

STARS ON STAGE: HOW THE CASTING OF CELEBRITIES IS USED
AS A MARKETING TACTIC ON BROADWAY

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the Department of Marketing
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

May 6, 2019

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ABSTRACT

When a celebrity is cast in a Broadway production, it can be seen as a form of celebrity endorsement that draws audience members in and makes a show more profitable. Research supports the idea that consumers are likely to choose to see shows that feature celebrities over other shows, and that historically Broadway shows that have celebrities in them have had above-average rates of financial success. But beyond that, the presence of the celebrity changes the show itself, and the perception of the show in the minds of consumers. Meaning that the celebrity contributes to the show transfers to the show itself, and in this way the celebrity serves as an endorser for the show. The celebrity also serves as an endorser for the larger industry of Broadway through the connection that is created when a celebrity stars in a Broadway show. A successful celebrity casting can therefore benefit not only the show they are in, but Broadway as a whole, bringing relevance and popularity to the industry of Broadway theater.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades the casting of celebrities in Broadway musicals has become a popular practice. During any given Broadway season dozens of celebrities, from movie stars to famous singers, are cast in production openings or limited-time engagements. For example, in the 2018-2019 season, you can find John Lithgow, Jeff Daniels, Laurie Metcalf, or Bryan Cranston among the famous actors gracing the Broadway stage (New York Theatre Guide). The role of these celebrities is extremely important from a marketing perspective: they are an endorser for the show; they help generate buzz around the show and often lead to an increase in box office sales, at least for a limited time (Gainer, 2017).

Casting celebrities in Broadway can be seen as a kind of marketing tactic. While breakthrough hits like *Hamilton* and *Dear Evan Hansen* have kept box office grosses up, actual attendance at Broadway shows has declined in recent years and many shows run below 80% capacity daily (Passy, 2017). Casting celebrities from other mediums in Broadway roles is a way to draw crowds in and keep seats filled; it is a practice of synergy between marketing teams, casting directors, and celebrities themselves that ultimately has financial benefits for the show (Santana, 2009). If the Broadway theater industry continues to struggle to bring in audience members, celebrity casting may become even more prevalent than it already is. For that reason, it is important to understand how and why casting a celebrity appeals to potential audience members in order to capitalize on its benefits.

While research has examined celebrity endorsement in traditional media forms, no current research has explicitly applied celebrity endorsement theories to musical theater. This lack of literature presents an opportunity to research celebrity endorsement in a unique context, one in which the celebrity goes beyond being an endorser for a product and becomes a part of the

product itself. In this thesis, I will apply traditional celebrity endorsement models to the practice of casting celebrities on Broadway. By doing so, I hope to demonstrate how the celebrity compels potential audience members to see a show, how the celebrity becomes an integral part of the show's identity through the meaning they bring to it, and how the celebrity serves as an endorser for both the show and the larger industry of theater in the consumer's mind.

Celebrities Defined

Using celebrities as part of a marketing strategy is a common practice that brands utilize. From promoting politicians to selling products, using a person's fame and status has helped influence consumer decisions for hundreds of years (Kurzman et al., 2007). However, the concept of a celebrity acquired new significance in the age of mass media. With the development of media forms that could be widely circulated, like radio and television, celebrity culture solidified and became a tool for promotion: "Unlike earlier status groups, celebrities are a creature of capitalism: they involve the commodification of reputation" (Kurzman et al., 2007, p. 353).

What qualifies someone as a celebrity is not simple to define. The widely-accepted definition of a celebrity is "to be known for [one's] well-knownness" (Boorstin, 1962, p. 57). The value of a celebrity's well-knownness can even be quantified in the form of Q-scores, the industry standard for measuring the consumer appeal of performers (Miciak & Franklin, 1994). In terms of endorsement, a celebrity has been described as "an individual who is known to the public (actor, sport figure, entertainer, etc) for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed" (Friedman & Friedman, 1979, p. 63). Adapting that definition, "celebrities" in the context of this thesis refers to well-known performers who have received popularity from industries outside the realm of theater, such as music, TV, or movies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Celebrity and Consumer Relationship

Early research on the effect celebrities can have on consumers came from Horton and Wohl (1956). The research introduced the notion of parasocial interaction, described as an intimate one-sided relationship that develops between an audience and performers in media the audience consumes. Horton and Wohl explain that mass media forms such as television, radio, and movies give the illusion that the audience has a face-to-face relationship with the performer. In other words, we think of celebrities we see in the media as having a personal relationship with us. Horton and Wohl's theory is important because it demonstrates how consumers can be influenced by celebrities they see in the media, without actually knowing the celebrity. Celebrities can act as endorsers and influence consumer behavior because people see themselves as having a personal relationship with the celebrity; the celebrity is like a peer we know intimately, and therefore trust (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Consumers not only trust the celebrity, but actively desire to see more of them. Further research exploring parasocial interaction has shown that consumers seek out parasocial relationships when choosing entertainment. Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn (1980) examined the link between gratifications sought and obtained when people select media content. The researchers' conclusion was that obtaining the two gratifications of entertainment and parasocial interaction is strongly related when individuals select media content. Specifically, the research found that people choose TV news programming based on the perceived relationship they felt with the newscaster: the stronger the perceived connection, the more likely respondents were to watch said programming consistently and choose it over other news programs. In other words, TV users seek parasocial interaction to satisfy their entertainment needs. Palmgreen, Wenner,

and Rayburn's findings can be, and have been, applied in a broader sense to other media and entertainment forms. (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

To illustrate this idea, let us use the example of celebrity and TV personality John O'Hurley being cast in the Tony-winning Broadway revival of *Chicago* (Lefkowitz, 2018). Fans of O'Hurley might know him from his role of J. Peterman on the hit show *Seinfeld*, or from his years hosting *Family Feud* and the annual Purina National Dog Show, among other roles (NBC). It's logical to assume that people who have regularly seen O'Hurley perform on TV might develop a parasocial relationship with him; they trust him and feel like they know him personally.

The research mentioned on parasocial interaction supports the first research proposition:

P1: Casting a celebrity in a Broadway show makes potential audience members more interested in seeing it.

The Role of Celebrity Attractiveness

Research has shown that a parasocial relationship experience is more intense when viewers perceive a TV performer to be attractive, and when a TV performer addresses viewers on a bodily and verbal level (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). O'Hurley can be considered a handsome man; tabloid news giant TMZ posted an article where they described him as a "sexy silver fox" and "Doggone handsome" (TMZ.com). He was also named one of People magazine's Sexiest Men Alive in 2005 (NBC). Additionally, as host of both *Family Feud* and the National Dog Show, O'Hurley directly addresses viewers at home in his commentary, acting as himself rather than a character role. This leads to the conclusion that viewers who have seen O'Hurley on

TV have developed a strong parasocial relationship with him, which leads to a greater enjoyment of content that O’Hurley is a part of (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

The Draw of Celebrity when Choosing Entertainment

When O’Hurley is cast in a Broadway show like *Chicago*, it makes people who have developed a parasocial relationship with him more interested in seeing the show because they have enjoyed seeing John O’Hurley in the past and desire more entertainment experiences that he is a part of. If we apply the work of Palmgreen, Webber, and Rayburn (1980) to the selecting of a theater experience on Broadway, we’ll see that potential audience members who recognize O’Hurley would choose to see a show with him in it over a show with a lesser-known actor as the lead. A theatergoer who has a perceived connection with an actor in a Broadway show will be more likely to choose the show with the actor over other shows.

More modern research on celebrity’s power over consumers supports the idea that consumers are drawn to products that celebrities endorse over competing products. Hamish Pringle has written extensively on celebrities’ ability to influence consumer behavior and purchase decisions. Pringle (2004) states that “Celebrity endorsement acts as a signpost to quality and can significantly enhance the reputation of a brand. In using products which have a celebrity association, consumers get a little bit extra in terms of imagery, aspiration and entertainment and this is often enough to tip the balance in favor of one brand instead of its competitors” (p. xxii). Pringle’s sentiment supports the idea that the presence of a celebrity in a show is a huge draw for consumers. Celebrities cast in Broadway are a kind of endorser for the show. The show is a product, and they publicly support it. The celebrity demonstrates their endorsement of the product in this case not by using it, but by actually being a part of it. The product, or the show in this case, has a tangible association with the celebrity when the celebrity

is acting in it. This association is powerful enough to sway consumers, potentially leading them to see a production with a celebrity cast in it over other productions when choosing entertainment on Broadway.

Furthermore, it can be argued that a potential audience member will be willing to pay more to see a show with a celebrity cast in it. In 2014 students at Ithaca College conducted a survey to determine whether theatergoers' willingness to see a show is affected by the casting of a celebrity in the show. They found that 40% of surveyed theatergoers would be more likely to see a show if it featured a celebrity, and 30% would be willing to pay more to see said show, meaning that casting a celebrity can be used not only to increase the amount of potential ticket buyers, but also to raise the price of individual tickets. (Fedor & Maciolek, 2014) The survey results speak volumes to the marketing appeal of casting celebrities in a show. While the survey did not take into account the individual parasocial connection that respondents might have with a celebrity in a show, it is reasonable to assume that if the strength of the parasocial relationship positively corresponds to the theatergoer's desire to see a show with a celebrity in it, so too does the theatergoer's willingness to pay more to see the show. In the example with John O'Hurley, this would mean that a fan of O'Hurley's would be willing to pay more for tickets to *Chicago* during the time when O'Hurley is acting in it than they would be willing to pay if he was not in the show.

Supporting this idea, producers have found that for many celebrity engagements on Broadway they can get away with charging higher prices since the demand to see celebrities perform is strong. Many theatergoers are extremely price insensitive when it comes to seeing celebrities performing in Broadway shows, especially if there's only a short window (Thompson, 2012). When celebrities star in Broadway shows for a limited time, it creates scarcity and an

intensified interest in the show, which makes audiences less price sensitive. Theatergoers are willing to pay hundreds of dollars for a single ticket, which goes above and beyond the price necessary to recoup production costs and the celebrities paycheck (Thompson, 2012).

Consumers could be drawn to seeing a celebrity perform in a Broadway show and willing to pay more for it not just because of a parasocial relationship, but because consumers perceive the celebrity as adding premium value to the show. In his book *Celebrity Capital: Assessing the Value of Fame*, Dr. Barrie Gunter hypothesizes that another reason society is infatuated with and influenced by celebrities is that celebrities have an intrinsic value, or capital, that we associate with them (Gunter, 2014) Celebrity value can be broken into different terms: consumer capital, corporate capital, political capital, social capital, and psychological capital. When a celebrity is cast in a show on Broadway, consumer capital, psychological capital, and corporate capital are involved. Consumer capital deals with how much the celebrity appeals to consumers and can generate publicity, and psychological capital is concerned with the emotional attachment people have towards a celebrity. These types of celebrity capital influence the celebrity's relationship with potential audience members, and go hand in hand with the notion of parasocial relationships. When consumers have a strong parasocial relationship with a celebrity, it implies that the celebrity has intrinsic value in the form of consumer and psychological capital. Corporate capital deals with a celebrity's ability to earn money for brands through their association with a brand. A celebrity with high amounts of consumer and psychological capital will attract audience members to a show, and high amounts of corporate capital affects the show's ability to charge higher ticket prices.

The Celebrity's Influence on Perception

The research and articles mentioned demonstrate how casting a celebrity in a Broadway show increases an audience's interest in the show and increases how much they are willing to pay to see it. However, this is not the only reason that casting celebrities in shows is a valuable marketing tactic. Besides being a draw for the audience to see the show, the celebrity also acts as an endorser for the show, as I have already explained. As an endorser for the show, and an integral part of it, the celebrity influences the perception of the show itself.

Well-established celebrity endorsement models support the idea that a celebrity cast in a show acts as an endorser, and contributes to the perception of the show. McCracken (1989) proposed the idea that celebrities' effectiveness as endorsers stems from the cultural meanings with which they are endowed. According to McCracken, "The endorsement process depends upon the symbolic properties of the celebrity endorser" (p. 310). Meaning passes from celebrity to product and from product to consumer, and advertising serves as an instrument of this meaning transfer.

McCracken writes that meaning that begins with the "dramatic roles" of the celebrity, such as the previous roles they have played in their TV, movie, political, or athletic careers (McCracken 1989, p. 314). The meaning of the previous roles becomes the meaning of the celebrity themselves; what they have done in the past shapes the meaning associated with them today. When the celebrity becomes linked with a product through endorsement, some of the meanings of the celebrity become meanings of the product. McCracken illustrates this meaning transfer process as a three-state model: starting with the context of the celebrity in previous roles to the celebrity himself, to the product the celebrity is endorsing, and ultimately to the consumer during the consumption of the product.

McCracken's model of celebrity endorsement sets the foundation for my second research proposition:

P2: The celebrity gives new meaning to a Broadway show by being a part of it.

To illustrate this hypothesis, first I must demonstrate how McCracken's celebrity endorsement model can be applied to celebrities acting as endorsers of the show they are cast in. A celebrity has a certain cultural meaning associated with them from the previous entertainment roles they have been a part of. When they are cast in a Broadway show, the celebrity's meaning becomes part of the performance they give and the show itself, adding an extra layer of meaning to the show. The show becomes endowed and associated with the meaning the celebrity brings, making it new and different than it would be without the celebrity.

Dr. Barrie Gunter (2014) supports the idea that the meaning the celebrity is associated with transfers to the brand or product the celebrity is associated with: "Celebrities have been found to have value as commodity endorsers. Marketers recruit celebrities onto advertising campaigns in the hope that any positive sentiments consumers hold about a celebrity will transfer across to advertised brands" (p. xiii). When it comes to celebrities on Broadway, casting directors cast celebrities like a marketer would recruit a celebrity to be a part of an ad campaign. Casting directors want the meaning of the celebrity and the positive sentiments consumers hold about them to transfer to the production itself.

Transferring meaning from the celebrity to the show they are cast in is applicable to Gunter's idea of celebrity capital, as well. Gunter writes that if a celebrity has established an intrinsic value through their work or public exposure, this gives them different forms of

“capital”, which can be spread elsewhere (Gunter, 2014). This capital, as discussed earlier, comes into play when celebrities are cast on Broadway.

Celebrity and the Identity of a Show

Long-running shows that utilize celebrity casting often, like *Chicago*, become reliant on the meaning the celebrity brings to the show in order to keep it relevant and in vogue. According to an article from Playbill, *Chicago* has "become something of a revolving door for celebrities itching to make their Broadway debut" (Tran, 2017). Celebrities that audition for the show are encouraged to bring their own personalities and musical stylings into the role, says the article, making the show different with each casting choice. Duncan Stewart, one of the casting directors for *Chicago*, said “I think it's actually the star casting, in a way, that's kept this show so damn fresh” (Tran, 2017). Stewart’s quote supports the idea that celebrities that join the cast bring something new to the show that makes people want to come back; it's a way of keeping *Chicago* running and popular. Without the celebrity casting, in fact, shows like *Chicago* might not even survive. The other main casting director for *Chicago*, Benton Whitley, said in the same Playbill article, “If we duplicated the same show we did in 1996, I think the show would have closed a long time ago” (Tran, 2017). The meaning celebrity castings give to shows is so impactful that it can not only add to a show, but even keep a thirty-year-old show like *Chicago* open and successful.

Chicago is not the only show that has become reliant on celebrity casting, it a phenomenon that is demonstrated often when shows that had celebrity cast members close soon after the celebrity leaves (Healy, 2010). Sometimes the identity of a show is so closely tied to the celebrity in it that when the celebrity is removed, the show itself loses a crucial part of its meaning that the celebrity gave it. An example of this is the show *Promises, Promises*, which

was part of the 2009-2010 Broadway season and featured celebrity cast members Kristin Chenoweth and Sean Hayes. When Chenoweth and Hayes were starring in it the show grossed over \$1 million a week, but their departure forced the show to close (Healy, 2010). “The producers built the \$9 million revival of *Promises* as a vehicle for Mr. Hayes and Ms. Chenoweth”, an article from the New York Times explained. “So much so, they now contend, that the actors have become irreplaceable” (Healy, 2010). The article goes on to say that it’s difficult to recast roles that grow to be heavily identified with widely recognized actors. The closing of a show after a celebrity leaves occurs often: it happened again in the 2009-2010 Broadway season with Denzel Washington in *Fences*, and more recently with Josh Groban in *Natasha, Pierre and The Great Comet of 1812* during the 2016-2017 Broadway season (Gainer 2017; Healy 2010)¹. The celebrity is crucial to the show they are in because of the meaning the celebrity brings to the role. When you take away that celebrity, you take away the added meaning, and shows such as *Promises, Promises* that were banking on that meaning suffer as a result.

While one could argue that anyone cast in a Broadway show brings their own unique meaning to the role, the meaning associated with celebrities is more powerful and impactful. This is because celebrities, particularly actors, are often typecast in the roles they play, they maintain continuities across their most popular and commercially successful roles (Crippen, 2014). In the same paper in which he explains his celebrity endorsement model, McCracken (1989) also discusses how typecasting is essential to celebrity endorsement by referencing the movie industry:

¹ It should be noted that Groban leaving was not the only reason *The Great Comet* closed; there was a lot of controversy surrounding the recasting of his role (Blair, 2017).

The North American movie demands the participation of actors charged with meanings; it needs actors to bring their own meanings with them to a part... One of the troubles with unknown actors and actresses is that they are unable to carry meaning into the role they are asked to play... It is precisely this type-casting that makes celebrities so useful to the endorsement process. It is the accumulated meanings of celebrities that make them so potent a source of significance. (p. 316)

This conclusion from McCracken can carry over to the idea of casting celebrities in musicals: compared to an unknown actor or actress, a celebrity can be more powerful in a role because they bring with them an accumulation of previous meanings. These meanings, in turn, become associated with the show.

The idea that casting celebrities in a Broadway show makes audience members more interested in seeing the show and the idea that celebrities bring their own meaning to the show go hand in hand. The dissertation of Kevin Calcamp from Bowling Green State University examines the perception of a celebrity by audience members, and how that perception is influenced by preconceived notions and previous associations with the celebrity (Calcamp, 2016). One of Calcamp's main points is that celebrities cast in Broadway shows act as endorsers, but the relationship becomes more appealing to audience members because celebrities are not simply promoting the show, they are actively a part of it: "Because these stars perform in the productions, they provide something more than just an endorsement; they provide an opportunity for consumers to purchase a once-in-a-lifetime experience. As such, one distinct advantage of casting a Hollywood star in a production is exclusivity" (p. 30). The presence of a celebrity in a show serves as an endorsement of the show from that celebrity to potential audience members, and it creates a unique opportunity for the audience to experience the celebrity in person, further

encouraging the sale of tickets. Calcamp's writings support the idea that it is the endorsement of the show by the celebrity, and the unique meaning that the celebrity gives the show by being a part of it, that makes audience members want to see a show more.

Finding Fit between Celebrity and Show

Because of this somewhat symbiotic relationship between a celebrity and the show they are cast in, extra care must be taken from a marketing perspective to ensure the right celebrity is put in the right show; the celebrity's existing "brand" plays a key role in finding fit:

The marketing of a production on Broadway and Off-Broadway with a star cast in a leading role must consider that the star is already an established brand, with pre-existing values, assets, and liabilities that can be either marketed in a way to capitalize on the star's brand or in opposition to it. The duality of this marketing allows the production to showcase the star and allows the star to be showcased. Either way, the marketing must represent a complimentary image for both star and production (Calcamp, 2017, p. 32).

This idea supports what McCracken had written on celebrity endorsers: the celebrity brings their own meaning to the product, or in this case, the production (McCracken, 1989). The meaning the celebrity brings must benefit the production, or complement it in some way, to be a successful match. The selection of the celebrity that is cast needs to be thoughtful, and marketing surrounding the show should take advantage of complimentary connections between the celebrity and the show.

The same is true for any celebrity endorsement process; as McCracken writes: "Ideally, the choice of particular celebrities is based on the meanings they epitomize... an advertising campaign must then identify and deliver these meanings to the product" (p. 316).

Barrie Gunter's writings (2014) reiterate the importance of casting a celebrity that is complimentary and relevant to the show: "If a celebrity is perceived by consumers to have a background or character that makes them relevant to a particular product or service, this will enhance their effectiveness [as an endorser]" (p. 89). A celebrity cast in a Broadway production becomes a more effective endorser of the show when they are relevant to the show in some way. This can be achieved by playing a character similar to previous roles the celebrity has played, which as referenced earlier, often occurs due to the prevalence of typecasting. As McCracken talked about when discussing typecasting in Hollywood, the meaning associated with celebrities is more powerful and impactful when they are playing a role similar to those they have played before. Not only is their associated meaning more powerful when they are typecast in Broadway shows, but according to Gunter, they should also be more effective endorsers.

Casting the right celebrity in a Broadway role goes beyond their popularity, or even their talent. Critics have condemned the practice of casting celebrities on Broadway repeatedly, saying that shows become reliant on the celebrity's presence and that the celebrity is often less talented and worthy than lesser-known actors (Gainer, 2016; Soloski, 2016). But from a marketing perspective, casting a celebrity, and knowing they will be an endorser for the show, is about fit for the show's brand. Pringle states, "The choice of a celebrity identified as being best for it is one of the most important decisions that will ever be taken for the brand" (p. 77). The brand, or the show, will become linked in the minds of consumers with the celebrity when the celebrity is cast in it. The casting is just as important a decision for the marketing of the show as it is for the quality of the show itself.

Celebrity Casting and the Larger Industry of Broadway

As I have previously established, the celebrities that are cast on Broadway become an essential part of the show's brand, altering the show itself and often increasing audience members' motivation to see the show. However, celebrities cast in shows still serve as traditional celebrity endorsers in the sense that their presence expresses an approval for the show, and a definitive link between the show and the celebrity. While it is clear that the celebrity acts as an endorser of the show they are cast in, it is also my belief that the endorsement process extends to another "product": the theater industry as a whole.

P3: The celebrity cast in a show acts as an endorser for not just the show itself, but the entire industry of Broadway theater.

McCracken's model of celebrity endorsement can be applied to this idea, as well. Instead of an individual show being the product the celebrity is endorsing, in this case, it is the larger enterprise of Broadway theater. The meaning sought to be applied to the product by the celebrity endorsing it is popularity, relevance, recognition, and the like. If a well-known star is acting in a Broadway show, it brings relevance to an industry that is not always at the forefront of consumers' minds. A celebrity in a show brings a mainstream quality to live theater, which has been declining in popularity and attendance for years (A. Cohen, 2018; P. Cohen, 2013).

Even the biggest hits of Broadway cannot be compared to the popularity of other entertainment mediums. As Lin Manuel Miranda, creator and star of the groundbreaking Broadway musical *Hamilton*, said when he hosted SNL: "I'm fresh off a long run performing in my musical *Hamilton*, which fortunately is one of the biggest hits ever on Broadway, so that means most of you at home have no idea who I am." (Miranda, 2016) Miranda's quote aptly illustrates that the majority of Americans pay little attention to Broadway theater. While some on-stage performers like Miranda can become mainstream through their major successes, in most

cases, it is easier for casting directors on Broadway to bring a mainstream quality to their show by casting an already well-known celebrity. American culture's obsession with celebrities provides a link between them and the theater industry when they are cast in a Broadway production (Garrison, 2017).

A celebrity's popularity and influence extend not only to the show itself but to the theater industry as a whole because all parties have a symbiotic relationship with one another. Success of the celebrity in the role they are performing in means success for the show, and success for the show means success for the industry of Broadway. When casting directors use the popularity and influence of a celebrity to create an association between the celebrity and the show (through the transfer of meaning that was previously discussed) both the show and the industry can reap the benefits of a successful star casting.

Barrie Gunter's book on celebrity capital discusses the phenomenon of a celebrity's success in a role leading to success for a larger industry within Hollywood: "Celebrities can produce genuine financial yields for companies via direct and indirect corporate links. Hollywood stars can add box office value to films and this in turn can contribute to the profitability of companies that produce them" (Gunter, 2014, p. 135). Applying Gunter's writings to Broadway, we can argue that celebrities have a link with the larger Broadway industry when they appear in a Broadway show. They add box office value to the productions they are in, which contributes to the profitability of the entities that produced the show, which in turn makes the theater industry as a whole more profitable. This domino effect of profitability demonstrates a clear connection between the celebrity and the theater industry. The connection not only makes the Broadway industry more profitable, but also more popular in the minds of consumers through the same kind of chain reaction. If an audience member has a favorable

opinion of a Broadway show with a celebrity in it, the favorable opinion will also transfer to the theater industry as a whole due to the connection between the celebrity and the Broadway industry that was established when the celebrity acted in the Broadway show. It is a transfer of meaning, like McCracken's model, that eventually leads the consumer to have a more positive perception of the theater industry via the influence of the celebrity.

Calcamp (2016) hypothesizes the association created when a celebrity appears in a Broadway production is not that of an endorser and a product, but rather of a product with another product. He writes that casting a celebrity does more than simply help promote a show and sell tickets, it also creates an association in the minds of the audience between the three entities the celebrity, the show, and musical theater as whole:

At first glance it simply appears that the star has been cast to generate buzz and help sell tickets for the Broadway show. However, closer observation reveals that three products are inextricably linked together through a single event: the show being produced, the star actor, and the larger enterprise of Broadway theatre (p. 31).

Though Calcamp describes the relationship differently, his idea still supports the notion that a celebrity on Broadway connects the audience with the Broadway industry as a whole. This, in turn, supports the uniqueness of celebrity casting in theater productions: it is more than just finding a popular actor to fill a role and generate ticket sales, it is about using the influence of the celebrity to create a positive association between the celebrity and the show, so both the show and the industry can reap the benefits of a successful star casting.

Expanding the Consumer Base with Celebrity

When a celebrity acts on Broadway it serves as a doorway for those who might not normally be interested in theater to experience it. Having a well-known celebrity in a show draws a more diverse crowd to the theater, thereby creating a wider appeal for the art of theater in general. Theater director Catherine Rodgers writes, “As passersby see a recognizable actor or actress' name lit up on a theater's marquee, their name alone can become a selling point regardless of the play or role” (Rodgers, 2012). The presence of the celebrity draws in consumers who might have little interest in the production itself, but once the consumer experiences the production, they might discover a newfound love for theater. The celebrity is an endorser for the product, or the show, and the enjoyment of the product leads the consumer to try other products in the same category.

Even critics of the practice of celebrity casting on Broadway concede the benefits that come with appealing to a larger audience. In an article condemning casting celebrities for their name versus real talent, theater critic Alexis Soloski acknowledges that “Certainly, it brings people in who otherwise might not attend and gives Broadway a welcome shot of the glamour it can sometimes lack, making the lights of the Great White Way glow more brightly.” (Soloski, 2016) This supports both the idea that celebrity casting exposes a more diverse audience to theater, and the idea that celebrities make the Broadway industry more relevant and fashionable.

Celebrity Casting and Securing Profit

In today's industry, only one in five musicals make a profit (Rodgers, 2016). Broadway producers want to draw in the largest crowds possible to make sure that musicals are financially successful. As stated before, having a celebrity cast in a Broadway show makes audience members more interested in seeing the show, and it makes the show and industry itself more

relevant. Therefore, the casting of a celebrity can be seen as a tactic to increase a show's financial promise.

A thesis from Douglas Santana of San Jose State University entitled "The box office effects of casting celebrities on Broadway" looks into the use of celebrities on Broadway from a financial perspective (Santana, 2009). The thesis uses twelve case studies of Broadway shows to depict how celebrities are used to extend a production's longevity and bolster financial success. The author begins by discussing the history of casting celebrities from other mediums in Broadway shows in the modern day, which began with David Bowie being cast in the Elephant Man in 1980. He then goes into some detail on how the practice has evolved to become mainstream and has contributed to the commercialization of Broadway (commercialization referring to the emphasis on making a profit as the primary goal of the enterprise). While Santana's work is somewhat dated as it was published in 2009, his thesis demonstrates some insights that have likely held true over the last ten years. First of all, he recognizes that the new trend of hiring performers for financial gain rather than talent is a business move more than anything. As Santana writes:

The upside at the box office and the ability to use the celebrity's name in advertising and on merchandise is too appealing for some producers to resist.... major Broadway producers are focused on creating commercial theater that will appeal to the largest cross section of potential Broadway audiences (p. 10)

Santana demonstrates that from a business perspective, the casting of celebrities in musical theater is a wise move to attract wider audiences and generate higher ticket sales.

Furthermore, Santana concluded from evidence provided by the case studies that casting celebrities in Broadway musicals is financially beneficial for producers and has a positive overall effect on the longevity of the production. Santana analyzed box office records and financial data from twelve diverse shows that utilized celebrity casting, and found that, among other things, eleven of these shows turned a profit. As mentioned previously, across the industry only about one in five Broadway musicals recoup their investment. With that in mind, Santana's research demonstrates that musicals that cast celebrities are far more likely to be financially successful than those that do not.

Santana's thesis is supported by quotes from professional Broadway producers that have seen firsthand that stars boost sales. During the recent Great Recession, attendance at Broadway shows was down 7.6% (Nichols, 2009). Casting celebrities was seen as imperative for financial success and stability of a show. *Dreamgirls* producer John Breglio told Reuters at the time, "It is absolutely essential now to have a major star, a major star, to put on a play... You know with stars in it you are guaranteed to at least get your money back" (Nichols, 2009). Fellow Broadway producer Fred Zollo echoed this sentiment when he discussed the decision to cast major celebrities Hugh Jackman and Daniel Craig in his Broadway show *A Steady Rain*: "The idea of obviously raising excitement because of their star power or selling lots of tickets is terrific and obviously all of us were happy to do that in these tough economic times" (Nichols, 2009). Clearly, producers are aware of the positive financial effect casting celebrities can have on their shows. Though worries about financial success might have been higher during the economic recession when the producers were interviewed, the risk of a Broadway show not being profitable is still high. The enormous cost of producing a show, about \$16 million for some musicals, combined with the low success rate of shows means that many investors on Broadway

will not recoup their investments (Rogers, 2016). Tactics like drawing in audience members with a celebrity casting can help make profitability a little more likely.

The power of celebrities to make a show more profitable goes hand in hand with parasocial interaction theory, relating back to my first research proposition. Tony-award winning Broadway producer Irene Gandy has said in reference to celebrity casting:

I would say that we go after names to get people in the seats and help the box office...

Theater has changed, and audiences like to go see people that they've never seen live before and that they are familiar with (Daniels 2012).

Audiences feel familiar with a celebrity by seeing them on TV, in movies, or other mediums. They form a parasocial relationship with these celebrities that makes them want to see more of the celebrity, and as previously discussed, makes them willing to pay more. Producers like Gandy might not be fully aware of the psychology behind this phenomenon, but they see the proof of it in their show's box office results.

Celebrities making a show more profitable also relates to Gunter's writings on celebrity capital, especially corporate capital. Celebrities on Broadway demonstrate their corporate capital through their ability to make money for the shows they are associated with, and by extension, make money for the larger enterprise of Broadway. This connection, as discussed earlier, links together the celebrity, the show, and the theater industry as a whole, showing that casting a celebrity on Broadway goes beyond simply filling a role.

CONCLUSION

The practice of casting celebrities from mediums outside of theater in Broadway productions has become commonplace in recent years. The relationship between the celebrity and the show is a unique form of celebrity endorsement, but there is little academic writing analyzing this relationship. For many shows, casting a celebrity is the only way to create appeal and make the show succeed financially. To capitalize on the celebrity's presence, and to ensure a successful fit between the celebrity and show, it is important to understand how and why casting a celebrity appeals to potential audience members.

Casting celebrities in a Broadway show makes potential audience members more interested in seeing it. We can see this by studying the celebrity and consumer relationship, especially the notion of parasocial relationships. Research has shown that consumers seek out parasocial relationships when choosing entertainment. Additionally, consumers are drawn to products celebrities endorse over competing products, and consumers perceive celebrities as adding premium value to the products they're associated with. For these reasons, it can be argued that an association between a celebrity and a show can lead consumers to see a production with a celebrity cast in it over other productions when choosing entertainment on Broadway.

Additionally, the celebrity brings new meaning to a Broadway show by being a part of it. This conclusion is rooted in McCracken's model of celebrity endorsement, in which meaning transfers from celebrity, to product, to consumer. Applying this model to celebrities cast on Broadway, we see that the celebrity has a certain cultural meaning associated with them from the previous entertainment roles they have been a part of. When they are cast in the show, or the product in this case, the show becomes endowed and associated with the meaning the celebrity brings, making it new and different than it would be without the celebrity. However, this can

sometimes lead to a dependency on the presence of the celebrity, and oftentimes shows are forced to close when the celebrity leaves.

Finally, the celebrity cast in a show acts as an endorser for not just the show itself, but the entire industry of Broadway theater. A celebrity's popularity and influence extend not only to the show itself but to the theater industry as a whole because all parties have a direct relationship with one another: success of the celebrity in the role they are cast in means success for the show, and success for the show means success for the larger industry of theater. Furthermore, celebrity casting has the potential to expand the consumer base for Broadway theater. Having a well-known celebrity in a show draws in fans of the celebrity and a more diverse crowd, thereby creating a wider appeal for the art of theater in general. Celebrity casting has a positive effect on both the popularity of Broadway theater and an individual show's financial success.

The conclusions of this thesis expand on marketing theory by demonstrating a unique form of celebrity endorsement and its real-world implications. Though the relationship between celebrity and show follows traditional celebrity endorsement models in many ways, it also differs. For example, the way the celebrity expresses endorsement of the product, or the show, is more intimate. The celebrity transfers meaning to the product in this case not through an advertising campaign, but by becoming a part of the product. There are few other examples outside the realm of theater and entertainment in which the celebrity can become entwined with a product in this way.

Applying celebrity endorsement models to Broadway theater expands the notion of what can be thought of as a product, as well. Previous celebrity endorsement research focuses on physical products, like consumer goods. A live production is not a product in a traditional sense, but marketing practices from other kinds of products can still be applied and taken advantage of.

The implications of this thesis are important for Broadway producers, casting directors, and marketers. Predicting, or at least taking into consideration, how a celebrity can effect consumers' perceptions of a show is important to producers and casting directors when deciding to cast a celebrity. A celebrity with a negative reputation can do damage to the show and endow it with meaning that was not intended. But if a celebrity is well-suited to the role they are cast in, a complimentary connection can be formed in consumer's minds that benefits both the celebrity and the show. From both a casting and marketing perspective, the celebrity must be the right fit for a show. If a celebrity is well placed, they become a more powerful endorser for the show. The marketing surrounding the show should take advantage of complimentary connections between the celebrity and the show to further entice consumers to see the show.

Producers also must consider the financial pros and cons of a celebrity casting. The financial benefits of casting a celebrity are clear: celebrity casting makes consumers who are fans more eager to see the show, and willing to pay more. Additionally, higher interest in a show coupled with a larger consumer base leads to a better chance of financial success. But on the other hand, the show can become so reliant on the presence of the celebrity that it will be unable to survive without it.

Casting celebrities in a show can be seen as a business decision as much as an artistic one. While, as critics mention, the celebrity might not be the most appropriate or talented choice, the celebrity brings increased demand and financial stability. For this reason, the practice of casting celebrities on Broadway is likely to continue in the future.

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