways in which we can continue to promote accessibility, innovation, and inclusion within this emerging field.

"The Impact of Intimacy Choreography and Consent-Based Practices in Undergraduate Actor Training" opens this issue, with Kaila Roach—current undergraduate student and actor—calling upon faculty in actor training programs to include intimacy choreography and consent-based performance techniques in undergraduate theatre curriculum. Roach melds PAR methodology and reflections upon her own experience with publications related to consent in actor training in order to analyze the benefits of early exposure to consent-based performance practices and to establish that consent-based practices are readily accessible to educators, making the inclusion of these practices in undergraduate

curricula overdue. Roach reflects upon the ways in which her experiences learning Theatrical Intimacy Education's Best Practices changed her approaches to coursework and the craft. In an impassioned plea, this 'note from the field' attempts to ignite change in the ways that young actors are trained to see themselves, the work they do, and the industry.

While Kaila Roach learned from a faculty mentor, Matthias Bolon—also an undergraduate actor at the time of writing “Asserting Boundaries and Conflict Resolution with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Consent-Based Practices and Shakespeare”—proposed his own methods for introducing consent-based practices into undergraduate theatrical spaces. His article outlines a workshop that he created and facilitated at the University of Colorado Boulder. Bolon developed this workshop for use with his peers, hoping that the activities involved would guide undergraduate and graduate students in the exploration of both verbal and nonverbal communication of consent using Shakespearian texts and performance. His efforts illustrate the desire among many early-career actors for support with communicating consent; young artists and scholars, such as Matthias, are already innovating, creating insightful approaches that the entire field—intimacy practitioners and educators alike—can learn from.

Acacia DëQueer and Kristina Valentine's article, supported by research contributions from Chelsey Morgan, Lex Devlin, and Ana Bachrach, presents the data gathered by this team of intimacy professionals and arts practitioners in their “Intimacy Professionals Census,” a questionnaire shared via social media to networks of intimacy professionals largely working within the United States. The authors have gathered the responses to this census, and present the demographic breakdown, common training practices, and perceived barriers to entry into the field of performed intimacy specializations that characterize our field in this nascent stage. Despite its small sample size, this is the first known attempt to document these factors across the organizational alignments that currently divide many in our field. This presentation of data invites other artists and scholars to delve into exploring the cultural factors that are driving both the current demographic makeup of our field, as well as the power and gatekeeping structures that are currently emerging within our field, both as represented within the small sample size of “The 2022 Intimacy Professionals Census Review” and in the reality of the broader field of scholars and practitioners not represented among the respondents to this study.

Chelsey Morgan's “Visions for Justice and Critiquing Consent: On Taking Performativity out of Performance,” then, transitions us from practice-based reporting on developments in the field into critical response to current consent-based performance practices. Their article analyzes the cultural

factors that reinstate power imbalances even as we attempt to insert consent-based practices into our industry. Morgan, currently pursuing their MFA at Loyola Marymount University, asks us to consider *what happens when consent fails* and to consider *why* consent fails the most vulnerable of artists most often. Engaging with a deep history of scholars and artists whose voices have been erased from the canonical understandings of theatre, performance, and consent, their article provokes the type of deep thinking that all intimacy professionals who claim to care about anti-oppressive practices need to envelop into our praxes and approaches. While Morgan boldly resists the pressure to provide us with clear answers that one could pretend will neutralize our industry's complicated history of re-creating and capitalizing upon practices of disempowerment that have emerged elsewhere in U.S. society, they highlight the ways in which the work of interdisciplinary scholars can inform consent professionals in interrupting these cycles. Furthermore, Morgan calls for the recognition of the Cultural Competency Specialists as necessary throughout the field of theatre and performance.

Alli St. John, a theatre practitioner currently based in Minnesota, reflects upon the ways in which consent-based practices can benefit participants creating theatre by, with, and for youth—even when simulations of physical intimacy are absent from the process and product. In analyzing the intersection of consent-based performance and working with youth, St. John's article adds to Kim Shively's "Using Principles of Theatrical Intimacy to Shape Consent-Based Spaces for Minors" (2022) in calling for theatre artists and intimacy specialists to acknowledge the need for specific practices and processes in youth-centered theatre, arguing that centering the needs of participants and young people in creative processes is in itself a form of consent-based practice. St. John further proposes her twelve "Suggested Practices," a framework she offers for supporting the creation of a consent-based culture. This framework builds upon practices proposed by companies such as Theatrical Intimacy Education and Intimacy Directors and Coordinators, adding St. John's own thoughts and useful steps that producing entities—schools, theatre companies, and festivals alike—can take to support the establishment of a consent-based culture as early as audition announcements and through closing rituals.

Dr. Lusie Cuskey's article titled "Consent-Based Considerations for the Musical Theatre," then, calls attention a different genre's intersection with consent-based performance, arguing that the addition of music into the theatrical process "invites additional levels of vulnerability" (156). Cuskey engages with specialists and scholars of musical theatre and of consent-based performance alike,

outlining the ways in which this genre may create the need for additional time and effort dedicated to ensuring that the production's company—inclusive of cast *and* crew—can work through difficult, emotionally activating content in healthy and productive ways. Dr. Cuskey also investigates the intersection of fandom and performance responsibility, and the ways in which artists who live within this intersection may experience additional pressures and activating emotions due to the layering of their personal ties to the work on top of their professional experiences within the work. This consideration is especially important in 2022, when the recent COVID pandemic catalyzed an increase in accessibility to musicals and performances, which could in turn fuel the personal connection to work that theatre professionals bring to, and merge with, their professional endeavors. For intimacy specialists working in musical theatre—as well as other genres with particularly strong fandoms—this could prove to be an interesting and fruitful consideration.

These authors issue a collective call to action: consider the work that consent-based performance *is currently doing* within the theatre and education industries, rather than the work that we—as hopeful artists eager to enact change—*hope that it is doing*. Identify the shortcomings of current practices in consent-based performance: the lack of training for undergraduate actors, the barriers and gatekeeping already forming within this industry, the ways that many approaches fall short of exorcising white supremacist culture from the theatre industry, the ways in which current practices insufficiently serve certain communities and genres of performance. Listening to these voices, hearing this call to action, invites us to plant our feet on the starting blocks and race towards developing new theories and approaches that serve the creation of consent-based performance more equitably and more effectively.

Amanda Rose Villarreal, PhD

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