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Inclusive Casting Debunked: Towards Holistic Interventions in Staged Performance

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Abstract

The conditions surrounding the recent resurgence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement illustrate the persistence of systemic racism in social life, including the cultural sector. Cultural practices in the Western world rarely dehumanise individuals, but they can play a crucial role in legitimising and perpetuating discriminatory dispositions against marginalised identities. Systemic domination works in covert ways and manages to capitalise even on cultural diversity initiatives, such us casting practices that have been developed to address the underrepresentation of marginalised communities of colour, gender and ability in staged performance. Drawing on theatre studies, sociology and theatre-related statistics and journalism that relate to casting diversity initiatives, this paper coins the term 'inclusive casting' to expose how such practices have surreptitiously perpetuated multiple and intersecting discriminations in staged performance across the UK and the US since 1970. It argues that such diversity initiates are tokenistic because they improve quantitative representations, such as the number of people with marginalised identities on stage, but ignore how they perpetuate inequalities through qualitative representation, such as the breadth and substance of the roles on offer. It suggests that interventions in the cultural sector should not target isolated manifestations of social inequality, but, instead, develop holistic practices and evaluation models that also condemn the misuse of inclusive casting and prioritise inclusive authorship.

Bio

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Social equality initiatives have aimed to improve the representation of marginalised identities in theatre, with a focus on how individual artists reflect the identities of real people in society. Interventions promoting the visibility of marginalised identities in casting practices, for which I will use the umbrella term inclusive casting, have been in use for 70 years. However, recent studies, statistics and evidence from activist movements show that marginalised identities – including women, people of colour, people with disabilities and people from a working-class background – are still underrepresented (Askew, 2019; Friedman, O'Brien & Laurison, 2017; Gardner, 2018; Hung, 2018; Hutchison 2016; Molina-Guzmán, 2016; Snow, 2017). It is necessary to examine the successes and failures of diversity initiatives in casting, especially in the context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which was sparked anew after a white police officer killed the African-American George Floyd on 25 May 2020. The video of the killing mobilised worldwide protests and digital discussions about systemic racism across many sectors, including theatre (The British Blacklist, 2020). This article aims to contribute to the discussions raised by the movement by illuminating how diversity initiatives in theatre casting have surreptitiously reinforced white supremacy, and also other dominant ideologies, such as patriarchy and ableism. It suggests that the way forward requires comparative, assertive and holistic institutional interventions.

The problems with representation can be expressed quantitively (how many people with marginalised identities are represented) or qualitatively (whether the representation is positive or negative). Recent digital activist movements have raised awareness of the ongoing problems

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with quantitative representation using platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Thomas, 2014: 475). The hashtag #50:50 exposed the exclusion of women from theatre (Hutchison, 2016) and #OscarsSoWhite (Molina-Guzmán, 2016) drew attention to the exclusion of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) from film. Following the #CripTheVote movement, which was aimed at politics (Wong, 2016), campaigners exposed the exclusion of people with disabilities from film (Hung, 2018), and similar concerns have been raised about working-class people across theatre and film (Askew, 2019; Friedman, O'Brien & Laurison, 2017; Gardner, 2018; Snow, 2017). Moreover, there are qualitative concerns about perpetuating negative historical stereotypes of the working class (Shah, 2019, as cited in Masso, 2019), which is also true for marginalised communities of colour, gender and ability.

Inclusive casting, which succeeded the 1967 term 'integrated casting', refers to mechanisms aimed at improving the quantitative representation of marginalised groups on stage ('Equity - Play Fair', n.d.). In the US, it is described as non-traditional casting, which succeeded the term 'colourblind casting' (Thompson, 2006). Four different practices are involved in the practice of inclusive casting: blind, in which the best actor is cast in a role, regardless of the race/gender/ability described or implied in the text; societal, in which actors with marginalised identities are cast in various social roles; conceptual, in which an actor with a marginalised identity is cast in a role to make a point; and cross-cultural, in which the world of the play is transferred in a different cultural setting to facilitate the casting of marginalised identities (NTCP, as cited in Pao, 2010, p. 4). Conceptual casting relating to race has been also described

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as ‘colour-conscious’ (Thompson, 2006, pp. 6-7) – a term that can be also extended to gender-conscious or ability-conscious casting. However, practices that improve the visibility of marginalised groups of colour, gender and ability quantitatively can perpetuate their qualitative under- or mis-representation.

This article argues that casting practices can tackle social inequality only by addressing quantitative and qualitative representation holistically while taking into account the multiple and intersecting axes of oppression that marginalised identities have to contend with. This can only happen when unacceptable practices across the cultural sector are condemned assertively, and when the disadvantaged position of non-white, non-male and non-able authorship, for which the term inclusive authorship is coined, is considered and addressed as a priority.

Methods

Through a focused analysis of how quantitative and qualitative representation work with and against each other, we can begin to understand the complex, misrecognised mechanisms that perpetuate social inequalities within theatre diversity initiatives. After giving a historical overview of how inclusive casting has improved the quantitative representation of marginalised identities in the theatre industry in the last 70 years, this paper identifies the hidden oppressions within social equality initiatives in staged performances of the last 70 years. It critically analyses three practices that counteract the positive impact of inclusive casting: the sole focus on quantitative methods to assess the visibility of marginalised identities, the misuse of inclusive casting, and the problems of inclusive authorship.

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This paper draws primarily on relevant scholarship from performance studies, but it also makes use of sociology, film and cultural studies to interrogate 'diversity' practices. The main focus is the UK theatre industry, but alluding to examples of the US theatre industry that pioneered the practice and the wider cultural sector further illuminates the analysis. It also uses statistics and articles from industry-related journalism of the last decade– in particular, the theatre industry paper *The Stage*, and unions like Equity in the UK (equity.org.uk) and its US equivalents, Actors' Equity (actorsequity.org) and SAG-AFTRA (sagaftra.org). The history and current state of inclusive casting show that, although it was created to tackle patriarchy, white supremacy and ableism, it often reinforces them.

Historical Background

As the history of inclusive casting shows, such initiatives have traditionally addressed isolated manifestations of social inequality, such as the lack of actors from marginalised communities in staged performance. Social, economic and political barriers exclude marginalised communities of colour, gender and ability from the theatre industry. Actors from working-class backgrounds are also 'significantly underrepresented' (Friedman, O'Brien, & Laurison, 2017, p. 1). Women and BAME people from working-class backgrounds are at a particular disadvantage (ibid, p. 14). Actors with disabilities face similar barriers. Even though various organisations have set up targeted training schemes (Hemley, 2017; Graeae, 2019), these often feel like 'a tick box exercise' and perpetuate exclusion (Madeley, 2017, as cited in Hemley, 2017) because they

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segregate and further marginalise them. Those who are sceptical of inclusive casting, have early on identified that such diversity initiatives mask this lack to access, which needs to be addressed.

Joseph Papp coined the term colourblind casting in the US in the 1950s (Thompson, 2006, p. 1). Between 1956 and 1991, he cast black actors in historically white roles in 77 Shakespeare productions to improve the diversity of his New York Shakespeare Festival (Widener, 2006, pp. 201-212). In the UK, the practice was firstly applied in 1958 at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, when the Caribbean Black British actor Edric Connor was cast as Gower in Pericles (Rogers, 2013, p. 411). Connor's campaigning resulted in Equity's commitment in 1968 to promote inclusive casting (Chambers, 2011, p. 128), and its adoption by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the National Theatre by the 1980s (Rogers, 2013, p. 411).

Colourblind casting assumes 'that color is the least consequential or least significant element when evaluated alongside age, physical ability, and gender that, as a result, it can be ignored or overlooked' (Young, 2013, p. 57). Although it visibly improved the representation of ethnic minorities on stage, it has been accused of institutionalising racism. In the mid-'90s, the mixed-race American playwright August Wilson argued that '[c]olorblind casting is an aberrant idea that has never had any validity other than as a tool of the Cultural Imperialists...It is inconceivable to them that life could be lived and even enriched without knowing Shakespeare' (2001, p. 29). Wilson exposes how colourblind casting indirectly perpetuates the dominance of the white playwright in the field of theatre. Also, the notion that Shakespeare's plays are

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‘universal’ implies that creatives and audiences can be ‘blind’ to race (Thompson, 2006), but also gender and ability. Colourblind and cross-cultural casting, and also practices that deny gender, ability or class in similar ways, are central in the contemporary history of Shakespearean production. Its reputation for improving the visibility of marginalised groups reinforces its legitimacy but also perpetuates the domination that Wilson suggests it reproduces.

The debate around colourblind practices led to the term non-traditional casting: ‘the casting of ethnic, female or disabled actors in roles where race, ethnicity, gender or physical capability are not necessary to the character’s or play’s development’ (Non-Traditional Casting Project, 1988). The term was embraced by theatres and unions in the US in the 1980s and 1990s, as it ‘is inclusive both in terms of the people affected and the approaches developed’ (Pao, 2010, p. 5). Unfortunately, the term did not succeed in improving the visibility of all marginalised identities, leaving people with disabilities at a particular disadvantage (Harrington & Bove, 1991, p. 15). However, the visibility of non-white actors in American Shakespeare festivals, Broadway and regional theatres improved (Pao, 2010, p. 8). It even extended from the American stage to film and television adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, with the casting of the African American actor Denzel Washington as Don Pedro in Kenneth Branagh’s film adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) marking a significant turning point. British stages improved in similar ways (Rogers, 2019).

Inclusive casting challenges audience dispositions. It has been suggested that ‘a black or racially mixed cast forces audiences, white and black, to come to terms with their own

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subconscious racism' (Kolin, 1991, p. 150). Because it both promotes the visibility of marginalised identities and develops the relevant dispositions of audiences, it is assumed to improve the social positioning of marginalised identities in society. However, inclusive casting has been described as a 'utopia', because it assumes that not only 'racial [gender, ability] assumptions but also the prejudices and discriminatory beliefs that can serve as social obstacles no longer exist' (Young, 2013, p.58). In today's theatre industry, where actors with marginalised identities face a range of social inequalities, the belief in such a utopia can only serve as a mechanism of oppression. Inclusive casting practices often refuse to acknowledge the cultural difference between performers and do not address the causes of the discriminatory practices that disadvantage actors from minority communities (Hingorani, 2009, p. 165). Debbie Thompson writes:

> Many people, and particularly white, middle-class liberal humanists, want passionately to believe in and practice color-blind casting both on-stage and in daily life. They want to believe that race is a 'mere' construct, and if we stop reconstructing it, it will go away. That, for them, is a good thing, for if race is only a matter of individual identity, then it is not a systemic problem. (2003, p. 135)

As Thompson suggests, inclusive casting practices can perpetuate the denial of systemic racism, which inactivates social movements and systemic reformations. Casting practices aimed at tackling white supremacy – or patriarchy or normativity – might, in fact, serve it.

Towards assessing qualitative versus quantitative representation

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Casting initiatives need to develop holistic models to assess how each case addresses multiple and intersecting axes of oppression. The assessment of qualitative versus quantitative representation in inclusive casting illuminates how the diversity initiative hides multiple axes of oppression. Quantitative and qualitative representation are intertwined in inclusive casting. In listing the various problems with inclusive casting , we should not imagine a simple binary of qualitative or quantitative representation, but rather view both as informing an effective practice towards inclusivity. Although the two types of representation are equally important for social equality, diversity initiatives have traditionally prioritised quantitative representation and neglected qualitative representation. The reasons for this are primarily methodological: it is easier to prove that a mechanism has had an effect by using quantitative methods, like counting how many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) actors are currently performing in the West End and whether the proportion of BAME actors reflects the wider BAME population. It is harder to analyse qualitative issues, like whether the roles on offer perpetuate social stereotypes or whether they ensure equal career progression for actors with marginalised identities.

For example, the quantitative problem that only 39% of employed actors in the UK are women (Purple Seven, 2015) is self-evident. It can be resolved by casting more women, and unions and national funding bodies have encouraged this to be done (Byrne, 2017). However, diversity initiatives do little to eliminate the stereotypical roles that perpetuate women's disadvantaged position in society. The feminist tool the 'Bechdel Test' gauges whether screenplays are sexist (Agarwal, Zheng, Kamath, Balasubramanian, & Ann Dey, 2015) by

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posing two questions: does the narrative contain at least two women, and do they talk to each other about something other than a man (Bechdel, 1985)? The popular tool also applies to theatrical plays and exposes that diversity initiatives rarely target problematic narratives. Inspired by the Bechdel Test, the Fries Test asks the following questions to probe the negative representation of people with disabilities: 'Does a work have more than one disabled character? Do the disabled characters have their own narrative purpose other than the education and profit of a nondisabled character? Is the character's disability not eradicated either by curing or killing?' (Fries, 2017). Similarly, the Riz Test highlights the stereotypical portrayal of Muslim people as characters who are 'irrationally angry', 'superstitious, culturally backwards or anti-modern', 'a threat to a Western way of life' or 'misogynistic' and usually appear in narratives about terrorism or the oppression of women (Riz Test, n.d.). Such tools can be used in casting initiatives to assess the importance of various marginalised communities in fictional narratives and characters.

Similarly, it is easy to prove that 80-90% of actors in Shakespeare productions are white and that 10-20% are from BAME backgrounds, with British East Asian (BEA) actors cast in much lower numbers (Rogers, 2013, p. 421), and adopt measures to address the inequality. However, it is difficult to address the fact that very few BAME actors are cast in major roles, unless the production is staged cross-culturally (Rogers, 2019, p. 56), which indicates that 'systemic inequality remains stubbornly in place in twenty-first century British classical theatre' (ibid, p. 69). In West End musicals, BAME representation stands at 38%, but BAME performers

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are usually part of an ensemble and are less likely to have leading or even named parts, with BAME women being particularly disadvantaged (Snow, 2019b). As the aim of having more minority actors on stage is achieved, the qualitative disadvantage tends to be overlooked (Shultz, 1991, p. 10). Issues with qualitative representation function as a hidden mechanism of oppression that neutralises the positive effects of the diversity initiatives that are aimed at tackling quantitative representation. Because BAME actors are usually cast in smaller parts, colourblind casting reinforces the marginalised positioning of BAME people in the theatre industry and society in general. The scrutiny of recent applications of the practice (Thomas, 2014) – like the RSC's casting BEA actors as 'the dog, the guard, the horses and the maid' in The Orphan of Zhao – invites systematic action to assess the casting of actors with marginalised identities comparatively, both in numbers and importance.

Even the quality of leading roles traditionally given to marginalised identities within inclusive casting practices undermines equality and diversity. For example, although BAME actors have been given more leading roles in the 21st century as a result of social upheavals (Rogers, 2013, p. 419), 'the number of leading roles performed by ethnic minorities, the roles that appear to be starting to be put into a category that can be termed a 'black canon' indicate that, to date, even in Shakespearean performances there is a glass ceiling for actors of colour' (ibid, p. 428). Similar mechanisms are in play when dispositions about gender and ability are challenged. The negative representation of marginalised identities in theatre because of inclusive

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casting extends from representing a society in which they have marginal importance to leading roles that develop new social stereotypes.

Alongside creating new social stereotypes, inclusive casting can amplify historical stereotypes. For example, British-Asian actresses are often cast as the bride or the mother of the bride in Shakespearean adaptations around arrange marriages (Panjwani, 2019). Asian actresses of various backgrounds are generally cast in roles that perpetuate 'the popular image of the humble and silent housewife', or as 'the shopkeeper', 'the dedicated doctor' or the 'cyber whizz kid' (Jarrett-Macauley, 2016, pp. 10-11). Actors with disabilities tend to be offered demeaning roles or roles that 'lack meaningfulness' (Sandahl, 2008, p. 255-6). For example, Complicité's and Schaubühne's latest co-production of *Beware of Pity* (2015) failed in its representation of disability:

> There is no doubt that the play is out of step with contemporary sensibilities. It would fail the Bechdel Test for its representation of women, the Fries Test for the representation of people with disabilities, and any other test you might care to administer. (Wake, 2019)

Anthea Williams writes that 'directors have a responsibility to the people they represent on stage, particularly when representing people from a minority group. This is not a limitation; it makes the work better' (2019). Williams is a theatre maker with a disability. She highlights that the narrative and characters in *Beware of Pity* perpetuate dispositions that put her at a disadvantage in her everyday life (ibid). When casting strategies do not consider whether the roles that make marginalised identities visible are associated with damaging historical stereotypes, they often

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reproduce the inequalities that they attempt to address. Instead, casting initiatives need to consider how the roles of marginalised identities offer fresh and unconventional representations of the world and invite audiences to envision a future society in which marginalised identities are empowered.

However imperfect, the focus on quantitative representation has been a positive step towards including marginalised identities. Even when 'stereotypical and reductive', inclusive casting 'may still facilitate a visibility that brings with it phenomenological sensations of empowerment' (Chow, as cited in Rogers & Thorpe, 2014, p. 435). Such diversity initiative 'is an important step in the necessary transformation of mainstream theatre' into a profession that responsibly addresses the challenges of racial representation (Lewis, 2007, p. 1), but also other social struggles. Still, focusing solely on quantitative representation perpetuates exclusion in covert ways. Moreover, the intersection of gender, race in marginalised identities could further perplex inclusive casting, both in terms of quantity—for example, even though BAME men are now visible in the West End, BAME women are still not-- and quality—like historical stereotypes that apply to BAME women.

A holistic casting practice is necessary, to assess how each case addresses multiple and intersecting axes of oppression, measure targets both qualitatively or quantitatively, and to strategise character and narrative that challenge audience biases. The re-examination of 'the terminology that defines contemporary practice' (Banks, 2013, p. 3) should be combined with critical questions at a policy level, including: 'How do casting choices express ideological

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values? … Is British theatre as inclusive as it likes to think it is? Does the casting of commercial theatre, and shows produced by national theatre institutions, really reflect diversity?' (Rogers & Thorpe, 2014, p. 434). Such questions are most effective when they are targeted at the pre-production stage of individual productions. The challenge will be to move beyond assessment and towards practices that affect the core of production decisions.

Towards asserting authentic casting

Alongside a holistic approach that embraces the complex ways in which hidden oppressions affect casting practices, it is necessary to also establish an assertive approach that identifies acceptable and unacceptable applications in staged performance. The application of inclusive casting has been particularly problematic when detached from its scope, for example when it has been used in reverse and resulted in actors with dominant identities being cast in roles with marginalised identities. Such a reverse casting strategy has been successfully used to make a political point in Ping Chong's *Chinoiserie* (1996), which exposed the binary of black/white America and highlights that Chinese Americans should also be considered in racial discourses (Chambers-Letson, 2011). However, this was an exceptional use of a practice that usually undermines social equality. This section debunks arguments that support the misuse of inclusive casting for practical, financial or artistic reasons.

The use of inclusive casting for practical reasons is considered acceptable across educational settings (Young, 2013, p. 58). For example, to match the students' skills in a school production of the musical *Big River*, an African American student was cast as the white

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Huckleberry and a white student was cast as Jim, the slave (Accetta, 2013, p. 352). As a result, the Rogers and Hammerstein Organization (R&H) initially denied the rights to perform the musical and clarified that 'the concern did not have to do as much with the African-American student performing Huck but with the white student performing Jim' (Fink in Accetta, 2013, p. 354), but eventually gave schools special permission to use alternative casting practices (Accetta, 2013, p. 355). Overall, the practice was misused, as it ignored race in a musical about race and it was used not to improve representation, but rather to solve a problem commonly encountered when casting in an educational setting: the pool of actors for the roles is limited. Inarguably the performance of African-American characters by white actors is associated with the lampooning of people of African descent in the minstrelsy of the early 19th century. Consequently, educational institutions need to assertively condemn the casting of white students in African-American roles and, extend this to assert authentic casting in all roles that represent people with marginalised identities.

Actors' unions stress that inclusive casting should not be used the other way around: when roles are written for marginalised identities, authentic casting is necessary for social equality. Inclusive casting should be used for 'casting artists who had been systematically excluded and discriminated against for reasons such as the colour of their skin' in a predominantly 'Euro-centric, Western repertoire' (Jensen, 2013). It should not apply to culturally specific roles ('Equity - Play Fair', n.d.). The term 'authenticity' is used across the UK and the US to highlight that marginalised identities should not be performed by actors with dominant

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identities (ibid; Jensen, 2013). It 'was never intended to justify casting a Caucasian in a culturally-specific role, or casting a non-disabled actor in a disability-specific role. To do so is a misappropriation of the term and the practice, since the goal is to rectify exclusion' (Jensen, 2013). The performance of roles with marginalised identities by actors with dominant identities illustrates a misuse of inclusive casting.

Unfortunately, the misuse of inclusive casting still occurs on mainstream and non-mainstream stages in the Western world. Native Americans have stressed the necessity of casting Native actors to play Native characters for 'myriad political and historical reasons…among them the legacy of red-face performance in theatre, film, and television and the pervasive mainstream impression that all Indians must be played by non-Indian actors, because all Indians are dead' (Mohler, 2016, p. 63). However, even after its cancellation in Canada, Robert Lepage's *Kanata* was eventually staged in Paris with white actors in the indigenous roles (Valiante, 2018). The practice has been also misused in Germany (Clybourne Park, 2012) and the UK (The Wales Theatre Awards, 2018).

The casting of actors with dominant identities in roles that represent communities with marginalised identities has been traditionally used when financial interests are prioritised over diversity. When it was announced that the 1989 West End production of *Miss Saigon*, starring the white actor Jonathan Pryce in the role of the Eurasian Engineer, would transfer to Broadway (Paulson, 2017), Asian American actors protested, saying that 'yellowface will never happen here' (BD Wong, 1991, in Paulson, 2017). Actors' Equity initially supported them but withdrew

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when the producers threatened to cancel the Broadway transfer (Paulson, 2017). The critic Sheridan Morley had predicted such a compromise, arguing that 'huge numbers of their members will now complain to American Equity that they have been denied work because of the Asian lobby' (Thames News, 2015, secs 00:02:22-00:02:54).

The quantitative disadvantage was that an Asian American actor lost the chance to play the role. The obvious qualitative disadvantage was that the negative 'yellowface' stereotype with eye made of 'prosthetics, a sort of a very light latex which is a false lid' was reinforced (Pryce, 1989, as cited in mimibarthez, 2006, sec. 00:01:09). Quality of representation was further complicated by the fact that Asian actors were cast, but not in the leading role (Broadway World, 1989, 1991). As in the similar case of the RSC's casting in *The Orphan of Zhao* in 2012 in the UK, 'the fact that BEA actors were cast at all served only to exemplify how casting functions as a tool of discursive power that upholds the socio-economic dominance of whiteness in the theatre industry of twenty-first-century Britain' (Thorpe, 2014, p. 436).

A number of victories against the misuse of inclusive casting have resulted in performers withdrawing from leading roles (Masso, 2018a), but other attempts at disrupting the practice have led to the cancellation of productions (Snow, 2016). In an open letter to the Wales Theatre Awards, 40 industry professionals complained about the 2018 nomination of 'shows which include white actors in non-white roles' (Nickels, Shayek, Lopez, Norton, & Ghazoul, n.d.). The organiser cancelled the awards (Wales Theatre Awards, n.d.) and accused the signatories of

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wishing to 'destroy rather than enhance this unique celebration' (Smith, as cited in Masso, 2018c), which double-excluded them.

People in key positions in the theatre and film industries have been crucial in legitimising or resisting the casting of actors with dominant identities in roles representing marginalised identities. The American playwright Bruce Norris refused to give the performance rights of *Clybourne Park* to Deutsches Theater after it suggested that 'the colour of the actress' skin would ultimately be irrelevant, since they intended to 'experiment with make-up' (Norris, 2012, as cited in Haydon, 2012). Norris's reaction was criticised as 'provocative', 'tactless cultural imperialism' and 'regrettably short-sighted' because there is a lack of Black actors in Germany and because '[w]hen a German theatre director says 'make-up' they might intend any number of non-naturalistic devices' (Haydon, 2012). Such arguments imply that theatre directors can control and predict how the actors' identity characteristics of race, gender or ability, will be received by audiences. The claim that race can cease to signify or be signified, and is thus not included in the sign system of directors and audiences, disadvantages minority groups.

Considering that the misuse of inclusive casting for practical, financial or artistic purposes reinforces historical stereotypes and discriminations, casting initiatives need to assertively condemn its selective and exceptional use. Casting initiatives need to establish an understanding that practices, which can be traumatising to individuals with marginalised identities, are unacceptable across professional, educational and community settings .

Towards prioritising inclusive authorship

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Alongside a comparative and assertive approach, inclusive casting initiatives need to be assessed holistically together with inclusive authorship. Most playwrights in the English-speaking world – including Norris – and theatre audiences are white. Haydon implied that, since white authorship is the norm, authentic casting cannot improve representation (2012). Directing is also a form of authorship and many creative decisions, including casting, are often made by artistic directors and producers. As most writers, directors, and producers are white men, a lack of diversity in casting is inevitable:

> The Writers Guild of America's 2005 report found that women made up just 18% of film writers. People of colour accounted for about 6% of the writers compared with 29% in the present day general population. Hence, primarily white male decision makers buy scripts from primarily white men, who tend to write lead characters who are white men. (Robinson, 2007, pp. 7-8)

The kind of roles that writers ascribe to identities is crucial for the inclusion of marginalised groups.

A major problem with authors from marginalised communities is that theatres consider them unpopular. When talking about why inclusive casting is a mechanism of exclusion, Wilson stresses the need to fund works of non-white authors in the non-commercial sector: 'By making money available to theaters willing to support colorblind casting, the financiers and governors have signaled not only their unwillingness to support Black Theater but their willingness to fund

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dangerous and divisive assaults against it' (2001, p. 29). However, established theatres do not risk employing authors with marginalised identities. Similarly, when women playwrights complained about their underrepresentation among writers at the National Theatre's 2018 season in the UK (Wertenbaker, Harris, & Spallen, 2019), such inequality was justified as a result of 'the historic gender imbalance', which the theatre could not counterbalance because it needs to stage classical plays (Snow, 2019a). If theatres with established audiences and available funding cannot replace the staging of classical plays with new works by diverse playwrights, the spreading of positive initiatives in the commercial sector seems impossible.

Even when authors with marginalised identities get funded, their work rarely reaches broader audiences. They are often institutionalised, 'limited to their ethnical background' and 'reduced to 'social' or 'community' art – just not professional art' (Sharifi, 2017, p. 332). In the UK, although BAME theatre companies have been financially supported since the 1970s, they are largely perceived as 'other' – 'as 'marginal' to the 'mainstream' of British theatre' (Verma, 1994, p. 56). Black British writers of the late 20th century have struggled 'to have work staged in non-community settings' (Osborne, 2006, p. 27). This is also true of British artists with disabilities. Commercial and state sponsorship for disability arts has resulted in its domestication, eliminating the politicisation that was originally at its core (Darke, 2014, pp. 138-141), further perpetuating exclusion and inequality.

Nevertheless, we cannot be sure that employing diverse writers to write narratives with diverse characters will resolve the qualitative concerns about the positive or negative

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representation of marginalised identities. To tackle such qualitative issues, multicultural casting has been adopted, which involves 'not just superficially using the visible racial stereotypes or essentializing models of difference, but having artists of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds actively and assertively contribute to the creative process' (Pao, 2010, p. 6). Though promising it becomes particularly problematic when artists from marginalised groups internalise historical stereotypes ascribed to their identities. For example, the 'over-sexual' Latinx stereotype has had a long-lasting impact on Latinx actors, who internalise stereotypical physicalities and attitudes (Espinoza & Ocampo-Guzman, 2010). Conversely, in a contemporary adaptation of *Othello* the main actor's 'interpretation of black masculinity, or rather his own identity, was a narrative controlled by a white man' (Glotzer, 2018, p. 52). Such an unconscious embodiment of negative representations of their communities burdens artists with marginalised identities and often legitimises stereotypical representations. Therefore, improving the quantitative representation of authors with marginalised identities alone does not necessarily improve social equality, as the qualitative representation of marginalised groups could still be undermined. Unfortunately, the systemic nature of social domination can result in the unconscious internalisation of patriarchal, racist and ableist narratives by creatives and actors with both dominant and marginalised identities. This becomes more problematic if we consider the representation of intersectional identities.

Although inclusive casting has often been used to mask problems relating to white authorship, practices that promote inclusive authorship are also struggling to identify, confront

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and tackle the complex ways in which dominant ideologies surreptitiously turn diversity initiatives into mechanisms of subjection. Inclusive authorship is undermined by the internalisation of dominant ideologies, the lack of access to the acting industry for actors and creatives with marginalised identities, and the placement of artists with marginalised identities with community art, which compromises professionalisation and limits visibility as their work does not reach broader audiences. For these reasons, casting initiatives need to assess inclusive casting and inclusive authorship practices holistically, considering that they are interconnected in the way that they perpetuate hidden oppressions in staged performance.

Conclusion: towards holistic interventions

This paper analysed why inclusive casting, in the 70 years since it was first adopted, has failed to improve the social positioning of marginalised identities. It analysed how such diversity initiative has often reinforced multiple axes of oppression because of the focus on quantitative over qualitative representation, the misuse of the practice and its isolation from inclusive authorship. It argued that, to promote social equality, casting initiatives need to develop interventions that approach the problems with qualitative and quantitative representation holistically, condemn the misuse of inclusive casting and prioritise inclusive authorship. The above strategies can be used to assess how individual cases address multiple and intersecting axes of oppression.

Holistic approaches in casting will address the representation of multiple and intersecting marginalised identities and invite audiences to envision an empowered future positioning of

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marginalised identities in society. They will examine applications of the practice case by case and evaluate how both quantitative and qualitative targets are met and how improving one might deteriorate the other. A holistic approach will also consider how the misuse of inclusive casting, such as the casting of actors with dominant identities in roles with marginalised identities, undermines social equality. For example, the casting of white actors in roles for BIPOC reinforces historical stereotypes and the casting of able-bodied actors in roles for people with disabilities undermines the careers of actors with disabilities. Most importantly, it should be acknowledged that the misuse of inclusive casting is also unacceptable in educational and community settings because it undermines the establishment of authentic casting in the professional industry and traumatises people with marginalised identities. It is also crucial that holistic approaches will assess inclusive casting practices alongside inclusive authorship because the two are interconnected in how they affect the visibility and also the representation of marginalised identities in narratives and characters. Such holistic approaches should not assume that people with marginalised identities will not reproduce oppression in staged performance, but will invite them to develop an awareness of the problems, alongside individuals with dominant identities.

Instead of using inclusive casting practices that mask the problems with access for artists from marginalised groups by targeting isolated manifestations of social inequality, institutions that stage performances should engage in dialogue with unions to develop three-dimensional casting interventions. Despite the differences and nuances of the problems for the various

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marginalised communities, there are also similarities in the problems with misrepresentation, exclusion from roles that represent marginalised communities and the lack of support for authors with marginalised communities. However, it is crucial that such interventions are not limited just to paperwork that key agents of the industry are invited to implement in their productions, or a critical lens that academics, journalists and lobbies can use to discuss productions after they are realised. Rather, it should be backed up by legislation and be fully considered, applied and evaluated during pre-production.

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