

COSTUMES GET INTIMATE

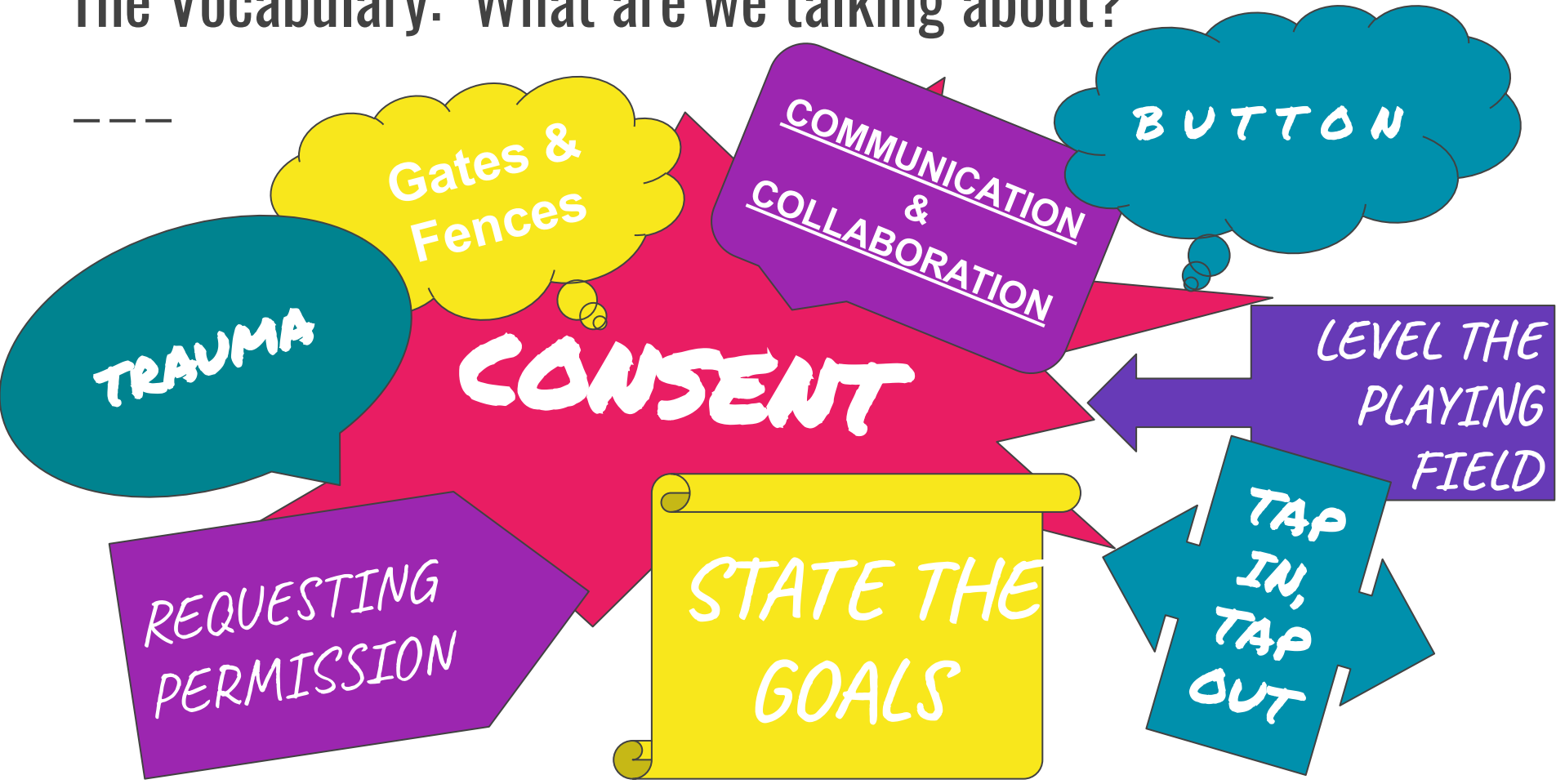
Finding Best Practices for Intimacy and Personal
Boundaries in Costume Work

Compiled by Jessica Wegener Shay in collaboration
with ATCA RDN 2022 Participants

The Audiences: Who needs to understand this stuff?

- Student Actors
- Costume Shop Supervisors
- Costume Professors and Instructors
- Professional/Guest Designers coming to work in an Academic Setting
- Anyone Working with Actors in Costume (Drapers, Tailors, Wardrobe Folx, Artisans of all sorts)

The Vocabulary: What are we talking about?



Consent

- We need permission for everything.
 - Touch
 - Discussion of intimate topics
 - Measurements
 - Photos
- Consent can be withdrawn at any time, and for any reason.
- It's Ok to Need a Break/Stop Anytime
- Acknowledging that boundaries can change in real time and these changes will be accommodated.
- Don't demand an explanation for a NO or Trauma. Take the NO and move on a different path towards the goal.

Requesting Permission

- Provide Opportunities for Boundary Conversations EARLY
 - Ask Open-Ended Boundary Questions BEFORE you start the Fitting/Measurements/Quick Change/Rehearsal
 - You could incorporate a non-binary body diagram that actors can illustrate at measurements with their zones of comfort and discomfort.
- Ask Open-Ended Questions. Avoid questions that have a one-word answer. Here are some good ones:
 - “Will it work for you if?”
 - “What are your thoughts on that?”
 - “How do you feel about that?”
- Talk about what you’re going to do before you do it. At every step, every time.
 - This can be a hard thing to learn to remember—especially in fittings—but try to narrate the fitting in such a way that the actor has a chance to say NO before you touch any part of their bodies at all.

Stating the Goals

- Start out the meeting/measurements/fitting by talking about what you are hoping to accomplish in this moment.
- Be sure that the references (sketches/research etc) are there to display those goals!
- Talk about what you're going to do and why you're going to do it BEFORE you do it.
- Always have a reason for trying something on.

Communication

— — —

- SLOW DOWN. Be ok with pausing before you speak so that you can be thoughtful about what you say.
- Follow the “Golden Rule”—Talk to others how THEY would like to be talked to.
- Avoid using Slang and make your language as precise as possible.
- Use the language of EVERY BODY—avoid binary terms and fashion and beauty “ideals.”
- Ask for what you need. And ask others what they need.
- Set up a boundary if you need to.
 - “I’m uncomfortable using that term. Can we say___ instead?”
- Point out the exits—take a moment, Button, put a pin in it!
- Acknowledge Trauma and Tension—don’t write things off as “no big deal”
- Acknowledge and then “Shake Off” the trauma when harm has been caused—intentionally or no. Apologize if you need to.

Collaboration

- LISTEN. Listen to the whole thought of the other person. Try to hear and understand fully. Wait to form your response until you've heard the whole idea.
- Remember that we are here to work together to create a character and tell a story-with clothes.
- SLOW DOWN-Look for signs (not just verbal) and red flags along the way.
- If you encounter a boundary-Find a different path to the same goal. Be Flexible.

Leveling the Playing Field

- Level Playing Field—Everyone has the authority to say NO.
- If you are in a position of authority, name it. And then reiterate that it's ok to say no to you, even though you are in that position.
- In order for this collaboration to work, we must participate as equals.

Trauma

- We don't know what might trigger trauma in someone else's body
- They might not know either
- We want to avoid causing harm.
- Trauma is created in mammals when they become trapped.

“In other words: If an organism is stuck in survival mode, it's energies are focused on fighting off unseen enemies, which leaves no room for nurture, care and love. For us humans, it means that as long as the mind is defending itself against invisible assaults, our closest bonds are threatened, along with our ability to imagine, plan, play, learn, and pay attention to other peoples' needs.”--*The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel A. Van der Kolk

Gates & Fences

This is a term used by Chelsea Pace, Laura Rickard, and other intimacy professionals to help actors describe which parts of their bodies they are comfortable or uncomfortable with others accessing or touching.

A **Gate** indicates an area that can be accessed with PERMISSION.

A **Fence** indicates an area that cannot be accessed.

“Button” and other Code Words for “Hold on a sec...”

Actors and intimacy professionals have taken to using various words to indicate the need for a break in the action in order to take space and time for something that has made them uncomfortable.

This might be the result of touch, but could also be related to pretty much anything—trauma, racism, microaggressions, alienation, etc. Any reason is an acceptable one for a pause.

Other words/ phrases sometimes used:

Hold, Ouch, Pause, I need to put a pin in this, etc..

Tapping In, Tapping Out, Shaking it Off

- Make it clear when you're starting and ending a fitting, meeting, measurements, or discussion.
- Point out the exits—take a moment, Button, put a pin in it!
- Acknowledge Trauma and Tension—don't write things off as “no big deal”
- Acknowledge and then “Shake Off” the trauma when harm has been caused—intentionally or no. Apologize if you need to.
- Animals release trauma from their bodies by literally shaking. People can too.
 - Help yourself or an actor release some tension by having a good shake—or whatever movement you find necessary.
 - Acknowledge the trauma and allow the time and space for that movement.

Methods and Resources

[Glynis Rigsby & Consent Studio](#)

[Intimacy Directors & Coordinators, Inc.](#)

[Staging Sex by Chelsea Pace](#)

<https://www.theatricalintimacyed.com/> - TIE

<https://www.intimacycoordinatorsofcolor.com/> - they were great
(Rae)

What do I tell the Actors?

Ok. I'm taking this really seriously. Now how do I let the actors know?

What do we need to talk about with Actors?: When We Do Something New, Let's Talk About it First!

Biggest Gift we can Give:
Letting Students know what to
expect ahead of time...



How to share that Info:

- Make these things a part of the general conversation.
- Share a Guide to Costumes with actors ahead of Time.
- Provide that info in multiple formats.
- Cover the process from Measurements to Stage with Clarity and Brevity. They won't read your 20 page document.
- Add Specifics in your emails about measurements, fittings, tech/dress rehearsals, etc.
- Whenever possible, say things again and again in person. Give in-person briefings on Costume Practices wherever you can talk-at rehearsals, town halls, etc.

The Topics for Actors: What do we need to talk about?

- The Team Members
- Measurements
- Fittings
- Intimacy-Consent, Collaboration, Communication
- Dressing Rooms
- The Tech Process
- The Performance Process

Costume-Specific Resources for Actors

The University of Michigan's "What to Expect at the University Productions Costume Shop" Video



Jessica Shay's
[Fordham Actors' Guide: What to Expect in the Costume Shop](#)