

Typecasting **By Acting & Life Coach Doug Warhit**
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"I can play anything. I get so frustrated when they only see me one way."

When you're starting out, you should be able to play roles based on your physical appearance, even if they're not representative of your self-image and background.

For example, if you grew up in Beverly Hills and you got your masters degree from Harvard, but you look like a Mafia hitman or a gangbanger, you must be able to pull off the body language and dialect for these types of characters. If you're Israeli or Italian, but everyone thinks you're Cuban, it would be in your best interest to perfect a Cuban accent and even learn to speak Spanish. If you're a genius, but you look like Marilyn Monroe, you should be able to make us believe you're a ditzy blonde. The reason is, when you appear on camera, the audience automatically makes assumptions about you. If your performance is inconsistent with your physicality, it takes them out of the story.

Agents and casting people operate the same way. They assess who and what you are the moment they meet you. It will make your life easier if you can give them what they expect.

If you're not sure where you fit in, try the following exercise:

Go to the shopping mall with a friend. Stand in one spot without speaking and have your friend approach shoppers one at a time, point to you and ask them to take a thirty second survey. You can cull your questions from this list or make up your own.

1. Do they think you look like a hero/heroine/villain/victim?
2. White collar/blue collar/bum?
3. Cop/crook/judge/attorney?
4. Doctor/nurse/patient?
5. Kindergarten teacher/college professor/high school or college student/drop-out/slacker?
6. Would they expect to see you on a soap opera/sitcom/nighttime drama?
7. How old do they think you are?
8. Wealthy/middle class/poor?
9. Ethnicity/religion?
10. Funny/serious?
11. Successful with the opposite sex?
12. Lecherous/monogamous?
13. Bossy/wishy-washy?
14. Athletic/couch potato?
15. Warm and loving/someone to avoid in a dark alley?
16. Life of the party/wallflower?
17. Would they expect to find you at McDonalds or a fancy French restaurant?
18. If they found you in a fancy French restaurant would they expect you to be the maitre d'/hostess/busboy/waiter/chef/owner/bartender/customer?
19. Married with children/single on the prowl?
20. Workaholic/lazy?

Note one: From the above exercise, cull three to six characters you'd be cast as. Work on these characters until you can do them in your sleep. (Don't wait until you have an audition.) Know how each of your characters dresses, moves, thinks, speaks, and relates to the world.

Note two: Just because you're going to create characters based on your appearance doesn't mean your choices have to be cliché or generic. The more creative and specific you are, the more likely you are to do memorable work.

Note three: If you're opposed to portraying a character that perpetuates a stereotype you find offensive, don't do it. No one can force you to take on any role. (The role will still be done; just not by you.)

Note four: If you don't like the way you're perceived, experiment with your appearance, e.g. hair color, style, and length; clothing; diet and exercise; eye glasses and tinted contact lenses.

Your goal should be to get "pigeonholed" so agents will know how to market you and casting people will know what roles to bring you in on. Whether you're overweight, nerdy, the boy/girl next door, a body builder, an athlete, drop dead gorgeous, sleazy, sinister, or clean cut, do everything you can to cultivate and perpetuate that image in the minds of the people who can hire you. Once you're successful and become known for playing certain types of roles, you can then deal with the issue of showing them what else you can do. Create a mold before you worry about breaking out of it.

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