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Skin Deeper: The Mental and Physical Body of an Actor

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Skin Deeper
By: Allyce C. Torres

As the house opens, there are outlines of the bodies on brown butcher paper hanging on the walls, surrounding the audience. At each seat in the audience, there is marker and instructions telling the audience to walk through the space and write an adjective on each of the body outlines. The audience then takes their seats. The stage is blank except for a row of chairs/blocks along the upstage wall and a mirror laying face down under one of the tables downstage

Lights up. From the back wall, one moves to the center of the stage facing the audience. Dressed in audition wear. Holding a head shot. They stand and slate as they would in a normal audition. This is repeated as the rest of the company files in one by one. Each of them hits their "mark," clearly denoted by a white spike-tape box on the floor where they land. They Slate stating Name, Height, weight, eye, and hair color. They repeat their stream of words as they slowly remove clothes to reveal basic movement blacks underneath. They also remove make up and pull hair back into a pony tail or for men leave it slicked back. They then take the head shot and leave it on the middle of a table in the room, as they flip it over, each one has "ART vs. BUSINESS" written on the back of it.

½ of the group gets up onto tables and begins speaking. They are the BUSINESS. whilst the other group moves to the center stage area and begins a movement exploration. They are ART.

BUSINESS: Chanti, Zach, Debra, Adrienne, Priscilla

ART: Rosie, Jenna, Ebu, Kayla, Ian

*As they speak, the lines slightly weave in and out and overlap. * All in bold happen at the same time**

CHANTI: PLAYING YOUNG. How can YOU become America's Oldest Teenager in the audition room. Research the current looks. Don't wear what was hot when you were in high school. Try websites like eSPIN and Seventeen.com. In general, go for a pixie cut, or something short.

DEBRA: Seeking: Athletic Women ages 17-21. Must have GOOD bodies. These characters will be seen in their Underwear. Seeking: submissions from blonde actresses aged 15 for the role of Juliet in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Character is extremely attractive, "pretty", and very slight but soft in build.

ZACH: Seeking: Men ages 20-24 for Mack and Mabel. Please no effeminate submissions. All submissions must be extremely masculine in every sense. Seeking: submissions for a work shop of BETWEEN BULLETS. All submissions must be males over the age of 18 but look 24-45. They must be handsome and believably be perceived as a love interest. All others will be thrown out.

PRISCILLA: I'd rather be thin and starve than binge and be a whale. Come ON ladies. Work that ass. When you're tired and weak, remember how good it feels to hear someone say "Have you lost weight?"

FREEZE

ADRIENNE: Either you cast within those stereotypes and people know right away who that character is or you cast *against* those stereotypes and people have to... figure it out. Ultimately time *is* money. SO the more time you spend on challenging or going against the gain, the more of a risk you take... that... you're... losing their attention. We have to ask ourselves if we want our audiences focused on the people we chose or the message of the play. I'm sorry I'm not sorry, but I'm gonna have to say that I'd rather not have people taken out of the world of the play just because I used a heavy girl in a skinny role.

UNFREEZE

CHANTI: When Submitting for agencies, only apply to ones that are say distinctly looking for a "specific type"- athletic, high driver, senior citizens, comic, rollerbladers, Latino.

DEBRA: All acceptable submissions must be naturally blonde and the age 15. Any brunette or red headed headshots will be thrown out. Please call (760) 509-4325 to submit. Seeking:

ZACH: Seeking: Cool Asian Kids for an after school music video for ages 12-15. All submissions must be of actors who are asian or who look asian. Males only! Seeking: Effeminate males for an all male production of SMILE.

PRISCILLA: Things I'll wear when I'm skinny: Bralets, Skinny Jeans, Sun Dresses, Bikinis, Loose sweaters, Leggings, Bikinis.

FREEZE

IAN: Well, It's kind of... a cop out. To choose looks over talent? It's just playing with what audiences already know... you know? Without any sort of... questioning? Yes, we only have 2 hours, but our audiences aren't stupid. Perhaps by putting different bodies onstage, we rewrite and redefine the definition of beauty. And isn't that what art is? To redefine? So let's redefine the ideals by *challenging* our audiences. Race Free, Gender Free, Body type free, age free casting is the direction we need to move in in order to change the face of theatre. If more companies begin using this casting method, the more range of beauty ideals we will see in the real world. Life tends to mirror art. So if we lead the way, the rest will follow.

UNFREEZE

CHANTI: OR if an agency mentions the phrase "accepting developmental clients" that means you have no viable major credits but you *look good* and probably will book because your type is so much in demand.

DEBRA; Seeking: Submissions for a workshop production of TALL GIRLS. Actors of all ethnicities encouraged to submit. We are looking for a racially diverse cast. All actors and actresses must be over 5'10" to be considered.

ZACH: Men must be thin and be able to believably play women with little prosthetic aid. Please send in a headshot with no facial hair in addition to an image of the actor in a wig. If the actor has long hair, please style it to achieve a feminine look.

PRISCILLA: The PERFECT workout for you to lose weight and feel great. 100 jumping jacks, 90 crunches, 80 squats, 70 leg lifts, 60 jumping jacks, 50 crunches, 40 squats, 30 leg lifts, 20 jumping jacks, RUN for 10 minutes.

FREEZE

ELIZABETH: I think what I hate the most is that I *know* that this is how it works. That I can look at a casting announcement and knowing that I could *kill* in that role, but also knowing that I'm not skinny enough to play that part. I can be the best actress in the world, the most talented, whatever. But we *will* go into this world and be beaten by borderline actresses because they "look" the part. Well, ok. I don't... know. but I never want to play the characters that "look like me". I want to be the murderess or the bad ass, but I'm not going to be initially called in for those roles... ever. Unless they are consciously going against type. So it's limiting the ways in which I can express myself artistically.

UNFREEZE

CHANTI: Women keep your make up simple, natural, fresh, and rosy: blush, lip gloss, a little mascara. Only use foundation if you're one of those people who NEEDS it. But generally, make sure you have good, clear, HEALTHY skin. But if you do have acne, don't worry, you can always play the before shot!

FREEZE

ADRIENNE: I hate when people ask this question because it's like... yes, bad terms get thrown around when actors don't match visual expectation. So of course we try to match physical expectation. But there *are* roles for all body types. People just have to be willing to play those roles and know that not everyone is a Marilyn, some are Jackies, and Some are Fanny's, the list goes on. I don't want this to sound cold, because it's not. But it's simple as this. You go to a store, there's this comfy beautiful couch and then there's one that's kinda crooked and bumpy, which one are you gonna pick?

UNFREEZE

DEBRA: Seeking: an attractive, clean cut, Asian/Pacific Islander Male with great teeth, clear skin, short hair (fauxhawk or buzz cut preferred) for a new film project. Must be between 18 to 26 years old, taller than 5'7". Muscular build: defined chest and arms.

FREEZE

ELIZABETH: Audiences want to see someone they *want* to look at onstage. And that person isn't ugly.

UNFREEZE

PRISCILLA: Remember, nothing tastes as good as skinny feels.

FREEZE

IAN: I want it changed. I want it changed so bad. But... it's like even though I'm here, I'm a part of this examination of how our bodies are being exploited and whatever, but I look at backstage magazine and everyone is beautiful. And I look at the shows here at Wesleyan and the leads are always the pretty, thin girls and strong, handsome men. And it's hard not to feel like this system is an immovable force. And even if I could debunk it and overthrow this system... I can honestly say I don't know how I would change it... or how we're going to debunk it.

(Actors transition to 2 lines along the edge of the stage and begin a game of RED ROVER. Business People Call Out different "Roles" and the ART run across and either get denied or accepted into the chain)

RED ROVER:

BUSINESS: Red Rover, Red Rover, send the ingénue right over....

(All women Cross, Rosie makes it through)

BUSINESS: Red Rover, Red Rover, send the Mom right over...

(Group crosses, Kayla and Elizabeth make it through)

BUSINESS: Red Rover, Red Rover, send the Bombshell right over...

(Jenna makes it through)

BUSINESS: Red Rover, Red Rover, send the Gay Kid right over...

(Ian gets through)

BUSINESS: Red Rover, Red Rover, send Perfection right over.

(All come over and are locked out, they then Unlock the BUSINESS's arms and walk through. Claiming their perfection. The ART students exit, as they do, they set up the chairs for this section. The BUSINESS kids become STUDENTS and enter the space as if going to lunch. Students sit at the lunch table, someone who is clearly not a theatre student is seated. The students enter as if having come from a movement class on weightiness day. They have gym bags and trays/plates that have taped-out food outlines or pictures on them and utensils, representing their lunch.)

ZACH: Hey, dude, theatre table (gestures for him to leave)

KID: (jumps up) Oh shit, sorry guys! Hey, great job in the show last night by the way!

ZACH: Hey thanks!

(Everyone sits down and begins eating, adlibbing)

CHANTI: ..And I hear this girl just start singing "Look at my hair, look at my eyes, look at my body, look at my (let's out a cat belt)"

(Laughter)

PRISCILLA: No, I'm telling you that's EXACTLY what it was like. Furreal.

CHANTI: also, like that song choice for her...

PRISCILLA: yeah, she shouldn't be asking anyone to look at her anything

(laughter)

CHANTI: NOR! It's so bad. But it's so true.

ZACH: was she like heavier?

CHANTI: I mean... (references 2)

PRISCILLA: she was like if dolly parton had a baby with Christina in the bad years.

ADRIENNE: No but really. Also, is it bad that I spent all day looking around at the other auditioners being like "Who looks like me?! Am I prettier than her?"

ALL: NO ME TOO! YES! HA! Etc.

ZACH: Please, you're fine. We were EASILY the prettiest people there. And the best dressed too. I saw a girl actually audition in tap shorts.

DEBRA: I feel like I'm in a vending machine. Like press B-5 and you get the blonde with blue eyes, B-9 for brown with green.

PRISCILLA: like saran wrapped and ready to go.

(laughter and ad libbing)

ADRIENNE: OH my goodness, I am so sore. Jazz today was nuts. (sees 2's plate) what did you get?

PRISCILLA: I got this like rice and vegetable thing... it was at the veggie station

ADRIENNE: is it good?

PRISCILLA: I mean... it's saga, but yeah. I wish they had brown rice instead of white. I'm trying to cut out dairy and white carbs for this month.

ZACH: Oh here we go again. Can we NOT turn this into a who's eating what?

ADRIENNE: wait, what is she saying?

PRISCILLA: I'm not eating dairy and white grain for a month

DEBRA: hey!! I'm cutting out dairy! (they high five)

PRISCILLA: oh really?

DEBRA: yeah, my professor told me I was looking a little flabby the other day in dance class so I'm trying this and also upping my shirk times by an hour to tone up before MUNY auditions.

PRISCILLA: Oh crap, do you know what you're singing yet? I haven't decided for sure.

DEBRA: I think I'm just going to sing my uptempo. I've done it a million times but i just want to do something I know is good rather than try to learn something new this late in the game. Did you pick out what you're wearing?

ADRIENNE: I did! No patterns and I'm wearing pants because I know I can't get any of the ingénue-y roles and also because my legs are not ready to be seen just yet.

ZACH: I HATE these things, like can't I just skip the audition and get the job?

PRISCILLA: I think what I hate more is being there with all of those other kids from the other schools. There are so many of them, they're so catty, but most of them are just...BAD

CHANTI: seriously though, and you look at some of them and are like...just go home, why are you even here. Also did I tell you what my friend from Viterbo told me?

PRISCILLA: No, what?

CHANTI: Well I saw him at KTA and he told me that people at his school hate seeing Wesleyan students at audtions-

ADRIENNE: why because we're the best?

CHANTI: well, duh. But no, he said that they call us the "pretty school"

ZACH: Oh! I've heard that too! My friend who goes to George Washington told me that. That people know you only get into Wesleyan if you're pretty...

DEBRA: It kind of makes me wonder how some people got here then.

PRISCILLA: really though? That's awesome! We go to the pretty school!!!

ADRIENNE: well chase told me when I auditioned that the best advice he could give me was to stay thin because it would make it easier for me to get in.

PRISCILLA: That can't be real though... I mean we have people who are heavier here

ZACH: yeah, like a couple. AND they're all beautiful.

PRISCILLA: but that's not like, the normative pretty I guess is what I'm trying to say.

CHANTI: well, that's true kind of- and it is easier for you to get cast here if you're thinner. Like I went in for x hours the other day and was going through the costume bible updating people's size charts and almost everyone with a lead in that show is a under a size 6.

ZACH: but it does help that they even the ones who aren't skinny are all seriously abnormally pretty- Even the boys.... Even though they're kind of Hobbits.

DEBRA: And they're pretty in an interesting way. That makes it easier for them to get cast here.

CHANTI: we were talking about playing "Ugly" characters in class on Monday, and my professor told us he hates when pretty people talk about being ugly in monologues because no one believes it, then he told none of us to do those characters because we wouldn't be here if we were ugly.

ADRIENNE: but that's not just here, that's like, everywhere. So at least they tell us when we're here. Like they're getting us prepared for the real world kind of.

CHANTI: Sometimes I wonder if normal people think about this stuff

ZACH: HA! The answer is no. If I weren't an actor, I doubt I would think about it this much.

DEBRA: well that's true. Oh shit. Hey, (3,2) do you guys wanna head over to tap early to go over the combo before class starts?

(Chorus of yeah's and everyone begins to exit the playing area)

ZACH: did you see Mary lately? She's getting so (gestures chunkiness)

PRISCILLA: well she's not taking any dance classes this semester...

(Conversation dims as the STUDENTS exit the stage. Debra remains seated. As she sits, a string box is created by actors right behind where DEBRA is seated, framing her. She looks at her food. makes a decision, hands the tray back to the actors holding her box. They grab the tray as well as her chair and exit. DEBRA pulls out a pocket mirror and checks her lip gloss. As she does so, the other actors take away the chairs so that she is alone in her chair. ELIZABETH enters and stands downstage of DEBRA:)

ELIZABETH: Now Every Girl is expected to have: caucasian blue eyes, Full Spanish lips, a classic button nose, hairless asian skin, a California tan, a Jamaican dance hall ass, long Swedish legs, small Japanese feet, the abs of a lesbian gym trainer, the hips of a 9 year old boy, michelle obama's arms, and doll tits. The closest person to actually achieving this look is Kim Kardashian, who as we all know, was made by Russian scientists to sabotage our athletes. Everyone else is still struggling. - Tina Fey

(ELIZABETH pulls out the mirror it up facing the audience. On the back of the mirror are the words: THE DANGER ZONE. She holds it up for a moment and props it against one of the chairs along the upstage wall. And exits, as she exits, Debra stands and begins speaking, making her way down stage)

DEBRA. Ed wants me to be the best that I can be. Ed strives to make me beautiful and thin. Ed wants me to be successful. Ed never forgets to tell me when I have done something right. Ed cares about me so he wants me to succeed. Ed knows exactly what I need to do to be the best I can be.

(CHANTI, JENNA, ELIZABETH, ADRIENNE, PRISCILLA, KAYLA enter with their labeled bodies and a pair of scissors. They lay down their bodies- the label side up- and lie on top of them within the parameters of the outline except for ADRIENNE who begins speaking)

ADRIENNE. When I got here, I didn't notice my weight or worry about it. Lately though, my self image has begun to take a turn for the worse. There is no denying or hiding that. I love food. I love pizza and

bread and pasta and burritos and chips... the list goes on. I laugh when I tell people that I don't eat bunny food. But on the inside I hate myself for it. I've begun trying to slim down, but that doesn't mean eating salads, it means eating some cereal or just not eating. It's working so far, but I probably don't eat enough. Bulimia isn't something I identify as having, but I think the threat of purging could hurt me more than it does now. I like to tell myself that the reason I don't work out is because I don't have time. I tell myself it's because I'm worried I won't know how to work the machines at shirk and would be embarrassed. The truth is, I don't work out because I'm fat and lazy and I eat bad food because I like how it tastes. There. I said it.

(ADRIENNE kneels on her body. As DEBRA speaks, the rest of the actors do a small physical gesture)

DEBRA. Ed tells me that I need to be in control of my life. Ed will accept nothing less than perfection. Ed punishes me for my mistakes. When I do something Ed doesn't like, he tells me I will never amount to anything. This is how I know I need to do better

(CHANTI stands, begins speaking)

CHANTERICKA. I have this weird idea that I need to be under 100 pounds. Lately, I've become more aware of my relationship to food. I eat when I'm bored, tired, procrastinating, angry, happy, when I want to reward myself, when I'm upset, depressed...if someone else is eating, for comfort, etc. The point is I rarely eat because I'm hungry, and it makes me feel awful. I know I'm over 100 pounds but I'm not sure how much because I make a point not to weigh myself. If I did weigh myself I know I would begin to fixate on it and I just know it would become a problem. So I've chosen a slightly more blissful ignorance.

(CHANTI kneels. The physical gesture is repeated)

DEBRA. Ed wants me to be strong. Ed knows that I can survive without the things that the other, weak people need. Ed tells me that I am strong because I don't need the things other people need.

(JENNA stands)

JENNA. After my sexual assault during my sophomore year, I found that food was the only thing I had control of. I blamed myself for what had happened. I told myself I didn't deserve to eat. Things like this didn't happen to thin pretty girls. I was worthless and ashamed. I was so afraid to tell anyone about it. Food became my best friend and my worst enemy.

(JENNA kneels, the gesture is repeated)

DEBRA. Ed reminds me that I am strong, because I don't need food in my life. I don't need to eat. Ed won't let me forget that eating= weakness.

(PRISCILLA stands)

PRISCILLA. I feel like I need to be thin. When people tell me I look really thin it's like a double edge sword. On one hand I'm worried about appearing unhealthy but on the other hand when I look at the mirror I see big thighs and a pouche (little belly sack) and I want to lipo all of it off. I haven't weighed myself in about two years because I'm afraid. I feel like because I'm a performer that people have dubbed as being pretty and thin (though I don't believe it) I need to stay that way.

(PRISCILLA kneels, the gesture is repeated)

DEBRA. Ed tells me I will never be my best. I will always be fat and destined for failure. Ed tells me that I can trust the scale to tell me my worth. A high number is disgusting; a low number isn't good enough.

Not yet.

(KAYLA stands)

KAYLA. If I feel bad about something I did. If I'm not pretty enough, or talented enough, or I said something stupid, or screwed up an audition, I blame it on myself. When I was younger I had a self harm problem. If I did poorly in an audition, a cut was sufficient punishment. If I didn't get a good role in the play or had a bad rehearsal, a cut would make me feel like I'd punished myself and I'd feel better. It's not a problem anymore.. I think. I'm beautiful. I know I am. So why do I have such a time believing it? We're all told these things- this list of rules we have to follow- over and over in every media outlet and in every class we go to. They're starting to seep into our minds and making us see things that aren't

there and we can't get away from it. I'm an actor, people are always watching me and I *feel* myself watching how other people see me all the time. It's scary.

(Kayla kneels, the gesture is repeated)

DEBRA. The closer I am to 100, the more Ed likes me. The more Ed likes to torture me. Ed tells me that my worth is skin deep.

(ELIZABETH kneels)

ELIZABETH. I had to change my diet for health reasons and I started losing weight. First I thought I looked good. Then it just made me nervous. now I feel like I want to stay thin and be careful what I eat-losing weight doesn't scare me anymore. I'm becoming aware that everyone has certain things they're insecure about. No one feels perfect with their body. Everyone is limited by looks/body/race so why doesn't everyone just love what they have?

(Elizabeth kneels. Debra crosses so that she is standing dead center. They all long strips of fabric pull from their back pockets and tie them around their "place of pain"- areas identified by the actors as spots of insecurity, where most of the pain is held. i.e. Kayla's will be on her wrist, Rosie's on her hair, Chanti's on her thigh... etc. After they tie the pieces on, they exit, leaving the bodies across the floor. ZACH enters and recites:)

ZACH: BEYONCE IS FUCKING GORGEOUS

I'm talkin gone with the wind Gorgeous

JGL is hotter than hot

Sophia Vergara has kickin curves

And Taye Diggs is my husband.

They are pillars of beauty, icons

Measuring sticks

There's an ideal white man, and ideal black woman, and ideal asian...

The list goes on and on and on and on and

The spiral twisting in a sharp incline

And at the top, there are only pretty people

Each step holds it's own requisite for passage:

Blue but mysterious eyes

Blond hair with the right amount of highlighting

Thin body but killer curves

Light skin but not too pale

Some facial hair but only if it's kept under control

And we only know how to exist within the bars of this staircase

Whose steps, I'm pretty sure are buttered

Because I keep slipping

And we are measured by which step we're on

How high up the case we get

Our value and success determined by attributes assigned at birth

Over which we have no control

Fighting this hegemonic stairway

Fighting this these icons for the right to call ourselves

Beautiful, manly, worthy

We're constantly judging ourselves by Beyonce's high score

Because I'm on step 10

And she's on 9 million

Striving to reach the top
To jump the rails
But as long as B hold the Gold
My feet are glued down.

Actors enter and create two string boxes on either side of the stage. IAN and JENNA enter and walk directly into the boxes. We now begin the exploration of OWNERSHIP. People walk in one at a time and claim a limb, vocalizing "mine" as they do so. Once everyone has claimed a limb, they then mold the person's stance. After that, they then restyle/redress them. One of the "owners" on each side uses the string that created the box, to tie JENNA and IAN's hands. The other members place labels on them that say "MINE" the last of which will be placed over their foreheads (minds) and mouths. The owners then walk away as JENNA and IAN drop their poses, turn and look at each other, they turn around One has the sign "OWNER" and the other has the sign "SHIP" taped to their back. They hold for a moment and exit. The scene finishes and shifts to a 5 person piece it begins with one actor, and others enter as they add in)

JENNA: As an Actor, a huge question for me is what exactly my agency as an actor is... okay... that sounded reaaaaally pretentious... let's back track a little. I do want to know who owns me.

PRISCILLA: right now we feel like we have all this power because our professors ask us our opinions and we get to discuss theatrical practices in our theory classes but at the end of the day, actors are powerless. We are asked last. People tell us what to do.

ROSIE: I CANT DO ANYTHING! NO hair cutting. NO dying. NO tattoos. NO sunburns for crying out loud. No freedom!

IAN: Casting Directors! They literally hold my destiny in their hands. So they own my happiness... and by proxy I guess they kind of own me too

ZACH: I think right now my professors own me, like they can say anything they want to me and tell me to do things and yeah, I have the ability to not listen, but if they run the show here, like they are in charge of casting, then yeah I'm going to listen to do what they say.

JENNA: our body types and looks determine how we get cast... not if we get cast (for the most part) bodies have significance onstage and there are roles for all bodies. You can't switch out my body for a latina body or an asian body and say "hey these bodies mean the same thing" so yeah. What my type is and the meaning associated with that is what determines if I'm onstage or not

PRISCILLA: White people own me. The man has all this power in theatre and 9 times out of 10 that man is literally a white man. The kinds of roles available are written by white men, for white men, people producing are white men, directors are white men. Everything I do and how I fit into the cycle is determined by where a white man places me.

IAN: I'm gonna say women. Maybe because IWU is all women. But I think that the lens through which we all see ourselves is distinctly feminine. Like, I try to impress women in a way. I mean I dress for myself but I know women are the ones who will compliment my clothes. So they do have control in that way.

JENNA: uhm... I think costumers have a lot of control.. they control how I see my body as well as others

ROSIE: I mean, I feel like unless I'm willing to give up being an actor, and become something with more power, then I don't own myself

ZACH: I own myself. But I lease out my body and sometimes, I accidentally lease out my mind too.

(As they finish speaking, 4 actors come on stage. They line up across the stage. As they do. CONTRACT enters the stage with a clip board and overly large glasses and a whistle around their neck. They peruse and acquire signatures on their clip boards from each of the actors as they speak the following)

CONTRACT (ROSIE). HELLOOOOO Actors!!!! Welcome aboard your new position at Theatre Co. we are so excited that you are joining our ensemble. You have beaten out several actors from all across the world for these few slots. Your starting wage is \$300 a week with company housing and food stipends. And you are guaranteed casting in at least 3 of the 5 shows in the season. The final step before you are officially part of the team is to sign this contract. Please note that by signing below you agree not to the terms of the company. The actor may not drastically change their appearance in any way after they have been hired. You agree not to cut or dye your hair without the consent of the costumer, director, producer, and artistic director. You may acquire any new tattoos anytime after the signing of this contract or before the document's expiration date. Any existing tattoos must be covered up for any performance with appropriate make up provided by the actor. You may not gain or lose weight and will be expected to maintain the same size throughout the duration of your employment. In addition, You must behave in accordance to and uphold the values as stated in the mission statement of the company. By signing you agree to the terms outlined in this contract. Any violation of these terms is grounds for termination of employment.

(After the CONTRACT finishes speaking, people- BOXES- come up behind the ACTORS and use string or bands in order to create a large box around the body of the ACTOR, thus "framing" them. The actors test different means of stepping outside or testing the limits of the frame whilst the Boxes recite their lists and keep them contained)

ADRIENNE: Big Feet Scars Knobbly Ankles Flabby calves Thick thighs Jiggly butt Love handles Prominent hip bones Prominent rib cage Big boobs Sharp shoulder blades Freckled arms Pale skin Tiny hands Stubby fingers Crooked smile Straight teeth Jewish nose Almond shaped eyes Droopy left eyelid Long eyelashes Heterochromia Thick eyebrows Textured hair	IAN -thin -nice legs -nice skin - intense eyes -Cleft in eye brow - huge feet. - big smile -attractive lips - bigger nose - strong butt - short hair - light skinned	JENNA - 6' 1" - jewish nose - brown hair - long arms and legs - some curve - full chest - medium bust - flat stomach - red lips - right ear higher than left - forward bent shoulders - thin ankles - rosy cheeks	KAYLA - Black mixed - curly, brown hair- afro - curvy hourglass shape - 9/10 feet - round eyes - full lips - five feet five inches - piercings in nose, rook, doubles, cartilage, and singles - tattoos - medium sized freckle on chin
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(Throughout the course of the struggle, one actors gets completely shut in by their box, another is stuck with one arm reaching out, another breaks free but loses it's job, the other breaks free and retains it.

Everyone onstage is hurt and the anger is palpable. KAYLA grabs the mirror and brings it to the down stage right corner and she and CHANTI move down left and recite "Body Love" by Mary Lambert. As the piece is being spoken, PRISCILLA enters and takes a stance atop of 2 blocks up left. The res of the company joins her there. The following text is underscored by a movement piece- a physicalization of the journey to the mirror.)

CHANTI: I know girls who are trying to fit into the social norm
like squeezing into last year's prom dress
i know girls who are low rise, mac eyeshadow, and binge drinking
i know girls that wonder if they're disaster and sexy enough to fit in
i know girls who are fleeing bombs from the mosques of their skin
playing russian roulette with death; it's never easy to accept
that our bodies are fallible and flawed

BOTH: but when do we draw the line?

KAYLA: when the knife hits the skin?

isn't it the same thing as purging,
because we're so obsessed with death,
some women just have more guts than others
the funny thing is women like us don't shoot
we swallow pills, still wanting to be beautiful at the morgue,
still proceeding to put on make-up,
still hoping that the mortician finds us fuckable and attractive
we might as well be buried with our shoes,
and handbags and scarves, girls
we flirt with death everytime we etch a new tally mark
into our skin

i know how to split my wrists like a battlefield too

BOTH. but the time has come for us to

reclaim our bodies

CHANTI: our bodies deserve more than to be war-torn and collateral,
offering this fuckdom as a pathetic means to say,

BOTH: "i only know how to exist when i'm wanted"

CHANTI; girls like us are hardly ever wanted you know

KAYLA: we're used up and sad and drunk and
perpetually waiting by the phone for someone to pick up
and tell us that we did good

CHANTI: You did good.

(i know i am because i said am, my body is home)

KAYLA. so try this

take your hands over your bumpy lovebody naked
and remember the first time you touched someone
with the sole purpose of learning all of them
touched them because the light was pretty on them
and the dust in the sunlight danced the way your heart did
touch yourself with a purpose
your body is the most beautiful royal
fathers and uncles are not claiming your knife anymore
are not your razor, no
put the sharpness back
lay your hands flat and feel the surface of scarred skin

CHANTI: i once touched a tree with charred limbs

the stump was still breathing

but the tops were just ashy remains,

i wonder what it's like to come back from that

sometimes i feel a forest fire erupting from my wrists
and the smoke signals sent out are the most beautiful things
i've ever seen

KAYLA. love your body the way your mother loved your baby feet

CHANTI. and brother, arm wrapping shoulders, and remember,

BOTH: this is important:

KAYLA. you are worth more than who you fuck (*Reveals one Body collage*)

CHANTI. you are worth more than a waistline (*Reveals second Body Collage*)

KAYLA. you are worth more than any naked body could proclaim
in the shadows, (*Reveals third Body Collage*)

CHANTI. more than a man's whim (*Reveals fourth Body Collage*)

KAYLA. or your father's mistake (*Reveals fifth Body Collage*)

CHANTI. you are no less valuable as a size 16, (*reveals sixth body collage*)

KAYLA. than a size 4 (*Reveals seventh Body Collage*)

CHANTI. you are no less valuable as a 32A (*Reveals eighth body collage*)

KAYLA. than a 36C, (*Reveals ninth collage*)

CHANTI. your sexiness is defined by concentric circles within your wood;
wisdom

KAYLA. you are a goddamn tree stump with leaves sprouting out:

BOTH: reborn

(As the journey ends, and PRISCILLA is slowly lowered to the ground, the actors stand behind her in solidarity and move to sit along the upstage wall. DEBRA walks down center, carrying her label-body with her. The actors behind her recite from their positions)

1: Ed wants me to be the best that I can be.

2: Ed strives to make me beautiful and thin.

3: Ed wants me to be successful.

4: Ed knows exactly what I need to do to be the best I can be.

5: Ed tells me that my worth is skin deep.

DEBRA. Ed is not a real person, but he might as well be. Ed is my eating disorder, a person who only exists in my mind, Ed is like an abusive, judgmental friend who wants to break me down. For a long time I thought having Ed in my life made me lucky. He looked out for me and took care of me. Only a few of my other friends had Ed looking out for them too. And we knew what other people didn't; that with our own personal Ed's we would live blessed lives. But we were wrong. Ed is a strong, manipulative person. It is not your fault that he chose to attack you, and it is not your fault that he is so strong. I started to fight Ed every day with no hope at winning, until one day, I started to. Ed is strong, but I am stronger. I am worth more than the number on the scale, the size clothes I wear, or the number of bones that stick out from my skin. Ed will never beat me down again. You can fight him too.

(Debra tears her body in half. The other actors begin to move to new places in the space, they look at their collages and pick up their label bodies and tear them in half, as ROSIE brings a block down stage and speaks, the rest of the group does a movement walk around her picking up the torn pieces and placing them in the trash)

ROSIE. Over the course of my lifetime I have developed a list of physical traits that I dislike about myself. Our world is one of constant disapproval, and it has taught me so well that I could “disapprove” my body into a whole new one and still not be happy with how I look. In fact, if I were to create an image of my ideal self, it wouldn’t really look like me at all. I look around at all of my friends, and I wish that I could look like them instead. Why is it that I think I would be happy with any other body but my own? The people that surround me are stunning. I mean it, they—you are all the most beautiful people I have ever encountered, and I find myself wanting to look like you instead of me. I find myself wanting your physical radiance. And I realize that some of the things that are most beautiful about your bodies are the things that reflect your spirit, and attitude. And maybe these parts of your body that capture your essence so exquisitely are the parts that you don’t like. When I turn this all back to myself I have to consider that my physical (idiosyncrasies, imperfections, oddities), capture my nature. And since I don’t want a new personality, I have to accept my body. And I am learning to, a little more everyday.

(The actors move to new places in the room They Speak conversationally)

Adrienne: We started this project and every single day was a discussion of all of the bad- the stuff that comes with this. It got so bad that there was a time like “why I even put myself through this shit?” Why do this? Why am I still an actor?

Ian: I still want to be an actor. Like I’m willing to wade past the bullshit because I’m meant to do this.

Debra: I know and love the fact that not everyone is strong enough to do what I do, but I am. And I can prove to myself and everyone else that it is possible

Zach: I still do this because it’s the one thing that still makes me feel like nothing else can. It is still expressive and I still get the attention. It is till my art and comes with its rewards.

Rosie: Since becoming an actor and especially since coming to IWU, I think my self confidence has actually grown. It helped me embrace and celebrate my differences. I know that I am becoming the best me, and that’s all I could want.

Chanti: The hardest part of all of this was seeing how many people honestly don’t see any value in their image. WHY? We’re gorgeous. Everyone in this cast is beautiful. Everyone in this room is beautiful. When are we going to learn to listen when people tell us that?

Ebu: I love people, learning about them, studying them. Theatre is people in art and art in people.

Jenna: I am an actor because the love and passion for it is a gift from God. I love studying people. I love people. And Acting allows me to understand the different aspects of people and things different from myself. It gives me the opportunity to better understand God’s creations-people. Learning about other people and how other people work allows me to see someone outside myself and see different ways of life. I believe the challenges I face in this industry are direct challenges that I am meant to go through as a human to learn and grow.

Ian: I want to be a part of the group that changes peoples minds and ideals about stuff like this. Acting and actors can do that. We do do that.

Kayla: The industry is what is negative with portrayals, etc. nobody becomes an actor for the business side- the side that has no money and crazy hours --and pressure in addition to this. I am in it for the craft.

Prissy: Despite everything we’ve talked about, I still want to be an actress because I can’t imagine doing anything else. The art and craft of acting is what I love- the exploration of character, finding yourself in them and all that good stuff.

Debra: Without theatre I am not truly myself. I’m not truly content or truly alive.

Zach: I’m still going to want to look handsome, but I’m learning that there is not one scale that determines that. I am going to be beautiful and I’m doing it on my terms.

Rosie: I'm not even a part of my body anymore. My art transcends it.

Chanti: The feeling I get when I am onstage far surpasses the feelings I have of my poor self image.

(The actors strike a triumphant stage picture. Everyone begins to funnel off stage. However, as they do, ELIZABETH catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She evaluates herself: sucks in, fixes hair, and applies lipstick. She then moves off stage)