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Opal Clark on Directing *Stop Kiss*  
An Exploration of the Directorial Process

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A thesis

presented to

The faculty of the Department of Performance and Communication

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by

Opal Clark

August 2017

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Mr. Robert Funk, Chair

Dr. Wesley Buerkle

Ms. Karen Brewster

Keywords: Theatre, Directing, Communications, Rhetorical Analysis, *Stop Kiss*

## ABSTRACT

Opal Clark on Directing *Stop Kiss*

An Exploration of the Directorial Process

by

Opal Clark

The intent of this thesis was to execute a successful run of the play, *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son while achieving the playwright's intended message. Opal Clark directed this production of *Stop Kiss* at East Tennessee State University under arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc. It was performed to sold out audiences in ETSU Theatre and Dance Studio 205 October 2-7, 2016. The play explores experiences and hostility toward same sex couples, their relationships with one another and how one individual discovers sexuality. The project was documented through a series of journal entries written by the director. A prompt book was created to document movement and motivation of each character throughout the blocking of the show as a requirement of the department. Additionally, a feminist criticism of the script further explores the portrayal of the plotline. The consequences and implications of dramatic choices within the context of the play are analyzed within this section.

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## CHAPTER 1

### *Opal Clark on Directing: Research and Analysis*

The following is a presentation of my research, analysis, journal of events, and execution of the play, *Stop Kiss*. In order to aide the reader, it has been presented in this fashion to give clearer understanding of my directorial process. This chapter presents research and analysis prior to the rehearsal process. The second chapter discusses my experiences as a director throughout collaborative processes with faculty and an account of rehearsals. This chapter also includes my own personal insights, thoughts and considerations about what happened during the time of the events I recorded in my journal. Chapter 3 is the directorial prompt book, which gives insight to my directorial selections and the implementation of those choices. The final chapter addresses the accomplishments and challenges of the process and final production.

In my first semester of graduate school at East Tennessee State University, I had no idea what I wanted to do for my thesis. I had a casual conversation with the department head, mentioning that directing *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son had been a lofty dream of mine. From there I was invited to speak to the faculty at a faculty meeting to present my case as to why *Stop Kiss* would be a good choice for the fall playbill at ETSU. One thing led to another, and before I knew it, I was directing a mainstage production.

I was honored that the faculty would allow me to direct the show as a mainstage production. Graduate students directing mainstage production at ETSU has rarely been a part of the curriculum or an expectation of the department. I was honored to have the opportunity to direct a full length, mainstage production.

This was an opportunity for me to experience a side of theatre that I was still very novice to. Directing would be an educational opportunity while furthering my theatre experience. Additionally, it would provide me the chance to complete a feminist rhetorical



analysis of *Stop Kiss* as one of the chapters in my thesis combining both performance and communication elements.

I was familiar with the play, *Stop Kiss*, prior to directing this production. Having seen previous productions *Stop Kiss*, I had always been enamored with the playwright's choice of timeline presentation of the plot to the audience. One scene will present itself and following directly afterward, the next scene will flash forward to present day. This pattern effectively navigates emotionally intense and controversy-laden scenes with alternating glimpses of a heartwarming development of a romantic relationship between two women.

As a queer woman, the issues within the context of the script felt very near and dear to my heart. At the same time, I wanted to find a way to give a universal glimpse, as much as one production can, of queer relationship development and 'coming out of the closet' instead of showcasing my own personal story. I knew that drawing upon my own personal experiences would be crucial, while at the same time, it would also be important to remain true to the playwright's intent and reflective of the queer women's community.

*Stop Kiss*, written in 1998, is a look at the reality and risk people in queer relationships face, and is relevant even in 2017. While homophobia and violence against women is at the forefront of the play's issues, more importantly, the show addresses the humanization of same-sex relationships. Watching Callie and Sara's relationship grow and come to fruition, holds universal interest for all audiences.

#### *The Playwright*

Diana Son is a professional writer in theatre, film, and television. She is one of the only female, Korean-American women playwrights. Son is the daughter of Korean immigrants who met in the United States while migrating for educational opportunities within the medical field (Young, 2011). Known as the golden child in her family of four, the family did not anticipate her venture into pursuing theatrical arts as a profession. Son went on

to write award-winning shows such as *Stop Kiss* and *Satellites*. Originally from the town of Dover, outside of Philadelphia, Son's love of theatre came to fruition in high school when one of her teachers had taken her class to see *Hamlet* on Broadway. In her article, *Where Hamlet Leads, I Will Follow*, Son describes her initial disappointment when she discovers that *Hamlet* was not to be played by a man. Her disappointment was soon relinquished after seeing Diana Venora's performance, describing the actor's portrayal of the world renowned tortured teen as "...mercurial, explosive, desperate and dysphoric. I was rapt."(Son, 2010). Son attributes Venora's performance of Hamlet as her inspiration for becoming a theatre artist.

From Dover High School, Diana Son then went on to study Dramatic Literature and Theatre at NYU. New York would become Son's permanent place of residence and shortly after graduating Son proclaimed that she "went from being a total theatergoing neophyte to one who saw almost exclusively gender-bending, iconoclastic productions". The influence of her gender-bending, iconoclastic theatre productions can be seen in her play, *BOY*. The plotline is described as depicting an Asian American family who bore a fourth daughter in hopes of a son, who is brought up as a boy until one day he learns, in fact, that he is biologically born female (Hong, 2006, p. 61).

Queer and gender bending subjectivities are often and rightfully associated with LGBTQ community, history and scholarship. Son identifies herself as an ally to the LGBTQ community. *Stop Kiss*, a love story between two women in New York City is where Son found her breakthrough in the public eye. Son states that as a playwright it is essential "...to really make it a personal experience. . .you've got to confront something."(Gordon-Solomon, 2014, p. 51), And facing difficult or uncomfortable cultural issues, she certainly has. *Stop Kiss* premiered in 1998 at the very same theatre where Son had attended *Hamlet* as a high school student. In reference to seeing *Hamlet* in the Public Theatre Son stated, "It wasn't just

the play that changed my life. It was the play that gave me one”(Son, 2010, p. 93). Similar to how *Hamlet* affected Son, Son’s *Stop Kiss* has now been produced in hundreds of theatres in the U.S. and abroad ([www.samuelfrench.com](http://www.samuelfrench.com)), and has given a voice and life to the LGBTQ population. Son has received a number of awards for *Stop Kiss*, among them the GLAAD Media award for Best New York Production. She has been quoted, saying:

Gay people fear violence on a daily basis and yet it’s not articulated. So I felt that I wanted to expose it in a way that was very accessible. Because the incident in the play happens to women other people think of as “straight,” I think, it’s more accessible than if it happened to women living their lives as lesbians.(Tanaka, 1999 p. 26)

While Son gives voice to queer violence issues within the US, she also remarks that it isn’t the focal point of the play. Son claims that super objective within the show is the evolution of Callie’s character and her ability to go from being an indecisive, irresponsible individual to a decisive person who can go on to make a commitment (Tanaka, 1999, p. 27)

### *The Play*

#### *Background Information*

*Stop Kiss* is a contemporary drama that addresses the humanity of burgeoning homosexual romantic relationships, sexuality, and the realities of violent crimes against women and the LGBTQ+ population. Originally produced in 1998 in the Joseph Papp Theatre on Broadway, the show has proved to remain relevant over the past 18 years. In a review of the Pasadena Playhouse’s production of *Stop Kiss* by the LA Times in 2014, the show is not only about a heart-warming declaration of love but, “the subtler effects of living in a society in which tolerance is an unspoken fact”. Through the architecture of the drama, connections are forged between oppressive messages and inhibited souls.” (McNulty, 2011)

In agreement with the LA Times, many critics attribute the success of the message behind *Stop Kiss* to its dramatic structure. The scenes of the play alternate between two

timelines: the unfolding of Sara and Callie's relationship prior to their attack and the aftermath of Callie dealing with the attack and the reality of her relationship.

The play features a cast of seven, three women and three men with one role that could be cast as either gender. There is no specified time in which the play should be produced. However, it was a contemporary play that was first produced on Broadway in 1998. While most of the dialogue is still relevant to 2016, there are some moderate updates needed if the show were to be set in present day such as pop culture and technology references.

The playwright stresses that the cast should reflect the ethnic diversity of New York City and that the show should be performed without intermission. Son's original production of the play featured a cast of Korean-Canadian Sandra Oh as Sara. African-American actors Saundra McClain played Mrs. Winsley/Nurse and Kevin Carroll was cast as George. Son is adamant that actors of color be cast to give a true depiction and representation of New York City. Son states,

. . . I was so confused and upset that many of the subsequent productions had white casts, even in a city as diverse as London! I felt so alienated from productions of *Stop Kiss* that were all white. That is not the kind of work I want to contribute to American theatre. (Hong, 2006, p. 62)

The play takes place in several different places, however, the primary for Callie and Sara's relationship development occurs in Callie's apartment. The other settings, in no particular order, are: an emergency room, a hospital room, a police station, a cafe, and an outside street area. The play was copyrighted by Diana Son, herself, in 2000 and is currently published by Dramatists Play Service, Inc. The play was originally directed by Jo Bonney and produced by George C. Wolfe.

#### *Historical Context: Then and Now*

1990s continuing into 2010s remains a hotbed for issues such as LGBTQ rights, marriage equality, queer cultural stigma, and violence against women. Because the show was

originally produced in 1998 as a contemporary drama, it is important to understand cultural climate and historical context in both the 1990s and in the 2010s.

In a late 1980s study of violence against lesbian women conducted by Beatrice von Schulthess in San Francisco, it was found that 57% of lesbians in that area had experienced violence or the threat of violence because of their sexual orientation (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 795). Of that 57%, 15% reported their assaults or encounters to law enforcement. Further research in a 1991 study conducted by Comstock, suggested that lesbian violence and assault went unreported due to “fear of abuse by police, fear of public disclosure, and the perception that law-enforcement officials are anti lesbian.” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 795). In the mid 90s, half of the states still had statutes referred to as ‘sodomy laws’ which were used to criminalize gay men and lesbian women who took part in consensual anal or oral sex. These laws not only continued to criminalize queer relationships, but perpetuated homophobia.

Another law directly affecting the queer community was the implementation of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” by President Clinton in 1993([www.HRC.org](http://www.HRC.org)). Prior to this legislation, there was an outright ban on homosexuals serving in the military. The intent of the law was to allow the queer community to serve in the military without having to be open about their personal lives. However, those individuals who were serving as queer members of the military were subject to dishonorable discharge if their sexual orientations were discovered.

Violence and discrimination due to sexual orientation began to be recognized as an issue following the murder of Matthew Sheppard. In 1998, a young man attending university in the state of Wyoming who was brutally beaten and left for dead because of his sexual orientation. Pro gay and lesbian groups began to strengthen and several more grassroots organizations supporting the LGBTQ community began to surface nationwide (Zimmerman, 2000, p.796).

Going into the 2010s, the Marriage Equality Act was passed by the Supreme Court in 2015([www.marriageequality.org](http://www.marriageequality.org)). This allowed for same gender/sex relationships to be recognized federally, a huge step for the LGBTQ community to gain and preserve equal recognition for their relationships. President Obama eliminated DADT (Don't Ask, Don't Tell) in 2010, which also allowed for those military members who were discharged due to the discovery of their sexual orientation to be honorably reinstated back into the military ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)). This banned discrimination against sexual orientation and identification within military. Despite major progress in the fight for equal rights amongst LGBTQ identified people, in 2015, of the 7,121 hate crime attacks, 17.1% were of LGBTQ orientation ([www.fbi.org](http://www.fbi.org)); which remains a very high national average.

Now President Donald Trump, in 2016 prior to taking office, refused to support a federal discrimination clause protecting LGBTQ individuals ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)). He has also made declarative statements, saying that he disagrees with the Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)). Trump has further stirred controversy surrounding marriage equality on various media outlets including Fox News saying,

“WALLACE: But -- but just to button this up very quickly, sir, are you saying that if you become president, you might try to appoint justices to overrule the decision on same-sex marriage?” TRUMP: “I would strongly consider that, yes.” (Fox News, 2016)

Current Vice President Mike Pence, has gone on congressional record saying that societal collapse is contingent upon the deterioration of marriage due to the threat of the marriage equality act (Congressional Record, 2006, pg. 14796). Speaker of the house, Paul Ryan Which leaves the LGBTQ individuals wondering what 2017's public policy discourse will mean for the community. In a personal email with playwright, Son reflects on her own personal concerns saying,

I'm afraid to say the play is still relevant in terms of anti-gay violence persisting as a global problem. Just a few years ago there was a rash of gay bashings here in NYC. In the Village, no less. With one gay man being murdered. Last year another gay man

was murdered in the subway. It's a problem. The legalization of gay marriage and increased acceptance of gay relationships has not made anti-gay violence go away. Sadly. (D. Son, personal communication, October 25, 2016)

### *Directorial Analysis and Approach*

#### *Directorial Concept*

Through analysis of the script, I determined that the playwright's intent of the play is to humanize queer relationship development as opposed to the familiar politicization surrounding LGBTQ struggles. So, my concept for the play was to focus on the humanization instead of politicizing Callie and Sara's relationship. Going forward, I made directing and artistic choices that allowed Callie and Sara's relationship to naturally unfold, as any relationship would, while not denying the queerness of their interactions. To keep true to this element, I made sure to eliminate any focus that puts emphasis outside of their relationship (such as the current political climate). For example, I have found in my research some set and lighting designs in other productions of this play incorporated rainbow insignia. I chose to avoid such references in this production of *Stop Kiss*.

Relational shifts are a key element to this production. Callie and Sara's relationship steadily faces evolution throughout the duration of the show. In paying due diligence to focusing on relational shifts, I asked myself the following questions: How does Sara and Callie's relationship shift, force the two to look beyond their presumed sexuality? When does their emotional realization for one another happen? How does this realization affect their interactions with one another? How does the shift of character behavior affect their interactions with other characters outside of their relationship? How does the occurrence of violence, rendering Sara without voice, affect Callie's interactions with her environment? Through the examination of these questions and focusing on humanization vs politicization and relational shifts of character, I will aim to maintain the playwright's intent.

#### *Rehearsal and Production Information*

Several elements had to be taken into consideration for the direction of this production. Coordination of production meetings and rehearsals were an instrumental part of planning. Preliminary concept meetings with my mentor, Bobby Funk, began four weeks prior to the start of school on July 26th of 2016. Auditions for the production were held the week of August 22 with callbacks for *Stop Kiss* occurring on August 26th. Rehearsals began the following week on August 29<sup>th</sup>. Rehearsals were held four to five days a week in two to three hour segments. Rehearsal times varied with student and director schedule, but would run no later than 10:00pm. The rehearsal schedule was subject to scheduling changes due to faculty and director discretion.

The audience for this production was the student and faculty body of East Tennessee State University and the surrounding community. The production took place in the studio theatre, located in the Campus Center Building room 205 from October 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of 2016. The performance for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) as an associate entry occurred during the opening matinee performance on October 2<sup>nd</sup> at 2:00pm. The cast consisted of seven individuals from ETSU's student body, four women and three men. Two other theatre students, were used as stage manager and assistant stage manager. The stage crew was ETSU students who were required to obtain their theatre laboratory credit. The design team consisted of four ETSU theatre faculty; Dr. Delbert Hall (Scenic Design), Karen Brewster (Costume Design, Melissa Shafer (Sound and Lighting Design) and Zachary Olsen (Technical Director).

The design of the show was based around the concept of 'selective realism'. After several conversations with the set designer, Delbert Hall, we decided on a realistic apartment configuration center stage, with a smaller hospital room stage left and a café/office room stage right.



Costuming was one of the biggest challenges of this show due to the alternating timeline between present and past. The costume designer determined that most of the changes to indicate the passage of time had to be done through quick change, which is a costume change that has to be done very quickly sometimes with assistance. Quick changes were key to keep in mind when selecting costuming style for Callie due to the need to reflect passage or alternation of time within a very short period.

However, costuming choices were not purely utilitarian, Callie's costuming was also used to indicate the development of character throughout the show. In the first scene the audience views this character as having little desire in life, highly unmotivated and indecisive. As the show progressed, Callie's costuming expressed these aspects by going from being sloppily and haphazardly dressed to a character that cares about her appearance. There were other concerns in Callie's costuming that relate to clothing choices and sexuality. I didn't want to costume Callie in an outfit that would place her in society's imagery of 1990-2000s lesbianism. Lesbian identification in the media has long been determined by dress. In shows such as *The L Word*, premiered in 2010, displayed female queer identity as following heterosexual gender dichotomy. That is, some queer female characters were dressed in very masculine attire while others were frequently posed in dresses, skirts, and outfits we identify as being very feminine. The costumer and I decided to place both Callie and Sara in outfits that would be considered traditionally gendered as feminine for 2016. Since Callie and Sara have limited exposure to the queer community prior to meeting, we didn't want either character to be identifiably queer to the audience throughout the duration of the show.

Lastly, a costuming concern that required much rehearsal was in scene 22 where Callie dresses Sara in the hospital. The scene is intended to show Callie's ownership of her and Sara's relationship. The stage directions and script are very specific as to how Callie is to

dress Sara in this scene. In a relatively conservative area, there were concerns of a student being undressed onstage. To avoid these concerns, the costumer and I determined that Callie wouldn't dress Sara in a bra and that the hospital gown would be tied around her neck for the duration of Sara getting dressed to avoid exposure of the student actor. I also decided for the hospital wheelchair to be facing upstage, leaving Sara's back to the audience to help with this problem. The intention was for Callie's experience of dressing Sara and committing to their relationship be the central focus for the audience as opposed to the distraction of any onstage student nudity.

Lighting was a crucial element to the mood of the show. The apartment scenes were designed with warm, inviting lighting which one would possibly desire in their own home. In scenes happening outside of the apartment, lighting was designed to indicate some level of discomfort: being dark and aloof within the detective's office and bright and sterile within the hospital scenes. In transitional moments from scene to scene, we determined that a "blue-out" would be necessary. A Blue-out, similar in concept to a blackout, is when the stage goes completely dark with the exception of some blue lighting. This is to indicate to the audience that one scene is transitioning into the next, and that the show is continuing. With so many scenes transitions, we determined that if a blackout was used, the audience might have trouble discerning when the show would come to an end or just transitioning into another scene. Therefore, it was decided that all blue-outs would be used for scene transitions and a blackout would only be used for the final scene to indicate that the show had come to a close.

Sound helped the audience ease into transition periods due to the great number of scene changes within the show. The use of transition music was determined by how long it took to get from one scene to the next. Shorter transitions were made in silence, while longer transitions (those over 15 seconds) used music. Several elements determined the timing of transition. Some of these elements included costume changes and prop placement.

### *Directorial Play Description and Analysis*

*Scene 1* The opening scene begins with Callie on her phone talking to her on-again, off-again boyfriend, George. Clothing is strewn about, and the apartment looks very messy as though the tenant doesn't care. Sara enters the scene and the pair begins to get to know one another. While the audience first sees Callie not being particularly open to meeting a new individual, Sara, the mood switches once she discovers that Sara is likable and friendly. Callie ends up asking if she can see Sara within the next few days.

The objective of this scene is to primarily introduce these two characters to the audience and give enough background for the storyline to begin. The audience learns that Callie isn't a person who is skeptical to new experiences, that she desperately hates her job, and has a sense of humor when it comes to difficulties in her past. Sara reveals herself to be an adventurer who wants to make the world a better place and has left her former hometown to come to the city as a part of finding a new way of life. This opening scene is fairly utilitarian in a sense. It gives the audience context as to with whom they will be going through this experience.

*Scene 2* This scene is a flash-forward in time to just after Sara and Callie experience a physical assault. Callie is in the hospital after what the audience can extract has been a physical exam by medical personnel. Detective Cole is with her, taking her statement. Callie is being evasive and elusive in describing the events of what had taken place earlier that evening. The script reveals that Sara is in a coma and was, at one point, near death. It is clear that, at this point in time, Callie has become the sole spokesperson for what occurred that evening.

The objective of this scene is to conceal from Detective Cole of her what happened the night of the attack. This is evidenced by Callie's denial of the intimacy Sara and she had shared, which led to the attack. Detective Cole refers to Sara as Callie's girlfriend to which

Callie corrects him as Sara being a friend. The detective suggests that there was more that occurred between the two women prior to the time of the attack. Callie either blatantly denies or is evasive as to what had happened. While denying her homosexuality, she cannot escape her feelings for Sara as she does not want to leave the hospital to aide the detective in his investigation for fear that she may wake up.

*Scene 3* In this scene the playwright has taken the opportunity to utilize this scene as foreshadowing of the violence to come. Callie is cautioning Sara on the dangers of confronting aggressors in New York City when Sara describes being catcalled on the streets and when Callie refuses to go upstairs and confront her noisy neighbors. Callie dissuades Sara from being assertive or experiencing new things that may require some form of confrontation. Sara is not discouraged. The objective of this scene is to call attention to Callie's insistence that confrontation, in any form, on any level, is dangerous.



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

*Scene 4* This scene is unique to the play because it is the first and only scene that Callie's character is not in. The objective of this scene is to place doubt of Callie's heterosexuality. Detective Cole and Mrs. Winsley, a witness and a character who interfered in the attack from her balcony, is introduced to discuss the events that transpired the night of the assault. Both Detective Cole and Mrs. Winsley reference Callie and Sara's sexuality and

their relationship with one another. Mrs. Winsley states, “Two women in a West Village park at 4:00 in the morning? What’s the chance they’re *not* dykes”(pg. 20).



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

*Scene 5* George is introduced to the audience during this scene, or rather, the audience finally gets to put a face with the name. George unexpectedly shows up to Callie’s apartment, which on another day wouldn’t be anything out of the ordinary. Today, Callie has made plans with Sara. Callie makes several attempts to try and get George out of her home before Sara shows up; she fails in this attempt. George and Sara become acquainted, despite Callie’s efforts to get the two to avoid meeting. The objective of this scene is to avoid Callie giving away her feelings about Sara to George. Had Callie’s interest in Sara been purely platonic, it wouldn’t have resulted in a point of contention leading up to Sara and George meeting one another.

*Scene 6* The audience is taken back to the police station and witness an interview conducted by Detective Cole with Callie. The audience is able to witness Callie’s continued denial of her relationship with Sara and the development of her sexuality. As this scene progresses, Detective Cole is able to poke holes in Callie’s story, proving to her that she is undeniably lying about that evening. When Callie is no longer able to keep denying the events of that night, she emotionally reveals what she’s been hiding from the Detective.



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

The objective of this scene was to make Detective Cole empathetic toward Callie. While Callie's tactics change toward the end of the scene, she ultimately desires acceptance. In the first part of the scene, the audience witnesses Callie's denial of her sexuality and relationship with Sara despite Detective Cole's ability to disprove her initial version of the story. In the end, Callie relinquishes the truth in an emotional purge and in the hopes that the detective will understand.

*Scene 7* A big challenge that presents itself upfront is the transition of going from scene six, a very intense and emotional display of human vulnerability and insecurity into scene seven which depicts the lighthearted development of a romantic relationship. The transition is challenging for both the actor and the audience, as the mood from one scene is starkly different from the next.

This scene is key to the development of Sara and Callie's relationship. This entire scene is focused on the futon in Callie's apartment, giving their relationship a very connected and grounded feel to this central prop. The audience has the delight of watching the two be playful and teasing one another, vulnerable as they disclose personal information, and nonverbally acknowledge and deny the development of their mutual feelings for one another. The two are drawn to each other. Because of this, they look for motivation to stay with one

another: Callie encourages Sara to stay over; Sara uses Caesar (the cat) as an excuse to sleep next to Callie.



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

This scene has the potential to be very challenging, as the actors have to convey two things to the audience: that they are developing feelings for one another and that both characters are in denial of their feelings for one another. If done correctly, this has the potential to be a very heartfelt, humanizing scene. The objective for the characters in this scene is to initially recognize their interest in one another.

*Scene 8* This is another scene with a potentially challenging transition due to peaks and valleys of positive and negative emotions. In this scene George comes to Callie's apartment, confronting her about the attack. He is upset because Callie didn't get in touch with him after she had been taken to the hospital and he had to find out about the attack through the media. The objective for this scene is to get George to understand Callie's feelings for Sara. George expresses his concern for Callie and opens the door for her to reach out to him within the context of a romantic relationship. Callie, instead, chooses to keep her relationship with George platonic and expresses her desire for an amorous relationship with Sara.

*Scene 9* Some comedic relief is found within the context of this scene. Callie is preparing a roast, which she has obviously gone through great time and effort to create. The roast is ruined, as Callie is not a good cook. Sara comes in, excited to see her and Callie is clearly embarrassed. The two briefly discuss Callie's contempt for her job before the upstairs commotion forces them out of the apartment. Callie's motivation and objective behind this scene is to get Sara to support and comfort her. She is successful in this as Sara, on multiple occasions, proves to be a very supportive and helpful character that encourages Callie to think about what she really wants to do in life.

*Scene 10* This scene is unique to the show as this is the only scene without dialogue. Callie comes in to see Sara for the first time after the physical assault. Callie comes in, looks at Sara. Callie very quickly leaves as she becomes overwhelmed with emotion and grief. This is also a very challenging scene because there is no dialogue for the actor to use as a tool of expression and communication to the audience. I believe this is the scene, which Callie recognizes how important Sara has become in her life. The objective in this scene is for Callie to come to Sara to tell her how much she means to her, but ultimately fails because of her inability to express herself and her habits of avoidance and distancing herself from confrontation.

*Scene 11* Their first fight as an unspoken couple occurs in this scene. As a director and a queer woman, my love of this scene is immense due to the humanizing nature of queer relationships that takes place. For the audience, this draws a clear parallel that queer couples fight, just as straight couples do. Callie is upset, for reasons she chooses to be unclear over, and Sara eventually gets fed up with Callie's unreasonable argumentation and winds up saying things she regrets. The objective in this scene is held within Callie's efforts to repel Sara from her. She is frustrated with her feelings for Sara and wants to push Sara away without taking ownership of what she does or does not want.





(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

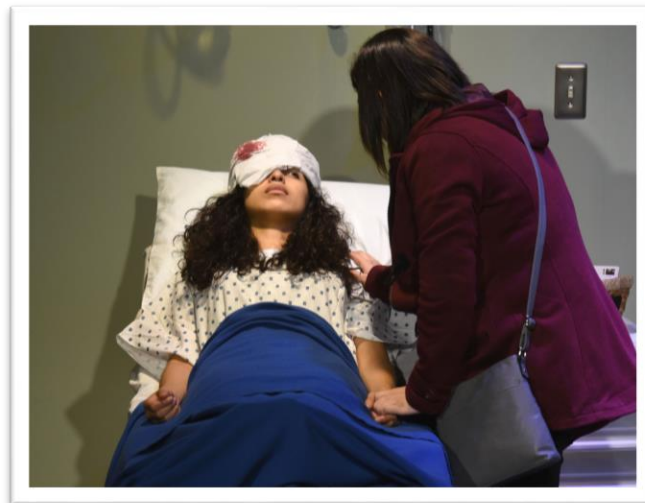
*Scene 12* In this scene Peter and Callie have their first interaction while waiting to see Sara in the hospital waiting room. Each having their own, but analogous objectives, both aim to repel the other. Peter makes it clear that Callie has no place being at the hospital or with Sara. He repeats the names of Sara's parents, knowing Callie has never met them. He discusses Sara's former life, perhaps hinting that Callie doesn't belong. Through his character's development, though at times he does show moments of compassion to give updates on Sara's condition. Callie works to make sure that Peter doesn't know what happens and insists that she won't reveal to him the details of that evening. She cuts him off, not wanting to hear of his feelings for Sara.



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

*Scene 13* This scene gives the audience an insight into Callie's insecurities and plays a part in revealing her true feelings for Sara. The scene opens to expose Callie seated on the futon depressed about her and Sara's argument. Callie's objective is to convince herself that her and Sara's relationship isn't of anything substantial or relevant. Callie makes the decision to call George and decide to meet up with him instead of reaching out to Sara.

*Scene 14* Similar to the discussion point in scene 6, scene 14 has the potential to be particularly challenging to the actor playing Callie. Not only is this an emotionally intense scene, it is ridden with stigma historically associated with LGBTQ individuals. These themes are noted in verbiage that discusses Callie suddenly being recognized and identified solely by her sexuality and being looked at as though she were some dirty old man. These are heavy topics to fully understand for an actor is likely between the ages of 18-22 and heterosexual. Having little life experience and never having been discriminated against for their sexuality could be a potentially challenging point for a director to pull out of their actor.



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

Callie tells an unconscious Sara just how lonely, confused and scared she feels. Callie's objective is quite simple: to get Sara to wake up. She is quite desperate for someone to understand her in this moment and asking for what could be considered a medical

miracle is the action that will fulfill her need in this moment in time. In a timely manner, Sara wakes up and Callie is immediately relieved.

*Scene 15* Directly carrying over as a result from scene 13, we see the results of Callie's actions. George and Callie have just finished having sex. Callie is attempting to convince George to stay instead of joining a work party. She fails. George leaves and Sara enters the apartment, knowing what transpired between the two. Callie's objective is revealed as she becomes vulnerable. She wants Sara to know that she has feelings for her. Callie doesn't state her feelings in plain language, she isn't ready to confront her feelings and be direct with Sara. However, by the end of the scene, the two have an understood recognition that their relationship isn't simply a platonic friendship.

*Scene 16* This scene opens in the hospital when the nurse is examining Sara, Callie enters the room. The nurse offers Callie comfort and relationship validation, which is appreciated, but ultimately Callie's insecurities and indecisiveness supersede her desire to care and love for Sara. Callie initially came to the hospital seeking answers, possibly good news and the nurse initially provides that. The objective for Callie was to seek comfort in another individual; she found this in the nurse working. The objective is abandoned when the nurse pushes Callie beyond her comfort, Callie quickly makes an excuse and seeks an exit.

*Scene 17* Callie and Sara have gotten back into the swing of their relationship as they enter the scene with grocery bags and making small talk. Sara works up the nerve to inquire about going to a lesbian bar with Callie. Callie admits that she's gone to one and enjoys the atmosphere. They both share an uncomfortable moment when they acknowledge their attraction to other women in the past, "I mean I can't imagine any woman who's never felt attracted--". Callie is unable to commit to this conversation for too long, we see her go to tactic of avoidance. She changes the subject when Sara asks too many personal questions. However, Callie can't help herself but to want to impress Sara. The objective of

this scene is for Callie to get Sara to recognize that she can take initiative and step out of her comfort zone on occasion. This is seen as Callie shows Sara that the neighbors no longer make such a commotion that she will be driven out of her own home.

The audience is offered a reminder of some redeeming qualities that Callie has after witnessing her abandoning Sara in the scene prior. Sara is so overcome that Callie has taken the initiative to speak with her neighbors and come to a resolution that they embrace for an unusually long hug. After escorting Sara to the door, Callie comes back to the futon rather excitedly and screams into a pillow. The audience is left with a very heartwarming experience, witnessing the couple's relationship development.

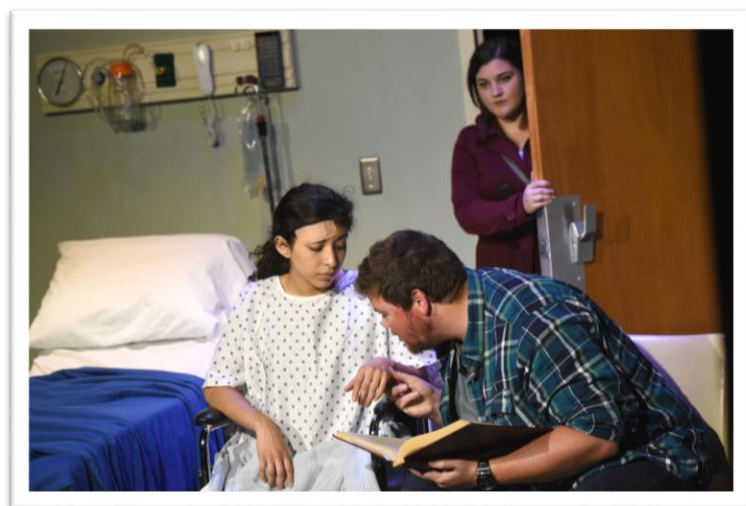
*Scene 18* Callie and Mrs. Winsley meet up at a coffee shop. Callie has the intention of thanking Mrs. Winsley for stopping the attack and Mrs. Winsley desires to find out more personal details of Callie and Sara's relationship. Mrs. Winsley had initially assumed that Callie and Sara were in a long-term partnership and references Callie's experience with her in-laws. Callie's objective in this scene was to seek understanding and comfort, believing that Mrs. Winsley could share in their experienced trauma. The objective is met unresolved as Mrs. Winsley becomes more and more confused due to Callie giving mixed messages about the pair's relationship.

*Scene 19* in this scene, George, Callie, Peter and Sara are supposed to go out to dinner. Callie is very nervous about this dinner; she wants it to go well. A twist occurred when Sara shows up at the apartment without Peter. There are a few different ways of interpreting this scene, but for my directing, I find two distinct objectives; one from Callie and the other from Sara. Sara's objective, achieved through sending Peter home, was to show Callie that she chooses to be with her and not her former relationship. Callie's objective, which she works to show through attempting to go to dinner and showing empathy when Sara shows up alone, is to prove to Sara that she is a good choice and can be supportive to Sara.



(2016, October 9) *Stop Kiss Photography*. Johnson City, TN: East Tennessee State University

*Scene 20* This scene opens with Peter reading a book out loud to Sara. Callie happens to enter the room just as Peter leans over to kiss Sara on the hand. Upon seeing this, Callie leaves the hospital room and seeks out the nurse. For the first time we see a complete change in the objective. Prior to this scene, Callie had been denying or fighting her sexuality and her feelings for Sara. This scene is a scene in which Callie makes the first step in taking ownership and responsibility of her relationship with Sara since the assault.



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*Scene 21* The audience gets to witness more of Callie's character development in this scene. After she, George and Sara go out to dinner; Callie and Sara come back to Callie's apartment. Here Sara asks Callie to go to a lesbian bar with her, Callie agrees. At this point, both of the women are very well aware of the feelings they have for one another. The objective becomes for the pair to go out on a date with one another. Going on a date to the lesbian bar gives the two an opportunity to express themselves in a safe environment and feel comfortable with each other in an area which would be generally accepting of their relationship.

*Scene 22* This is the biggest step Callie takes to prove to Sara that she wants to be in a relationship with her and is responsible enough to take care of her. Callie changes Sara out of her hospital gown into comfortable, lounge clothing. Possibly the first time Sara has been dressed in something other than a hospital gown since entering the hospital, Callie takes diligent care of Sara. This is the climax of the play; the objective of this scene is for Callie to show Sara that she is ready to take control of her future and her relationship with Sara.

*Scene 23* Last, but certainly not least, comes the finale of the show. Callie and Sara are shown leaving the lesbian bar. Both women are giddy, excited and full of life. They're openly holding hands and the final scene depicts the two kissing for the very first time. The objective of this scene was for Callie to take ownership of her feelings for Sara through physical affection and emotional vulnerability.

#### *Directorial Character Description and Analysis*

The following is a description of each character within the context of the show and the given circumstances. This is a fundamental analysis of each character, as the motivations behind their actions and the actions themselves will be discussed in following chapters.

*Callie.* Callie, by far, is the biggest role in the play. She appears in every scene with the exception of one between Mrs. Winsley and Detective Cole. Callie is described by the

playwright as being a woman in her late 20s to early 30s. Originally from upstate New York, she has lived in New York City since entering college at the age of 18. Callie works as a traffic reporter for a nondescript news station for an undisclosed period of time. She views her job as being meaningless, and mentions several times that she is unhappy in her occupation. Callie mentions that she feels as though she has no credibility and wouldn't be able to seek out a different job on her own, and goes through no effort to change professions despite being very unhappy in the one she currently holds.

In my interpretation of Callie, prior to meeting Sara, she is a fairly unhappy individual without any direction in life. In the opening scene, Callie's apartment is messy and random items are strewn about. Her clothing reflects that of her apartment; messy and haphazard. Callie has remained with the same group of friends since college, never branching out to new people or new experiences despite living in one of the most opportunistic cities in the US.

Callie doesn't just shy away from new experiences or confrontation, she actively avoids any activity or interaction which may result in that kind of encounter. This is not only difficult and problematic for an individual discovering and exploring their sexuality. At the beginning of the play, Callie believes herself to be heterosexual and there is no indications to lead the audience believe that this is an issue she has faced previously. Callie believes she will marry her friend George despite there not being much of a romantic connection. Callie and George joke with one another about dating other people, yet always winding up with one another. Because of this, Callie stumbles through her attraction to Sara in a fairly awkward manner. Callie is seen throughout the play repressing her feelings of attraction for Sara through her avoidance.

*Sara.* Sara is a very sweet, but adventurous Midwesterner in her mid 20s. She is originally from St. Louis, MO and has come to New York for a fellowship she was

awarded. For the fellowship, Sara works for a low-income school named Taft located in the Bronx. Sara loves life and her job. She is good at working with underprivileged children and takes great pride in her occupation as a teacher.

Sara's attitude towards life is contagious; Callie eventually cannot resist it. Her enthusiastic outlook keeps her character in search of new and exciting adventures. Sara intends to go on to visit various countries and expand her horizons whenever the opportunity may present itself in whatever way. It is her adventurous spirit that gets her into confrontational and potentially dangerous situations which Callie cautions her away from; her desire to confront a catcaller on the street, and finally telling their attacker to 'Fuck off'.

*George.* George is one of the only characters who offers the audience light comedic relief. He is in his late 20s and has been a friend of Callie's since college. George works as a bartender in the restaurant business. His group of friends knows him as a socialite, both friends from college and his coworkers.

George and Callie have entertained an on again, off again amorous relationship throughout the duration of knowing one another. Despite their messy relationship, George ultimately cares deeply for Callie and wants to see her happy. He gets upset with her when she doesn't call him from the hospital, disappointed that he couldn't be there for her in her hour of need. George supports Callie as a friend when he eventually recognizes Sara and Callie's relationship, though he never makes any outright statement of alliance or support.

*Detective Cole.* Detective Cole is the stereotype of masculine embodiment. He is around the age of 30 and has been a detective/officer of the law for an undisclosed amount of time. His character wants the truth and isn't afraid to go through aggressive means to obtain it. In his opening scene, he assumes Callie to be in a romantic relationship with Sara. When Callie denies this and is elusive about the details of that evening, Detective Cole gets very frustrated. At the police station later, Callie denies her relationship with Callie and Detective



Cole uses provocative language, and for the interpretation of this show, physical intimidation tactics to elicit the response he is looking for: the truth. Ultimately, Detective Cole is one who has a strong commitment to his work and wants to seek accuracy but whose motives through seeking justice and obtaining the truth may be ethically questionable.

*Peter.* Like Sara, Peter is a Midwesterner from the suburbs of St. Louis. He is in his early 30s and has been in a relationship with Sara for the past seven years until a couple months prior to her move to New York City. Peter makes his living in the restaurant business and speaks with Sara about coming to New York to try various cuisines, though his motives are probably less than honest. He saw himself as marrying Sara and leading a life with her. The break of their long-term relationship was devastating for him, and most likely, Sara's parents. He is still very close to her family, so when Sara comatose in the hospital, Peter comes to her aid. Peter hopes that through her recovery she will resign to being in the suburbs of St. Louis with him. He is patient and genuinely cares for her, ultimately wanting her to be happy.

*Mrs. Winsley.* Mrs. Winsley has been cast in this show as being in her early 40s and has been a New Yorker for the past 20 years. Originally from outside of Cincinnati, she's more New Yorker than small town girl now. Mrs. Winsley has fairly self-absorbed character traits in her two scenes. With Detective Cole, she wants recognition for the heroic act of lobbing a flowerpot off her balcony at the assailant. In a scene with Callie, she implores Callie for information while not listening to what Callie has to say.

*Nurse.* The character Mrs. Winsley often doubles the nurse. I chose to cast this character with a separate actor from Mrs. Winsley to simply offer more roles to the student body. The nurse for this show has been cast as being in their late 20s. This role is not gender specific. The prescribed age of this character will likely not be met as this production is for

the intention of scholastic acting in a university where the average age of the student is that between the ages of 18-23.

The nurse is only seen in two scenes, making the part quite small yet the purpose rather large. The nurse is the only character who gives Callie an opportunity to take ownership of her relationship with Sara. In one scene the nurse offers Callie validity in her relationship with Sara by speaking to her as though she were a partner of Sara; Callie goes on to deny this opportunity of validation. In another scene, Callie embraces the opportunity posed before her by the nurse in the previous scene and embraces the recognition of her relationship. By offering Callie a very concrete pathway to show Sara and herself that she is accountable, through bathing her in the hospital, the character of the nurse is vital to the development and audience resolution of Callie and Sara's relationship.

### *Directorial Approach*

#### *Directorial Intent*

Through extensive research, I have attempted to implement a directorial concept that is encompassing of the playwright's intent and the message of humanization of queer relationships. I have explored the dynamic of Callie and Sara's relationship with one another and supporting characters within a contemporary setting. Social stigma and cultural consequences derived from Callie and Sara's evolving relationship has been scrutinized.

Additionally, I have drawn on my own experiences as a queer individual. While I have never lived in New York City and I was not an adult in the 1990s, I have lived in conservative areas of the U.S. for the duration of my lifetime. Because of the conservative nature of the regions in which I have lived, I have had firsthand experience of both threats of violence and physical violence directly related to my sexual orientation.

Furthermore, I have extensively researched the playwright's intention of bringing a racially diverse cast to the stage and will attempt to ensure this important element is brought to East Tennessee State University's production of *Stop Kiss*. Lastly, I have utilized a

director's promptbook and journaling to thoroughly explore the experience and to keep my stated intentions.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Feminist Analysis*

This portion is an examination of the rhetorical implications of *Stop Kiss*. According to Schell, feminist rhetorical analysis is an examination of rhetoric that is meant to navigate and negotiate over multiple fields of inquiry. Feminist rhetorical analysis addresses “ethical challenges and struggles specific to feminist research” and employs feminist theory to critically examine rhetorical implications of socially and culturally constructed hierarchies (Schell & Rawson, 2010, p. 3). Ronald and Ritchie claim that rhetorical examination through feminism,

Challenges dominant epistemologies, asserts new topoi/contexts from which to argue, places material experience-- especially that of women, women of color, sexual minorities, and other nonmainstream groups-- at the center of knowledge formation, and it reconnects language/rhetoric to action and change. (Schell & Rawson, 2010, p. 176)

Son created a dynamic play that is relatable to both marginalized populations as well as the general audience, challenging dominant epistemologies by forcing audiences to reconsider notions of heteronormativity. She skillfully navigates through the text by offering the audience a multitude of ideas that places often rejected or over looked experiences at the forefront of the play. Son does not direct the audience toward focusing on one character identity over another, such as highlighting primarily the black experience in the work of August Wilson or primarily the queer experience in as seen in *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer. Instead, Son presents multiple identities and points of focus that allows the audience enormous latitude for seeing the identities that best relate to their own lives.

Foucault states that through the dominant Western lens the world has never stopped claiming, “To know how you are, know what your sexuality is”(1988, p. 110-111). Sexuality has been a key social component in determining our truths as individuals. Society has determined that an individual’s sexuality must be self-determined, and must be heterosexual

to not be ‘othered’. Those whose sexuality is found outside of the construct of heterosexuality, have historically met scrutiny which has, in turn, forced members of the queer community to ‘act’ on their homosexuality within private spheres (specific bars, around trusted friends) or in the isolation of their own homes. Works such as Son’s *Stop Kiss* gives voice to those experiences that are otherwise silenced. She challenges the audience to extend sexuality as truth to individualism outside of the heteronormative social construct.

Theatre experiences, performances, and education have been primarily presented from a Western, white, heteronormative male perspective; which is generally considered the dominant perspective. Traditional theatre canon poses itself as a neutral system, appealing to the “universal” spectator (Rush-Dutz, 2007, p. 73). Recent works, such as *Stop Kiss*, have compelled our audiences to view stage works that confront scholarship and acts of performance with intersectionality. A concept developed by Crenshaw, intersectionality explores “race, gender, and other identity categories” which are overlooked or mistreated by dominant ideologies or populations and used as vestiges to exclude or marginalized certain populations that are ‘othered’ (Crenshaw, 1993, p 1260). Yep claims that the, “process of *othering*” creates individuals, groups and communities that are deemed to be less important”(Yep, 2003, p. 18). Through *Stop Kiss*, Son has deconstructed *othering* of the queer female experience by placing the focus on two character’s realities. This by forces the viewer to first see Callie and Sara as individuals and later gives voice to their marginalization within society.

Rhetorician, Grindstaff, examines the performative act of homosexuality within American society. He claims that,

Reworking the performative contradictions that inhibit it will enable queer citizens to reinvent the very conditions of speaking about their world and their experiences—it will enable new forms of social agency. (2006, p. 154)

Son, along with other contemporary playwrights, have done just that. Instead of refraining from the exploration of homosexual content, audiences are confronted by bringing homosexual experiences to the public through theatre. Grindstaff goes on to state, that bringing homosexual content from private to public is an act queer resistance act which demands any sexual identity falling outside of the construct of heterosexuality have a valid space within the public sphere (lawful recognition such as repealing sodomy law and legalizing same-sex marriage) (Grindstaff, 2006, p. 154).

### *Confronting Audiences & Homosexuality*

For the *othering* of sexual minorities to stop, homosexuality must be given performance space. Just as valid as making that space is the question of, how is the public presentation of sexual minorities relatable to general or diverse audiences? For rhetoric, or public discourse related to homosexuality to change, same gendered relationships must be presented in a way that give their presence validity while simultaneously not isolating the audience.

Taking this into consideration, Son brings to the spotlight a love story between two women in the midst of a hate crime. Both women, while relatively knowledgeable of the queer community certainly do not identify as members of the community at the beginning of the play. Their initial disconnect with the queer community is seen through dialogue with one another. Callie explains to Sara about going out dancing with her friends and that,

. . .you don't have to worry about guys trying to pick you up... 'cause it's all women. I like to go there and dance, there's this kind of warm—like when you go to the bathroom, there's only one line and everyone's really nice and smiles. . .(Son, 1998, pg. 50)

Callie doesn't see herself as being a part of the community, and has a fantastical idea of what going to a lesbian bar is really like. Sara on the other hand, claims that lesbians in St. Louis just stay home and read. This leads us to believe that Callie and Sara want to believe that being a lesbian is an entirely pleasant experience, perhaps even beginning to

acknowledge that the lesbian community may be something that they're a part of, yet not exploring or admitting this possibility any further (Haught, 2002, pg. 19). The two are at the beginning of discovering who they are and what their relationships with one another mean.

Had the main characters been more readily identifiable with the queer community, the reliability of their experiences may have been diminished. The validity of their experience was aided by their appearance. The women are heteronormative presenting. That is, dominant society's assumption of lesbian sexuality is interpreted as being a "mannish woman" (Walker, 2001, pg. 23). Heterosexual women are assumed to be feminine in appearance, or heteronormative. Both Callie and Sara, in keeping with playwright intention and historicity of production, are feminine in appearance. In other words, the two can be interpreted as heterosexual in the opening of the play.

Son offers the idea of presenting heteronormative-passing women for main characters in an interview with Jennifer Tanaka. She states,

Gay people fear violence on a daily basis and yet it's not articulated. So I wanted to expose it in a way that is very accessible. Because of the incident in the play happens to women other people think of as "straight", I think, it's more accessible than if it happened to women living their lives as lesbians. (1999)

Utilizing Callie and Sara's heteronormative appearance presents the concept that, anyone could potentially fall in love with another human being, leaving the focus of the queerness of the relationship at the door and drawing into the limelight a love story, which would be at its core relatable to most audiences. Son utilizes feminine dress on stage, and in doing so; she echoes Butler's statement of lesbian representation of sexuality. Butler states,

It is important to recognize the ways in which heterosexual norms reappear within gay identities, to affirm that gay and lesbian identities are not only structured in part by dominant heterosexual frames, but that they are not for that reason determined by them. (Butler, 1997, p. 380)

In representing both Callie and Sara as feminine presenting, Son denies the dominant society's assumption of lesbian representation in Western culture while affirming that their

sexuality is not determined by their assumed heterosexual dress. Son's decision to present two heteronormative passing (women who can be visually interpreted as heterosexual) would then ease the potential apprehension and discomfort of audience members, then allowing them to then develop a full sense of connection with the characters aside from their sexuality.

Alternatively, the audience could characterize Sara and Callie as 'femme'. As mentioned prior, playwright's intent and in keeping with previous productions, both characters are costumed as heterosexual passing women. This feminine appearance requires a different approach from the playwright, herself. Hart states that queer female characters that are not defined by dress are then identified through their demonstration of construction of desires (Case, 2006, p. 14). The queer female characters then lose their sexuality as a visually fixed construct, and instead, their sexuality is indicated through the texts of the script or in indicated subtext by the playwright. Chambers and Carver state that, "this 'truth' is the idea that heterosexuality is the 'normal' or 'natural' way through which human physical and social experience must be lived"(Chambers & Carver, 2008, p 121). If the historical implication has been that heterosexuality is conceptually normative, then the distraction of appearing as homosexual is eliminated by the heteronormative appearance and allows the audience to see the characters as individuals first and later a part of the queer community.

#### *Queer Realization of Sexuality within Stop Kiss*

While Callie and Sara's relationship is brought to the forefront of the plot line, the realization of sexual orientations and identities are not fully explored. A theme of Callie's character, consistent throughout the show, is avoidance and indecisiveness. Sara, a much more forward character, asks on more than one occasion "What do you want, Callie?" This question is also apparent in other forms of subtext, whenever Callie's individual sexuality gets brought up by Sara with statements of, "Callie, I know that neither you nor I have ever--" or "I can't imagine any woman who's never felt attracted--" to which Callie quickly



changes the subject. Callie's character solves problems, or rather attempts to solve problems, by avoiding them. This is mirrored, not just her mantra for survival "The best thing to do is walk on by" (Son, 1998, pg. 16), but is the same coping mechanism she uses for not confronting her feelings for Sara and her reluctance to scrutinize her own sexuality.

Prior to meeting Sara, Callie is assumed heterosexual. She has been in and out of a sexual relationship with her long time friend, George. Callie's nonchalant attitude towards sex and her relationship with George implies that, perhaps, instead of being heterosexual she may have never given any thought to what she was attracted to prior to meeting Sara. Her relationship with George can imply two interpretations. One interpretation could be that Callie is displaying an attitude of convenience in her sexual relationship with George that indicates repressed or underdeveloped self-reflection in regards to orientation. The relationship of convenience between George and Callie owes its existence to the dominant culture. Callie's relationship could be interpreted as her acquiescence to the demands of heteronormativity rather than an expression of heterosexuality. The second, Callie demonstrates her apathy of her relationship with George when she explains to Sara, "George and I . . . are friends. Who sleep together. Sometimes for long periods of time. We've been doing this since we were. . . 20." (Son, 1998, pg. 17). Alternatively, the act could be interpreted as Son's desire to put forth a relatable character to a predominantly heteronormative audience. In doing so, Son could be making a statement of sexuality being fluid; ebbing, changing, and experiencing self-revelation.

According to *Lesbian Histories and Cultures*, sexuality and sexual orientation is, . . . seen as a shifting pattern of being and behaving, and an ongoing *production*, with multiple and changing significance. The emphasis on changeability and multiplicity does not deny that individuals are variously exposed to the compulsory and compulsive demands of the dominant culture. (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 697).

Zimmerman is implying that despite the current demands of society's need have one solid answer in regards to ones sexuality; sexuality remains abstract.

Son leaves Callie and Sara's sexuality ambiguous with purpose. Rather than explore the self-actualization of one's sexuality, she places the focal point upon Callie and Sara's relationship and how they exhibit agency. Son has stated,

I would never personally say, "This is a play about homophobia. This is a play about gay-bashing. This is a play about the civil rights of gays and lesbians in America." I would describe this play as a love story. (Tanaka, 1999, pg. 27)

By allowing the audience to connect with the characters as individuals before revealing either of their sexuality, Son creates a play not about political action but rather about the humanization of same sex relationships.

### *Stop Kiss & the Exploration of Violence Against Women Onstage*

Son showcases the severity of violence against women while not making it the focal point of the show. The physical assault is not set on stage. A description of sexual violence is not described in Callie's monologue when she finally admits to what occurred on that evening to Detective Cole. It must then be assumed that the assault wasn't sexual in act, purely physical.

Female playwrights have long explored violence against women on and off stage. Ozieblo states that the presentation of on and off stage violence against women often has the common goal of awareness and/or calls upon the audience to act out against the injustice itself (2012, pg. 38). Historically, theatre has downplayed and stifled women playwrights and women's voices. Long ago assumptions were made about the female playwright. Their writings were thought to be exclusively about 'women's issues' that would be foreign, uninteresting, and not relatable to male viewers (Ozieblo, 2012, pg. 27). Since then, female playwrights have insisted on confronting the audience first hand with women's suffering. Giving a voice to women within theatre has certainly been vital in exposing abuse and injustice, forcing the audience to have a lived in experience with the goal of awareness and visibility.

Playwrights such as Charlotte Canning express just how difficult it is to effectively bring violence against women on stage to an audience. Canning compares the witnessing of violence with the absorption of pornography, “it was possible to make rape pornographically erotic” and points out the importance of the playwright to not put forth a scene which could be misconstrued for eroticism, “the actor’s body is not sexualized for a male viewer and rape is never sentimentalized, romanticized or glorified”(Ozieblo, 2012, pg. 34). Rape scenes, akin to scenes filled with violence against women, cannot lead the audience member to trivialize the experience without examination of potential detriment to awareness of women’s issues.

To begin the discussion of representation of violence against women on stage, violence itself must first be defined. Vandenbroucke, author of *Violence Onstage and Off: Drama and Society in Recent American Plays*, claims violence is displayed as being either direct or indirect (2016, p. 109). Direct violence is explained as violent acts that are conducted from individual to individual, these acts are known as individualized violence. Indirect violence, also known as systemic violence, is created through discriminatory policy, legislation or the enforcement of such policy (Vandenbroucke, 2016, p. 109). An example of systemic violence can be seen in *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner. The play, among many other political and queer issues, demonstrates systemic violence towards gay men particularly and their fight against AIDS. In a time when the government refused to recognize the disease wiping out individuals in the LGBTQ community daily, *Angels in America*, addressed the issue of systemic policy which was inhibiting queer individuals having access to treatment and education of preventative practices.

The purpose of dramatizing specific scenes of violence varies with the play intent of message. Bringing violent content to the stage can invoke a myriad of audience responses, but in the case of Son and several other playwrights writing about marginalized populations,

the display of violence can invoke an audience response unique to theatre. Katrak states that, “. . .audience’s affective involvement in live staged violence ‘hurts’ . . .” (2014, pg. 34). She goes on to quote Trezise who claims that having a spectator experience powerful images of other’s suffering generates a form of sympathy unique to that audience. Bringing such powerful images and presenting issues in a way that is relatable to audiences can bring awareness of the effect of violence on a population. When violence against women is displayed on stage, it can offer insight into women’s experiences as a vulnerable population.

However, bringing scenes of violence on stage doesn’t exclusively bring forth progressive ideologies on women’s issues. An act of violence on stage doesn’t always bring about a sense of change, in fact, it can do the opposite. According to Vandenbroucke, violence, particularly against women, could be presented as a mere extension of theatrical entertainment. Violence that is used for entertainment could then perpetuate current power structures or bring a sense of normalcy to a violent act.

Son does two key things which deny the audience to see Sara and Callie’s encounter with physical violence as a reinforcement of normalcy of violence against women or as a form of entertainment doing two key things: presenting the scenes in an order, which is a reflection of the past and present and moving the act of violence off stage.

By moving the experience of direct violence off stage the audience is allowed to enjoy the development of Callie’s and Sara’s relationship while simultaneously not allowing the audience to engage in victim blaming. “In this way, she forces us to compare our varying reactions to Sara, initially an unwanted guest, and later, the crippled victim of hate-engendered violence” (Ozieblo, 2012, pg. 27). The violence must be considered a hate-engendered act due to the motivation conjured by the notion of two women sharing an intimate moment through which male presence was not required. This process to forces the audience to recognize violence against two women without being able to blame the same sex

kiss that takes place on stage. In doing this, Son highlights the result of what hate-engendered violence can look like. The balance between the comedic and the dramatic allows the audience to absorb the consequence of violence without isolation. The idea of “laughter can be more effective than tears when it comes to awakening an audience to social ills” is both strongly and effectively at play (Ozieblo, 2012, pg. 38).

The production of *Stop Kiss* at East Tennessee State University is the culmination of several politically, socially, and culturally aware. Through Son’s work, there is an opportunity to share the notion of the queer female experience not as an exclusive sexual act, but rather the humanization of affection and connection within the construct of queer relationships. In doing this, Son has helped audiences create a relatable notion around queer relationships that in turn presents political power in an innocuous way. Son responds to dominant epistemologies and issues by presenting a love story representative of a population that often remains unconsidered.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Opal Clark on Directing, A Journal Process*

#### AUDITIONS

August 25, 2016 *Initial Auditions*

I arrived early to my first day of auditions to ensure everything was set up. I was excited, prepared and ready for whatever was to walk through the door and face me. As actors began arriving and filling out audition forms, I quickly felt like I was highly underprepared. As I started to get very insecure about what I was going to put forward as a director my committee chair, Bobby Funk, started asking me about my process and how I planned to go about this. I realized I was plenty prepared; I just needed to talk through my process and remind myself that I was ready for this. I had about fifteen actors show up to initial auditions. It was easy to weed through the first round of auditions, I had a gut reaction on most, a lot deriving from whether I thought they were comfortable with and could handle intimacy with a woman. In the scene that involves a kiss, I had a few actors decide to kiss one another on the cheek. Some had excuses for why they were unable to perform, but reassuring me that “I’m cool with kissing another chick”. As a queer woman, it was hard not to be insulted by their lack of understanding that this show was much more than just being cool with ‘kissing another chick’. The female actors that were unable to show forms of intimacy with one another were immediately eliminated. The men were different in that none of them had to perform homoerotic acts, so their acting was judged based on their abilities and knowledge to understand the characters. By the end of the evening I was confident that I had plenty of choices in actors, but felt that no one actor truly grasped how to portray same sex intimacy.

August 26, 2016 *Callback Auditions*

I went into this evening with a solid plan of action, every person with assigned partners to read which acts at what time. I reserved the right to stop actors in the middle of scenes, ask them to switch characters, or modify who read when. This really worked for me, I much preferred having a solid plan of action over the open cattle call auditions where I wasn't sure who would show up when.

I still had reservations on whether the female students, comprised of late teens to early twenties all in college, could grasp the gravitas of what was to happen to Sara and Callie within the context of this show. I had predominantly white actors show up for cattle call auditions the night before. Living in Eastern Tennessee, I knew that finding actors of color would be a challenge, but I wasn't quite prepared for how challenging this would turn out to be. I really wanted to keep the show true to itself, the playwright strongly encouraged that the show be a reflection of the diversity in New York City, and I agreed that this was an important element. Of the 15 or so actors that showed up, 3 were people of color. Out of the three I could only justify calling back two of the actors, as one had very visible stage fright.

I first auditioned the male actors, and after I felt I had exhausted what I needed to see, they were released and I would make my decision on the male portion of the cast after I met with the female actors. As I said previously, I was really concerned that the women who auditioned didn't have a concept for female-to-female homonormative relationships let alone intimacy. I gave more contexts to the characters and the situations they faced, broke them up into assigned partners and asked them to take a few minutes to rehearse the scripts independently to try and recognize the relationship that was occurring between these two people. The first few run through of scenes were, to kindly say, rough. But as I gave them direction, I soon realized that most of them were malleable actors, they were able to commit to the characters even if I felt like at this time that they didn't have a full understanding of

what it is like to be a queer person in a heteronormative world. That could come with further direction, time spent on the piece and commitment to character analysis. Initially I thought that there would be two that truly stood out above the rest. This didn't happen. I wound up with four female actors that I felt would be really great the any of the roles. It became a very tough decision, but as I began to talk through things with my chair, my cast came to a gradual solidification in my mind. Finally! I had a cast in my mind. I was absolutely thrilled and riding on cloud nine. I posted my casting list, sent out emails of congratulations and requested acceptance of roles. My goal for the week was completed.

*August 27, 2016 Callback Postmortem*

Despite the elation and relief experienced the night before, I woke up with a heavy chest and weighing guilt. Doubts had crept in over the night, wondering if I had truly made the right decision. Did the female characters appear to heteronormative? What if they were never able to accurately portray representation of the queer community that I was so proud to be a part of? Today, thoughts mulling over and over in my mind, was a very restless day.

*August 29, 2016 Read Through and Dramatic Analysis*

I was nervous going into today's read through with my actors. A myriad of insecurities were still haunting me: What if they couldn't grasp the material? Did I make the right casting choices? Do I have enough people of color to be representative of NYC? The answer to the later question is more than likely, 'no', but I kept reminding myself that in a predominantly whitewashed area that I had cast the only two people of color who would have been successful stage actors. What about my directing? Up until now, I had only directed smaller stage shows and children's theatre. Was I really going to be taken seriously as a director? Knots in my stomach, I took a deep breath and decided to take this one-day at a time.



After a decent read through of the show from start to finish, I started to relax. Breathe, I reminded myself. Now it was time for the difficult task- dramatic analysis of each character and the show itself. My mentor had left to go home, I was on my own. I opened the discussion, telling each of them, that they were welcome to share as much as they were comfortable with when relating to the characters and life circumstances that we would be examining. To my delight, the actors offered great insight into situations and their own characters. They never shied away from tough conversations, and felt open enough to ask questions when they didn't understand or couldn't relate to a certain circumstance. Perhaps, my casting choices were solid, after all.

### *The Rehearsal Process*

September 1, 2016 *One Week of Rehearsal*

Aside from a few administrative slip-ups made by myself, week one of rehearsal seemed to be going well. The actors playing Callie and Sara had good chemistry together and were easily directable. I aimed for the actors to come to the characters on their own terms asking questions. For example, "When Callie says, "People will recognize it"" what is her motivation? What is she feeling here? What is she really worried about? Most of the time the actors would give enough insight into the subtext or the context of the material to then be able to outwardly communicate to the audience what the character was experiencing. Generally, I am pleased with the progress we've made this week, though the ever-creeping opening production date never leaves my mind. We have so much to do in such a short period of time.

September 2, 2016 *A Chasm of Frustration*

Today's rehearsal was mentally and emotionally exhausting. Let's chalk this one up to student actors excited at the prospect of a long weekend due to fall break. Actors were easily sidetracked tonight coupled with Callie's complete misunderstanding of the material

she was attempting to act tonight. I wanted to pull my hair out. No, I wanted to shake her. The angry, queer, activist in me wanted to scream, “How do you not get that my life is not a form of entertainment?” Lesbian content does not warrant giggling. My mind immediately, pessimistically wanders to the school of thought, “I’m too old for this shit”. I wanted to be a part of the stereotype Sara jokes about in scene 17 that older lesbians stay at home, brew their own beer and answer their emails. No, I tell myself. You are responsible, Midwestern, queer mother who is sacrificing time with her family in order to make this work. This time will not go to waste. Trying to refocus the group, I worked to re-orient them to the gravitas of the material being worked with. With lukewarm results for the remainder of the time, I sent the actor playing Callie home with various homework. I had hopes that some soul searching from the actor would render better results on stage. Needless to say, I made it through the rehearsal without unleashing my angry, queer-femme stereotype upon any naive soul.

September 7, 2016 *Renewed Hope*

Fall break has come and gone, and it is time to get back to the grindstone. Wednesdays are shorter rehearsals for us, as I have classes once a week to attend and they happen to take place Wednesday evenings. My actors walked into rehearsal with some trepidation, I’m sure remembering my displeasure of our last rehearsal. Called for rehearsal tonight was Callie, Sara and Peter. Each walked in with far more focus than what was displayed last Friday evening. Scenes 12 and 14 were to be worked on in our short hour together, and the actors executed them with great mindfulness. Tonight, I felt the weight lifted as I could start to see the staging and acting go from mere staging and acting to transformation into a heartfelt experience. Stunned at the progress for tonight, I expressed my gratitude and gave what few notes I had for improvement. My spirits were lifted, what I

needed to have happen, occurred and not just with mediocrity but with real and genuine effort.

September 9, 2016 *A Director's Failure*

Today's rehearsal was the first 'off book' rehearsal, in that all actors are to be off script. We've only had rehearsal for two weeks now, but we only have three short weeks and two days until opening night, so I felt that I had to push my actors. Unlikely that they knew, but I'm assuming that I felt just as overwhelmed at the thought of needing to be off script this early in the rehearsal schedule for actors in a scholastic setting. Turns out, I was right to be weary of the success of today's rehearsal. Additionally, we were also missing our actress playing Sara and had to utilize our understudy (who was definitely not off script). Needless to say, several elements of today's rehearsal were not set to go well. I opened the rehearsal with a brief acting exercise and explained to novice actors how to ask for their cue properly and that they were expected to stay in character even when they dropped a line and would need prompting. For our three-hour allotted rehearsal time, I had originally planned to run through scenes 1-13. As I'm sure any reader may imagine, I definitely did not set us up for success during this rehearsal. I had asked for too much from our actors all at once. Requesting smaller chunks of script to be memorized, probably would have been much more successful. Noting that our lead actress, Callie, was entirely overwhelmed at today's rehearsal, I changed the plan of attack. I focused on working with the actors in two scenes that were without Callie. While I was working on those two scenes, Callie went out with our stage manager to work on lines in two other scenes. When we went back to the scenes to work, Callie was still overwhelmed at the material and I, intermittently, allowed her to use her script.

Not only did this create confusion and frustration for Callie and myself, the other actors had noted that Callie's lines were not learned. It created an uncomfortable atmosphere

for the actress playing Callie, as the other actors were notably off script and were making audible comments on occasion when she left the room. While Callie should have learned her lines at this point, it became clear to me that she was not the only culprit at fault for today's rehearsal. If I had scheduled shorter amount of scenes to be memorized, she may have been set up for more success. Callie has the most lines to learn out of anyone in the cast, and unbeknownst to me at the time of auditions, was the youngest actress out of the cast of upperclassmen that were otherwise cast. Today's experience did not go unnoticed, and the rehearsal schedule for Monday was changed to promote a more reasonable plan of execution.

September 16, 2016 *Stop Kiss is the New Black*

The actors have gotten better at line memorization, much to my relief. I do have a very young cast, ages ranging from 19-22, and despite last week's difficulty in learning they have continued to show growth and development. I came in to this particular rehearsal with very high hopes. Unfortunately those hopes were quickly dashed. Upon entering one of my lead actors came in with a wild story of how she was nearly arrested during her partying over the weekend. Hopes shattered, I quickly became frustrated with the bragging of this (almost) juvenile delinquent. The show opened for rehearsal and the not quite jailbird of an actress impressed me with her memorization, there were very few dropped lines. Rehearsal continued with ease for the other actors. While lines are no longer our issue, we now need to focus on content delivery and length of time in which the show is performed. Starting tomorrow, we will be treating the show as though it were ready to be performed. Actors will be required to stay backstage, the stage manager will call sound cues, and small costume pieces (coats, hospital gown, etc.) are going to be implemented into rehearsal.

September 21, 2016 *The Dangers of Indecision*

Tonight's rehearsal started off dragging. Everyone seemed to be moving in slow motion, this was definitely not within this cast's 'norm'. We got to scene five and had

missed so much blocking due to sluggish delivery and blocking that I brought rehearsal to a halt. I went backstage with my actress playing Callie and proceeded to ask her what was going on. Was she upset about something outside of rehearsal? Was she having issues with line memorization and blocking? Ultimately, I wanted to know why we were taking a few steps backward in this rehearsal. She stated she needed a few moments to get into character and it would be better. I allowed her a few moments to herself, and she came back ready to work. I took the time of this rehearsal to try and fix some final blocking issues that we were having. For me it felt very trial and error-esque. I typically have a generalized idea of what kind of blocking I want the actors to do prior to coming to rehearsal. For the three scenes I was having issues with, I very much felt unprepared and indecisive. My mentor assisted in fixing the trouble spots with me, but I couldn't help but feeling like perhaps my indecisiveness on the blocking was our primary issue. To be the issue standing in the way of the show development was not a good feeling.

September 23, 2016 *Designers to the Rescue*

Tonight was the night for 'crew view', which means anyone helping with lighting, costuming, props etc. would watch the show in order to get a grasp of the plot line and flow. Running through the show tonight was revealing to me as to how far we have come since the beginning of rehearsal. The show was now down to 92 minutes, a far cry shorter from the 4 hours it had taken us to get through it the week prior during rehearsal. I was now down to giving fewer and fewer notes, and the notes I was giving were getting more concise. I wanted to feel like the development of the notes I was giving was due to the show getting tighter and better, yet doubt once again crept in. Were the notes getting fewer because we're doing so much better or is it because my knowledge of the show was actually much more limited than I had once thought it was. On the other hand because I have seen this so much at this point, I began to wonder is this production telling of a touching

story? Will the audience view this as emotional and thought provoking? Will they buy into the actress I've cast as Callie? Upon the show's end this evening, I had meetings with the designers and my mentor. The meeting began to put my mind at ease with the comments such as, 'the show is light years ahead of where it was last week' and 'it was really sweet'. We then jumped into our problem spots of the show; opinions and advice were shared from all parties. I left feeling like we were heading in the right direction, but we still had plenty of work to do. Will we get there? I believe that we will as long as the cast and crew come ready to work to tech week.

September 25, 2016, *Misplaced Priorities*

I had scheduled a rehearsal in the afternoon to take place at my house. I had intended for this to be a speed read (some of the cast members, specifically Callie, were having difficulty with lines still), then a chance for the cast to have a meal together to encourage morale. Late last night, around 11:00pm, I received a text from my stage manager telling me that the actor playing Callie would not be at rehearsal because she decided to rush a sorority. As you can imagine, I was quite irritated. I made clear to my stage manager that missing rehearsal at this point was unacceptable, especially for an actor who was still having line issues and the rehearsal was specifically designed around. I heard nothing back and had assumed that all was taken care of, I was very wrong. I woke up to an email from the actor:

I don't know what to say other than I'm sorry. It's a situation I don't enjoy being in and I don't like making decisions like this. As I said, I don't know how to respond other than with an apology. (M. Doss, Personal Communication September 25, 2016)

After I received this email, I consulted with my advisor and supervisor who encouraged me to be honest with the actor and explain specifically why missing rehearsal is unacceptable. I responded:

As I said before, missing rehearsal at all this week is completely unacceptable. Missing rehearsal not only lets down the director and faculty that

invited you to participate in this role, but also is an extremely poor example to your fellow cast members and lets down the team. Theatre is a team-oriented event.

You did not list today's conflict on your original audition sheet, nor did you discuss it as a conflict when the entire cast talked about the rehearsal time for today two weeks ago. In addition to letting down the entire cast, you also potentially damage your future to participate in other roles at ETSU. This is a main stage production, if you treat the role flippantly there is a chance that it could be your last.

Sororities rush in both the fall and the spring; this is not your only chance to rush. This is, however, your only chance to play the role as Callie at ETSU. Lead roles are not to be taken lightly; there is a high level of responsibility and leadership expected. If I were you I would take a serious look at your future as a part of ETSU's theatre department. Your attendance today will send a message to myself and the theatre faculty, telling us what we need to know about your commitment to the theatre department.” (O. Clark, Personal Communication September 25, 2016)

After sending my email, approved by Professor Funk, I half expected her to show up to rehearsal. The entire cast showed up to my home eager to go through a speed read, they were really ready to nail down the few lines that were still being dropped. The actress playing Callie failed to show up, choosing her sorority rush event over rehearsal. At this point, I asked her understudy to step in for rehearsal. It was clear to me that the understudy was not prepared to step into the role of Callie, which was a very disheartening realization to come to terms with for myself Would Callie bother to show up to the rest of the rehearsals and performances or would she blow us off for the sorority?

September 26, 2016 *A Sobbing, Remorseful Actor*

I woke up furious. I stayed angry up until the time that I had to meet the actor playing Callie. Professors Funk and Brewster decided to meet with the actor prior to my showing up for rehearsal to explain to her why her actions were so serious. The actor had stated that she was under the impression that the rehearsal was optional. Why she thought this, I am not sure, as we had discussed the rehearsal in length a week before it was to happen. After Funk and Brewster finished discussing the implications of missing a rehearsal during tech week, she was in tears and threatening to quit the show. Brewster was offering genuine encouragement and comfort to her when I came into the office to speak with her. At this point, I realized that my anger and frustration would only result in more disaster to the

show. I swallowed my frustration and encouraged her to stay on, especially if she was considering pursuing a career in acting later on in life. As a freshman, I reminded her, she needed to complete the show she was in otherwise it would potentially be difficult to get cast by another director on campus who would doubt her work ethic. The actor stated that she was committed to the show and that this mistake would not happen again. I asked her to take some time to take a few deep breaths, dry her tears and to get into the mindset for rehearsal, to which she did. After all, the show must go on.

September 27, 2016 *The Slow Crawl*

Today is our second day of lighting and sound cues. Yesterday we worked on scenes 1-12 to get specific lighting and sound cues down exactly where they need to be in the script and as the actors deliver the lines, we're doing the same thing today but with scenes 13-23. This is a long process! Most of the crewmembers along with the SM and ASM are brand new to their specific jobs that they've either been assigned or volunteered for. While the crew members are catching on at a speedy pace, they're still working through and processing what exactly they're supposed to be doing and when. The cast seems to be unaware as to the steep learning curve these crewmembers have had to take on, so it hasn't affected acting or cast morale at this point. While we still have some lighting and sound glitches at this point, I do have full faith that the particular individuals that have been put into these crew positions will do well and give the show more life than it had before.

September 28, 2016 *A Costumer's Nightmare*

This rehearsal was designed specifically for the cast and backstage crew to focus on costuming. This show has 23 separate scenes, most of which take place in different points in time. Because of the amount of quick changes coupled with all the different costumes Callie needs to have to indicate different time and place, this aspect of the show became quite challenging. We went slowly, very slowly as to make sure that everyone knew (actors and



crew members) which costume was to be on stage when, where the actor was to change, and how quickly the change had to happen. I am very fortunate to have a brilliant costume designer, who not only created and put together fantastic costumes for this show, but also was diligent and thoughtful as to how to make these quick changes happen seamlessly. The costume designer really took a big lead in running this rehearsal so that the actors and crew could practice quick changes: how the actor was to get dressed and undressed, if clothing was to be placed on stage or be changed back stage, and finally to ensure that all of the planned costuming would function on stage. This rehearsal went smoothly, though, similar to working lighting and sound cues it was no indicator for how long the show would run. I can tell the cast is getting a little worn out, but they're keeping positive attitudes and plowing through as necessary.

September 30, 2016 *Almost There*

Opening night is two days away and our second to last rehearsal has been decent. We're meeting some mechanical elements that we needed to- correct and timely costuming changes, sound and lighting cues, memorization, and last but not least we have been averaging the show's run at 96 minutes. The actor playing Callie has come to rehearsals in a timely manner and prepared to work. While I feel as though some character development and presentation still has some elements left unexplored in the characters of Callie and Sara, the supporting cast is very good. I'm afraid that so much time was wasted on Callie's memorization; the opportunity to further explore character development was lost. Because Callie's character is, to me, incomplete it has altered the depth through which Callie and Sara could explore their relationship. I'm sure several directors before me have felt this way, but if I just had a few more days I feel as though I could get the show to where it really needs to be. Alas, no more time is to be had, but what we do have is still a very good show- just not an excellent one.

## *Performance Week*

October 2, 2016 *Opening Day/Night*

Prior to our first performance, two designers and myself met with KCACTF (Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival) adjudicator for lunch. It was lovely to sit down and pick another educator and theatre professional's brain that I hadn't spoken to before. I got to the theatre just before lights were to go down, and we had sold out for our matinee performance. Watching the cast, I could tell that several of them were skittish. Nervous behavior plagued the backstage area. The first few scenes were the weakest points of the performance this evening and I realized that three out of my six actors hadn't been in a straight-play before or had never performed in a main stage production. Fortunately, we made it through the performance. It was not our best performance, by far, but it was a good performance. In speaking with several audience members afterward, I realized a lot of my critiques were coming from having seeing the show repeatedly and know what this cast's best looked like. After the first show was completed, the cast's jitters and anxiety melted away. It was like each of them had taken a deep breath. The following performance that evening went much, much more smoothly. The cast worked well with one another, and each character was portrayed genuinely.

October 3, 2016 *Fantastic Performance*

I walked away feeling fantastic! Including rehearsals this was, by far, the best any of the actors had performed. After this performance, I was invigorated by the energy my actors brought to the stage. The audience felt the same. I was able to sit around and listen to the audience's feedback and some of the words that I heard in conversation were: inspiring, eye opening, and excellent. Tonight, I feel as though my process as a director in combination with the result of the production had come circle. I feel like I was able to give the audience a humanistic look of the realities of the queer community. It was a very fulfilling night.

October 4, 2016 *The Horrible, No Good Audience*

Tonight was an incredibly frustrating night. First, the slightest disruption from any audience member is incredibly noticeable due to the size of the theatre. The Studio 205 theatre that was used for this show, seats about 60 people. The audience sits on chairs that are placed up on wooden risers created by our scene department. Any shift of weight makes the wood creak. Not only that, the audience is positioned so that they are sitting within a few feet of the performance space. The exits are located on either side of the wooden risers, but in order to get to them anyone who isn't seated next to the doors must cross in front of the entire audience to exit. That being said, this audience was so disruptive that my actors had to pause intermittently because those talking in the audience made it impossible for the other audience members to hear anything. This was incredibly frustrating to sit through. At one point, I almost got up to ask the disruptive audience members to leave but decided that due to the size of the theatre and audience positioning it would only cause further disruption to the other viewers. Despite a hostile audience, the cast members performed excellently. Not once did they break character or let a scene go due to what was happening in the audience. I would definitely label this performance a success in combination with what the cast was facing.

October 5, 2016 *Backstage Testimony*

Tonight's audience was so full that I had to give up my seat to overflow. I spent the evening backstage with the crew, which provided a completely different insight as to what the show entails. I was able to witness first hand, exactly what my young actors do to get into character or to make the upcoming scenes successful. I was also able to observe the amount of camaraderie that took place throughout the show. It was nice to sit back and see them encouraging each other and helping one another prepare for upcoming scenes. I felt as though, if I have done nothing else throughout my time in directing *Stop Kiss* I have, at least,

played a part in facilitating and creating a cast who relied on each other and created new and meaningful relationships. Even though I was able to view the audience via infrared camera that we used to call cues since the tech crew had to be placed backstage without view of the stage, I was still unable to really get a feel for the audience's reactions or how my actors performed.

October 6, 2016 *Full House*

Another night of sold out performances! I'm really enjoying this pattern. Tonight I stayed glued to the infrared camera in order to try and gain some understanding of the evening's performance. I cannot say that I was successful. The infrared camera doesn't have enough clarity to see any facial expressions. The camera, while useful for sound and lighting tech, doesn't provide perceptibility in order to interpret effectiveness of actor performance. What I was able to observe was audience reaction. This audience was very receptive to what was on stage, at least during humorous moments. Lines that were intended to draw laughs were successful. And in keeping with the previous night, the cast provided a close knit, elevated sense of camaraderie for one another.

October 7, 2016 *Closing Night*

Officially, we have sold out every single performance with the exception of Sunday evening. Once again, I was kicked out of overflow and was forced to sit in the back with the cast and crew. This audience, as was the night before, was very responsive to laugh lines. The cast's energy was very high; they were excited to be giving their final performance. I stood out in the hall, listening for audience reaction. It was a very positive response. Two excited audience viewers came up to me asking, "Did Callie and Sara end up together?" I smiled, hearing several of these questions and many congratulatory remarks from other audience members.

### *Post Mortem*

I have gotten a lot of student, professor, and community feedback as people have recognized me in public or have congratulated me on campus. The overall interpretation that I have gotten from those who have provided direct feedback has been an overwhelming message of positivity. While I am pleased with the overall result of the production, there are a few minor things I would have changed. Looking back, I would have set an earlier deadline for off book and would have insisted on allowing cues to go on for as long as they did. Had we been able to get up out of the book earlier, particularly the actor playing Callie, I feel as though we could have taken the show further.

In personal criticism of my own directing, I would have utilized the space a little more in giving acting directions. Sometimes in an attempt to get the actors to understand the material, I neglected physical direction. Additionally, while lost in my concept of trying to get the actors to understand the experience of the characters, I neglected my personal goals of each rehearsal. Had I kept those goals in mind, I may have been clearer in my direction from an audience standpoint.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Personal Correspondence*

#### *KCACTF Review*

Written Response: Stop Kiss

Oct. 2nd 2016 2:00

Show Director: Opal Clark

Respondent: Talon Beeson

First of all, I just want to take a second and say “Thank You” for having me. It was a treat to spend the day with everyone and discuss the show with you. Also, please keep in mind that this is my point of view on the work. I wasn’t there for the journey which can change everything. Take my thoughts worth a grain of salt. If you like or agree with them: Huzzah! If you don’t, ignore them!

Okay, on with the show.

**1. Choice of Play:** I believe this was a great choice to be produced at ETSU. The ages are not too much of a stretch and require very little suspension of disbelief by the audience. The subject matter is topical, especially in our current political environment, and provides a much needed humanizing look inside the lives of these characters. Even though the play is a bit older, the themes resonate loudly. I also think it is a great choice considering the space that was available. Stop Kiss is a favorite of small storefront companies in NY and Chicago and Studio 205 fits the bill perfectly. Most students, on leaving school, will spend the majority of their performing time in small, adaptable black box spaces and getting that experience is invaluable. The intimacy of the space also enables a much more intimate style of acting, which is useful for film and TV work.

**2. Direction:** Overall, I feel that the choices that were made were strong. The humanizing factor seemed to ring very true and clear. I was also a fan of the staging; using 3 separate

spaces very clearly delineated. The blocking was clean and not at all muddled and provided very clear stage pictures. The pacing, however, seemed to suggest something that I did not witness in the production.

I felt that all of the scenes in the apartment were paced to suggest a humorous, almost sitcom-like patter. This is also suggested by the writing in the apartment scenes. The opportunity was there to have the apartment serve as a “safe-haven” for the characters and allow them to build their relationship in-between the frightening worlds of the hospital and the police station and give a balance to the piece. Though I felt this in the pace and the writing, the sitcom quality seemed to be lacking in performance and direction. It almost felt as if the apartment scenes were weighing heavier than the police station/hospital scenes and having meaning forced upon them instead of naturally there.

The hospital/police station scenes were spot on. They were shocking and grounding in a frightening world. The police station was an especially solid place. The fine work of the director and the detective made it very clear that it was his space and he was firmly in charge. On the same note, the hospital scenes felt sterile and hopeless, capturing that world very well.

I was also a big fan of the general flow of the piece from scene to scene. The scenes flowed very nicely into each other, especially considering the myriad of costume changes the show requires. I also want to congratulate you on the staging of the kiss. Placing it in the same place as the Nurse/Callie exchange gave that location on stage a special, almost magical feel. That was the place of new intimacy and that was clear in the staging.

### **3. Acting:**

a) Callie: Callie had some wonderful moments in the show. In particular, I felt the second scene was very dropped in and honest. She clearly communicated the breezy “floating through life” quality that I believe Callie should have. Her physicality was solid throughout, never shifting into an unknown place for the character. I felt that the first meeting with Sara

was a little too easy. They seemed to drop into a friendly and knowing banter very quickly and skipped over the awkward “what do I say to you” moment that new people meeting go through. I understand the need to build their chemistry from the first meeting, but I think their first moments need to be strained and awkward so we see a full journey from the characters. By the end of the show, Callie was letting moments land and taking her time, which was great to see. The ending scenes in the hospital and the kiss were especially dropped in. Be careful about being mono-tactical. There are many ways for a character to get what they want and all options should be explored. Vocally, I am a bit worried for the performers instrument. It sounds like she is staying in her upper register and throat which could cause long term damage. I would like to hear her ground her voice more in her chest and lower body, this would cause less strain on her voice in the long term.

b) Sara: Sara really grew into her part as the show progressed. By the end I felt she was taking her time and really letting the moments land before speaking. As she grew to love Callie, her rooting in character grew as well. As with Callie, I feel that their first meeting was a little too easy. Especially for someone new to the city, her eagerness to make friends might make the situation even more awkward than it would normally be. They seemed to fall into a “best-friends” type of banter right off the bat, instead of feeling each other out first. This moment need not last long, in fact by the middle of the first scene I believe they fall into that comfortable patter, but the journey was missing. I was also a bit confused if Sara was completely aware of the growing attraction between the two of them. Sometimes it seemed as if she was and she was manipulating the situation to make it grow (asking Callie to lay with her so the cat would come) and sometimes it seemed as if she was clueless as to what was going on (the fight over going to the awards ceremony.) A stronger choice could have been made here one way or the other. Watch out for being mono-tactical. There are lots of options to achieve goals and they should all be tried and explored.



c) Detective Cole: I was impressed with how in control of the situation Cole seemed to be at all times. He knew what buttons to push and when to push them to get the information he needed. He came across as a puppet master in the piece, working the moving parts to get the required response. Sometimes, however, I felt that he was playing pre-planned choices instead of finding them in the moment. It is not that the choices were wrong, in fact, I agreed with his tactic on them all. It seemed, however, that he knew exactly what he was going to do before he walked in the room and just ran the script. He should look for real moments in the other actors to push him to make his decisions.

d) Mrs. Winsley: In a very small role, this actress made the most of it. She was fun and easy to watch. She provided the necessary information in an entertaining and dropped in way that was a nice moment of levity. The actress also imbued the character with a high level of sympathy and relative open-mindedness which I found to be touching. I wonder about the accent choice. The character states that she is from Cincinnati, however she was speaking in a NY style accent. This is not an incorrect choice, I am just wondering if a different accent may have been useful.

e) George: George had some moments that were strong and very dropped in. In particular, as he watched Callie and Sara banter on the futon while he observed from the kitchen island. I felt that this moment was filled with the knowing “next-door-neighbor-observer” role that this character requires. I think the actor had the correct idea with this character. He should be played as a comic-relief observer type. My worry, and the general danger with this character is, that he was just waiting for his next punch line instead of actively listening to his partner and reacting honestly in the moment. The lines are funny, they would be even funnier if they were more honest. A problematic moment for this character (in the script) is his angry outburst at not being told of the attack and seeing it on the news. The actor handled it well enough, although it was a bit mono-tactical. He relied on

attacking the entire time instead of shifting to a softer verbal action once the shock of the moment had occurred.

f) Peter: I found Peter to be a solid rock in this production. His choices were deft and appropriate and gave an “outsider” POV on the situation that was needed when introduced. He was kind and gentle, although clearly hurt. The actor handled these emotions well and incorporated them into the scenes. I would like to see the actor work on partner work. When he was reading to Sara, it seemed as if he had become un-engaged with her. This moment should have been even more directly attached. It is difficult to remain attached to partner through another object (the book,) but from the other work I have seen this actor do, I believe he is capable and should strive toward this.

g) Nurse: In a short and relatively thankless role, I thought the Nurse was solid and to the point. I saw the clinical softness she brought to the hospital room and it’s calming effect on Callie. She wasn’t there to judge, just to do her job and, from the standpoint of an actor, that is a great attitude to have. Do your job, live in that moment and the rest will take care of itself.

**4. Design Elements:** The design elements of the show were overall very well executed. I felt that the set enabled the dramatic action to flow naturally from the central apartment scenes through to the outside hospital/police station scenes. The entire set had a sterile feel, which was useful to the overall show. Callie’s apartment didn’t feel personal, which fit very well with her “unattached to her life” attitude. This enabled the addition of the award to her shelf to have extra weight and was a very nice touch.

The lighting was also a fantastic aid in the flow of the show. It never felt intrusive, but instead served as a guide from scene to scene. I would have liked to see a little more of a “blue overhead light” feel in the police station/hospital, but this was a minor issue that was not at all a detriment to the overall show. I was especially fond of the way the “intimacy

spot” (mentioned earlier) was lit. Providing the park and the hospital hallway with the same glow... it wasn’t about the location, but about the feeling happening, again, a very nice touch. The costume work was very good, never intrusive but also complimentary to the characters and their choices. Considering the massive amount of changes and costumes needed for this show, they were handled very well and never felt stale.

**5. Technical Elements:** The show ran quite smoothly. For an opening show, the flow and general technical implementation was very nice. With that many costume changes, the show had the possibility to drag. However, in general, the changes were handled well and expediently. There were a couple instances where the scene changes went a little long, but I felt that it could have been easily remedied with some more scene change music.

I had some questions about the sound design. Overall I felt that the volume and masking of the design was too much. None of the sound felt as if it was coming from the world of the play, but instead it felt very piped in. Cell phones, the door buzzer and the tapping all sounded out of the world of the play. The sounds themselves were fine, however they were a bit loud and clear. I think a muffling effect on the tapping, for instance, would have been useful.

As I mentioned, overall I enjoyed this show. The issues mentioned above were not world breakers for the production. I think everyone should be very proud of their work on this show.

Congratulations!

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## CHAPTER 6

### *Opal Clark on Directing: Summation, Discussion and Conclusions*

I was an undergraduate at Kansas State University when I saw my first production of *Stop Kiss*. It was the first time I had ever witnessed a character that showed some reflection of my experiences on stage. I had never witnessed a female lead that had to think about her sexual orientation in film or television as well. As a person in my late teens to early twenties, observing the plotline unfold was a considerable moment of empowerment. Since then, I knew when I was to work on my master's degree that I would aim to give this moment of empowerment to another individual.

I was very fortunate to have faculty as my scene, lighting, and costuming designers. The faculty was immensely helpful in the process. They were attentive, sensitive to the material, and supported my design choices as a director. My faculty advisor was, by far, the biggest asset to my directing experience. Professor Robert Funk attended all rehearsals with the exception of one or two. He supported me in my choices, and would suggest an alternative route of obtaining a goal when he saw me struggling. Professor Funk, ultimately, let me be the main force as a director while strongly supporting my artistic decisions.

I recognized areas in my research that were important for me to portray that I either didn't experience myself during that first production or that I was simply unable to remember. It was very important to me to align with the playwright on casting a racially diverse cast. Attending a predominantly white university could have made this a very challenging or impossible goal to achieve. I was very fortunate that the individuals who were cast. I was able to select a very talented, Sara, who identifies herself as Latina and a talented, Detective Cole, who made his debut at ETSU and identifies himself as Hispanic and African American. The two individuals would have been my first choice for their characters

regardless of the goal to cast people of color in the show. The rest of the cast identified as white.

My biggest downfall as a director, were the scenes in which I was unable to communicate a comprehensive goal for the overall scene. There were times that my actors were unsure of their character motivations. When I lost sight of the scene's super objective was cause for further confusion for the actors. Additionally, the actress playing Callie would often show up unprepared for rehearsal. Frustratingly, she appeared to have met her acting peak during auditions. She needed lengthy conversation with me to understand her character, and I did not always have the patience for lengthy conversations in combination with her unpreparedness. Perhaps if I had more experience as a director, I would have chosen to either cast the show differently or would have been able to communicate more clearly, allowing the actor to convey a better-rounded character.

Despite personal issues relating to responsibility with the actor playing the lead character, the production was an overall success. My first hand knowledge of being a part of the queer community helped to shape my choices. My study of communication assisted in helping to convey various objectives whether it is character motivation or super objective to the audience. Prior to my studies at East Tennessee State University, I was unsure as to how performance and communication aligned with one another. Through this experience, I was able to comprehend the potential effects of performance on community (ETSU as a student body). As a director, I learned how to further my analysis of plays and how to communicate motivation and objective to actors while considering how the audience may or may not interpret a directing choice.

Finally, I learned that I am still a novice to the directing world. While I have concept and knowledge of communication processes in theatre, I still have much to learn; particularly when working with actors. I have learned how to be clearer in conveying objective and

motivation to actors and how to more effectively communicate intent. I was able to experience first hand, how to rely on mentors in times of struggle or uncertainty. Moreover, I have learned that it is important for me to remain an eternal student of theatrical art and a lover of collaborative work.

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