

*How I Learned to Drive* and  
How our Sociological Normality Has Perpetuated Assault

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## **Table of Contents**

-Table of contents – Page 2

-Artistic Aims – Pages 3-8

-Research Essay – Pages 9-17

-Technical Essay – Pages 18-23

-Actor's Journal – Pages 24-28

-Actor's Portfolio – Pages 29-31

-Bibliography – Page 31 -32

## **Artistic Aims**

The play I performed for my senior project is *How I Learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel. This play is about a woman nicknamed Lil'Bit. She was named after her genitalia from birth; we are never taught her real name. She has been raised with a single mother, grandmother, grandfather, and at varying levels of exposure, her Aunt Mary and Uncle Peck. The play shows her retelling, processing, and recounting her sexually abusive relationship with her Uncle Peck. She was born and raised in a "cracker" background, in rural Maryland, and the land she lives on or near, where driving lessons take place, is owned by the agricultural farm department. Through the duration of the play, we see Lil'Bit's active ages ranging from 11-17, with the narrator's age as 29. She is largely searching for better education, freedom, acceptance, and to get away from her manipulative, patriarchal family. The narrator version of Lil'Bit is twenty-nine, she speaks during the transitions, telling us of the time, the place we are in, and filling in context. There are moments when the transition from this narrator to a younger age happens within the scene, and times when there is a snap in and out of the present and past tense which even continues inside of the context of some scenes. I had to find the differences between when she is curious about things and has already become too educated, when she is asking a question in earnest and when she is asking a question to get a rise out of someone or to emphasize a point. Plotting out the sequence of events in relation to each other and the questions she has on her mind was complex. She knows so many segments of subjects, without the full topics, such as knowing what it is to be groped and touched but all without knowing the implications of consent, boundaries, and a world outside of her body. One of the top priorities in this show was to bring it into the modern age and clarify the levels of consent. Throughout the entirety of the play, it was important to me

to develop and establish her levels of comfort and active consent, or lack thereof, in each and every scene with Peck. I wanted to properly differentiate her ages and the different levels of knowledge she had during that time.

Our director Mari Cipriaso, our Dramaturg Tess Walsh, and the collective cast and crew explored and laid out a detailed timeline of the actions within the play, and the characters' corresponding ages through the first read-through and rehearsals. We used the references within the text, and historical data to plot the linear course of actions in Lil' Bit's life. Our dramaturg laid out historical reference sheets for all our scenes, detailing any historical references or outdated terms to help us with the context of the times and where this family specifically resides in the world. She also gave us references for the music, cars, and culture of the time period. It was important for me to find the differentiation between all her many ages through physicalizing, tone, and feeling. She ranges from age eleven to twenty-nine over the course of the whole play, in non-chronological order. The fact that this play is on a nonlinear timeline made it extra important to clearly and explicitly differentiate the ages. It helped me to place different physical emphasis and habits for certain ages, to associate with this time of her life. Finding the way she carries her body, where her emphasis is physical, finding the way that the body would respond to the touch it was receiving, how does the receiving of touch changes as she ages, and learns increasingly how wrong their relationship is. The first scene is all done in pantomime and with extremely minimal movement, the stage directions say that only the face should emote. I have had to find ways to express her reactions to the touch without any physical movement outside of the stage directions listed which are extremely minimal. Focusing on the way that breaths express, and when she is "touched" how that would make her react. Make sure that it comes off as uncomfort-

able, not erotic. The monologue that had my brain wrapped and I think revealed so much to her subconscious is within scene Nine. She goes on a rant surrounding her body and specifically her chest. Of her breasts, she says how “they’ll just keep growing with a mind of their own until I collapse under their weight, and they suck all the nourishment out of my body, and I finally waste away while they get bigger and bigger and—.” (Vogel) This view into her internal world is not one we frequently get to access. It is closer to a panic attack, or a representation of something more internal. Her narration is always from a removed, processed place, and the writing lends to a removed perspective as it is all from memory. This text helped me to develop the way she holds herself and where her emphasis is. There are very few minutes where she is chest forward, it has been a part of her that caused more harm than good for most of her life, gave people something to comment on, and pick on. She is always aware of this part of her body but not in a confident way. I wanted to find different centers of gravity for the continuing shifting in ages. For every age, there had to be a weight and physicality of the chest. Scene nine, to me, is the first exposure we have to this internal head “fire” where she has learned to feel safe, since her body no longer was, and I think in many ways still is not her own. She is so in tune with what physically about her is drawing Peck and other men into her, yet this reveals to us how out of touch she feels with her own body. Her interactions with Greg reveal insight into what I think she must view herself as, the idea this part of her body rules who she is, this shows her struggle to differentiate the genuine from the sexual. Peck has given her such a complicated intertwined viewpoint of her body, love, and sexuality that it becomes a web to unravel, try to process, and understand. We see from her ending monologue that she has come to live within her head, ever since the assaults began. “That day,” she says, “was the last day I lived in my body. I retreated above the neck, and

I've lived inside the "fire" in my head ever since." (Vogel)

Peck gives reference to the car being a female itself. He gives us the description: "when you close your eyes and think of someone who responds to your touch - someone who performs just for you and gives you what you ask for - I guess I always see a 'she.'" Lil 'Bit tells us that she doesn't change the car from "she" to anything else. Some have thought of this as an implication of her sexuality. I have seen this line and some other context within the play to understand in my version of her that she doesn't see a man as someone who could be so giving and loving as this description he gives. Her examples with men have been her extremely sexist grandfather and her uncle who uses love to manipulate her. Even her interactions with Greg reveal some of this outlook on males, when she's asked to dance, she refuses for fear that he simply wants to watch her body move as they dance.

We discussed a concern about ambiguity to some who would be viewing the play. We wanted to make sure that the way this show is perceived and taken is with the right intentions. We worked very hard to try and clearly differentiate the moments when the action comes from Lil' Bit and when it comes from Peck. This was of my primary goals. There are three scenes and moments within the play that could incorrectly imply consent or action as motivated by Lil 'Bit. There is manipulation that occurs, and her actions are a result, not of her own volition; we wanted to make sure that this is noticeably clear.

After the first run of the play, some written theatre reviews found sympathy with the character of Peck, we want people to find disgust in the ambiguity instead of sympathy. The photoshoot scene was a specific example of this, we spent a lot of time discussing and looking at the different ways to represent this moment. I was trying to match her physicality, age, and

level of comfort to the things being said to her, this was one of my biggest challenges and concerns.

The way people carry themselves can drastically change the way they're being perceived. I found that the difference in the physicality of this moment to be very important, having my shoulders rolled back and an open chest, for the unbuttoning of her shirt would be more likely to convey a willingness and comfortability within this moment. In my having hunched shoulders and a rounded back while unbuttoning the shirt we were expressing the physical discomfort that was very present despite her actions. These could have expressed two completely different intentions at the moment, they showed two separate levels of comfort, power, and consent. There are a few moments when she seems afraid of Peck physically harming her in a non-sexual way. The fear here is more active. When she is drunk in the car, and when she is thirteen, and asks him to stop drinking. I think it was important to find the difference between this kind of active fear and the lack of comfort that is present through the other parts of their relationship. "Thinking just one notch of the wheel would be all it would take and yet some reflex took over, my hands on the wheel in the nine and three o'clock I never got so much as a ticket, he taught me well." She discusses her relationship with alcohol in an early monologue, and this quote is one of the only instances we hear of her lingering relationship and the knowingness that driving drunk could be the end of her life. This moment, I think, is one of not knowing if she is so trusting of her own abilities in driving, possibly the only thing she is able to feel confident about. Is she also so numb that part of her is allowing the openness for such a tragedy? I think it's a tragic combination of both, a small moment in the script allowing us to see how broken she truly is. As an actor, I wanted to find the most genuine way to express the complicated feelings of this assault and the repercus-

sions it had on her life to our audience. The last moment when Uncle Peck is in the backseat as Lil' Bit finally drives off is so telling of her mental state for the rest of her life. This moment was to be showing the idea that as a result of the trauma he will be with her for the rest of her life. She doesn't have to forgive it, but she has accepted it for her own wellbeing and to give herself the opportunity to move on.



## Research Essay

The play *How I Learned to Drive* uses the story of Lil'Bit, her family, and her Uncle Peck to show how the sexualization and manipulation of young women by society and individuals allows for them to be taken advantage of at an extremely high percentage. I will explore this idea by using sociological factors, including the sexualization of young women, the historical lack of adequate sexual education specifically for females, and the idea of power dynamics in romantic relationships. These along with other factors have allowed for the consistent taking advantage of women on both large and small scales. It is as present now as it was in the 1960s, women socialized traditional gender roles in society have forced and taught us for so long to be quiet, complacent, and take up as little room as possible. A lot of the discussions in this play surround a very stereotypical, limited standard of beauty. "The standards of beauty for women tend to be sexually appealing to heterosexual men and produce idealized versions of Western and White women's faces and bodies." (Lorber, Moore)

The way Lil'Bit's body is discussed and described is not only very sexual but very much based on this body stereotype as explained by Lorber and Moore. The play operates out of chronological order, yet we can understand the escalation and progression of their relationship, through the help of Vogel's use of title cards and sharing of significant dates. The first assault occurs at age eleven, on a road trip together, and continues as it leads up until Lil'Bit's eighteenth birthday when she is asked to marry Uncle Peck, and she never sees him again.

Sociologists typically use three main theories when guiding their research and discussing sociological ideals, theories are a set of explanations used to help guide research. The main theories are the symbolic interactionist perspective, the conflict perspective, and the structural-func-

tionalist perspective. Each theory has unique qualities they look for when studying how society is functioning. A structural functionalist may look at a situation with the view of trying to see how all the parts of society work and intertwine. The conflict theory focuses on contradictory interests in society and the resulting change and conflict. Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level lens; this perspective looks at how one's individual interactions help to form the beliefs one holds about society. Constructivism is a subset of symbolic interactionism; it focuses on the idea we as individuals play a role in constructing society and the norms that we live by. I believe that in looking at the play *How I Learned to Drive* from a Symbolic interactionist perspective, we can see how the character of Lil'Bit became shaped by the normality that she observed and interacted with.

The play *How I Learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel, takes place primarily throughout the 1960s, a time when women's rights and bodily autonomy were even less in our own control than now. This play offers us a lens into a family whose gender roles, power dynamics, and both contradictory shame and explicit discussions surrounding sex and sexuality, leave Lil'Bit confused, and exposed to the manipulation and exploitation done to her by her Uncle Peck, via grooming. We have seen a huge change within roughly the past five years, our society has attempted to reframe the ways we discuss consent, sexual education, the media's presentation of females, and our culture surrounding the way we discuss and can both validate and invalidate assault.

As a result of the MeToo movement, and the increased discussion and acceptance of the feminist theory, whose upswing came as a reaction to the election of a man who had openly advocated for the mistreatment of women and put in place many policies attempting to restrict and control the actions women could take in relation to their bodies. "Feminism has increased

awareness of how bodies are gendered by making visible the cultural and social dynamics that produce difference and dominance out of male and female bodies”. (Lorber, Moore) There has been increased public and individual awareness of sexual assault, we have seen new advocacy organizations, the development of more well-rounded and thought-out sexual education, and we have seen more acceptance and believing of victims of assault. Through a symbolic interactionist viewpoint, I think we can see this as an acknowledgment from citizens of our societies’ faults while learning and working to change the way we speak about them, and hopefully, to positively shift the viewpoints and cultural standards for future generations to come. Although we have seen these positive reactions to these movements and increased support of victims, we do continue to see abuses of power and backlash to these movements. Power is still taken advantage of and results in the lack of consequences for many perpetrators, especially those with lots of money or influence. This has been especially highlighted by the fact that we live in a patriarchal, and heavily gendered society.

There is a systematic categorization of genders from birth, the different gender roles are then in turn given different recognition and rewards, which increases the social capital for one gender over the other. If one is taught traditional gender roles, that is what they are prone to believe, and possibly model themselves after. It is said that men who agree with traditional roles expect themselves to be a provider and to have most, if not all the control over an intimate relationship, which would be more likely to lead to a one-sided dominant power dynamic. We still see our larger culture regularly and consistently refer to grown and young women as girls, aging them down, and removing the age and power that is more typically associated with the term women. In our society, we have historically seen, and continue to see, the hyper-sexualiza-

tion of young women and infantilization of females within popular culture, not to mention the being treated as general sex objects. We sell products and services with sexuality; in magazines, TV, commercials, social media ads, we see the use of young women to promote products, usually with some type of beauty, physical attraction, or hyper-sexualization. “Emulating these (media) images women exercise, diet, and have surgical procedures to look pubescent, with prominent breasts, narrow waists, rounded hips, and tight buttocks.” (Lorber, Moore)

As a culture, we put an emphasis on female-presenting bodies, at an extremely high level compared to most other demographics. We police the things that may be worn in schools, posted online, and done behind closed doors. We have seen through history the use of public policies, sociological standards, and other factors to affect the way women, specifically younger women, are talked to, manipulated, and in some cases taken advantage of physically. Gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is established by a culture’s established normality, stereotypes, and so forth. Even though gender is established by society, it also plays a role in power dynamics, from birth we find that things are gendered differently in certain colors (blue and pink), certain traits (strong versus beautiful). These differences carry on through the rest of our lives, they influence the way we hold ourselves, our interests, interactions, careers, and so much else. Children have been taught, generally, that boys should be strong and tough, while girls should stay obedient and kind. Teaching these stereotypes of weak versus strong from a young age reflects and impacts the larger power dynamics that are at play in our society. “You throw like a girl” is a term that is used as an insult, traits of femininity expressed in males are looked down upon. When women conform to society it is more likely as a result of social pressure, and when they deviate from the group, they are more likely to face greater judgment than if

a male were to take the same actions. We must look at power as an influence in consent. First, we must define both consent and power. According to the Legal Information Institute, “Consent means a freely given agreement to the conduct at issue by a competent person.” Power is the ability to influence another person's actions and choices. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, there can be many kinds of imbalances of power. Should one person have more resources whether it be money, a place to live, a reputation, or a car, this can give them a bargaining tactic for further manipulation. If someone is in fear of what would happen to them, were they to say no to an act, they cannot be a consenting party. The way we talk about female bodies impacts the way that we in turn carry ourselves, take up space, judge our worth, and so many other daily factors. We see a higher percentage of girls struggling with eating disorders, anxiety, and depression. According to the book *The Sexualization of Girls and Girlhood* “our culture is saturated with sexuality.” According to a study done by The State University of New York Press. “Of all brides in 1970 13% were under 18 years of age” Within the first five scenes of the play, we hear multiple references to the character of Grandmother being a child bride, after getting married at 14. She is said to still believe in Santa at the time she got married, combining beliefs typically associated with childhood, with adult activities such as getting married. This is also a prevalent myth surrounding the marriage of musician Jerry Lee Lewis to his 13-year-old cousin in 1957; she was said to have believed in Santa Claus when they married. Similar to one’s view of family, our views around sex are also shaped by social context; the expressions of sex vary not only by individuals but by culture, religion, and social setting.

The United States History with sexual education, or a lack thereof, has been in constant debate over the past century. The history of sex education within the United States has been used

as an attempt to control people's bodies, specifically woman, and those of minority groups. According to the organization Sexual Education for Social Change (SIECUS), “Sex education— if done properly—has the power to serve as a vehicle for social change. Understanding the history of sex education in this country, the enduring debates on the topic, and the overall pushes and pulls of the last century can help us understand how to best educate young people and change our society.” (SIECUS 6) We can see this expression and discussion of this families' expectations surrounding sex and marriage during the scenes titled “Men, Sex, and Women parts I, II, and III”. Within these scenes, the characters of Grandma, Mom, and Lil’ Bit discuss the questions, worries, and expectations surrounding sex. We see Grandmother reflecting a very old-fashioned perspective highlighting the idea of no sex before marriage, as she was most likely taught in school. Tactics like fear and shame are used to scare one away from engaging in any sexual activity. Lil’ Bit is told if she has sex before marriage she will bleed, and “Squeal like a stuck pig” (Vogel). In these discussions of sex within the play, we hear multiple references to the bible, eve’s sin, and the lord's name, specifically from Grandma. She is in denial of the existence of orgasms, as she tells her daughter and granddaughter. There is no joy in sex for grandma, she references the rhythm method as a luxury, this is a type of birth control that used a woman's cycle to determine when she could get pregnant, not always with accuracy. Her example of sexual education was simple: “I told you what my mother told me! A girl with her skirt up can outrun a man with his pants down.” (Vogel)

This education reflects the ideas taught in programs such as the Family Life Education foundation. These programs focused on the idea that sex is intertwined with marriage, they were meant to teach how to prepare for the heterosexual, nuclear 1950s family. The 1960s saw a huge

cultural and educational shift, in regard to sex. The development of the SIECUS in 1964 advocated for sex and the body to be claimed by the individual, not the church, or government. We can see the changing mindsets and differences through the way that both grandmother and mother discuss sex. Her mother offers a more modern perspective. While maintaining that females should only sleep with people they love, she does have a more open conversation explaining that the presence of blood and pain is a possibility during a woman's first time. Although the mother is more education-oriented and open to discussion when it comes to sex, we do see underlying older beliefs. In the final sequence, titled "On Men, Sex, and Woman pt.III", Lil' Bit is told by her mother that she has some concerns surrounding the treatment she receives from her uncle, yet should anything happen to her, it would be Lil' Bit's fault and no one else's.

This type of discussion and reaction shows how victim-blaming was and still is so prevalent. Young women being raised in the early 1950s into 1960s were caught in this shifting sexual landscape. They had sex symbols to look up to in popular media, such as Marilyn Monroe, and Playboy Bunnies, while also being told that they should remain chaste to be "eligible for marriage" This presented young women with an extremely confusing moral dilemma that we see Lil' Bit herself struggle with, "The gnawing ambiguity that young women in the 1950s were facing; the divide between societal content through marriage and new desires for danger or rebellion" (O'Keefe) They both help to show how there is much more of a stigma and complicated relationship attached to females being sexually promiscuous, in comparison to males.

Within the 1940s and 50s, we saw a lot of communities in the United States turn to and begin implementing Family Life Education Programs. Family Life Education programs reflected that a vast majority of the country at the time and to this day practices some form of

Christianity. Although as a nation, we advocate for the separation of church and state, we have seen how religion can affect public policy. For a long time, the only sex education that was offered was the idea of celibacy prior to marriage offered via Family Life Education programs. “These programs reinforced traditional gender roles around sex, portraying boys as perpetual aggressors and putting the responsibility for setting limits on girls.”(SIECUS) We see a correlation between this acceptance of sex through the legalization and social legitimization of marriage and Peck’s proposal. Peck thinks that proposing to, and in turn marrying Lil ‘Bit will validate the existence of their relationship, and make it acceptable to society, in addition to the fact that she has just turned eighteen, being the legal age of consent.

Through the timeline of Peck’s relationship with Lil ‘Bit the actions and language used surrounding their relationship develop into more sexually explicit conversations as she becomes older. The conversation escalates from their meeting weekly to talk about the dynamics of cars to his discussing the dynamics of her body. I think in many ways this escalation and his actions can be classified as grooming. Grooming is defined as “a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults, and the environment for the abuse of the child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance, and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to strengthen the offender's abusive pattern, as it may be used as a means of justifying or denying their actions.” (Raine) We see multiple instances where Peck is telling either Bobby or Lil’ Bit that these are special moments between just them, secrets that must be kept from other members of the family. The idea of being taken advantage of by someone you know is far from unlikely, according to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network via the site Statista Research Department, “Child victims often know the perpetrator, 93%



are known to the victim, 7% are strangers, 59% are acquaintances, 34% are family members.” (Statista) This example may be on the more extreme example of a power dynamic, however on a smaller scale if someone has more power, access, or resources than another, this is also an imbalance of power where someone can easily be taken advantage of, as we discussed earlier with the many types of imbalances of power. I see Peck in this dynamic, he has a car, more age, and experience. This imbalance of power continues to develop as Lil’Bit becomes more reliant on him, and the space he offers her away from her family.

## **Technical Essay**

On November 11-13, 2021, *How I Learned To Drive* by Paula Vogel was presented in the CMFT Performance Theatre at SUNY Purchase, featuring Shelby Kline, Mikayla Schaefer, Dixie O'Connell, Sean Gordon, and myself, in a production directed by Mari Cipriaso. The sound cues, music, title cards, and projections within the play gave us a reference to the location, change of scene, an attraction that was happening at the time. There were also the uses of sounds like a car revving, beeping, key in a car ignition, class bell, shower, and a car taking off fast.

The sounds were important, designed by our director, to determine the location and the energy of space. The beeping within scene nine shows us the deeper connection that kept Lil' Bit going back to this abusive situation, because of the manipulation from Uncle Peck. At the school dance when she is being pursued by another male of her own age, this beeping begins and draws her back to Peck. The noise is supposed to be coming from her chest, as that is the thing, she is sure everyone is drawn to. This beeping helps us see the outer "noise" match the inner noise, showing us the way, she feels her chest, not her, is calling people to her without wanting.

Paula Vogel chose very specific music for the original New York City production which premiered on March 16, 1997, at the Vineyard Theatre, specific to not only the time period but also to the musicians of the time who had a history of dating younger women, like Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis. There were songs that have references to younger women in a sexual light, such as, "You're sixteen, You're beautiful, and You're mine," and "Young Girl" putting an emphasis on adolescents. She makes sure that music is explicitly emphasized in the show notes. Vogel gives song suggestions and genres to follow from the era. Throughout the duration of the play, we played songs that highlighted the male gaze, female sexuality, or references to younger

women, including “Young Girl”, "This Girl is a Woman Now" and Roy Orbison's "Sweet Dreams". Only in the last scene, after my final monologue, did we play “Gold Dust Woman" by Fleetwood Mac, to show a strong female voice to contrast the slower Doo-Wop type of music used throughout the duration of the show. This also showed one final huge shift as she drives away from this part of her life.

Within the first scene, there is a moment where we learn that the man she is in the car with is her Uncle. In the whole beginning half of the first scene, we find her only referring to him as an “older man.” I think there is a reason Paula Vogel did this, keeping the first scene ambiguous so that once we learn this piece of information it can drastically change the audience's reaction and feeling towards both characters. It’s like ripping off a band-aid.

We worked with an intimacy coordinator to block all the physical interactions between Peck and Lil ‘Bit. Much like a stage fight, we had specifically blocked-out actions that we rehearsed first strictly physically without lines or emotions. As we grew comfortable with the physical sensation and blocking, we would then come back to these scenes doing more table work and adding it all together. We would work on these scenes with only Me, the actor playing Uncle Peck, our director, Stage manager, and our intimacy coordinator. Then at the next rehearsal, we would bring in the rest of the actors and combine all the scenes together, with the physical blocking and movements that we had done previously.

The first reference to the assault within the play is a mimed action in scene one; all action is done through pantomime without any other movement or eye contact. The stillness made it even more important to specify when it was being broken. Simple actions like taking a breath became heightened and telling of so much emotion. The straightness of the spine, nose versus

mouth, sharp versus long, and the specificity and detail within a breath can reveal many different emotions. Our intimacy coordinator spoke on the differences a breath can express. In this scene specifically, he told of how one sharp inhale is more indicative of being uncomfortable, while several short sharp inhales can also be interpreted as sexual enjoyment. With the material and topic, we wanted to make it as clear as possible, even with something as small as a breath, how this was nonconsensual, not a moment of pleasure. It is supposed to represent a physiological reaction, that expresses the exact reaction to the action being simulated. This physical awareness reinforced my acting the necessary emotions in the scenes. In the moments of distress, breath was also important, displaying wherein the back and body these tears and breaths were coming from.

We were working on an alley stage, staying conscious of the fact that we had audience members on both sides. We therefore performed with the constant flipping of space. Our director worked on keeping some scenes within profile while doing others with rotating character placement. The photo shoot scene, scene ten, gave us an interesting opportunity, for part of the scene I was on a stool in the middle of the alley, we used this mobility to allow me to continue swapping sides throughout the scene giving both sides of the audience a view of my posture from both the front and back and to see the expressions of both Lil'Bit and Peck. In this scene, we also had the photos that were being taken (within the scene) projected on the back wall. These were taken during a tech rehearsal and would look exactly the same every night. I was required to match both my physical position and emotional expression of the moment, to the photos as they were taken.

We used the driver's seat to reveal and reflect who was in the position of power at the time. When Lil Bit is in situations within her control she is placed in the driver's seat. For example, it is heavily implied in scene six that Lil'Bit has had sex with a young high schooler on her bus ride to Upstate New York. She is in the driver's seat, for the duration of the scene, as she now has control over this situation in a way Peck once did over her.

The technicality in the writing of the last scene is unlike the rest of the show. It is the only example we have where something is physically being done to Lil 'Bit, and another character is speaking for her. We staged this by keeping me in a neutral position in the car as the other actress spoke downstage in shadow lighting. There is a physical shift that brought me back into the scene, when I was placed on to Peck's lap this was our way of showing the connection between the voice and physicality. Otherwise, elsewhere in the play, she is the narrator and also being herself onstage throughout the duration of the play. This sudden change of voice gives us a jarring experience in an attempt to try and match the change, shock, and confusion after the initial assault. The final monologue follows this scene. Within this text, she expresses to the audience how that was the last day she lived in her body. This jarring writing technique was used to show the distance between her mind and her body. It is the first time she is assaulted; we are shown the dissonance that occurs separating her from the painful reality of her situation.

Developing and confirming a costume presented a surprisingly difficult challenge, but fortunately, we had my full costume finalized on opening night. We knew that not only did I have to be able to have the flexibility of moving between ages ranging from eleven to thirty, but I also had to be able to add on and take off pieces of clothing for specific scenes. Working with a jumpsuit as one of our initial options presented to be difficult to change in and out of on a technical

level, although we all felt it represented the era and character well. We then shifted between several skirt, pant, and top combinations till we settled on a mustard corduroy skirt, white top, green and orange neck scarf, with biker shorts and a tank top underneath to make changes fast and easy. It had to be minimalist enough to allow for age changes while also making me feel like the character. After establishing my “base” costume we used multiple shifting scarves, skirts, and sweaters to accomplish a change in time, place, and in some ways power. My neck scarf became a dinner napkin for scene three to show the change in location, throughout the scene the handling of the scarf also helped to show the progressing level of intoxication throughout the scene.

Throughout this scene, the use and handling of the swizzle sticks also showed the progression of intoxication. We broke this scene down into three levels of intoxication. It began with distracted drunk, moved to sloppy, and finally into emotional as the liquor continued to affect her. Since this scene also contains one of the only moments where the action is initiated by her, we wanted to make it explicitly clear how drunk she was and how this again was an uneven power dynamic, although the taking of the first drink is consensual it is a result of being socially conditioned and pressured. This then resulted in a nonconsensual act. The changing of costume pieces during monologues and scene changes allowed me time to internally and externally transform between the ages and stages of Lil’Bit’s life.

After the initial performance for the faculty, I took the advice of Lenka Pichlíková and added a second pair of heeled shoes and two changes in hair to help with the physicality of changing ages and emotions. I pulled my hair fully up out of my face, and with a heel for the final scene with Uncle Peck. This choice was to show the growth of her standing up and being able to leave the abuse, the first and only time you saw the entirety of my face and neck fully exposed

without hair. At the youngest age of eleven, I added two simple pigtails to emphasize the youth in her, and the extremity of the manipulation and way in which she is being taken advantage of. They helped add a natural bounce and young energy, this helped me find the innocence and vulnerability that comes with such a young age.

The Greek chorus is on stage for the duration of the show, showing the closeness but lack of awareness from this family, they are present for the duration of her assault but have no knowledge. Although they are physically expressed as close, we see how little they actually know. Low lighting, household activities, and silence helped to add to the familiarity of being in a home, hoping to make the audience feel like they could, disturbingly, be in their own living room. The TV in the living room, which had a cycle of clips from sixties TV shows, became too distracting for audience members and we had to add limits to the moments it could be played as to not draw away from the context or main scene that was happening.

All of these technical aspects helped me to find and develop this extremely complicated character as fully and truthfully as I could. We were able to use the technical elements to help us bring this text and story into a post “Me Too movement” world, in a safe and progressive way.

## **Actor's Journal**

Who: Lil'Bit, ages 11- 29, large chested, insecure in her own physicality.

Where: Suburban Maryland, Beltsville Agricultural Farms, Her Uncle's car, A Public Bus  
(greyhound of some sort)

When: 1962- 1986

Why: To teach, process, and try and understand the abuse she underwent as a child. How did it make her who she was today? How could she have learned anything positive from someone who harmed her so much?

Questions I have for myself.

Whenever she says it "getting late" in the first scene this is her way of escaping? When and why does she begin to use the word uncle within a scene?

What is the line that has been drawn between them? Is it sex? Has it shifted from the first instance to now? - what is it in every scene?

Does she feel the presence from the first assault when she is in the car with him? How does it shift in each car scene?

When does she realize this is wrong? - referencing how it will hurt aunt Mary during the car scene? How many times has she heard these arguments within the family? Surrounding her father, her birth, the absence of help her mother had? How does that make her feel?

Does she ever have control? Is it genuine or a false sense of control? How does it shift as she grows?

What is the definition of respect for each of them? And this family?



## **Timeline layout of scenes**

Traditionally the narrator is written to be 35, in the show notes however there is a note stating to match the age in the final monologue to the actor's age who is playing Lil'Bit.

We decided that 22 was too young for certain references and didn't give enough distance from the rest of the ages in the play, nor match the timeline allowing for the upstate bus trip to happen in scene six.

Although our timeline is slightly off we wanted to honor the time period and music that was written in as well as the author's note in the final monologue.

1951- born

1962 – scene 15

1964 - scene 12 age 11

1965- scene 10

1966- scene 9

1967- scene 8

1968- Scene 3

1969-scenes 1& 2

1970-scene 3 monologue context

1979- scene 6

1981-Narrators time setting - modified to age 29

How does her posture change between ages? What shifts? - Physicality, voice, exposure, knowledge

### **Intimacy session notes**

For all physical interactions and scenes, ESPECIALLY scene done in pantomime. Physiological reactions will exist regardless of emotion. Straight spine vs curved- reflecting posture. How do we breathe? - what does the breath reflect? Positive, negative? Sharp vs long inhalation? The specificity of the details expresses the exact reaction to the action. Stillness in the first scene of miming specifically so that any movement at all is elevated. Three stages of drunkenness'-Distracted, Sloppy, and emotional. What moments does it swap? Track the drinks. How does the drunk progress?

### **Scene by scene**

Scene one- to teach a lesson we must tell a story. Does she think they won't believe her unless she validates it and gives the whole story? The sensory memory of the scents and smells what do they bring back to her? - her childhood, him, cars, summer, youth. "don't go over the line now" - is sex the line? Specificity of physical detail and stillness in the moments.

Scene two- a TYPICAL family dinner, these kinds of conversations happen frequently. Lil'Bit is diminished to nothing but a body by her family. Speaking only of her body, mostly her chest. Peck is the only one who speaks to her brain.

Scene three- just passed the driver's test on the first try on a stick shift, first time trying liquor, is she drinking so that he won't? When does she determine that this is wrong? Track the drunkenness!!

Scene four- cousin Bobby, Peck uses similar wording and strategies to gain trust from both BB and Lil' Bit.

Scene five- learning about the family dynamic and the ways that both grandmother and mother view sex so differently,

Scene six- the meta play experience, lining up the layout of a scene, breaking the fourth wall. Uncle Peck is already dead. Sleeping with a younger guy, she knows the intention before the action because he taught her that skill set, repeating the cycle? A power dynamic- a swap of control. The illusion of allowing the younger man to ask her out knowing what is coming.

Scene seven – men sex and women pt. II why is there always blood?? The feeling of unfairness for being a girl and having to experience the pain.

Scene eight- truly one of the closest moments to him. These are the lessons that she carries on in the car for the rest of her life, that make her the driver that she is today. I would argue this is the only genuine thing that he gives her. Later in life, in the monologues, it becomes HER power.

Scene nine- the school- the absence of friends, being unsafe in the showers- horrific. Judgment from her female and male peers. Bizarre monologues – giving access to the fire in her mind, how controlled she truly feels by her chest, and the sexuality that has been assigned to her against her will.

Scene ten- love bombing, if she looks at him, he will be able to tell that she is so manipulated that she would do anything for him. We only hear I love you from him in the play, no one else. Only after the, I love you does she allow the undressing.

Scene eleven – Aunt Mary – the victim-blaming, her perspective of the family and her husband.

Scene Twelve -doing the dishes- why does she make this deal AFTER he has assaulted her. She offers to see him more. So young, why is she allowed to take on the responsibility of this older man's mental health and sobriety... repetition of the world talk and meet in public. This is the first time she mentions the drawing of the line.

Scene thirteen- the letters: the obsession in her absence, material things to bring her back both physically and metaphorically. He sees affection she sees obsession. She is finally free on her own to process her abuse.

Scene fourteen- going into this knowing she needs to end this relationship. The pressure of processing her reality, discovering what other relationships can be like. His insistence, to go to any measure. She asks him to drink. He said he never would if they were together, she initiates it as a tactic for her own removal.

Scene fifteen- mother gives her the blame and sees something in the relationship. The initial assault was the separation of her body and brain.

Scene sixteen – she has never done anything that jiggles, the car is her safe space, it is acceptance, not forgiveness. He will always be with her not in a positive way.

## Actor's Portfolio

*How I Learned to Drive* – Senior project

Playwright: Paula Vogel

Director: Mari Cipraso

Location: Center for Media, theatre, and Film at Purchase College SUNY

Show date: November 11, 12, 13, 2021



*How I Learned To Drive -*

Uncle Peck is passing away

*A Robot Wrote This* – Senior Project

Playwright: Alexis Kilburn, in collaboration with Artificial intelligence.

Director: Megan Stacey

Location: Humanities Theater at Purchase College SUNY

Show dates: February 20, 21, 22, 2020



*A Robot Wrote This* – Millie is dancing her way into the office for the morning to start!

*The Wolves* – Mainstage

Playwright: Sarah DeLappe

Director: Sarah Wansley

Location: Center for media, theatre, and film at Purchase College SUNY

Show date: October 18 -October 26, 2019



*The Wolves* - #7 shows an orange slice during a snack break in practice.

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