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# Devising: Improving a Perceived Glistening Community!

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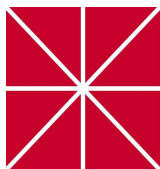
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# Devising: Improving a Perceived Glistening Community

Katie Laner with Dr. Jocelyn L. Buckner, Chapman University Department of Theatre

## What?

Theatre for social change has long relied on devising methods to create pieces reflecting current cultural and societal issues. Employing exercises, games and workshops, theatre for social change devising practices are as distinct and numerous as the many different communities they work with. Through leading a performance ensemble comprised of Chapman University peers called Cross the Line, I developed a devising methodology to access critical social issues facing our immediate community in order to create a performance piece.

## The Process:

I researched and assessed Augusto Boal's ideologies and games of Theatre of the Oppressed and the Fringe Benefits devising workshops and methods.

Theatre of the Oppressed uses exercises and games to address local issues effecting a group of people who have suffered from repression or whose needs have been invisible to general society. Created during a time of intense political chaos in South America, his exercises have continued to spread throughout the world to communities struggling with various needs that have been continually ignored or mistreated by their society or government. Boal's games, thoroughly outlined in *Games for Actors and Non Actors*, range from simple games such as playing tag to more complex ones. Beginning the devising workshops with these exercises allows the actors to use their body to explore feelings and images of oppression as well as begin to bond as an ensemble.

After the Boal exercises and games the troupe realized their roles as members of the Chapman community and as actors who must engage with these difficult subjects of oppression. We then built concrete aspects of performance: devised scenes and dialogue and discovered what specific issue of oppression we wanted to explore. The Fringe Benefits Theatre, based in Los Angeles, currently works through educational and creative partnerships to bring social justice to a variety of communities. Their workshop guidelines facilitated the sharing of personal stories, interviews and hurtful language involved with the oppression we were addressing. Scenes were then improvised following the Fringe Benefits workshop structure for initial script development.

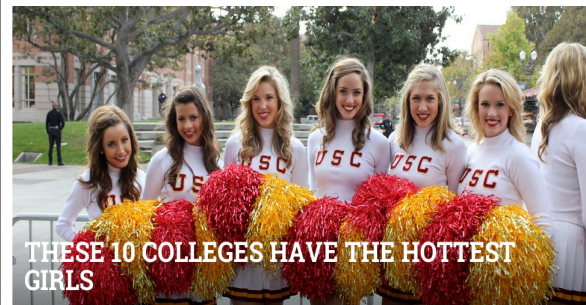
## Why?

**“Live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world”**

Bowles, Norma. *Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2013.

Chapman University appears to be a glittering haven of educational bliss. In brochures we are freshly green mowed lawns and shining faces of youth ready to be the global citizens that change the world. But if you make the effort to see the muck brushed under the rug, you find a place that lets micro-aggressions that reflect intense oppression flourish. The fact that this persists in an institution where intelligent individuals are seeking to better themselves is intolerable. If the collective does not notice what is immediately surrounding them, then it will continue to perpetuate and flourish as they move out of their microcosm and into the beyond.

## Conclusion: What the process lead to



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Taken from <http://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/colleges-with-the-most-attractive-girls>

Chapman women were ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in this online article. During one of the devising workshops this article was discussed and eagerly decided on as the issue of oppression we wanted to address. From then on we focused our story sessions and scene development on how looksism, or judgments based on physical appearance, affects the Chapman culture.

We then formed performance outcomes:

**The Problem:** Looksism is both created by ourselves and projected onto others by individuals or the community as a whole, causing us to adopt social masks, limiting a person's worth and identity to appearance and creating a public view of Chapman that can be abrasive exclusive, and intimidating.

**The Goal:** Aiming to bring empathy, examine prejudices and help open eyes and hearts to see people as people first by highlighting the negative and even abusive relationships we have with ourselves and others.

**For the Future:** With our devised scenes a script will be constructed and performed in Spring 2015 for the Chapman community.