

# SKINTIGHT

BEAUTY  
ISN'T  
EVERYTHING.  
SO WHY  
IS IT THE  
ONLY  
THING?

**ROUNDAABOUT  
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**UPSTAGE GUIDE**

A publication of  
**EDUCATION AT  
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# UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



## SKINTIGHT

By Joshua Harmon

Directed by Daniel Aukin

Roundabout reunites writer Joshua Harmon and director Daniel Aukin (the team behind *Bad Jews* and *Admissions*) for *Skintight*, a scorching examination of beauty, youth and sex. Reeling from her ex-husband's engagement to a much younger woman, Jodi Isaac (Idina Menzel) turns to her famous fashion-designer dad for support. Instead, she finds him wrapped up in his West Village townhouse with Trey. Who's 20. And not necessarily gay. But probably an adult film star. At least, according to Jodi's son. Who's also 20. And definitely gay. *Skintight* assays the nature of love, the power of attraction, and the ways in which a superficial culture persists in teaching its children that all that matters is what's on the inside.

## A NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES

As the Isaacs battle over definitions of partnership and devotion with the nucleus of their family hanging in the balance, they each come face to face with their deepest-held beliefs about decency, age, and desire. Joshua Harmon, with a relentless, biting humor and a microscope trained on the intimate machinations of familial power play, tackles our culture's fixation on youth, bias against the aging, and obsession with all things "hot." As is the case with all of Josh's plays, nothing escapes his crosshairs, and no preconception emerges unscathed.

### WHEN

2014

### WHERE

A West Village townhouse on Horatio Street

### WHO

**Jodi Isaac**, mid-40s

**Elliot Isaac**, (almost) 70, Jodi's father

**Benjamin Cullen**, 20, Jodi's son

**Trey**, 20, Elliot's partner

**Orsolya**, a female housekeeper, 50s/60s

**Jeff**, a male houseboy, 40s/50s



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# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DANIEL AUKIN

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Director Daniel Aukin about his work on *Skintight*.

**Ted Sod:** This is the third time you and Joshua Harmon are collaborating on a new play. What do you think makes a successful playwright/director collaboration that's ongoing?

**Daniel Aukin:** If it were easy to define, then we would all be following the recipe. I think there's an element of "who knows?" to it—it's mysterious. I've had multiple play collaborations with playwrights, and when I've had those experiences, like the one with Josh, I try to approach each collaboration as if it's the first time and not take for granted the previous collaborations. I just try to come to it as fresh-faced as possible. I think it's a better question to ask of the playwright than it is of the director since Josh picked me.

**TS:** What I'm curious about is if there is a shorthand that comes after multiple collaborations?

**DA:** Sure. Over time, as you become accustomed to the rhythms and vulnerabilities of both parties, there's a lot of checking in. When does one or another of us need space? There comes a time in the rehearsal process, especially on new plays, where I feel like it would be better for the production if the playwright is not at every rehearsal. That can be a sensitive conversation to have—negotiating that, giving and taking, what a new play needs at any moment. A director wants to be completely respectful of the playwright's authorship and ownership of the text, but you also want the actors to feel like they own the performance they're giving. How one gets there can sometimes involve the playwright letting go for a period. It allows the actors to go their own way and make their own mistakes and discoveries. I think for *Bad Jews*, Josh was in the rehearsal room 90%-95% of the time. And on *Admissions* he was there probably 85%-90% of the time. I'm not talking about a lot of time away, but sometimes there are moments where I feel like it is better for the actors if there isn't somebody who they imagine has the answer to everything—whether they actually do or not—in the room.

**TS:** Can you talk about your immediate response to reading this script? How did the writing in *Skintight* resonate for you personally when you first read the play?

**DA:** In the case of both *Admissions* and *Skintight*, the draft I first read was in a very early stage of development. And even then, there is this tremendous aliveness to Josh's writing. He has a way of using this medium of the dramatic play to work out things for himself. I feel like there is an urgency to what he's trying to interrogate that is very personal. And it's not an academic exercise. That's been true of all of Josh's writing that I've been exposed to. That sense of urgency and passion is always coming across. That, in a way, is for me a more vital aspect than to be able to come away from reading a piece of writing and saying, "I know what this means and I know how he's exploring it." When I read Josh's writing, I have a feeling of being present with an artist wrestling with complicated and multi-faceted questions.

**TS:** In *Skintight* the world of fashion and alpha gays figures prominently in the storytelling and how that world comes into collision with family values and aging. How did you prepare to direct this play? Did you have to do research?

**DA:** I think one of the things that Josh is interrogating is the culture's fixation and obsession with physical beauty and youth. And I also



think, quite separate from that, it is a play that is about an emotional, familial battlefield. My focus is on these characters as people more than anything. I have done a lot of research about things to do with fashion and aging and with our culture's obsession on youth. But, to some degree, because the writing is what it is, the play takes care of that. It's my job to focus on character behavior that feels endemic and plausible and dynamic and true.

**TS:** Will you talk about what traits you need from the actors cast in *Skintight*?

**DA:** It's really hard to talk about that. You know it when you see it. Very often, the person you cast is actually doing something that you didn't know you needed. It's like "Oh, that's actually something I hadn't even considered." I get excited about an actor bringing in a dimension that I hadn't imagined. I go in with some kind of a blueprint, but the process of casting can be one of discovery, too. What would it mean to have this actor against this other actor? Imagining the pairings, imagining the ensemble. The difference in rhythms, the difference in energies. What do the actors bring to the stage when they are doing nothing? We all have certain energies that we give off even when we think we're doing nothing. Casting isn't like putting a target on a wall and trying to hit that target. It's putting a target on the wall and discovering that the target was misshapen and it wants to go in a different direction that you hadn't anticipated. Very often with casting, the goal posts keep moving as your understanding evolves.

**TS:** How does rewriting come about for you and the playwright on a new work? I imagine you might have to be very delicate about approaching a playwright with any suggestions you may have?

**DA:** Yes, it's very delicate, and the variables change as the process progresses. A lot depends on where you are. It can take some time before newly rewritten material becomes second nature. It's easier to execute changes to the text earlier in the rehearsal period. Then with a writer who rewrites through previews up until the very last minute—which Joshua can be—one has to understand the consequence of making changes one feels 50/50 about. One can be freer with auditioning changes early on in the process, but as you get deeper in, the cost/benefit risk of a new piece of material and the time it takes to become fully integrated becomes a factor.

**TS:** And the preview audience I would imagine gives both the writer and the director ideas.

**DA:** True. There's some things you might feel 50/50 about changing and one of us will say, "Let's wait to see what happens in previews. Just because we feel ambivalent about a section of material, we may be dead wrong. So, let's not fix something if we don't know for sure."

**TS:** What do you think motivates Jodi and Elliot—is this some parent-child relationship that got stuck in the child's adolescence? What is going on there for you?

**DA:** I do have strong feelings about some of these things. But I also think that it's important not to say that there's a single reading of it. There are entrenched, complicated behaviors going back to Jodi's childhood and her relationship with her father that are unresolved. I guess I think it will be an open question for some audience members, the degree to which they may judge or feel that Elliot is somebody who didn't need to have children. How important is having children and grandchildren in his life? To what degree are they an integrated part of who he is? To what degree are they a burden or a distraction?

**TS:** Do you feel like Jodi might be making the same mistakes with her son, Benjamin, that her father made with her?

**DA:** I don't think they're the same mistakes. That's my gut. I think there's a lot to unpack between the two of them, but it doesn't feel like it is the same complicated relationship that she has with her father—so, no, I don't think of it as replication. But, as I say this I haven't yet begun rehearsals, so...who knows?

**TS:** I'm curious what you think is going on between Elliot and Trey—is their relationship purely transactional?

**DA:** I think one of the things that is so deft about the writing of Trey is that for some audience members he'll be very easy to dismiss. But there



Daniel Aukin in rehearsals for *Skintight* with Jack Wetherall and Will Brittain  
Photo: Jenny Anderson

is a truthfulness about his behavior. I don't think he has great illusions about the transactional relationship universe that he's walked into with Elliot. He doesn't even see that as problematic, nor does Elliot.

**TS:** I love that a central argument in this play also deals head on with women and aging and the way women are treated once they pass 40 in this country. Did you have to educate yourself on this subject?

**DA:** I have a lot of women over 40 in my life. And I have the writing and Idina, but it is true I am not a woman so there are aspects to what it means to be a woman in America at this time that I only see from the outside. So, I will be relying not only on Idina's responses and impulses, but also female friends and colleagues who come to see the play and whose counsel I seek during previews to figure out if we're speaking to that aspect of the play in a truthful and unvarnished way.

**TS:** I understand you're going to be working with us again next season.

**DA:** Which is exciting. I will be directing *Apologia* by Alexi Kaye Campbell in the same space with Stockard Channing in the lead role. •

# INVISIBILITY OF MIDDLE AGED WOMEN

BEAUTY ISN'T EVERYTHING.

In *Skintight*, both Jodi, a woman in her mid-40s, and Elliot, her 70-year-old father, grapple with what it means to age in modern society. Elliot, a successful fashion designer and businessman, is in a relationship with a much younger man, while Jodi, a lawyer, is dealing with the emotional fallout of her husband leaving her for a much younger woman.

Jodi and Elliot's stories highlight a frustrating reality: while men gain status as they age, middle-aged (and older) women are considered less valuable than their younger counterparts. This devaluation affects how women are hired, promoted, and paid; how they are (or aren't) depicted in the media; and how they see themselves.

Women of all ages are underrepresented on TV and in film, but middle-aged and older women are all but invisible. The largest number of leading roles are available to women in their late twenties and early thirties, while the number of leading roles for men increases throughout middle age.

Leading men in the movies retain their sex-symbol status as they age. Their love interests, however, aren't allowed to grow older with them. For example, let's examine the career of Denzel Washington. In *Malcolm X*, released when Washington was 37, Angela Bassett, then 34, played Betty Shabazz. Fast-forward to *Flight*, shot when he was 57, and his love interest is played by 35-year-old Kelly Reilly. Reilly is on the older side of actresses to have played opposite Washington.

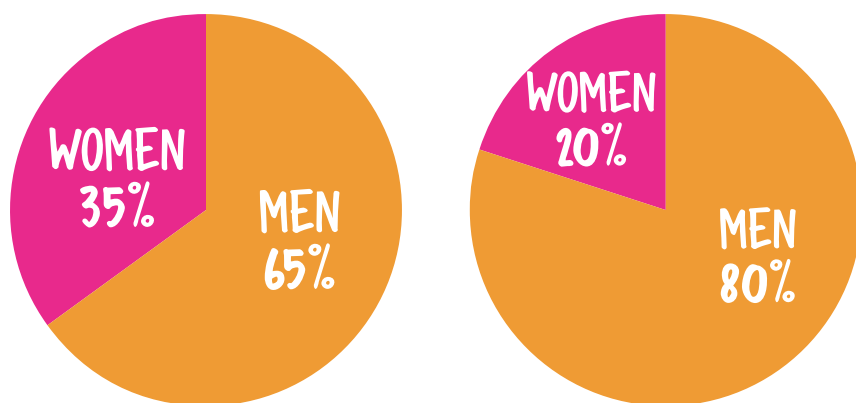
After their short careers as sex symbols, women are relegated to "mom roles," and they frequently play mothers to actors they never could have given birth to. Sally Field played Tom Hanks's mother in *Forrest Gump* despite being just ten years older than Hanks. In *Alexander*, Angelina Jolie played Colin Farrell's mother; in reality, she was not quite one year old when he was born.

When middle-aged women appear on screen or in advertising, they are often made to look younger and to fit an ideal of female beauty. In 2013, supermodel Christy Turlington, then aged 44, posed in a series of Calvin Klein underwear ads to mark the 25th anniversary of her first Calvin Klein underwear ad. While other current photos of Turlington show a beautiful woman with some wrinkles and signs of age, the new ads appear to have airbrushed Turlington's skin back to 1991.

A 2017 video advertisement for Calvin Klein Eternity perfume and cologne again featured Turlington, this time with her real-life husband, actor Ed Burns. Turlington's face, body, and hair show no indicators of her age, while Burns' salt-and-pepper scruff and minor wrinkles are on display.

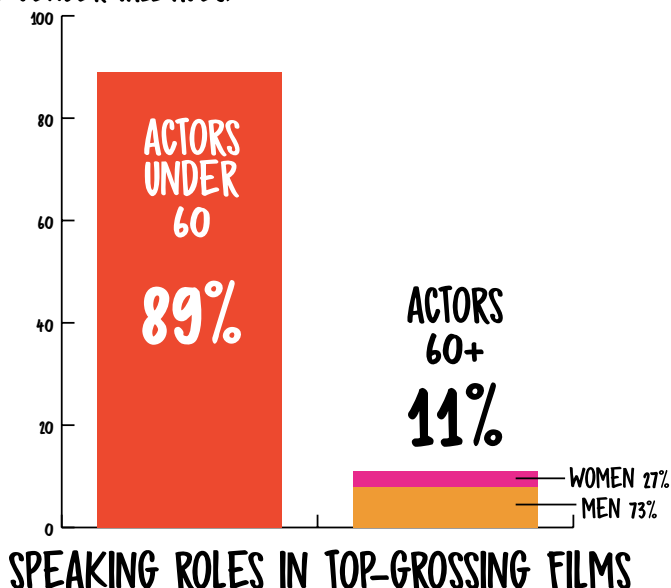
The cultural obsession with youth and beauty isn't just cosmetic; it has real-world repercussions. If women aren't allowed to age in popular culture, they aren't allowed to age at work. Women in

## MIDDLE AGE = 45-65 YEARS OLD



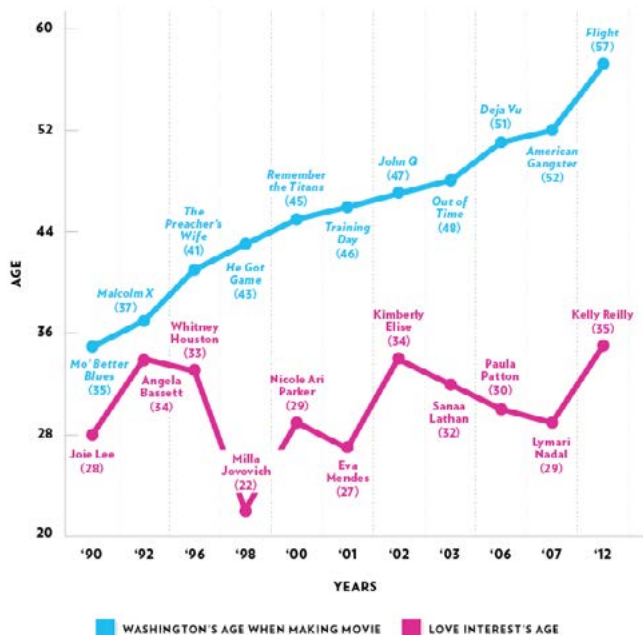
LEADING FILM ROLES BY GENDER (ALL AGES)

LEADING FILM ROLES BY GENDER (40+)





## DENZEL WASHINGTON



Read *Vulture's* full article [HERE](#)

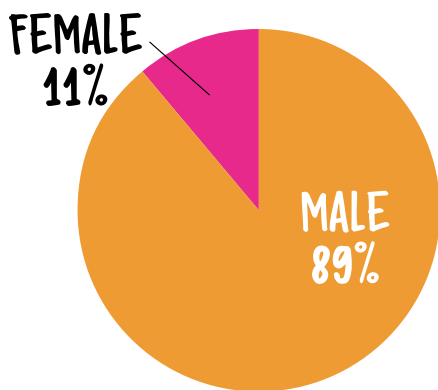
the professional world like Jodi, a successful lawyer, are held to increasingly strict beauty standards. In 2016, Debora Spar, president of Barnard College, wrote a *New York Times* article about beauty standards for women in leadership roles, the very women who broke through glass ceilings and defined modern feminism. "For women in certain professional or social circles, the bar of normal keeps going up. There are virtually no wrinkles on Hollywood stars or on Broadway actors; ditto

for female entrepreneurs or women in the news media. There are few wrinkles on the women in Congress and even fewer on Wall Street. Chief executives, bankers, hospital administrators, heads of public relations firms and publishing houses, lawyers, marketers, caterers: Certain standards of appearance have long been de rigeur for women in these positions, from being reasonably fit and appropriately dressed to displaying attractive coifs and manicured nails. But more and more, these standards also now include being blond, dark- or red-haired and nearly wrinkle-free. Just saying no—to chemicals, peels, lasers and liposuction—becomes harder under these circumstances, even if no one wants to admit that's the case."

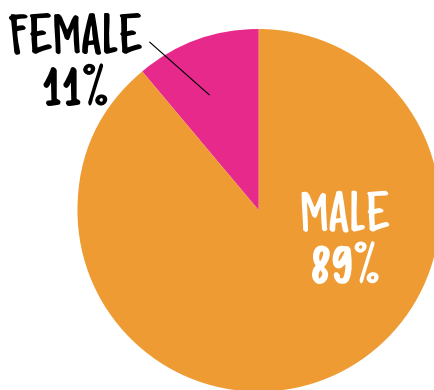
Even women employed in low-wage jobs face this problem: recent studies have found that women experience twice as much age discrimination as men when applying for jobs.

Why are middle-aged women invisible in the media? Because media has traditionally been created by and for men, and women face gender discrimination behind the camera as well as in front of it (see pie charts below).

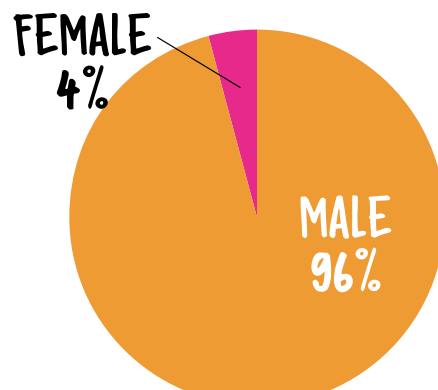
In recent years, older actresses have found successes shifting from films to cable and streaming television series: Glenn Close in "Damages", Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin in "Grace and Frankie," and "Happy Valley" with Sarah Lancashire and Siobhan Finneran all feature older women in leading roles. •



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CINEMATOGRAPHERS OF 250 TOP GROSSING FILMS OF 2017

# INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT JOSHUA HARMON

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Playwright Joshua Harmon about his play *Skintight*.

**Ted Sod:** What inspired you to write *Skintight*? What do you feel the play is about? Does the play have personal resonance for you and, if so, how? This play was commissioned by Roundabout after your debut play at RTC—are there any specific challenges in writing a commissioned play?

**Joshua Harmon:** *Skintight* was the first commission I ever received. Roundabout offered it to me in 2012, right after *Bad Jews* opened (Yes, that is 6 years ago. These things take forever). In theory, a commission sounds like a total win-win: I write plays, now someone is giving me some money to do just that. But I found it was actually very challenging. Whenever I had written a play before, it had been entirely for myself; now I was in a position where I knew someone was waiting for the play, and would read it, and would read it from the position of having essentially bought it, and you don't want to disappoint. So, I wound up playing this weird mind game with myself where I pretended it wasn't a commission, it was just an idea I could write for myself and throw away and never show anyone. And I guess that worked, mostly.

I think *Skintight* is about so many things—beauty, youth, sex, desire, history, fashion, aging, class, religion, sexuality. But those are just themes. The play itself is, in many respects, a traditional American family drama. What makes this different is that these characters aren't typical to the genre: a multigenerational, queer Jewish family. That's not something I've seen before. An exploration of identity is at the center of much of my work, and getting to tackle two of the central identities of my life—Jewish and gay—in the context of a traditional family drama has been really thrilling.

It's a little mind-blowing, to consider the distance one family can travel in the course of one century—economically, ideologically, religiously, linguistically—and while I suppose that could happen anywhere, it does feel particular to a certain moment in time in America. This family represents that idea, but to the extreme. As Elliot (the family's paterfamilias) realized his own American dream, he moved farther away from his personal history; at the other end of the spectrum, his grandson is deeply fascinated with the family's ethnic and religious roots, and in many ways is seeking to return to the place his family left. These characters are quite specifically drawn, but they're also enmeshed in relationships, both familial and romantic, that we all understand. It's my hope that the things which make these characters specific will also make them identifiable and accessible to people from all walks of life.

**TS:** Will you give us a sense of the kind of research you had to do in order to write this play and how you went about doing it?

**JH:** Almost none. But that's pretty typical for me. I usually work from the inside out, so with a few exceptions, my plays tend not to come from extensive research, but rather, from lived experience and careful observation. That said, I did read and watch *A Streetcar Named Desire* over and over and over, but I don't know if that was research or just love.

**TS:** Your play deals with strained parent-child relationships as well as the unforgiving way American culture treats women over 40.



Joshua Harmon

**Another theme in the play is how many successful older gay men take up very young partners. Why were you interested in writing about these subjects?**

**JH:** I was in my twenties (so young!!) when I started writing this play. I wanted to write a play about our obsession with youth while I was still technically on this side of it. I had a sense, starting in my teens, that I was going to be much happier once I got through the early years, and I was right. I did not love being young, so it baffled me that our culture exalted youth when I found that time of life so fraught with unhappiness. Not every culture is as infatuated with looking young as ours, but the quest for the fountain of youth did not begin with the advent of Botox. It has ancient antecedents.

The writing of this play was an attempt, I suppose, to ask questions about things I did not understand. As a young person, you see older people doing crazy things to their faces, and you want to understand why. Or you watch powerful men get older, while their arm candy never ages, and you wonder why. Or you begin to notice that your favorite actresses stop appearing in new movies. Or the models, both male and female, you've seen in advertisements, start to disappear. Where do they go? Embedding these questions within the context of a family drama meant they could be more than merely thematic musings; they could drive the engine of the play. Jodi especially is in a tremendously raw and emotionally vulnerable spot, but her pain and anger free her up to dig into some of these questions in a way that's deeply personal. She can expose some of the hypocrisy around her, even though she's still at the mercy of these oppressive cultural tenets.

Which brings us to hypocrisy, a favorite theme! We are all hypocrites, in so many different ways, but I guess it really does excite me to find those places and examine them. American culture is certainly ripe with examples, but perhaps in no place is our hypocrisy more obvious than the contradictory messages we send children. Be yourself, we tell them, but also spend lots of money to attain a completely unattainable ideal



of beauty. It's kind of like Polonius telling Laertes, "to thine own self be true." Um, ok Polonius. But as global warming becomes an increasing threat to our planet, the fact that more and more people are ceasing to look, well, human... it's disturbing. We live in an age when people are more disconnected from what makes us human than ever before—isolated, on our phones. There is some correlation to the fact that just as global warming begins to really take hold, we are looking less and less human. But who knows? Maybe the coming age calls for more injectables in order to survive the looming catastrophes.

**TS: The play also makes some very salient points about lust vs. love in primary relationships—what intrigued you about this particular argument?**

**JH:** In exploring questions about desire, one can't help but crash into our nation's Puritanical roots. For example: during the years when gay marriage was being hotly debated, I remember being struck by the way in which the question was framed as an issue of love: It shouldn't matter whom you love, love is love is love, etc. I don't disagree, but I tend to think sexual orientation is an expression of desire. A man is not heterosexual because he falls in love with women; it's because he's aroused by women. It's about attraction. The person you desire might become the person you love, but watching people pretzel their words around, to turn sexual desire into something more palatable, something less uncomfortably explicit, for the mainstream public—I understood why that was smart branding, but it still struck me as strange. We live in a culture that still treats desire with a lot of shame, even as it seeks to profit from it. I don't exactly have a thesis here, but there was something I wanted to explore not just about how we think of desire, but also the way in which it is both the bedrock of our families—the thing that brings two people together—and also a destructive force in upending those family bonds. Toward the end of the play, Jodi asks Elliot, "what is so great about hot?" In other words, why does desire matter? Writing this play created a space to contemplate that question

**TS: Will you talk about the development process for this play? What important revisions did you make during its development, and do you feel you will continue to rewrite throughout the RTC rehearsal and preview process? What events usually motivate your revisions during rehearsals or previews?**

**JH:** I had the idea more than six years ago and asked to write the play as my commission for Roundabout. I wrote the first draft a year later, while I was a student at Juilliard, and we did a workshop in December 2013. Then I sat on the play for a while, too scared to turn it in, but eventually I did, and Roundabout did a workshop in January 2015. Then I went off to The Magic in San Francisco for a weeklong writing retreat and did a big rewrite of the play, then we did another workshop in May 2016. At that point, Todd felt it was ready for production, and then it was a question of scheduling. The basic structure of the play has not changed—it has remained two acts and five scenes from the beginning. But within that structure, much has changed. For example, in the first workshop of the play, there were six characters. I killed off one of them (Trey's mom made an appearance!), and by the next workshop I'd killed off another. So, it became a four-hander. But then I felt we needed to have a sense of Elliot's power and wealth—I didn't believe that these people were alone in the house—so I added the two servants to the play, and now we're back up to six. The play has actually changed quite a bit in that sense. I anticipate doing a lot of work in the

room, and that mainly has to do with staying open in rehearsal. I tend to draw a lot of inspiration from the particular actors I work with, so as I come to know them better, I respond accordingly in the writing. But at the same time, especially with something that's not brand new, it's essential to trust the impulses I had when I wrote it.

**TS: How have you been collaborating with your director, Daniel Aukin? This will be the third play of yours Daniel has directed. What makes you want to collaborate with him? What type of questions did you ask each other while working on this play?**

**JH:** Daniel has directed every workshop and reading of this play, so it's been five years of conversation. That's a very different process than with *Bad Jews*, where he and I met for the first time in April and went into rehearsal five months later. I can't yet say whether it's better for something to happen super fast or for it to take time. But in the course of five years, I've changed, and I bet he would say he's changed some. We're not entirely the same people we were when we started working on this, and our relationship has changed, too—it's grown deeper, and richer. But the short answer—why do I like collaborating with him? Because he's brilliant. He's a lovely person, and that helps—but I have learned so much sitting beside him. Daniel has a deep respect for the mystery of making a play. He never pretends to have all the answers. He is unafraid of saying, "I don't know," which actually takes great confidence. In not having all the answers, one leaves space for something else to emerge. It is almost mystical. And then an answer appears, no one knows where it came from, but there it is, and you keep going.

**TS: What traits do you feel the actors need for the characters you've created in this play?**

**JH:** Gutsy. Fearless. Brave. Funny. These are some of the most specific characters I've ever written. Finding people who could meet those descriptions AND were thrilling actors took a lot of work. God bless [Casting Director] Carrie Gardner. But, oh my God, we have such an amazing group of actors. I can't wait to be in the room with them.

**TS: What other projects are you working on? What are you most excited about writing next?**

**JH:** I don't know! This is the last of the plays I wrote during my time at Juilliard. It's the end of a chapter. But after the back-to-back openings of two plays this year, I'm thinking a vacation would be really nice?

**TS: Can you tell us a bit about your experience working at Roundabout? This is not a question designed for you to be a skill, but an opportunity for us to hear what you've found valuable about working here as a playwright.**

**JH:** Obviously, I feel tremendous gratitude toward Roundabout. They gave me my first production and have continued to support me in such meaningful ways. This is the third play of mine that they're producing. But gratitude alone isn't reason enough to keep coming back. I keep wanting to work here because everyone has so much respect for artists. They don't breathe down your neck, they don't micromanage you. They seem to understand, kind of like Daniel does, that if something is going to work, it's not because a group of people sat around and made executive decisions. Every time you make a play, you're taking a huge risk, there's just no way to mitigate against that fact, which is something they seem to embrace. I love them. •

# OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

← BEAUTY ISN'T EVERYTHING.

Throughout *Skintight*, we see many of the characters coming to terms with how attractive they are perceived to be by themselves and others. Where do we form these ideas about what “conventional” beauty is? In large part, it is the media, including film, television, advertising, and more, that surround us with ideas that inform what traits are thought of as more desirable than others.

In May 2014, Jean Kilbourne, who has chronicled the ways in which women have been represented in the media since the 1960s, gave a TED talk about her work. In it, she showed ads from the beginning of her studies, with taglines like “feminine odor is everyone’s problem” and “I’d probably never be married now, if I hadn’t lost 49 pounds,” all of which promoted stereotypes about what it means to be an ideal woman: that you have to be thin, curvaceous, well-mannered, and have perfect hair and skin.

In more recent years, Photoshop has allowed for the altering of women’s bodies to fit these ideals in a variety of ways. In 2008, L’Oréal Paris was accused of whitening Beyoncé’s skin in an ad for their hair products, which is one glaring example of racial bias that runs rampant in the beauty industry. Other common tactics include creating a “thigh gap” for women, enlarging their breasts or buttocks, or erasing any imperfections in their skin.

Beyond the ways in which women’s bodies are manipulated, the ways in which they are presented are often sexualized. In 2016, a campaign called #WomenNotObjects was formed to stand up to the objectification of women in the media. One of their first actions was to call out companies like Burger King and Tom Ford, whose ads for sandwiches and men’s cologne,

respectively, depicted women performing sexual acts on the objects. The campaign also conducted a study of over 15,000 ads and consumers’ responses to them, comparing these that objectified women to those that didn’t. Results showed that, among every demographic surveyed, objectifying ads had a negative impact on the brand’s reputation and the intent of the consumer to purchase their product. The idea that “sex sells” is certainly a common marketing axiom, but the results of this research would indicate that this may not be true.

In addition to the negative effects on brand intent, the objectification of women has a detrimental impact on those viewing the ads. Studies have shown that, even if we are only passively watching an ad, our brain is processing its images subconsciously and incredibly quickly—all it takes is the flash of an image for it to leave a mark. The more that images of over-sexualized or digitally-altered women surround us, the more that we are subconsciously affected by them. This can have direct impacts, like women trying to wrap their legs tightly in cellophane to achieve a real-life thigh gap, or trying to enlarge their lips to mimic the look of Kylie Jenner’s. The effects can also be less obvious, however, and can subconsciously reinforce the idea that women have to look and act certain ways in order to be accepted by society. These ads are not only seen by adults, but by children as well, and can begin to influence their standards of beauty from a harmfully young age.

It’s no wonder, then, that in *Skintight* we see Jodi concerned with how her body is perceived by others. While companies like #WomenNotObjects raising awareness about the harmful effects of the advertising industry’s work on women is important, what is more important is not having these images surrounding us and affecting our brains to begin with. •

Beyoncé's natural skin color (featured in the left picture) was clearly altered in 2008's L'Oréal Paris advertisement





Jack Wetherall and Will Brittain  
in rehearsals for *Skintight*  
Photo: Jenny Anderson



Idina Menzel in rehearsals for *Skintight*  
Photo: Jenny Anderson

## WHEN MEN BECAME SEX OBJECTS

Until the 1980s, mainstream culture and advertising often cast women as sex objects and framed their images to appeal to the male gaze. Historically, men in advertisements were represented as figures of authoritative masculinity (such as the Marlboro Man), but rarely sexualized.

All this changed in 1982, with a striking new underwear campaign by Calvin Klein. Bruce Weber's photograph of Olympic athlete Tom Hintnaus leaning back seductively in his white underwear appeared in magazines, on bus stops, and a billboard towering over Times Square. *American Photographer* magazine called it one of "10 Pictures That Changed America," declaring "for the first time (men) were sold as sexual objects not breadwinners or authority figures." *The New York Times'* Herbert Muschamp observed that "men assume the passive role once assigned almost exclusively to women," which he saw as "a force for change in relations between the sexes."

Subsequent Calvin Klein campaigns showcased the buff bodies of Antonio Sabato, Jr. and Marky Mark, while Weber's homoerotic images spread through advertising—most notably the rebranding of Abercrombie & Fitch in the '90s. Today the term "hunkvertising" describes how muscular men sell everything from soap to salad dressing.

As with women, such imagery impacts how men feel about themselves. A 2016 market research survey saw that 50% men prioritized being in shape over relationships and work promotions, while 17% admitted to feeling self-conscious in comparing themselves to male models. The survey suggests: "Whilst this holds a level of aspiration for some men, for many more it has resulted in feelings of inadequacy."

Click [HERE](#) to view Calvin Klein's earliest underwear advertisement.



# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR IDINA MENZEL



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with Actor Idina Menzel about her role of Jodi Isaac in *Skintight*.

**Ted Sod:** Where were you born and educated? When did you decide you wanted to be a performer, and did you have any teachers who profoundly influenced you?

**Idina Menzel:** I was born in NYU Hospital in New York City, and I grew up on Long Island. I wanted to be a performer ever since I can remember. I've been singing and acting and running around putting on shows in my living room since I was a little girl. I went to the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU and majored in theatre. I've often cited that my two biggest influences were my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Pincus, and my music teacher, Mr. Roper. Mr. Roper was the first person who really saw something special in me, and Mrs. Pincus instilled creativity in all of us. One day, there was this beautiful blizzard happening outside our classroom window, and she got so excited and said, "Children, pick up your pencils and paper and run to the window and write a poem about what you see!" I actually remember the title of the poem I wrote—"The White Ghost"—which was a bit redundant, but that was what my poem was about.

**TS:** Why did you choose to do Joshua Harmon's play *Skintight* and the role of Jodi?

**IM:** I have to say the first things that appealed to me were the creative team and the opportunity to finally work at the Roundabout Theatre Company. I have always wanted to. I love having the chance to work with playwright Josh Harmon and director Daniel Aukin. They're both incredible artists, and I wanted to collaborate with them. Josh's script is wonderfully written, and it is just a gift. It's funny how certain roles come to you at just the right time in your life when you need to confront certain things in yourself.

**TS:** Will you tell us about some of those things that you and the character of Jodi are confronting in common?

**IM:** I'm in my mid-40s and I'm getting older and I'm constantly assessing how important beauty and youth are to my happiness. I identify with Jodi as a mother, a fierce advocate for her son. I identify with her loneliness and her desire to be closer to family, and I identify with her frustration with American culture putting so much emphasis on being young and beautiful. I want to be a role model for my son, and yet, I can't hide who I am and pretend I haven't gotten caught up in these skewed American values.

**TS:** How will you prepare to play this role? It sounds like Jodi's close to you, but not exactly you. Will you give us a sense of what your process is?

**IM:** I hope Jodi's a bit more self-absorbed than I am. Then again, my friends might say, "It's a really good fit!" The preparation I do is in breaking down all the language and trying to get all the juice out of every word, nuance and punctuation mark because Josh is very specific about that. The more I study the text, the more subtleties I discover and I realize how informative his language is. It keeps fueling me and answering questions about my character. For me, it's always about the text, the language. My preparation is getting inside of the text because Jodi doesn't let anyone get a word in edgewise—she never comes up for air—she just talks and talks and talks. I try not to glide over anything and make sure I give



every word its due.

**TS:** I want to ask you about this intense argument that goes down between Jodi and her father, Elliot, about the difference between lust and love—how do you relate to that?

**IM:** I think that I would normally completely side with Jodi's perspective in the argument and yet, I can totally see where Elliot is coming from. He has a very unique relationship to his lovers. There are many different incarnations of love, and I get it. I think whatever makes people feel the most alive is what they should cling to. I would hope that people feel like they're entitled to all of it. But being physically attracted to someone and having that kind of relationship is important and, for me personally, it's okay if someone really wants that kind of sexual passion 24/7. It's really important to some people. We all need to live our lives passionately. So, I get that part of his argument. But it isn't what Jodi wants or needs at this juncture in her life.

**TS:** What do you make of Jodi's relationship to Elliot? Do you think he's been a good father?

**IM:** I'm still trying to figure that out actually. I think Jodi probably doesn't think he was a very good father.

**TS:** It must be hard on a child—no matter what their age—to have an extremely famous father.

**IM:** I think part of Jodi's psychology could be that she is overprotective of her mother, since her mother was rejected by her

father. I was a child of divorce, so I'm well aware of how it feels when you're stuck in the middle. You live your life with this desire that one day your parents will get back together. It permeates everything. And even though objectively you realize that's never going to happen—there is this little girl part that's in me and in Jodi, too—that hoped that it still might happen.

**TS: Let's talk about Jodi's relationship to her son, Benjamin. What's going on there? He seems like a very bright young man to me.**

**IM:** Yes, he is extremely bright. It also seems like he needs to escape from his life—that perhaps Jodi has pushed him in certain directions and she's just been hovering and controlling, and he's at the point where he's got to find his own independence. I'm still trying to understand the dynamic between them; obviously she's crazy in love with her son, but there is a distance between them.

**TS: Do you have any ideas about Jodi's understanding of Trey, her father's boyfriend?**

**IM:** I love how Josh has written him. I'm not quite sure of his real intention, you know? I don't know what his secrets are. Is he innocent or is he really out for the money? Does he have an agenda or is he blissfully ignorant? I've been thinking about that a lot lately. I don't know if Josh will ever reveal to me what was within his heart when he wrote the role of Trey.

**TS: I want to ask you about another theme that is in the writing and one I think will be resonant for our audience, and that is how American culture treats women once they mature past 40. You've discussed it earlier, but I'm wondering if you think things are going to change with the "Me Too" movement?**

**IM:** It's one of the many things that I love about the play. I don't know exactly how it will affect show business, but I would hope that the "Me Too" movement will allow more women writers, directors, and producers to tell stories about women my age and older and that those stories will be of interest to people and that audiences will seek them out. And perhaps women will feel more at ease expressing their opinions without fear of losing a job.

**TS: I once heard a female friend of mine who was over 40 say, "It's like I'm invisible. They don't see me anymore!" Do you think that's true for Jodi?**

**IM:** For Jodi it is true, for sure. I don't feel like that in my own life, but it is certainly true for Jodi. I definitely think she's been traded in. Some women get traded in for the trophy wife and I guess for a trophy boyfriend in the case of Elliot.

**TS: I think a lot of people over 40 are going to relate to what you called Jodi's "loneliness."**

**IM:** It's funny you should say that because a lot of the characters I've played have been role models for young women, like in *Frozen* and in *Wicked*. I'm often looked at as a role model for empowering young women, and here I am, a woman in my mid-40s, and I'm still wrestling with some of the same things that I'm out there pontificating about. Sometimes I feel like a hypocrite, but I always try to be transparent and explain to these young women that it's a journey—that you have to keep striving to find those things about yourself that make you unique—and that there are

going to be days when you just don't want to get out of bed in the morning. None of us have it all figured out, and we struggle, and we don't always feel beautiful and beloved.

**TS: How do you like to collaborate with a director? What do you look for? What's important to you?**

**IM:** I like to feel appreciated and comfortable and that it is okay for me to fail and ask stupid questions. I like to collaborate. I like guidance. I want someone to say, "That doesn't work—let's try it another way." If there is mutual trust, that allows everyone to do their best work in the rehearsal room.

**TS: What inspires you as an artist?**

**IM:** Oh, God, that's a hard one. I think it's a constant searching for who I am, what kind of person I want to be, what I want to say in the world and what kind of mark I want to make. My love for my husband and my family are inspiring. I'm always striving to figure out where I fit in the world and how I can use my creativity and my voice to connect with people.

**TS: What advice would you offer to a young person who says, "I want to be an actor"?**

**IM:** I would say, "Work hard, get training, find teachers or coaches who you love, and then figure out that thing that makes you idiosyncratic and special and celebrate it. Be yourself. Try not to be like anybody else, try not to copy another actor or try to fit into some type you think they want—just be you." •



Idina Menzel and Eli Gelb in rehearsal for *Skintight*  
Photo: Jenny Anderson

# “GOLD DIGGERS”: FRAUDS OR ICONS?

← BEAUTY ISN'T EVERYTHING.

Upon learning that Elliot's new partner is a 20-year-old named Trey, Jodi and Benjamin immediately mistrust his motives. Trey swears that he loves Elliot regardless of their difference in age, but Jodi and Benjamin are convinced that Trey is only after Elliot for his money and lavish gifts. Trey's role in this play may seem familiar—his storyline draws from the archetype of the Gold Digger, traditionally portrayed in literature, film, and music as a young woman who dates or marries rich men for their money alone. As a young man rather than a young woman, Trey is an inversion of the traditional type, but the implications of calling him a gold digger remain much the same. The term is used colloquially today in a generally derogatory manner against those who are seen as dating only for mercenary purposes, but the history of the phrase has more folds than one might think.

The phrase “gold digger” was popularized by Avery Hopwood's play *The Gold Diggers*, which premiered at the Lyceum Theatre on Broadway in 1919 and depicted the young women of its story as sly and cunning seductresses of rich men. Though Hopwood's gold diggers often outwitted their male counterparts, their ultimate motives didn't get much more complex than a superficial hunger for wealth and luxury. The play, though itself relatively sympathetic toward its gold digger characters, spawned a decade of storylines that portrayed gold diggers as unscrupulous pleasure-seekers who needed to be reformed into demure housewives. In the early 1930s, though, the gold diggers of film and theatre became the heroines of stories in which they deftly outsmarted rich businessmen, whom the nation had come to villainize with the advent of the Great Depression. Audiences cheered actresses such as Joan Blondell, Ginger

Rogers, and Mae West, whose characters, struggling through poverty, gamed an unjust system in pursuit of basic necessities and respect.

In the second half of the 1930s, Hollywood tightened enforcement of its Motion Picture Production Code, which set the standards for what could and could not be shown on film. Heightened censorship led filmmakers to revert back to storylines in which gold-digging women who broke the “moral code” were punished rather than glorified. With some exceptions, the films of the late 1930s largely condemned gold diggers—an attitude that pervaded American culture and even led some cities to adopt actual laws prohibiting gold-digging behavior.

In the decades since Hollywood's Depression-era censorship code, the gold digger icon never regained the heroism of those early-1930s mavericks. From hit movies like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959) to top songs like “Lyn' Eyes” by The Eagles (1975) and “Gold Digger” by Kanye West (2005), the gold digger archetype has been portrayed only occasionally with sympathy and depth and almost never again as a street-smart rebel who emerges victorious over the upper class.

Even in 2018, the term “gold digger” generally connotes laziness, dishonesty, and fraud. But the origins of the trope reveal that there may be more to unpack from these characters than cultural assumptions might have us believe. Calling Trey a gold digger, then, might be a more complicated label than it seems. •



Joan Blondell in *Three On A Match*



Ginger Rogers



Mae West



# QUEER EYE ON HORATIO ALGER

Benjamin's birthday gift to Elliot, a copy of Horatio Alger's juvenile novel *Ragged Dick*, is an astute choice. Alger's uplifting message that anyone can pull themselves up "by the bootstraps" feels archaic today, but the discovery of Alger's homosexuality, made long after his death, provides relevant insights to the characters of *Skintight*.

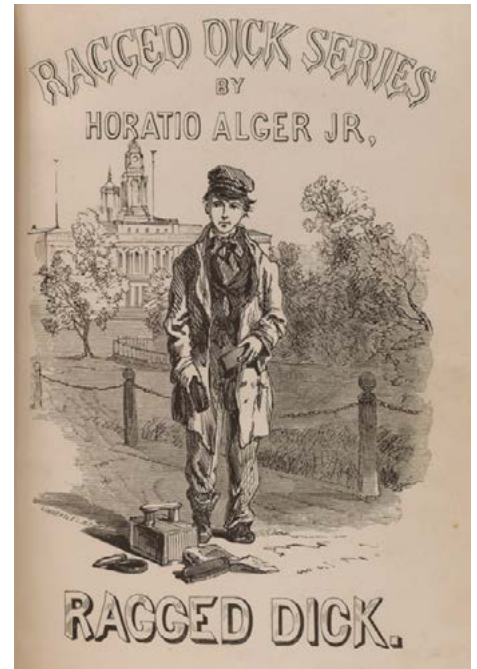
Horatio Alger Jr. (1832-1899) was one of the most prolific and popular writers of the Gilded Age. His breakthrough *Ragged Dick* (1867) introduced a uniquely American hero: the poor youth who rises to respectability through hard work, perseverance, and "pluck." The story follows an orphaned shoeshine boy on the streets of New York as he educates himself and advances in society, with support from some wealthy businessmen who take an interest. *Ragged Dick* sold so well that Alger recycled the "rags-to-riches" plotline in nearly 100 books. Although never esteemed as a great literary talent, Alger's self-help message impacted generations beyond his own lifetime. (Figures as disparate as Groucho Marx and Ernest Hemingway acknowledged his influence.)

Alger was the youngest son of a respected Unitarian minister in Massachusetts. A sickly but intelligent boy, he aspired to become a writer but also studied religion at Harvard. He briefly held a position as a Unitarian minister, until rumors of sexual activity with teenage boys spread through his congregation. Out of respect for his father's reputation, the church agreed to sweep the scandal under the rug, provided Alger would never again work in the clergy.

Alger fled to New York in 1866. He visited the Newsboys' Lodging House, where he met the homeless boys who inspired

his books. At a time when authors did not own copyrights, Alger could earn a modest living, but not a fortune. He supplemented his income tutoring for wealthy families and lived alone, although sometimes in the company of boys he befriended, until his death.

In 1972, the discovery of the church scandal and Alger's presumed homosexuality sparked new interest in his work. In his essay, "The Gentle Boy From the Dangerous Classes," Michael Moon interprets the Alger plot as a "particular brand of homoerotic romance as a support for capitalism." Moon identifies the importance of older, wealthy men who take an interest in Alger's young and explicitly good-looking heroes. Moon's reading is an example of the scholarship Benjamin might explore in his Queer Theory course, and provides a historical lens for considering Elliot's relationship with the much younger Trey. •



The first edition of *Ragged Dick* by Horatio Alger (1895)

Read Horatio Alger's bestselling *Ragged Dick* [HERE](#).

Read Michael Moon's queer analysis of Horatio Alger [HERE](#).

## QUEER STUDIES

The relatively young academic field of Queer Studies emerged in the 1970s as an outgrowth of women's studies, African-American studies, and other identity-based fields. Early courses emphasized the hidden history of gay and lesbian lives. Next, "queer theory" emerged in English and literature departments, examining gender as a social construct and sexual identity as

a kind of "performance." In the late 1980s, City University of New York and City College of San Francisco created the first departments for LGBTQ studies. Today, many U.S. universities and colleges offer classes, majors, and even graduate degrees in Queer Studies—with connections to many academic disciplines, including history, biology, philosophy, and social sciences.

# HUNGARIAN JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST

In *Skintight*, Jodi Isaac's son Benjamin is in the midst of a semester abroad in Hungary, where he's been exploring his family's roots as Eastern European Jews. Now self-identified Americans, the Isaac family has been living in the United States for nearly 100 years, and memories of Jodi's grandparents' lives in Hungary are distant ones. But Jewish experiences of the Holocaust in Hungary in the 1930s and 1940s loom large in the history of any family of Hungarian Jewish descent.

The seeds of Jewish persecution in Hungary before and during World War II were sown at the end of World War I. Hungary, which in the early part of the 20th century existed as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, fought alongside Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria in World War I as a member of the Central Powers. After being defeated by the Allies in 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was split up, and Hungary was greatly reduced in size and population. When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, Hungary sought an alliance with Nazi Germany, who supported Hungary's desire to regain the land it had lost at the end of World War I. Allyship with the intensely anti-Semitic Germany spurred anti-Jewish legislation in Hungary, including a drastic restriction on the number of Jews allowed in an array of professions in Hungary, a draft that forced young Jewish men into labor units, and a racial law defining who was to be considered "Jewish."

The first massacre of Hungarian Jews took place in 1941, when some 18,000 residents were identified by the Hungarian government as "Jewish foreign nationals," deported to Kamenets-Podolsk in German-controlled Ukraine, and murdered. In 1942, another 1,000 Jews were murdered by the Hungarian military, who claimed to be in pursuit of Serbian partisans. Hungary joined the Axis

Powers alongside Germany in December 1941, but after suffering huge losses on the battlefield, Regent of Hungary Miklós Horthy attempted to withdraw from its alliance with Germany. In retaliation, Hitler's army invaded Hungary in March 1944 and established a fascist government loyal to Germany. Under this new government, the Jews of Hungary were forced into ghettos, and during the spring of 1944, over 435,000 Jews were deported to the Polish concentration camp of Auschwitz and killed.



Hungarian Jews

That fall, Horthy publicly announced that Hungary would break ties with Germany and seek a peace agreement with the Allies, but in response Hitler overthrew Horthy's government and put the savagely anti-Semitic Arrow Cross Party, led by Ferenc Szálasi, into power. Szálasi's government terrorized Jews in Budapest, Hungary's capital, killing over 80,000 of them in Budapest alone and sending another 85,000 on death marches to the Austrian border, while forcing another 70,000 into ghettos.

The Soviet army liberated Hungary in April 1945. All told, around 568,000 Hungarian Jews had died during the Holocaust—almost equivalent to the entire population of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, today. After the

war, only about 144,000 Jews remained in Hungary as survivors, and around 70,000 of those soon left Hungary for Israel or Western countries, largely due to Hungary's poor economic conditions and remaining anti-Semitic policies.

The suffering endured by Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust is almost impossible to imagine, but it is important to remember the magnitude of their tragedy. In the world of *Skintight*, the Holocaust can feel distant, but as Benjamin discovers during his semester in Hungary, there is no one who remains untouched by it. •

# SKINTIGHT





# DESIGNER STATEMENTS

BEAUTY ISN'T EVERYTHING.

## LAUREN HELPERN—SET DESIGN

When I first read Joshua Harmon's script for *Skintight*, the set seemed relatively straightforward: a realistic living room in a West Village brownstone. However, when we looked at a model of what everyone will think of when they hear "brownstone" on stage, we realized it didn't meet the demands of the show, practically or aesthetically. I had always imagined this set as double height because it needs to immediately convey great wealth, and volume is a luxury in this city. A double height space also let me put a staircase front and center and allowed for multiple entrances and exits to other parts of the home. I went back to photos of brownstones where the owners had removed the back part of the parlor floor to open up the space to the garden level. Even more exciting to me were the few brownstones that had been connected to back buildings, probably former stables. These spaces had height and bold architectural details, like skylights. The director, Daniel Aukin, and I started to explore what a space like this could be if it were gut renovated. Daniel talked about the room being like a jewel box, so we looked at marble walls and other high-end finishes, along with details like linear vents and fireplaces. As with real life renovations, we had to make compromises along the way to fit into the budget! To counter this beautiful pristine interior, we are framing the room with the cross-section of the building, exposing its crumbling inner structure.

## JESS GOLDSTEIN—COSTUME DESIGN

As a costume designer the first step in my process is to read the script. I found *Skintight* to be immediately evocative of a very particular New York world of people, and I was very excited to see how specifically and satirically the characters are drawn by playwright Joshua Harmon. It was very easy to imagine them in my mind. Elliot Isaac seems to bear a more than passing resemblance to Calvin Klein, a fashion

designer whose career and brand have always been based on the sexuality of youth. Elliot appears to be not only obsessed with nubile male beauty but also, like Calvin, with a very expensive, minimal, and sterile style of living. I looked at lots of photos of Calvin, many with his recent boyfriends, who, like the character of Trey, all appear to be several decades younger. They're very much the same type as Trey, All-American and muscular and very comfortable in their bodies. It was fascinating to observe how Calvin and the boys were often dressed in the same tight, form-fitting clothes, which were far more age-appropriate on the boys. The two characters who work for Elliot in his townhouse, his housekeeper Orsolya and his houseboy Jeffrey, will be dressed as an extension of Elliot's design aesthetic. Clean, well-tailored lines in serene tones of white, black, and greys. Idina Menzel plays Elliot's daughter, Jodi. We meet her at an emotional crisis as her marriage has just fallen apart. Her costumes may somehow reflect that disarray and uncertainty, jarring and disrupting the controlled placidity of Elliot's world. The final character of *Skintight* is Benjamin, Jodi's 20-year-old son. He is a somewhat awkward, yet blunt, out gay college student, majoring in Queer Theory. Director Daniel Aukin suggested he represent Elliot's worst nightmare, as Ben is totally unimpressed by Elliot and his career and has no interest in fashion or style. I imagine Ben in unobtrusive shirts, sweaters, and khakis, slightly rumpled and careless.

## ERIC SHIMELONIS—SOUND DESIGN

Joshua Harmon's writing and Daniel Aukin's directing aesthetic has me tending toward a wonderfully minimal approach to sound and music for *Skintight*. There will be a handful of practical sounds to bring the set and the action to life, and transition music will consist of a cycle of spare piano compositions that complement the emotional complexities of the play. •



The set model for *Skintight*



The computer set rendering for *Skintight*

# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR  
EDUCATORS

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## HOW DO PLAYWRIGHTS WRITE DIALOGUE TO EXPLORE INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-W.11-12.3.A)

In *Skintight*, Joshua Harmon uses both serious and comedic dialogue to explore three generations of a family and reveal their conflicting values and perspectives. In this playwriting activity, students create original dialogue focusing on an adult child who disapproves of their parent's choices.

**BRAINSTORM** Ask students to imagine an "adult child" (i.e. their age or older) and her/his parent. Next, as a group, create a list of choices the parent might make that the adult child might not approve of. (Example: divorce, relationship, a career decision.)

**OUTLINE** Ask students to create and name two characters (one PARENT and one ADULT CHILD), choose a setting for the scene, and decide one choice that the PARENT has made prior to the scene. Explain that they will now write a scene in which the ADULT CHILD challenges, confronts, or questions their parents about this choice.

**WRITE** Have students write 10-25 lines of dialogue, alone or in pairs. (Advanced groups may write longer scenes.)

**SHARE AND REFLECT** Have students read their scenes aloud. Identify the conflicts students have chosen for their scenes, and reflect on these. Why do adults sometimes disapprove of their parents' choices? Do parents always have an obligation to please their adult children? Why or why not?

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## HOW DOES A DATA SCIENTIST COLLECT AND INTERPRET DATA ABOUT REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSS.ID.A.1)

In *Skintight*, both Jodi, a woman in her mid-40s, and Elliot, her 70-year-old father, grapple with what it means to age in modern society, where beauty standards favor young, thin, Caucasian women. This math activity asks students to survey a magazine to develop a data set, then visually and verbally interpret their findings.

**MATERIALS:** Materials: A selection of fashion or lifestyle magazines from recent years; paper; markers

**ESTIMATE** Hold up a current fashion or lifestyle magazine and ask students to guess what percentage of the women depicted in the magazine are white; what percentage are under 40; and what percentage have a thin body type.

**COLLECT DATA** Working in pairs or small groups, students design and conduct a survey of how women are represented in the magazine, choosing one area (age, body type, race, etc.) to focus on.

**DESIGN** Ask each group to design an infographic that displays their findings. How can they create a graphical representation of their data?

**SHARE AND REFLECT** Have each group share their data and infographic. What do these results tell us about what we place value on in our society? How are we influenced by these ideas?





# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

## HOW DO WRITERS EXPLORE THE IMPACT OF FOOD ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA.W.11-12.3.B)

In *Skintight*, chicken paillard holds a unique significance for the family and may ultimately help bring Jodi and Elliot back together. This playwriting activity asks students to connect with food in their own lives and create a monologue to reflect on these experiences.

**BRAINSTORM** Review the article on chicken paillard on page 22 of this Upstage guide, and discuss the significance of this dish in *Skintight*. Then, reflect on the role of food in your own life: what are your favorite foods? Which foods bring you together with family or with friends? Can you remember an event in your life where a specific food played an important role in your relationship with another person?

**WRITE** Create a monologue in which one person tells a story about a time when a specific food had impact on a relationship. This may be based on a real event from your own life, or you may invent a fictional story.

**SHARE** Students either read their own monologue aloud, or exchange and read another writer's piece for the group.

**REFLECT** What are the different ways that food has an impact on our relationships? Why do you think food plays a unique role in bringing people together?

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## HOW DOES A DESIGNER CREATE A BRAND THAT EXPRESSES THEIR VALUES?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D)

In *Skintight*, characters grapple with what it means to age in a culture that values youth above all else. This activity asks students to define their own values and design a fashion brand reflective of what they choose to celebrate in the world.

**MATERIALS:** A selection of figure templates from [HERE](#), markers or colored pencils

**BRAINSTORM** With the class, create a list of three well-known apparel brands. What do these brands value, and how do they sell that to the customer (i.e. Nike values athleticism, Victoria's Secret values sex appeal, etc.)? Ask students to write a few sentences about what they value and how an apparel brand could reflect that.

**DESIGN** Distribute figure templates and allow students time to draw an outfit or article of clothing from their brand. Encourage them to name their brand somewhere on the sheet.

**SHARE AND REFLECT** Stage a gallery walk and study each brand. What does this brand value? How do you know? In what ways are the brands we see changing beauty standards?

# CHICKEN PAILLARD AND RESOURCES

BEAUTY ISN'T EVERYTHING.

## CHICKEN PAILLARD

Chicken paillard is a popular dish that is referenced in *Skintight*—it was a meal that Jodi's parents learned how to make together in a cooking class while they were still together. Jodi's mother continued to make this dish whenever Elliot would come over for dinner, after their divorce. It is a memory that Jodi has of her parents that is fond and enduring.

While *paillard* is a French term, this name is only used in the United States. The story goes that the name comes from a restaurant in Paris in the 19th century called Restaurant Paillard, named after its owner, M. Paillard, who served this popular dish at the time. When the restaurant closed, the name disappeared from France, but it stuck in the United States.

Chicken paillard is served in many different cuisines including American, French, and Italian.

-In the United States, the name used is "paillard"

-In France, the name used is "escalope"

-In Italy, the name used is "scaloppine"

This dish usually consists of either chicken or beef meat that comes from the more underused part of the animal, like the legs or thighs. This meat tends to be tougher, so it must be deboned and then tenderized, which makes it thinner and causes it to cover a larger surface area. This is also done so that the meat can be cooked evenly.



Chicken Paillard

The dish can be prepared one of two ways. After it is deboned, skinned, and tenderized, it can either be marinated and grilled to serve with salad, or it can be breaded and fried. Flavors on the meat are meant to be simple, as Chicken paillard is typically served alongside bolder flavors. This is also why the more underused parts of the animal are utilized in this dish.

**HERE** is a recipe from Martha Stewart for Chicken Paillards with Lemon-Butter Sauce if one feels inspired to get cooking. •

## RESOURCES

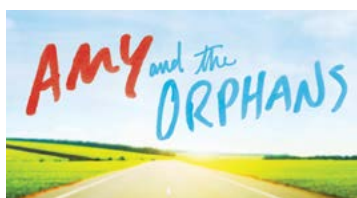
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# ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

## ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO) celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. A not-for-profit company founded in 1965, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of familiar and lesser-known plays and musicals with the ability to take artistic risk as only a not-for-profit can while discovering talented playwrights and providing them long-term artistic support to contribute to the future of the theatrical canon. Roundabout presents this work on its five stages and across the country through national tours. Roundabout has been recognized with 36 Tonys®, 51 Drama Desks, 5 Olivier Awards, 62 Outer Critics Circle, 12 Obie and 18 Lucille Lortel Awards. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org).

## 2017-2018 SEASON



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH KAREN LOFTUS, LISA AND GREGG RECHLER EDUCATION PROGRAM MANAGER

**Ted Sod:** Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the Education department's Lisa and Gregg Rechler Education Program Manager?

**Karen Loftus:** I'm one of seven children born and raised in Dunmore, Pennsylvania, a borough of Scranton in Northeastern Pennsylvania. I was a typical theatre kid in high school and went on to study acting and directing in undergrad. In grad school I focused on stage management and production, and I've held many different jobs in production, design, publishing, and education. My resume always felt strangely disconnected to me since I spent time in multiple careers, but when I saw the job posting for the Education Program Manager position for the Theatrical Workforce Development Program, I felt my experience aligned really well with what was in the description.

**TS:** Describe your job at RTC? What are your responsibilities?

**KL:** I get to manage the TWDP at Roundabout, which is a three-year technical theatre training program for 18-24 year-old residents of NYC. This program offers an alternative pathway to enter the industry for those who don't wish to attend college. I oversee all aspects of the

program, including working with the Teaching Artists to develop the curriculum, creating and maintaining the schedule, communicating with training and employment partners, overseeing the budget, and anything else that helps to continue to make the program grow.

**TS:** What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

**KL:** The best part is seeing the fellows succeed. Whether it's learning a new skill, getting a new job, or watching as a shy younger person becomes a strong leader. The hardest part right now is the time commitment that a new program takes. We're in year two of the program, and we continue to revise and make the program stronger.

**TS:** Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

**KL:** I feel that Roundabout truly respects designers and technicians, and I wanted to be a part of that type of company. Education at Roundabout is a leader in the theatre education community, and it is fulfilling to be a part of a group that has such an effect on so many young people. •

Learn more at [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org). Find us on:





# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

## TICKET POLICY

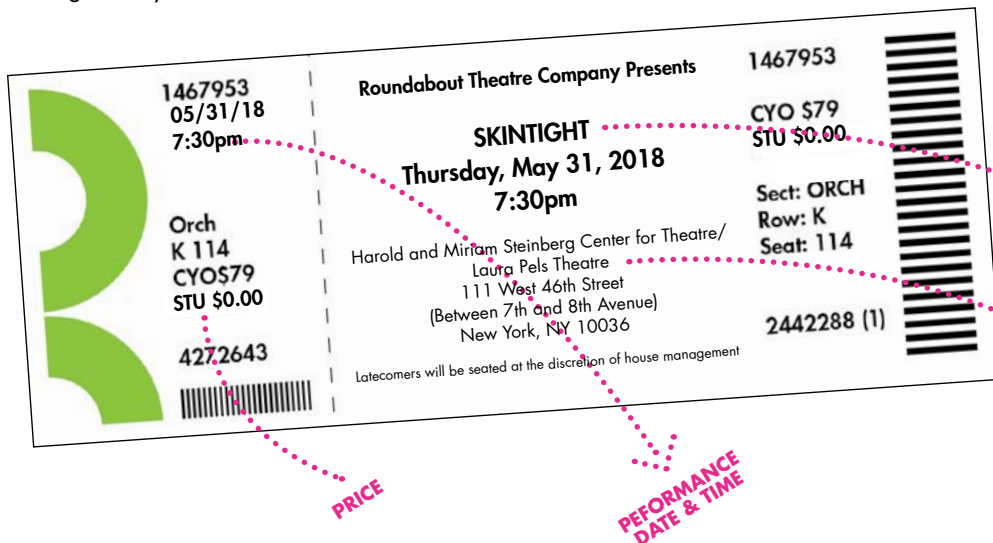
As a student, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row, and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

## PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the restroom for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



## A Roundabout Commission

*Skinight* is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New Play Award, and was developed with support from the Laurents/Hatcher Foundation.

Roundabout's work with new and emerging playwrights and directors, as well as development of new work, is made possible by Kathryn Patterson and Tom Kempner.

We gratefully acknowledge the Roundabout Leaders for New Works: Alec Baldwin, James Costa and John Archibald, Linda L. D'Onofrio, Peggy and Mark Ellis, Howard Gilman Foundation, Jodi Glucksman, Sylvia Golden, Judith and Douglas Krupp, K. Myers, Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater, Ira Pittelman, Laura S. Rodgers, Seedlings Foundation, Mary Solomon, Lauren and Danny Stein, Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, and Dr. Leonard Tow.

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