



CENTER FOR
SCHOLARS &
STORYTELLERS

EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF LIVE THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES IN THE U.S.



Sara Keith Studios

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Developed in partnership with
Theatre for Young Audiences USA (TYA/USA)



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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS) and Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA/USA) partnered to explore representations of gender and race, both on stage and behind the scenes, in theatrical productions for children in the 2018/2019 season in the United States. A comparison season (2008/2009) was also included in the analysis to explore shifts over the last decade. This report aims to provide initial data on the landscape of theatrical productions for children, identify areas where progress has been made, and suggest areas that can be improved upon for the future.



INTRODUCTION

Theatre is meant to be both a mirror and a window, reflecting our experiences and introducing us to the worlds of others. Live performance can be an especially powerful tool for young audiences, providing children with the moment of seeing their own lived experiences represented on stage while allowing them to empathize with characters very different from themselves. In order to ensure that our industry is achieving this mission for all children in our communities, it is important that we also hold a mirror up to ourselves.

Thus, this report is both a mirror and a window, too, as it not only reflects the progress that has been made in the last decade but demonstrates the depth of work that the Theatre for Young Audiences field needs to accomplish in order to fully represent the diversity of our country, and of its children, especially in telling the stories of BIPOC communities. The report was initiated by the leadership of the national TYA field as a necessary step in confronting these inequities and in taking action. It also provides a window to other professional fields, connecting us with our colleagues across media who are creating stories for young people and bringing the TYA field into a vital conversation happening at the national level about the role that storytelling plays in ensuring that all children grow up feeling seen, represented, and celebrated. Additionally, it connects us to the important work happening in the larger theatre community, including the Artists' Anti-Racism Coalition, in using data to inspire change.

Today, it is more urgent than ever that all young people, especially those who have been historically marginalized and underrepresented, find power and recognition through the stories we tell. It is also important that we support and uplift our entire artistic community, especially providing a platform to artists who have yet to tell their story. We need to use data to catalyze meaningful change and dismantle racism in our industry at all levels. In the face of crisis, we must enact our values as artists and organizations. We will utilize this data as a guiding source of inspiration for the stories we tell and the artists we employ moving forward. This report, and the information it offers us, will provide the foundation of the TYA field as it is rebuilt.

- *Jonathan Shmidt Chapman, Executive Director at TYA/USA*



Theatre for Young Audiences USA (TYA/USA) is the leading national organization representing the professional field of theatre for children and families. For more information, visit www.tyausa.org.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling comes in many forms, through written texts, audiovisual formats, and more recently, digital and interactive media. Each of these forms of storytelling has been extensively studied specifically with respect to lack of representation. However, one area that is understudied is live theatrical productions, a form of storytelling which has existed for over 2,500 years. It is an important part of the conversation. This is why when Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA/USA) approached CSS to partner with them on an examination of this field, we enthusiastically accepted. We hope it is the beginning of a conversation that will bring together the many stakeholders involved in creating and performing stories for youth. We equally hope that by working together, we can make sure that all young people feel seen and heard in the stories that we tell our children.

- Yalda T. Uhls, Ph.D., Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Scholars & Storytellers



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Based in the psychology department at UCLA, the Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS) exists to support authentic and inclusive stories for young people at every stage and age, from 2–25. CSS works with research scientists in a variety of subject matters to ensure the expertise they offer is relevant for content creators and is both realistic and research-based. CSS also curates research, translates it into lay language, and disseminates it through a variety of platforms; provides materials for caregivers to run alongside content; and designs original scientific studies with the input of the entertainment industry. Collaborations have included work with Disney Channel, Jim Henson Productions, Amy Poehler’s Smart Girls, YouTube Kids, Mattel, and other industry influencers. You can learn more about their work at scholarsandstorytellers.com.



MAIN FINDINGS

The aim of this report is to shed light on the representation of gender and race in live theatre productions for young audiences.

Comparison of 2008/2009 and 2018/2019 Seasons

PLAYWRIGHTS:

- The percentage of female playwrights **remained essentially unchanged** from the 2008/2009 to the 2018/2019 season (33% to 36%). However, the number of playwrights who were People of Color (POC) **more than doubled** over that same ten-year period (9% to 20%).

DIRECTORS:

- The percentage of female directors **increased by 14%** from 2008/2009 to 2018/2019 (38% to 52%), achieving gender parity in the most recent season. However, the vast majority of directors were White with **only a 5% increase** in POC directors from the 2008/2009 to the 2018/2019 season.

ACTORS:

- The percentage of female actors cast as main characters **increased by 7%** from the 2008/2009 to the 2018/2019 season, and there was also a **13% increase** in the percentage of POC in actor roles over the same time period.

77% of the entire population in the U.S. is White and 23% are POC (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). However, 50% of U.S. youth under 18 years of age are POC, and this number is expected to grow over the next decade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

In our analysis, POC included individuals from the following racial and ethnic groups: East Asian, Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Native American/Pacific Islander. Individuals of other races or mixed races were included as well.



MAIN FINDINGS

The aim of this report is to shed light on the representation of gender and race in live theatre productions for young audiences.

2018/2019 Season

CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC PRODUCTIONS:

- *POC playwrights and directors* were employed at much higher rates in *Culturally-Specific Productions* as compared to *non-Culturally-Specific Productions* (69% vs. 8%, 49% vs. 7%, respectively).

POPULAR TITLES:

- *Popular Titles* accounted for **8.5% of the total titles**, but because they are performed more frequently, these productions account for **23% of all productions**. **Over 90% of the Popular Titles were Adapted Titles**, while only 5% were Original Content, suggesting that Adapted Titles are more likely to be widely-produced nationally. Moreover, across the entire season, 74% of the productions were based on existing intellectual property, while only 26% of the productions were original narratives.

ORIGINAL CONTENT:

- *Original Content* productions had the **most diverse and equitable landscape**, in terms of both gender and race, as compared to Adapted Titles and Fairy Tales/Fables.



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METHOD

Sample:

We conducted a numerical analysis examining a total of 441 theatrical productions from two different seasons: 2008/2009 (n = 193) and 2018/2019 (n = 248). Specifically, we compared the gender and race of playwrights, directors, and actors across both seasons, as well as within the 2018/2019 season only.

To obtain the sample, TYA invited all eligible TYA companies affiliated with TYA/USA to participate. The affiliation was established either by the theatre holding an institutional membership or its leaders holding individual memberships. 75% of the invited eligible theatres participated, representing nearly 50 theatres across 26 states. Eligible TYA theatres were defined as theatres that primarily produce live theatrical productions for young people (ages 0–17) and families, excluding youth theatres (e.g., stage productions with casts of unpaid children/adolescents or casts who are primarily involved for educational/recreational purposes).

Materials:

TYA/USA and participating theatres provided a list of productions, along with the following information for each production: a synopsis; the year of production; the type of production; the production location; the names of the playwrights, directors, actors (main characters); and type of character each actor/actress played (e.g., human, species, etc.).

Analysis:

A detailed manual was created to define categories of race and gender. Two trained research assistants used the manual to categorize the gender and race of the playwrights, directors, and actors cast in main character roles, by using the production materials that were provided by participating theatres. When these materials were unavailable, we searched public platforms such as IMDb, IBDB, LinkedIn, Facebook, and the artist website when accessible online. In a few instances, the information on the artists could not be found, and as a result, we did not include their race or gender in the breakdown (i.e., missing data). For ~20% of the sample, the research assistants compared their work to ensure they agreed on the categorization. If there were any disagreements, they worked together to resolve them.

A limitation of this study is that gender is portrayed as a binary male/female category (with the exception of the actor-specific data in 2018/2019). We recognize that in cases where identification was not publicly noted, some individuals in our sample may not identify as either male or female and that these categories may not be aligned with self-identification. Similarly, race was determined by examining public records, but we recognize that this information may not always accurately reflect one's self-identified race. Given the limitations of information available through public platforms, in some cases, specific information about one's gender and race was difficult to find and/or was not available. Thus, some individuals may not be accurately identified.



THE LANDSCAPE:

Comparing the 2008/2009 and 2018/2019 Seasons

When I was at Howard University, learning how to be a writer, we used to say ‘the hunter will always be the hero until the lion writes the story.’ We understood that the world looks different through every different set of eyes. All of our young audiences need to see themselves and hear themselves accurately portrayed on our stages. That can only happen when the creative team that makes the work, starting with the playwright, knows our audience’s world as a real place, full of good folks and bad ones, challenges, and celebrations. Back at Howard, we also used to repeat the words of poet Amiri Baraka: ‘If the beautiful see themselves, they will love themselves.’
I still believe it.

–Pearl Cleage, author, poet, and Distinguished
Playwright in Residence at the Alliance Theatre



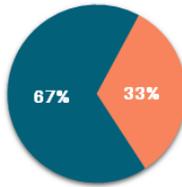
PLAYWRIGHTS

Playwrights are responsible for writing the dramatic material of a theatrical production. Across both seasons, our analysis included a total of 539 playwrights ($n = 225$ in 2008/2009, $n = 314$ in 2018/2019).*

Main Findings: Gender

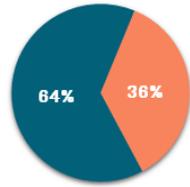
- Males accounted for nearly two-thirds of playwrights in both seasons.
- The percentage of female playwrights remained essentially unchanged from the 2008/2009 season to the 2018/2019 season (33% to 36%).

Gender of Playwrights:
2008/2009



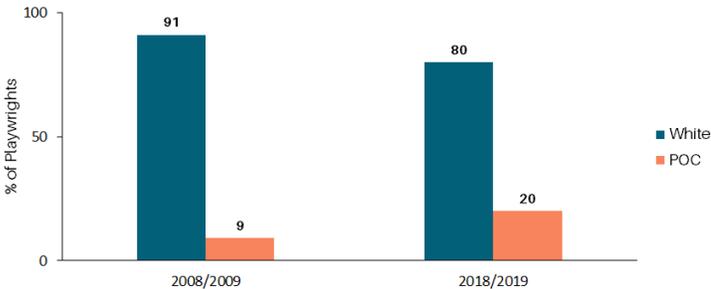
■ Male ■ Female

Gender of Playwrights:
2018/2019



■ Male ■ Female

Race of Playwrights:
10-Year Comparison



Main Findings: Race

- The vast majority of playwrights in both seasons were White, while fewer than a quarter were POC.
- The percentage of playwrights who were POC more than doubled from the 2008/2009 season to the 2018/2019 season (9% to 20%).

Call to Action:

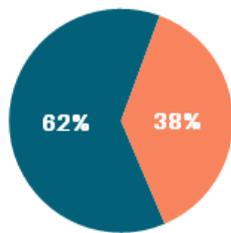
The purpose of live theatre is to tell authentic and meaningful stories, but in order to do this, representative artists and creatives need to be behind the scenes to shape the narrative. It is imperative to have diverse representation behind the scenes in order to produce *more balanced, authentic, and accurate* content.

* Lead creatives such as composers and lyricists were included in this sample. However, the authors of the original source content (for Adapted Titles and Fairy Tales/Fables) were not included.

DIRECTORS

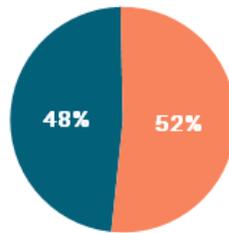
Directors are responsible for leading the creative vision and overseeing all of the artistic aspects of a theatrical production. Across both seasons, our analysis included a total of 429 directors ($n = 182$ in 2008/2009, $n = 247$ in 2018/2019).

**Gender of Directors:
2008/2009**



■ Male ■ Female

**Gender of Directors:
2018/2019**



■ Male ■ Female

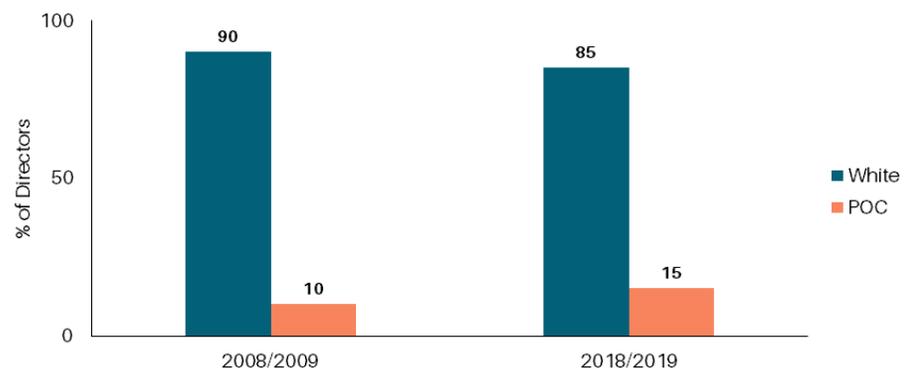
Main Findings: Gender

- The percentage of female directors increased by 14% from the 2008/2009 season to the 2018/2019 season (38% to 52%), reaching gender parity in the most recent season.

Main Findings: Race

- The vast majority of directors were White (85%).
- In the last decade, the increase in POC directors was only 5%.

**Race of Directors:
10-Year Comparison**



Call to Action:

Directors are highly influential and central to the creation of a theatrical production. It is therefore extremely important to have diverse representation in these roles, in order to provide a wider range of perspectives in envisioning the way a story is brought to life on stage.

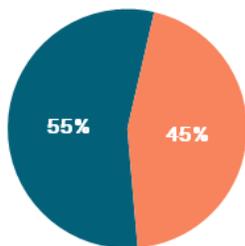
ACTORS

Actors make a production come to life by portraying various characters on stage and by performing for an audience. Across both seasons, our analysis included 1,777 actors cast in main character roles ($n = 748$ in 2008/2009, $n = 1,029$ in 2018/2019).

Main Findings: Gender

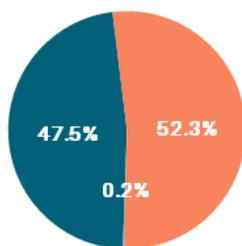
- In both seasons, the percentage of male and female actors cast in main character roles was fairly equal.*
- The percentage of female actors increased by 7% over the ten-year period, resulting in gender parity.

Gender of Actors:
2008/2009



■ Male ■ Female

Gender of Actors:
2018/2019



■ Male ■ Female ■ Non-Binary

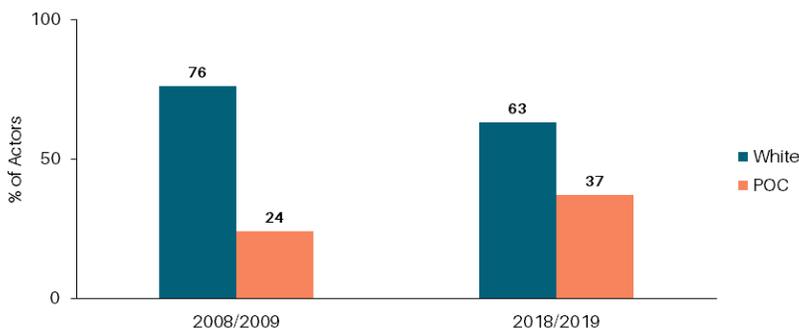


THE SNOWY DAY AND OTHER STORIES BY EZRA JACK KEATS/Childsplay. (Photo Credit: Tim Trumble)

Main Findings: Race

- In 2018/2019, 37% of the actors were POC.
- This represents a 13% increase from the 2008/2009 season.

Race of Actors:
10-Year Comparison



“ All my life I loved theatre but for so long I assumed it didn't love me. And then I saw someone on stage that looked like me and I felt seen, I felt heard, I felt that I mattered. ”

– KJ Sanchez, Founder/CEO
American Records, a theatre company

* Of the actors included, 0.2% from the 2018/2019 season identified as non-binary.



TYPE OF PRODUCTION

Adapted Titles: Productions based on an existing intellectual property such as a book, TV show, or movie.

Original Content: The narrative of the production was created specifically for the stage.

Fairy Tales/Fables: Productions based on traditional children's stories that convey morals and virtues, typically passed down from generation to generation by oral tradition that then became part of the collective consciousness. This category also includes productions adapted from the stories written down by Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm.

Main Findings:

- In each season, the combined percentage of Adapted Titles and Fairy Tales/Fables accounted for approximately 75% of the productions. This means that the vast majority of productions were based on source material originally created for other platforms.
- These results suggest that playwrights are given the opportunity to tell original new stories only 25% of the time.
- The percentages of each type of production remained largely the same from 2008/2009 to 2018/2019.



THE LITTLE MERMAID/Nashville Children's Theatre. (Photo Credit: Michael Scott Evans)

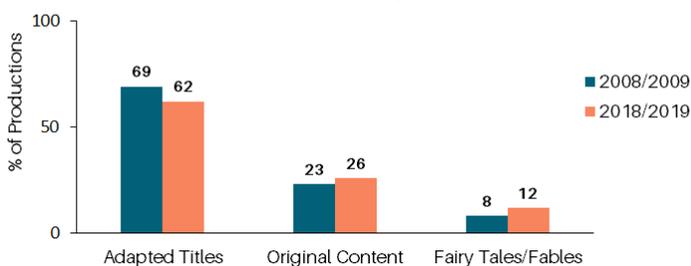


CARTOGRAPHY/Produced by ArKtype. Conceived and created by Kaneza Schaal & Christopher Myers (Photo Credit: Elman Studio)



CINDERELLA/Children's Theatre Company Minneapolis. (Pictured: Rajané Katurah and Dwight P. Leslie. Photo Credit: David Rubene Photography)

Type of Production:
10-Year Comparison





THE LANDSCAPE:

Findings from the 2018/2019 Season

“

Where the actual work of anti-racism comes in is to dig and to never be satisfied and to continue to look at the numbers and what's beneath the numbers.

– Stephanie Ybarra, Theatre Leader and Co-Founder,
Artists' Anti-Racism Coalition

”



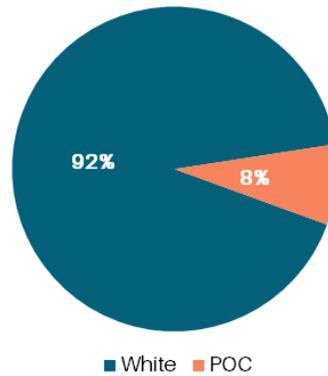
CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC PRODUCTIONS

- **Culturally-Specific Productions (19% of total productions in 2018/2019):**
The productions in which POC characters/communities/cultures were essential to the story's narrative and that without the inclusion of these characters/communities/cultures, the plot of the story would be drastically changed and cease to exist. This information was determined by reading through the synopsis of each production that was provided by TYA/USA and the participating theatres.

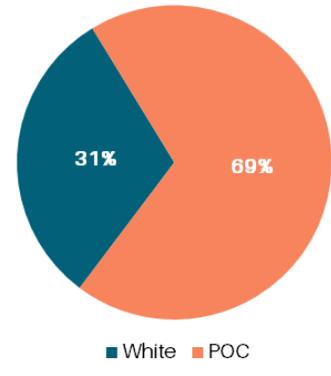
Main Findings:

- In Culturally-Specific Productions, more than two-thirds of the playwrights (69%) and actors (65%) were POC.
- We compared the rate at which POC artists were hired in both Culturally-Specific Productions and non-Culturally-Specific Productions. We found that in the former, POC playwrights and directors were employed at much higher rates, 69% and 49% respectively vs. 8% and 7% in the latter.
- Within the director category, there was an equal percentage of White and POC directors. This suggests that White directors are being hired to lead productions about cultural groups that are not their own.

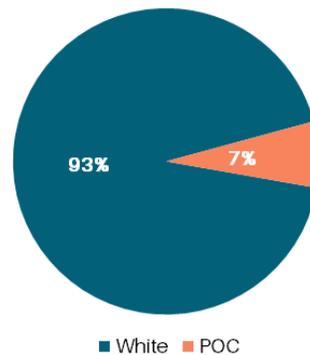
PLAYWRIGHTS:
Non-Culturally-Specific



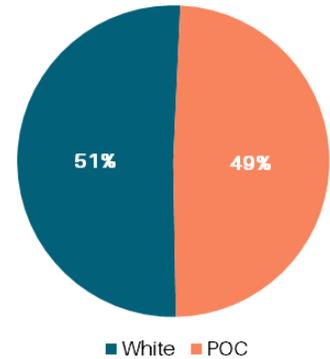
PLAYWRIGHTS:
Culturally-Specific



DIRECTORS:
Non-Culturally-Specific



DIRECTORS:
Culturally-Specific



Call to Action:

While it is important to have racial diversity amongst the creative leaders behind the scenes of Culturally-Specific Productions and to expand the canon of culturally-specific stories that are told, these shouldn't be the only productions in which POC have the opportunity to express themselves artistically. POC artists must *also* be represented in productions that are *not* culturally-specific.



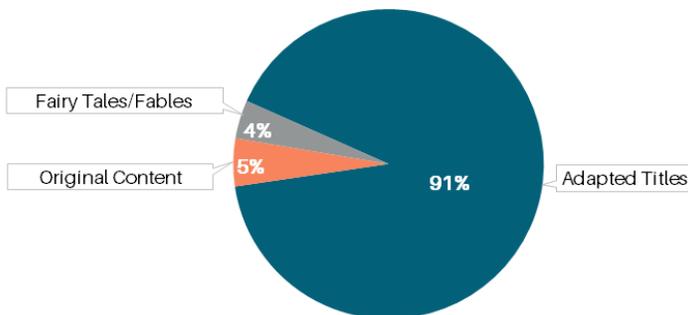
POPULAR TITLES

We defined **Popular Titles** as those titles that were produced three or more times nationwide in a season. These productions were important to examine because they are performed more frequently across regions and thus may have more impact on children. Our analysis found a total of 17 Popular Titles in the 2018/2019 season ($N = 57$ productions in total). Two of these titles were Culturally-Specific Productions ($n = 6$ productions).*

Main Findings:

- Popular Titles ($n = 17$) accounted for 8.5% of the total titles in the 2018/2019 season ($N = 199$ titles), but because these titles are performed more frequently, these productions accounted for 23% of all the productions in the season.
- Over 90% of Popular Titles were Adapted Titles.

Type of Production:
Productions of Popular Titles



Call to Action:

The dominance of Adapted Titles in productions across the country raises important questions about why Original Content isn't produced more widely after it premieres. Are these productions seen as regionally specific? Are they not economically viable for wider production? Are they not necessarily known widely because they aren't published and licensed at the same rate as adapted material? The field must begin to consider these critical questions and think about ways in which to increase the lifespan and exposure of Original Content productions.

* A title refers to the name of a theatrical property, whereas a production refers to the stage presentation of a title (i.e., a title can be performed numerous times in various productions).



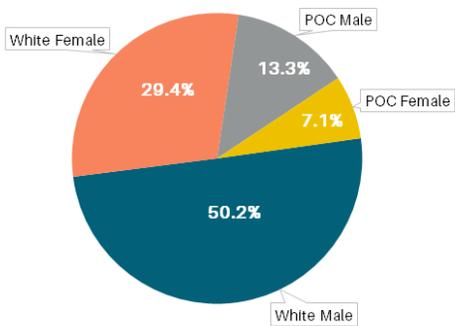
GENDER BY RACE

It is important to understand the intersection of race and gender to determine whether POC males or females are being hired at different rates than White males or females. Thus, we took a look at gender by race for each category.

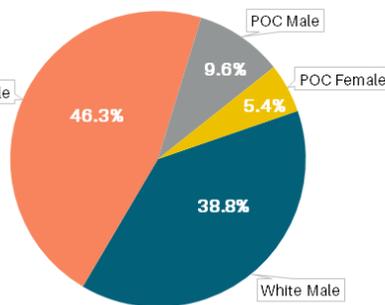
Main Findings:

- More male playwrights were POC than female playwrights.
- 10% of all directors were male POC, while only 5% of all directors were female POC.
- For actors, the proportion of Whites and POC was fairly equal between males and females.

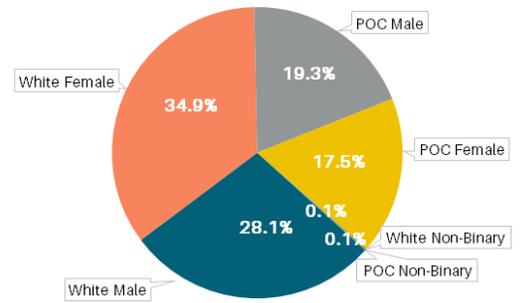
**PLAYWRIGHTS:
Gender by Race**



**DIRECTORS:
Gender by Race**



**ACTORS:
Gender by Race**



Call to Action:

An area to consider for improvement is the representation of female POC in playwright and director positions.



GENDER AND RACE BY TYPE OF PRODUCTION

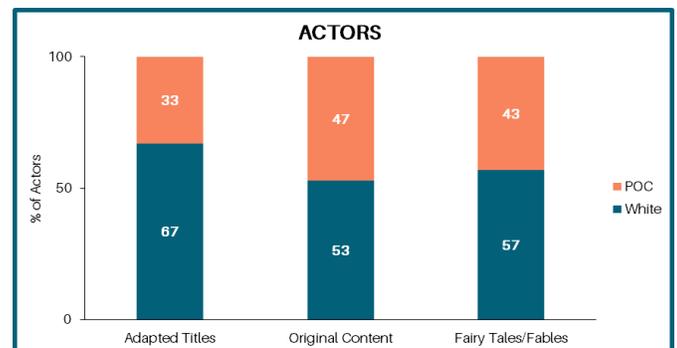
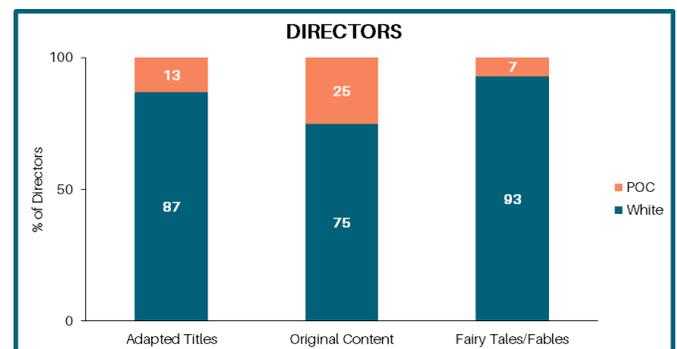
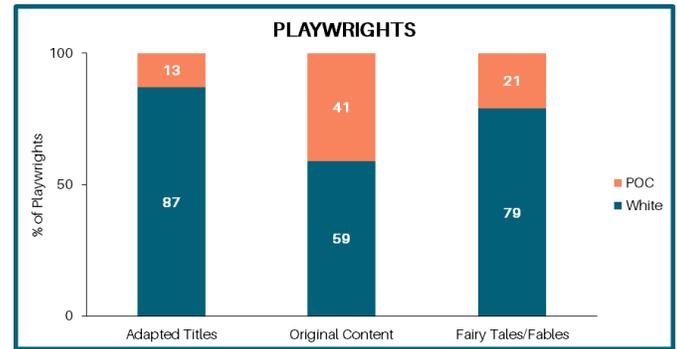
Main Findings:

- Original Content productions most consistently achieved a gender balance, across playwrights, directors, and actors (females: 50%, 62%, 41%, respectively).
- Original Content productions had more POC playwrights, directors, and actors than Adapted Titles and Fairy Tales/Fables.

Call to Action:

It seems that theatres are hiring POC in Original Content productions more often than in Adapted Titles or Fairy Tales/Fables. This is particularly relevant given that only 5% of Original Content productions were Popular Titles, which means they are not as widely produced across the country.

When the theatre industry provides space to create original work, a more diverse and equitable landscape is created, as opposed to when industry relies on existing source material.



RETURN TO NIOBRARA/The Rose Theater. L to R: Kenneth Ramos and Albert (Abby) Ybarra. (Photo Credit: Alex Myhre)

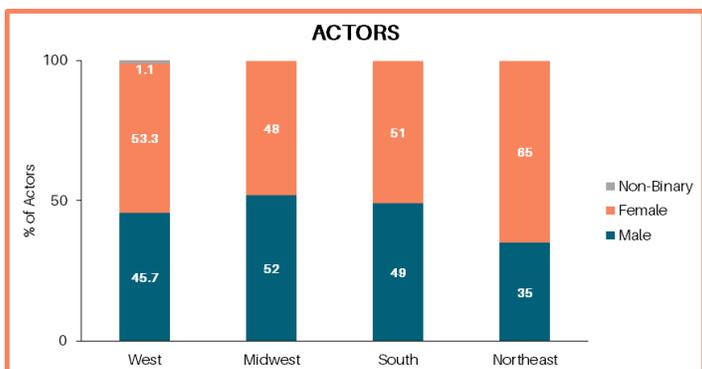
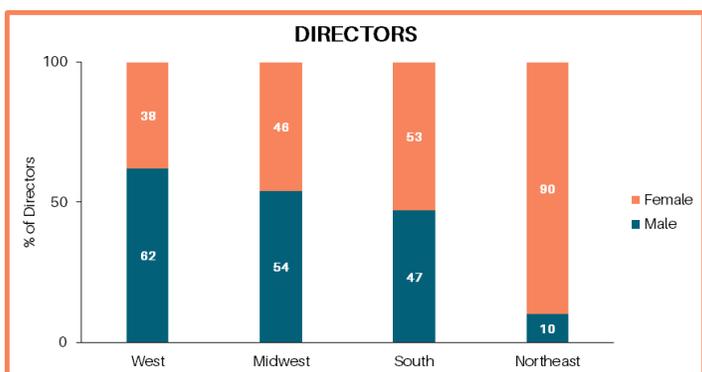
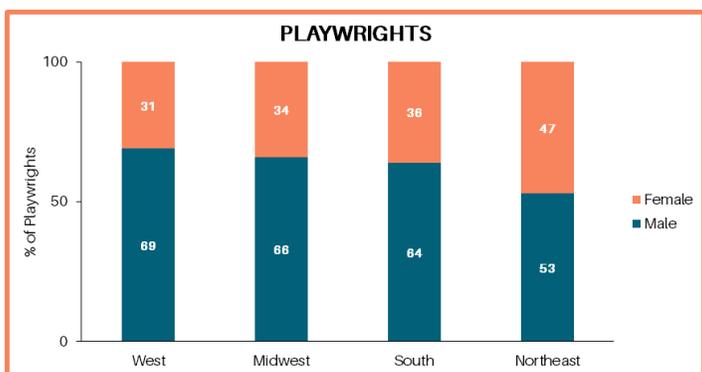
“Numbers tell a story. We want to tell a story with data, with hard numbers.”

– Jacob Padrón, Theatre Leader and Co-Founder, Artists’ Anti-Racism Coalition



GENDER BY PRODUCTION LOCATION

The production location refers to where the participating theatres were located and the productions staged. In the 2018/2019 season, most of the productions analyzed came from the South (39%, $n = 95$), then the West (26%, $n = 66$) and Midwest (24%, $n = 59$). The fewest number of productions came from the Northeast (11%, $n = 28$).



Main Findings:

- Male playwrights and directors dominated across each region in the U.S. except in the Northeast.
- The Northeast region was the closest to reaching gender parity amongst playwrights.
- The Northeast also had a large percentage of female directors (90%) and cast the highest percentage of female actors of any region in the U.S.





RACE BY PRODUCTION LOCATION

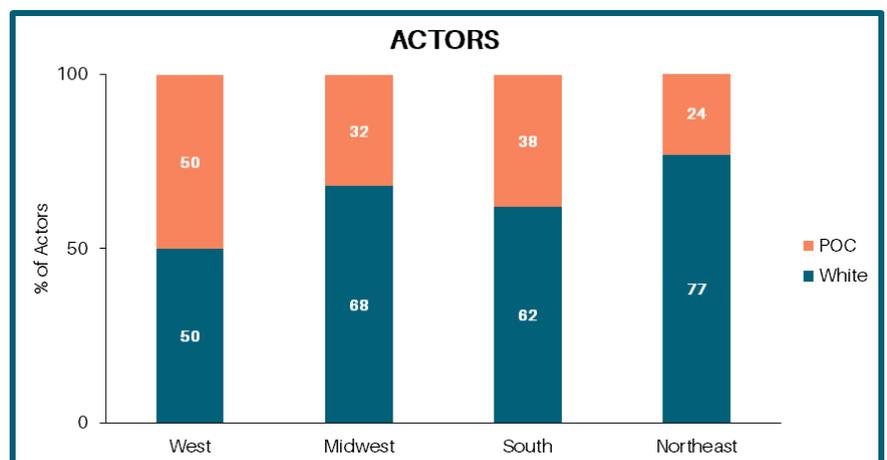
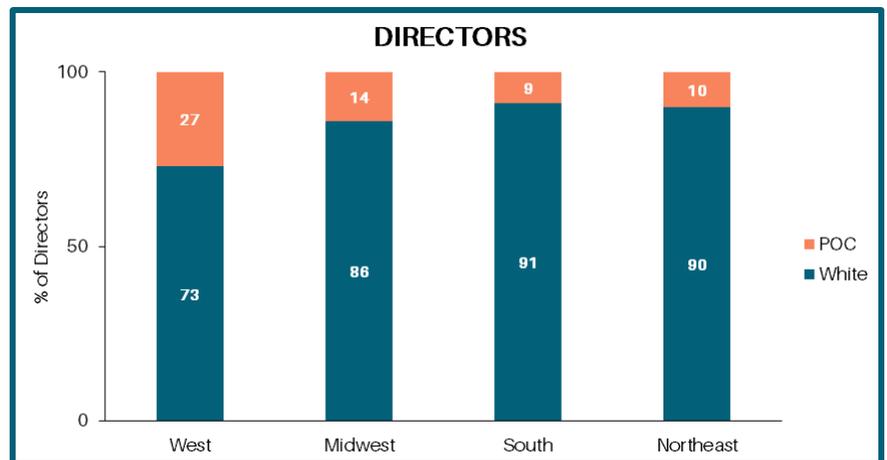
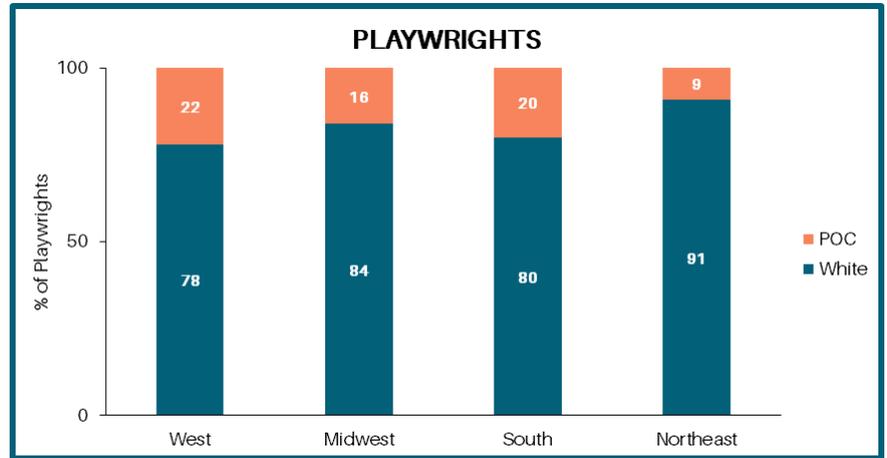
Main Findings:

- Productions from the Western region had more POC in playwright, director, and actor roles than any other region in the U.S.
- The Northeast region had the greatest female representation behind the scenes and on stage, but it had the lowest percentage of POC behind the scenes and on stage.



Call to Action:

We saw the dominance of White playwrights and directors across all regions of the U.S. It is critical to have diverse representation amongst artists to ensure all voices are being heard behind the scenes and on stage.





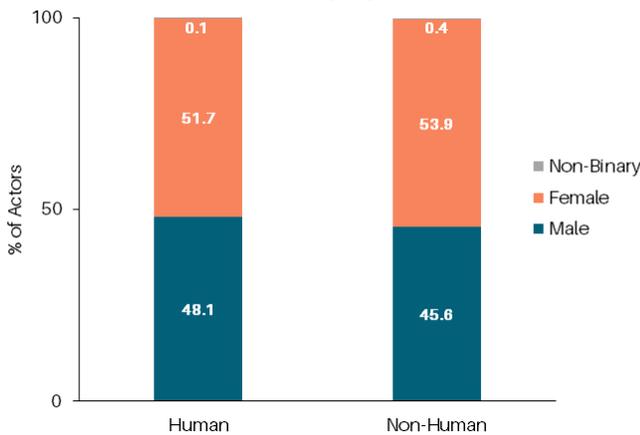
TYPE OF CHARACTERS

Although our analysis found that gender parity was reached amongst actors in the 2018/2019 season and that the percentage of POC actors increased from the 2008/2009 season to the 2018/2019 season, it was important for us to dig deeper and examine the types of characters that females and POC in actor roles portrayed.

Main Findings:

Male and female actors were cast as human and non-human characters at roughly the same percentage. Similarly, although White actors accounted for a larger percentage of both human and non-human main characters overall, there was no difference in the proportion of both White and POC actors cast as human and non-human characters.

Gender of Actors by Type of Characters



Race of Actors by Type of Characters



Human Characters

(75% of characters in 2018/2019 season):

An actor's role in a production was written specifically for them to play a human character/role.

Non-Human Characters

(25% of characters in 2018/2019 season):

An actor's role in a production was to play a non-human character such as an animal, monster, or mythical creature. Puppeteers were included in this category if the puppet was a non-human species.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Thank you to Jonathan Shmidt Chapman, the Executive Director at TYA/USA, for his contributions, in particular with respect to the Calls to Action.
- Thank you to the research assistants at TYA/USA: Gregory Mytelka, Olivia Aston Bosworth, and Taylor Jane Cooper.
- Thank you to the research assistants at CSS: Zuri Smith (UCLA), Anna Yang (UCLA), Anjali Subramaniam (UCLA), and to Josanne Buchanan (University of Toronto).
- Thank you to Jamie Azar, Louise Zeitzew, and Carrie Coleman for their thoughtful edits and to the entire CSS team for their feedback and support.
- Thank you to Stephanie Ybarra, Jacob Padrón, and the Artists' Anti-Racism Coalition for encouraging TYA/USA to pursue this type of research.
- Thank you to Edie Demas for inspiring TYA/USA to connect with colleagues in other Children's Media industries and for connecting TYA/USA to the Center for Scholars & Storytellers.
- Thank you to all of the participating theatres for their work in compiling and providing their season materials for this project.
- Thank you to Colleen Russo Johnson, Dafna Lemish, and Maya Götz for the inspiration from The Landscape of Children's Television report.

**Thank you to Bob Evans and Steve Davis,
whose leadership and generous support of
TYA/USA made this research possible.**



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