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## When I Grow Up, Everyone Will Love Me: Gender Performance and Liberation

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**When I Grow Up, Everyone Will Love Me:  
Gender Performance and Liberation**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of the Arts  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## **Acknowledgements**

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**“I have a physiological need to be recognized, so I’m enjoying this moment very much.”**

**- Karen Finley**

**“There's only two types of people in the world: the ones that entertain, and the ones that observe.” -Britney Spears “Circus”**



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## Preface

Hello and welcome to my theater and performance senior project paper. Before we get into the nitty gritty, I want to lay some quick structural groundwork. First, it would be impossible to explore every aspect of the making and performing process in fifteen or sixteen pages. Instead of attempting the impossible, I chose to curate a chronological overview of the process highlighting the key challenges, discoveries, and questions that we encountered on the way. Second, I want to clarify the lens through which I experienced this process. I had the ultimate luck to collaborate with Madie Reilly, the best friend and co-creator I could ever ask for, on this piece (more on this later). From the beginning, Madie and I decided that we would co-write the piece while Madie directed and I performed. So, for this paper, I will take you through my experience through the lens of a co-writer and actor.

I split this paper into four sections. First, I take you through the initial origins of the work: Where did the idea come from? What questions did we want to explore? What did our initial research and inspirations look like? Second, I take you through the rehearsal process: What did our rehearsals look like? How did we craft our twenty-five minutes? What was it like to approach the piece as an actor? Third, I explore the performance process: How did we translate our work into the Luma Theater? What was it like to perform an original work for a live audience? And finally, I wrap up with some post-show reflections and thoughts for the future. Let's get into it!



### **Part 1: We're Making a Play?**

If you had asked me junior year what I was going to do for my theatre senior project, I would have laughed in your face. I had no ideas. Zero. Luckily for me, I was taking Gender Theatre with Jack Ferver that semester (Thanks, Jack). For our final projects, we had to create a ten minute piece that explored how our understanding of gender in performance had evolved over the course of the semester. For my piece, I took quotes from actresses I admire about being women in the acting industry. I then blended these quotes, along with a few of my own, into a monologue that I read while putting on 1950's inspired makeup. After I was "made up," I transitioned into dialogue from *Gypsy* and sang through the chaos that is *Rose's Turn* in an attempt to break apart the woman I had constructed in the first part of the performance. In my final paper accompanying this work I said, "I am curious to see what happens if I start with these categories that were placed on me and my work, like the overbearing mother for example, and blow them apart from the inside out. What happens to me, the actor, when I allow myself to become possessed by the spirits of famous female actresses and the character of Mama Rose? Whose voice is being heard? Is it mine? Is it theirs? Is it the patriarchy that has shaped us? If I let these women, with all their complexities and traumas, into my body, what does it teach me about myself? How does it shape my sense of self and my sense of my gender?" (Eisendrath, 3). These questions became the basis for my senior project proposal and jump started my collaboration with Madie.

When I first asked Madie if she wanted to collaborate with me, she said no. Madie and I met while working on the department production of *Desire* in 2019. As the only two freshmen in the show, we bonded very quickly and became roommates the following year. While we have been almost inseparable since then, we had never worked together on a piece. It was scary to

make that leap. Madie was worried that collaboration on such an important project would be risky for our friendship, so we submitted separate project proposals. Luckily for me, about a week later in the tea aisle of Hannafords, Madie changed her mind. I gave her a brief summary of my proposal to explore the relationship between gender and performance, and she was all in. After a long discussion of expectations and boundaries, we were off to the races. We decided on the following ground-rules: We would co-write the piece, but Madie would take on the role of director and I would be the actor. We would set specific times to work on Sproj and specific times to hang out as friends without working on the project. Most importantly, we would have regular check-ins where we honestly discussed how the process was going and if anything needed to be done differently. We both agreed that our primary goals were to have fun and make something that we were excited to share, this was especially important since we would both be dealing with the stress of two senior projects instead of one. With all this in mind, we submitted a new joint proposal and began our research process.

Here, it is important to note that both Madie and I are very organized and hardworking. Throughout the whole process, we had no trouble staying on task, scheduling rehearsals, and doing our fair share of the work. This was evident as soon as we started our initial research. To begin, we consolidated our initial thoughts into two main questions: What does it mean to perform gender? When did we learn to perform the role of ‘woman’? We then spent the summer collecting media content and reading pieces of gender theory that might begin to answer these questions. We made a mega list of theories to read and celebrities, movies, and plays that impacted our sense of gender. In doing so, two things became clear: First, there was a direct correlation between performing onstage as an actor and performing gender in everyday life.

Second, so much of our understanding of gender, specifically the role of white women, was created by the media and pop culture we consumed as we grew up on the internet.

I found two texts especially foundational to my work on this piece. In her book, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler questions the categories of sex, gender, and desire and their relationship to regimes of power. The goal of the text, as stated by Butler, is “to center on -and decenter- such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, ix) I was especially struck by her exploration of phallogocentrism: the idea that all western philosophy, culture, literature, and language is centered around the masculine and the “phallus.” Prior to reading this text, I had never heard this term. It was exciting. For Butler, the phallus was different from a piece of anatomy, it was the presence of power. This distinction was especially important for our work. Madie and I wanted to challenge the systems of patriarchy, not just yell at men. Butler’s exploration of the phallus as a form of social capital did just that: it separated the institution from the individual. As she puts it, “The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms.” (Butler, 13) In our work, we wanted to indict a system, not a person; phallogocentrism was the key to that. If the *system* is phallic, how does it treat the person without the phallus? In turn, how has the person without the phallus internalized their lack thereof? How do we move through our assumptions about gender and power?

Butler also questions the basis of contemporary feminism and the assumed universal identity of women. What do women, as a gender category, have in common? Do women have any universal characteristics other than their oppression by men? I found Peggy Phelan’s book, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, to be helpful in answering Butler’s questions. In her book, Phelan examines the assumptions about the connection between representational visibility

and political power. She argues that in our phallogentric society, “The male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning.” (Phelen, 5) The man, carrying the phallic-mark, is defined as the standard, while the woman is defined as the “other.” While Phelen’s analysis seems to be limited to a strict gender-binary, the idea of the marked versus the unmarked is still useful. Phelen, expanding on Lacanian psychoanalysis, argues that “Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other.” (Phelen, 13) She believes that we look to others to see ourselves. For example, “when the unmarked woman looks at the marked man she sees a man; but she sees herself as other, as negative-man.” (Phelen, 17). These ideas of the seen and the unseen, the marked and the unmarked, are useful performance tools. In fact, Phelen directly writes that performance is a great opportunity for the unmarked to mark themselves. How does gender mark us in daily life? How does it mark us on stage? What does it mean to consent to be seen?

Both of these books influenced our writing and performance process. Butler and Phelen challenge how categories of gender and sex might challenge or support institutions of power and encourage their readers to separate the individual from the category. This encouraged us to focus on our own personal experiences instead of trying to encompass some larger political reality. As two white femme creators, this was especially important. Madie and I could never put the diverse femme experience on stage, nor did we want to. Butler and Phelen reminded us that this was okay: our experiences carried enough weight on their own. Butler and Phelen also encouraged us to use our performance as a mirror: how does a femme-body performing on a stage for an audience reflect the daily practice of performing gender for the societal gaze?

## Part 2: Rehearse, Scream, Delete, Rehearse, Laugh

After spending the summer researching and brainstorming ideas around gender and performance, we were ready to jump into the next step. This meant we had to write the script. To attempt this monstrous task, Madie and I set a strict work schedule. We decided to meet twice every week and have a full first draft written by the end of October. At first, our writing process was very traditional. We would meet on Monday's and talk through possible plot lines and scene ideas, draft up some versions for our next meetings on Thursday's and then revise over the weekend and repeat the next Monday. After a few weeks of this, we had almost no material that we liked. On September 27th, I wrote in my journal: "I feel like I'm getting stuck in the need to be correct and informative, but we aren't writing an essay, we are making a play." This was not a new problem for me.

I have a very intense inner critic and it has always made it difficult for me to write without judgment. My previous conservatory-style theatre training and professional work experience left me with a very limited idea of what made "good" theatre. When it came time to write the play, these ideas made it almost impossible for me to experiment with anything that existed outside of that preset norm. By the end of September, it was clear that I needed to change my mindset. After all, this was a *PLAY*. Around this time, we had an advising meeting with Jack where they reminded us to "take our nun-shoes off" and recentralize pleasure in our work. This led to a major shift in our creative process.

Starting in October, Madie and I took our writing process off the page and onto its feet. We came up with a new rule: if it is not giving us pleasure, we are throwing it out. With this in mind, we started to play and our new creative process was born. Madie and I would meet in Resnik studio, dance around to some Britney Spears and then experiment with some source text

on its feet. Madie would then ask me questions and in response I would improvise some additional text and remove the sections that felt artificial. From there, we went back to the script and rewrote whatever section we were working on to match our experience in the studio. Suddenly, writing the script no longer felt like an obstacle, but like a scavenger hunt. For me, putting the writing process back into my body helped me step out of the confines of my head and stop over intellectualizing every choice I made. For the first time in a long time, I was working from a place of pleasure and play, and it made a huge difference in the work. Suddenly, scenes that were muddled with an overwhelming need to explain and be taken seriously striped off their protective shells. It was liberating.

It was at this point, leading into our midway, that we finally started to see our play take shape. When we started the process in September, we had three main ideas for the show: The container of our show would be an audition, source text would be embedded into the script, and the character would be shifting between consciously and unconsciously performing for the audience. After two months of trial and error, we connected the dots in November and the play was born.

Our character, Woman, is preparing for a big audition. She is an actress in the digital age and is hyper aware of the expectations placed on her as a femme bodied performer in this industry. As she prepares herself for her audition, we watch her try on different variations of “female” performance, using the audience as a sounding board. First, she is an influencer. She embodies the language of Trisha Paytus, a youtuber famous for scandal, binge eating, and unhinged emotional rants. Playing an influencer would be great, if she didn’t have to look at herself all the time. Next, she tries stand-up comedy. But self depreciation and stories of failed

sexual exploits don't feel great either. In an attempt to re-center, she dips a toe into the role of the self-help "it-girl" and heads to the audition in a frenzy.

Upon her arrival, she meets the unavoidable straight, cis, white theatre guy. We all know him. We all love him. We all hate him. As the center of the phallogentric theatre industry, he carries a massive blue dildo. Woman, who will not be outshone by this over-confident butthole, wants it. What is it like to walk into every audition room with the confidence of someone carrying a massive dildo? She has to know. Together, they rehearse the audition scene. It's Twilight (obviously). Edward, the sparkly male vampire, is in love with Bella and also wants to eat her. Bella, the nervous human school girl, has discovered Edward's secret and is convinced he would never hurt her. Woman tries to embody Bella to the best of her ability, but it feels wrong. She doesn't want to feel weak. The two actors fight over the dildo and Woman wins. They perform the scene again, but this time the dynamic has shifted. This time, Woman wields the dildo and asserts her dominance as Edward. The moment is fleeting as the man quickly steals back his dildo and the fighting resumes. At this moment, Woman discovers that the door out of the room is locked. Why? Suddenly, Piece of Me by Britney Spears blares over the speakers. They have entered the dance portion of the audition. They dance. They spin. They have fun together. Something shifts.

Woman did not expect to enjoy spending time with the man. Maybe he is not what she assumed? But why was the door locked? And why do things keep happening that she didn't plan for? The man asks her about her life. In response, she vomits. Suddenly all of the things she was keeping buried beneath her facade are coming out. Is this her true self or just another performed version? Is there a difference? The fissure is widening. The show must go on. She continues to prepare for the audition. She puts on a slip, character shoes, and a dress: the uniform. But why is

she even doing this? This business doesn't support her, it abuses her. She knows it and yet continues to try. Why? Love? A childhood dream? A one in a million chance at happiness?

Suddenly a voice comes out from the void. It's the Woman's voice echoing a warning. She shouldn't be here. She is just going to get rejected again and it is going to hurt like hell. But the Woman has made a choice: she is in control. She is the owner of her body, and her mind, and her voice, and she is going to do what she loves for *herself*. As she sings through *Rose's Turn*, we watch as she performs as herself for the first time. She is not falling prey to her self doubt or any other voice that says she should be anything other than herself. It's beautiful. It's badass. It's free. The auditioner, another voice from the void, calls "Next!" and the play is over. After 25 minutes, Woman has liberated herself from the echoes of societal expectations, if just for a moment. Sadly it is not enough to win her a job, as the world has not changed.



### **Part 3: The Pleasure of Performance**

In the time between midways and tech week, the script went through dozens of revisions and cuts. Our first full run came in around thirty minutes, five minutes over our allotted time. To solve this problem, ruthlessly cut anything redundant or over-explanatory. This was surprisingly easy because once we knew what we wanted from the piece, we just had to simplify and amplify that story. About two weeks out, however, we ran into our first major problem. We lost Andrew—our cis, white theatre guy—to a baseball commitment. This sucked. I did a lot of screaming. Luckily, thanks to lots of support from our peers and Jack, we adjusted appropriately and were blessed to have Tim come in from the city to step into the role. We were sorry to see Andrew go, but were grateful for his early contributions. As the show neared, Madie and I transitioned our focus from co-writers to actor and director. Luckily for me, that meant that Madie took the lead on working with the Fisher Center staff, teaching Tim his blocking, and solidifying tech while I dove into the acting.

I will pause on my chronicle here to answer an important question: When we lost Andrew, why did we replace him? Why did we go through all this extra trouble to make sure that there was a real cis white man on stage? There are two answers to this question. First, I am greedy and I wanted a scene partner to play with on stage. Second, and more importantly, we needed a mirror. As Phelen described in her work, we use other people as mirrors to see ourselves. We wanted to investigate the gendered boundaries between performance and reality, between assumption and truth. The theatre industry is a white cis male space. This is a reality we could not ignore. The male character served as a reflection of this reality. He also served as a mirror for my character and the audience to investigate their assumptions about gender and power in the space. The male character does the bare minimum on stage and yet we still want to

watch him. Why? My character immediately assumes that the male character is the enemy. Why? What happens when this male character suddenly takes on a non-traditional male role? What about a dance? The male presence on stage served as a complication. How can we recognize his power and the system he benefits from while also seeing him as an individual? Can the two be separated? As creators, having a male human in the piece held us accountable for these complexities and forced us to hold multiple truths at once in our work.

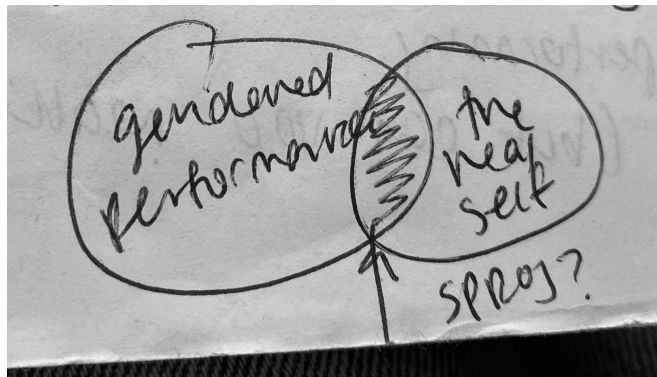
Now back to the process. I have studied acting for a long time. I was lucky enough to attend Interlochen Arts Academy for four summers of training programs and three years of full-time student training. Starting at age twelve, I had all of the major western acting techniques drilled into my skull (Stanislavski, Meisner, Alexander, Laban, you name it). While I am extremely grateful for this training, I was also very young and quick to build up habits. By the time I graduated from the school in 2018, I was technically proficient for my age, but I felt like a robot. My work was driven by a very strict notion of “good” and “bad” that has taken four years at Bard to unlearn. When it came time to make a senior project, I had one major goal as a performer: I wanted to reconnect with my joy of performing and spend less time worrying about getting things “right.”

To prepare for the performance I did three main things: I used traditional psycho-physical acting techniques to understand the character’s headspace; I then shifted this work into my body to combat my habit of overthinking; And finally, I set specific intentions for my time on stage that were based in pleasure and play. You will find an abridged version of this process below:

<p><b>The Brain</b></p>	<p><b>Who am I?</b></p> <p>“Woman” is a femme-bodied, female-identifying performer. Throughout the piece, however, we see two versions of her: the performed self and the true self. These two versions are at constant war with each other. The performed</p>
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self is always aware of being perceived and gendered, it embodies other famous white women (Trisha Paytas, Lady Gaga, Britney...) in an attempt to be accepted by society. The true self hides behind the performed self and does not perfectly fit the gender norms of the performance industry.

As an actor, I played these as two separate characters. The performed self begins the show, embodying all these different versions of gendered performance (summarized in a note from Madie's journal below) As she meets the man and gets into her body and starts to find joy through the fight and the dance number, the true self begins to emerge (hence the throwing up). As the true self begins to confront the preconceptions of the performed self, the performed self exits the body and becomes the voice-over. The true self, which now owns the body, fights the externalized performed self and over-powers it. Sadly, even in liberating herself, she does not get the job.



(Reilly, Journal Image)

### **Where am I?**

The location of the play is purposely vague, so as an actor I had to make specific choices about the rules of the space. While it may seem like the Woman is waking up in her bedroom, running to the studio for her audition, and then performing in the audition room, there are also holes in this reality. For example, the door out of the audition studio is locked. The male actor can walk freely through this door, but Woman is trapped inside. As a writer, I looked at the space as a dreamscape turned nightmare. The woman “wakes”

	<p>into her pre-audition anxiety dream thinking that she is in control. As she moves through it, however, it becomes clear that there are things that she did not plan for. As an actor, I looked at the space as very real, which made the non-realistic moments especially terrifying.</p> <p><b>Who am I talking to?</b></p> <p>Woman talks to three people during the play: her audience, the man, and herself. The audience is ever present in her experience, she is always aware of their presence and their expectations. The man provides a target for her anger and assumptions, but also an opportunity to subvert them. When she talks to herself, she is talking to her inner voice that is an echo of a larger societal voice.</p> <p><b>What do I want?</b></p> <p>Woman wants to be loved.</p> <p><b>How will I get what I want?</b></p> <p>If Woman gets this job, she will become a star and everyone will love her.</p>
<b>The Body</b>	<p><b>Where do I lead from?</b></p> <p>Woman leads from her head and her chest. She holds anxiety in her hands.</p> <p><b>What is my base tempo?</b></p> <p>Woman is always in a rush, she could break into a run at any moment.</p> <p><b>What is my breath-pattern like?</b></p> <p>Woman's neutral breath is shallow and quick, but as a trained ~actress~ she consciously tries to take deep grounding breaths when she is feeling overwhelmed.</p>

<b>The Spirit</b>	<p><b>What did I want to get out of my time on stage?</b></p> <p>Mostly, I wanted to have a great time. As a performer, I wanted to find moments to relax on stage. Moments to do less and simply be there, breathing. I wanted to release some of the chaos that has pent up inside me because I haven't been able to perform on stage since before the pandemic.</p>
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When it came time to perform the piece for an audience in Luma, I was terrified. About two days before opening I had a complete crisis of faith. I felt guilty about our piece. I felt like performing it was selfish and that I was being grossly over-indulgent. Luckily, Madie had some words of wisdom. She reminded me that my feelings were coming from a place of deep care about the piece. As usual, she was right. Prior to this project, I had never made anything that I was proud of. Yes, I had worked on projects where I was proud of my acting work or my singing but I had never written something that I felt proud enough of to put on stage. It was a new type of vulnerability that I had never experienced before. Funnily enough, my feelings were almost identical to those of the character we had written. Woman desperately wants to perform and has worked so hard on herself and her craft, but she still feels unworthy. She is constantly fighting the need to conform to some standard of female performance and the paradoxes that come with it: How can you try really hard and be effortless? How can you conform to the expectations of your gender while also being unique? How can you perform for yourself while also performing for others? These are the inner conflicts that both the character and I released into the void as the show went up in February.

As I briefly mentioned, this was the first time I stepped on a stage in front of a live audience since the spring of 2020. My body was not prepared. I ended up catching a cold and losing my voice the day before we opened. Although I was super grateful it wasn't COVID, I had

never actually *lost* my voice before and it elevated my pre-show terror to new heights. Given that the piece was a bit of a vocal marathon for me, losing my voice was not an option. I spent the day leading up to the show on self-inforced vocal rest (Me? Vocal rest? How?) and chugged about two gallons of tea before my call time. Thankfully, my body still knew how to perform after its two year break and my voice made it through both shows before utterly crashing.

Madie and I both agreed that the shows were a smashing success. Not only did the audience seem to enjoy watching it, I had the time of my life performing it. I can honestly say that this was the first time in a long time I felt that I was performing from a positive space instead of a negative one. When I was on stage, I didn't feel like I needed to prove anything or meet a certain criteria for excellence. I just wanted to share. It felt almost childlike. There is a moment in the script where the Woman says "I can feel it. This force. Just lingering right under the surface. Waiting for permission to just AHHHHHHH." That is what performing this piece felt like. I felt like all of the guilt, confusion, and anger I felt about the theatre as a business and the way it treats femme bodies was released and replaced with humor and joy. I gave myself permission to have fun. I would call that a smashing success.

#### **Part 4: We Made a Play?**

As of today, it has been a month since we shared our project and I could not be happier with the experience. Moving forward, Madie and I are already brainstorming ideas for our next collaboration (maybe something on Tiktok?) and we plan to submit this project for various grants. Personally, I feel as though this project was the ideal culmination of my four years at Bard. When I moderated into the Theatre & Performance program in 2020, I wrote: “I want to understand the world around me. I want to explore the parts of humanity that scare me and make work that excites me. I want to have fun with people that I love. I want to put a Kelly Clarkson flash mob on stage. I want to explore traditionally academic questions artistically and artistic questions academically. I want to take my work as a Political Studies major and use theatre as an additional tool of exploration. I don’t just want to be an actor who knows how to analyze a scene through the lens of Stanislavski, I want to be a director, a writer, a technician, and a collaborator. This is why I want to moderate into the Theater and Performance Department: to learn how to make work from all angles, not just the most traditional or expected ones.” Although I ended up using Britney Spears instead of Kelly Clarkson, I can happily say that I reached these goals.

When I wrote my moderation papers, I initially thought I would be creating a joint theatre and political studies project. Although I ended up creating two separate projects this year, the political implications of this theatre piece are undeniable. The patriarchy is alive and well in the theatre business and in the world. Femme bodied performers have been making work to address this oppression for decades. I think about Karen Finley, whose piece “Shut Up and Love Me!” feels like an x-rated sibling of our work. Finley uses her body as a political weapon. Unsurprisingly, this often got her written off as an exhibitionist or a crazed feminist instead of an artist. Personally, I don’t think these titles are mutually exclusive. Madie and I did not set out to

create a “feminist play,” but in the eyes of many, that is what we did. It’s actually pretty funny. I am of the opinion that all good theatre is political theatre. Putting bodies on stage is a political act. Performing for an audience is a political act. If I have to strip down and run around in a slip and heels like Karen Finley for people to listen to the words coming out of my mouth, that is a political act. Is that an act of feminism? Sure. Am I also just a femme body having a good time in a traditionally masculine space? Absolutely.

I came to Bard as an actor with a very narrow perspective on what theatre could be. My understanding of the form was limited to what those at the top of the white, western, capitalist, and patriarchal theatre business deemed acceptable. After four years, I have finally broken through these boundaries. I will be leaving Bard as a theatre maker: an artist. I now understand that I want so much more from this form than just a chance to get paid to memorize someone else’s words. Every experience I have, whether it be as an actor, a director, a writer, a dancer, a singer, a political studies major, or just a living and breathing body, will add to my work. I can create my own words, my own worlds, and even my own forms. Making and performing *When I Grow Up, Everyone Will Love Me* was an homage to that journey of liberation. To quote Bette Davis, “Without wonder and insight, acting is just a business. With it, it becomes creation.”



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## When I Grow Up Everyone Will Love Me

By Hannah Eisendrath and Madeleine Reilly

*An alarm goes off. Lights come up on W, asleep with her phone in her hand.*

*She finally wakes up, distraught. She sits up and checks her phone immediately. She grabs a hairbrush and some makeup, putting on her "natural morning face" and begins to film herself on an Instagram livestream. We see the livestream projected on the screen in real time.*

W

Hey guys. "I woke up this morning feeling like a chicken nugget. When you feel like a chicken nugget, you feel like delicious, but you also feel fried and fake in the inside. I feel like mcdonald's chicken nuggets are fake. They start out as a pink goop then become a chicken nugget. That's what I am, I'm pink goop, I started out as a pink goop, now I am a chicken nugget. While I might seem delicious, I am really unhealthy.

People say I should stop posting social media, but it makes me happy. Social media makes me happy, I love social media.

A chicken nugget doesn't feel social media impact. In fact, people love chicken nuggets on social media. That's why I feel loved. Everybody wants chicken nuggets, they want to taste chicken nuggets. However, no one really falls in love with a chicken nugget or gets married to a chicken nugget".

*[She turns around and stares at her face on the projector. She examines herself on her phone camera. She goes over to the microphone stand to speak.]*

I hate looking at myself.

I don't mind when you guys look at me though, you guys can look at me.

I think I could be a tiktok influencer. I would really really like to be a tiktok influencer.

I want to be one of those girls that makes get ready with me videos, you know the ones, where they match cowboy boots with a nightgown and a vest and it somehow looks effortlessly cool.

God I wonder what that's like.

Maybe I should get more tattoos.

If I had more tattoos then people would know I'm cool without me having to say or do anything.

I want to be the cool girl.

Or at least a cool person.

I think I could be.

The problem is, you can't try.

Or at least, you can't look like you try.

And if you couldn't tell, I try really hard. All the time.

I first started wearing makeup in the 2nd grade.

Or like the other day, I was talking with this guy and we were laying on his twin-xl dorm bed and he told me that he didn't want to kiss me because I gave off "relationship energy". That is obviously code for "if I kissed you you would expect me to do more than just sleep with you and I don't want to carry the burden of responding to your texts or saying hi to you in the hallway or having any sort of emotional human connection with you in any way". And sure, I get that. But like I didn't even want to date this one.

Like, do I have the words "Cannot Comprehend Causal Sex" written on my forehead?

Don't answer that.

Maybe I shouldn't talk to you guys about sex.

I don't know.

If I was the cool girl I could say whatever I wanted.

I would be a mystery to you.

I want to be a mystery.

I want to be "talented, brilliant, incredible, amazing, show stopping, spectacular, never the same, totally unique, completely not ever been done before, unafraid to reference or not reference, put it in a blender, shit on it, vomit on it, eat it, give birth to it." (Lady Gaga)

I don't chase, I attract.

What belongs to me will simply find me.

I possess the qualities needed to be extremely successful.

I floss every night, even when I'm drunk.

My ribs are wider than my hips, but that's okay because I don't want children.

My thoughts are filled with positivity and my life is plentiful with prosperity.

And I am going to kill this audition.

They will love me.

Everyone will love me!

*[She runs to her audition and enters between the chairs.]*

W

I'm here!!!

*[She finds a chair and sits. A man M enters, also carrying a bag.]*

M

Hey.

W

Hi.

M

Are you here for the auditions?

W

Me? Oh yeah. You?

M

Yeah.

W

Cool.

*[He pulls a dildo out of his bag. He rolls it around in his hands. He looks at her.]*

W

Why do you have that?

M

I'm holding on to it for a friend. She told me her dad was going through her stuff and she needed me to hold on to it for a little while.

W

Huh.

Is she your girlfriend?

No. M

Can I see it for a second? W

No. M

Why not? W

Because you can see it from over there. From where you're sitting. M

Fine. W

Will you at least run lines with me then? M

Sure. *[they stand and prepare to run lines.]*

How old are you? W

Seventeen. M

How long have you been seventeen? W

A while. M

I know what you are. W

Say it. Say it out loud. M

No. Ok, wait. This just feels....can I try something else? W

...okay?

M

*[she reaches for the dildo.]*

I told you, you can't have this!

M

Oh my god, look over there!

W

What?

M

*[She walks over and tries to grab it out of his hand. He holds on tight. They struggle. It turns into a full-on wrestling match.]*

W

If she's not your girlfriend then just let me see it!

M

I told her I would look after it!

W

You can't just walk around with the most expensive dildo in the world in your backpack and not let me touch it!

*[After more struggling, she comes out victorious. He is on the floor, breathless.]*

Let's try this again.

M

Okay.

*[She prepares again.  
She points at him with the dildo to cue the line.]*

M

How old are you?

Seventeen.

W

How long have you been seventeen?

M

A while.

W

I know what you are.

M

Say it. Say it out loud.

W

Vampire.

M

Are you afraid?

W

*[She stands over him. She puts the dildo to his lips.]*

No.

M

You should be.

W

You're...beautiful.

M

*[Their faces get closer. He leans in to kiss her, only instead he sneakily grabs the dildo out of her hand. He jumps back up to standing, They brush off and go to opposite sides of the stage.]*

Ha!

M

W

Why are you here?

M

What are you talking about? I'm here for the aud....the au... the... actually, I don't know.

W

Really?

M

I...

W

Then is there any reason for you to stay?

M

No...

*[W points to the door.]*

W

Then...get out.

M

But, don't you...

W

No. I don't.

M

Why are you being a bitch?

W

I don't know you. And you have no reason to be here so just...

M

Leave? You want me to leave?

W

Was I not being clear when I said get the fuck out?

M

You can't tell me to leave. This isn't your hallway—



W

You know what you're just like every other theater guy I went to highschool with. You think you are some supply in demand, but guess what, you're not. There are a hundred white people with brown hair that look just like us! YOU'RE NOT SPECIAL!

*[Determined, she walks up to the door and tries to open it. It is locked. She struggles.]*

M

Look, I'm sorry if I—Are you good?

W

Shit.

*[PIECE OF ME by Britney Spears comes on. It's loud.]*

W

*[over the music]* What is going on?

M

I think it's the dance call.

W

No one told me there was gonna be a dance call???

M

It's fine, it's fine just follow me.

*[M does a fully-choreographed dance routine a la Brit while lip syncing]*

I'M MISS AMERICAN DREAM SINCE I WAS SEVENTEEN

DON'T MATTER IF I STEP ON THE SCENE

OR SNEAK AWAY TO THE PHILIPPINES

THEY STILL GON' PUT PICTURES OF MY DERRIERE IN THE MAGAZINE

YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME?

YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME

I'M MISS BAD MEDIA KARMA

ANOTHER DAY ANOTHER DRAMA

GUESS I CAN'T SEE NO HARM  
 IN WORKING AND BEING A MAMA  
 AND WITH A KID ON MY ARM  
 I'M STILL AN EXCEPTION  
 AND YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME

*[Mid-song, he gestures to W. She takes her place and they finish the combination together.]*

I'M MRS. LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS  
 (YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME)  
 I'M MRS. OH MY GOD THAT BRITNEY'S SHAMELESS!  
 (YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME)  
 I'M MRS. EXTRA! EXTRA! THIS JUST IN  
 (YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME)  
 I'M MRS. SHE'S TOO BIG NOW SHE'S TOO THIN  
 (YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME)

*[It's hot and they kill it. The song ends and W keeps spinning. M collapses on the floor.]*

M  
 You were really good.

W  
 Thanks. So were you.

M  
 What do you wanna do with your life?

AW

Huh? Uh..I don't know. I mean, I've done a lot of things already. I guess I've been too busy to think about what's next. Actually that's not true. I've thought about it a lot but the more I think about it the less I'm sure about it.

I think I'm gonna be sick.

*[M offers them his bag. She throws up in it at center stage.]*

W

Thanks.

....

When I was eight my parents took me and my siblings out one time to see a movie. I can't remember what it was. All I remember is that it was one of those movies that you see as a kid and you see yourself in one of the characters and after you walk out of the theater you kinda feel like you're half them and half yourself? So anyways on the drive home I had this sudden burst of courage and I told them that I was bored of my life, that I was sick of living in the suburbs and being in third grade and I wanted something exciting to happen to me. Something as exciting as being princess of Genovia or being a pirate with a magical compass and getting to kiss Keira Knightly. I think my dad was fed up with me because out of nowhere he stopped the car and slid open the door of the minivan and said, "you want some excitement? go for it." The cold air slapped me in the face. It was dark. I had no idea where we were. And just before I could step out of the car my mom slammed the minivan door shut.

I think about that night a lot.

They are both my biggest supporters, my parents. They came to all my little school plays and talent shows. To them, I was a star. I am a star. But now the door is wide open again I can feel someone pushing me out of the car. Hard. And I know I have to go but I don't know...

*[she starts getting undressed.]*

I guess it's a question of confidence

I'm not a very confident person.

Which doesn't make any sense because I'm actually extremely talented.

I cannot even begin to describe to you guys how talented I am.

And I'm really fucking smart.

Like smarter than most people.

I actually sometimes wonder if my brain just works completely different from everyone else's because I see things that they could never see.

*[She goes over to her bag and pulls out heels and a slip and starts to get dressed.]*

I'm not trying to be self-absorbed or anything, like I'm not a selfish person.

But I'm trying to be honest.

With myself.

And you.

It's not easy. I'm actually taking a really big risk here. Because I think that you guys are gonna hate me for saying this stuff. It makes me feel guilty. Like I'm not sure I can be confident and likable at the same time.

I really want you to like me.  
 So I usually wouldn't say any of this.  
 I mean, I've gotten really good at making myself smaller.

But the truth is.  
 I'm not small.  
 I'm a beast.

Like I have everything I need to be really successful in this field. And sometimes I wonder what would happen if I just really went for it. Like if I actually walked into every audition room like the talented monster that I am. Just laid it all out there in the open.  
 I can feel it. This force. Just lingering right under the surface. Waiting for permission to just  
 AHHHHHHH.  
 FUCK.

I'm a fucking GOD. Can you feel it? "I am your god. I am your second coming. I am your mother and I'm SMARTER than you and more ATTRACTIVE than you and BETTER than you at everything that you love and you're going to get down on your knees and worship by mind, my mind and my body and I'm gonna be MOTHERFUCKING KING OF YOUR MOTHERFUCKING WORLD".  
 DO YOU HEAR ME?

I'M GOOD ENOUGH.  
 I'M FUCKING GOOD ENOUGH.

*[M exits at some point. Maybe he gets scared or bored or annoyed.]*

...

Where's my phone?

W

I just had it before I... where did it...did I...no....

Did I leave it at home??? There's no way I left it at home????

*[She dumps out her bag. Shit rolls everywhere. It's a mess.]*

FUCK

This is exhausting.

DON'T LOOK AT ME.

I hate this industry.

You know.... they tried to put me on lithium. They said I was crazy.

I'm not crazy.

*[looking off to M, who has disappeared.]*

Tell them I'm not crazy!

*[She starts to pick everything up, putting it back in her bag.]*

I WORK. I work seven days a week, no days off. They watch me every minute. They watch me change. They watch me eat. They want to control me. They want me to be happy.

AUDITIONER VOICEOVER

Number 24.

*[She puts on a red dress over the slip.]*

W

I thought maybe if I told them "I'm happy" enough then I might become happy, but I was in denial. I was in shock. I'm traumatized or whatever. "Is this what you have to go through to get what you want? Or is it just abuse? In a lot of cases, it is just abuse. But what do you do? There was nobody I could talk to. I should've walked out of rehearsal and called my agent. But I would've been fired, and I knew that. I don't understand it. I don't understand if it's because people think I can take it because I'm tough as nails. If I am, I've been made tough by this business in order to survive, in order to continue to perform, which is what I was born to do. They're not going to stop me from getting on a stage".

AUDITIONER VOICEOVER

Number 24.

W

But I'm not happy. I'm tired. And I cry every day.

AUDITIONER VOICEOVER

Number 24.

W

NO. Shit. Okay

Don't look at me right now.

I just....I can't

*She slaps herself a few times.*

AUDITIONER VOICEOVER

Number 24. Last call.

*[Another voice, H, comes from the voiceover void.]*

H

Hey.

W

What?

H

Hey.

W

..hi

H

You look like shit.

W

That's...so helpful right now. Thanks.

H

I'm just being honest. You look like you got hit by a bus. Did you get hit by a bus?

W

Shut up. Seriously shut up!

H

*[laughs]* okay, okay.

Is this a good idea?

W

Are you kidding me right now?

...

Did you lock the door?

H

No...

W

Yes you totally did.

H

No, I did not.

W

Yes you did.

H

Nuhuh.

W

Yuhuh!

H

Nuhuh!

W

This is such a waste of time! Such a waste of your time, my time, OUR time...

#### AUDITIONER VOICEOVER

Number 24.

H

You can't do this. You'll embarrass yourself! Trust me you'll thank me later.

W

I don't have a choice at this point.

H

Yes you do. You could just leave right now.

Walk offstage. Do it.

I dare you.

W

Shut up.

H



They're gonna see right through you.

W

Stop. I've worked too hard. You think you built me, built this but you didn't! You weren't trying to build me, you were just building yourself. Like some fucked up carbon copy. And you told me I was special. But only because you knew that I would do anything you told me to.

YOU'RE AN EMBARRASSMENT. I'VE SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE TRYING TO GET AWAY FROM YOU! TRYING TO BUILD MY OWN PERSON, MY OWN LIFE SEPARATE FROM YOU. BUT FROM THE SECOND I WAS BORN YOU HAD TO SINK YOURSELF INTO ME. AND NOW EVERY TIME I LOOK IN THE MIRROR I SEE YOU. I CAN HEAR YOU IN THE BACK OF MY MIND, IN MY THOUGHTS, IN MY DREAMS. I SEE YOU, RUNNING LIKE A LITTLE HAMSTER ON A LITTLE TINY WHEEL BEHIND MY EYE SOCKETS. THE TASTE OF YOUR VOICE IS IN MY MOUTH AND MY THROAT AND I WANT TO THROW YOU UP SO BAD BUT EVERY TIME I TRY TO I JUST DRY HEAVE. YOU'VE NEVER TOLD ME YOU LOVE ME. NONE OF YOU EVER LOVED ME.

I'M A STAR GODDAMMIT.

DO YOU HEAR ME? I'M A STAR!

*[instrumental for ROSE'S TURN plays.]*

*Curtain up!*

H

Tits up. Big smile.

*Light the lights!*

H

Did you get hit by a bus?

*Play it, boys!*

*Ya either got it, or ya ain't.*

*And, boys, I got it!*

*Ya like it?*

H

They're gonna see right through you.

W

SHUT UP.

*Well, I got it!*

*Some people got it and make it pay.*

*Some people can't even give it away.*

*This people's got it*

*and this people's spreadin' it around!*

H

Don't do that.

*You either have it*

*or you've had it!*

W

Hello, everybody! My name is Number 24! What's yours?

How do you like that, Mr. Director??

*Hold your hats and hallelujah.*

*Mama's gonna show it to you.*

H

You're not what they're looking for, but maybe it will work out this time.

Or else, why did you even come here?

You can't even walk through the door.

What are you looking for?

Why are you here?

W

I swear to god I'm going to fucking...

*Mama's talkin' loud.**Mama's doin' fine.**Mama's gettin' hot.**Mama's goin' strong.**Mama's movin' on.**Mama's all alone.**Mama doesn't care.**Mama's lettin' loose.**Mama's got the stuff.**Mama's lettin' go.**Mama?*

H

Walk offstage. Do it. I dare you.

*Mama's got the stuff.**Mama's gotta move.**Mama's gotta go.**Mama?*

H

They're gonna see right through you.

*Why did I do it?**What did it get me?**Scrapbooks full of me in the background.**Give 'em love and what does it get ya?**What does it get ya?**One quick look as each of 'em leaves you.*

*All your life and what does it get ya?  
Thanks a lot and out with the garbage,  
They take bows and you're battin' zero.  
I had a dream.  
I dreamed it for you,  
It wasn't for me,  
And if it wasn't for me  
then where would you be,  
No, you needed me!*

*Well, someone tell me, when is it my turn?  
Don't I get a dream for myself?  
Starting now it's gonna be my turn.  
Gangway, world, get off of my runway!  
Starting now I bat a thousand!  
This time, boys, I'm taking the bows and  
Everything's coming up Rose!  
Everything's coming up roses!  
Everything's coming up roses  
this time for me!  
For me! For me! For me! For me! For me!  
For me!*

*[The lights turn off, leaving W in basic work lights.]*

AUDITIONER VOICE

Next!

*[She opens the door and exits.]*

*End of play*