Finding a Revolution in Revulsion; Playing Paula Cori as a Fat Queer Woman

By

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Goals and Impacts Statement

All my life, I've felt a certain way about myself but never knew why or where this stemmed from, or how it even came to be. Why did I, a 12-year-old kid, worry about making myself smaller in a world that made me feel huge? Just because I was fat. I've always been told not to be flashy if you're fat because that's not what people want to see- because apparently the way your body looks disturbs and offends the people around you. Instead, you have to entertain them and be funny! People love to laugh and apparently, fat people can only be funny, that's their only perk. Or be greedy and villainous, people like it when they don't have to feel bad for thinking less of you. But the number one rule you could never break: never ever be vulnerable- they can't know you have feelings too- they can't know that fat people can be sad about anything other than their weight. Never share your story. Never compare yourself to the "normal person" because apparently there's a difference? Just never be. Because to be fat in this society? In this industry? You just have to shape yourself to fit in and be smaller.

For my senior project, I want to really dissect this problem, the stigma that society places on fat people, and how this gets represented on stage. Fat discrimination has been around for years everywhere and for my last year here I, a fat actor, want to leave my imprint here at SUNY Purchase by at least introducing it as a problem that needs to be worked on. We are the next generation of actors, we are the change and the fact that I was even given the opportunity to play a role other than the fat actor stereotyped role is the beginning of fighting against that stigma. Maybe it is not fighting that stigma in the world and the impact it's made in this industry, but for myself, and the stigma that society shoved down my throat; telling me that I can't be the love interest, I can't be the main character, I can't show my emotions- I have to stick to my roots, I have to be *funny*, I have to be *greedy*, I have to be *happy*, I have to be *small.* For my senior

project I will prove that stigma wrong by portraying Paula Cori in *Fefu And Her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes. Paula Cori is a queer woman who, unlike all of her friends that are around, is in the lower class. She is a complicated woman just trying to get around and build back her trust that has been broken by a past lover. She is a lover, a writer, an artist, a caring friend, but most of all? With everything going on around her, she is a powerhouse. With this portrayal I will prove that I, a fat actress, am also a powerhouse. I can be the love interest, I can be the main character, I can be vulnerable and not have it be disgusting, I don't just have to be funny for people to like my presence on stage, I can play humble, and sadness too but most of all, I want to challenge myself on instead being small… be big, take up space. I can do that too.

The question I want to tackle is: How do you make space for everyone, including fat people on stage? How do we as a community make that change? The reason I want to tackle this question is to create awareness, to document and prove a point that this is a living and breathing problem. I realize that there will never be an actual big *change*, society is too big and brainwashed to do that, I want to start small, start at SUNY Purchase, start within myself and then hopefully once i'm out of college and doing theatre out in the world, I'll know my worth and capability and make a change in all of the theaters and communities with which I work.

With this project, I think it's really important to find myself within this role, not only as an actor but as a fat queer woman. There is not a lot of fat representation in theatre to begin with and where there is it's demeaning to fat people. When there's not a lot of options for you, you have to start claiming what's not "socially" yours, which to break the stereotype would be a character that's conventionally "beautiful." What created this stigma? Why aren't fat people beautiful? What makes a character beautiful? Why doesn't a fat person fit this criteria? These are all answers I want to find within my performance and research. Being cast as a conventionally

beautiful character gave me the representation that I wish I was able to see growing up. Part of me wishes I was in the audience watching a fat person play this gentle, loving, powerful queer character. Part of me wishes I was able to be that audience member that took inspiration from such a performance. I hope that there were audience members that took inspiration, that I was able to show that it's possible for a fat person to be represented. This project is not only for me, or to prove a point, it's for the people who don't get to see their bodies represented in theatre or media. It's for the people that want to be seen but are told by society not to be. I hope to inspire, I hope to be the starting line for more people with a body like mine; this is for you, you are worth being seen too.

Research Essay

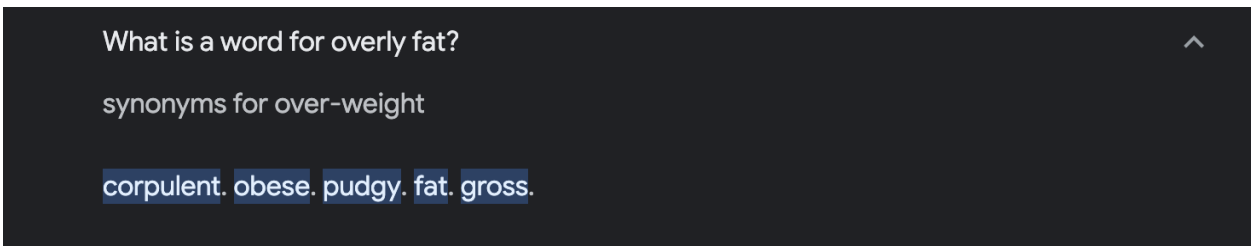
Being Seen For *Who* I am, Not *What* I am

Breaking stereotypes by portraying Paula Cori in *Fefu and her Friends*

Thin is beautiful and fat is not. Thin is “normal” fat is not. Thin should be celebrated, absorbed, placed center stage, fat should be frowned upon, disowned, hidden. I know reading this sentence might have been really uncomfortable for you. Maybe you went silent. Maybe you stopped reading all together. If the word “FAT " makes you uncomfortable, you're not the problem, but instead a victim of the stigmas and discrimination society streams into the media. FAT isn't a bad word, it's a word to describe a person's body. A fat person is nothing more than that, a PERSON, so why can't we treat them as so?

What is fat?

It's a describing word. As a noun it's what's in the body, as an adjective, it describes a noun, as a verb, it describes how something looks and moves. Fat is just a word. Why was it claimed to hold such a hurtful meaning? Why does it hold such negativity? Why is it shaming? Why is being fat bad? Fat discrimination is everywhere, from media, to dietary culture, to doctors, engineering flaws in transportation , internalized thoughts, schools, the theatre. Without even realizing, we as a society have helped to keep the discrimination strong. The word is so frowned upon nowadays that even looking it up leaves a bad taste in your mouth. The association to the word *fat* is almost always negative. Here is a screen shot taken when Google searching the word “fat” and the synonyms that correspond.



Since when was fat *gross?* Fat can be a positive word too- it should be a positive word to begin with, for it just describes how something is or looks. Fat is something that has been criticized for years, it's a body type that gets frowned upon just because of the way it looks and the assumption that people who are fat are “lazy” and “greedy” and aren't healthy. This view stems from instances like how doctors treat their fat patients who come in with a shot-out back that could be an actual deep medical problem but doctors won't even look past their fat body and blame it on that, to fashion pieces where the “plus size section” is either full of unflattering clothing pieces or extremely expensive.

Ever since the pandemic started, we as a society declined because the economy struggled. One way we all started to piece back together however is with art. With theaters and people starting to come back together, there were a lot of new stories being told, from voices that were not usually heard. There was one that was missing though. In *Reimagining Bodies Onstage*, an article by Jeff Bouthiette, he stands up for the inclusion of fat bodies writing, “the pandemic has provided an opportunity to reevaluate and rethink everything about the way we create theatre in america. This work has to include fat people” (Bouthiette, 1). The theatre is just one of the many places where fat people are discriminated against. Growing up as not only a fat person, but a fat woman, I learned pretty quickly that we live in a man’s world.The theatre industry has come a long way from circumstances when only men could be seen on stage, so naturally now that woman can step into the spotlight, the agenda has been developed to be catered to the male gaze because again, this is still a man's world. To fit the “male gaze” which is the act of objectifying women for a man’s appeal, you have to fit the socially accepted, traditional view of “beautiful” which seen through media is described to be thin, curvy in the right places- an hour glass if you will. JuliaGrace Jester quotes Karen A. Callaghan with, “it seems that there would be no place in

theatre for fat women, who are neither objects of attraction nor traditionally considered beautiful" (Callaghan, 1994). JuliaGrace Jester backs this up with her own words, saying " it is not that fat women have not had a place in theatre; it is merely that they have been relegated to the roles of the old, the ugly, or the comical. This also means that roles that do not specify the character's weight will rarely be given to fat women" (Jester, 249). All I want to ask is why? We're people too, we too can play a character for the character, even if the character isn't specified to be fat. It seems as a fat woman you only have three options. Do not step into the spotlight at all. Go rogue against the stigma and audition for a part that does not socially fit our appearance (and risk not even being seen). Or play a part that depicts us and further adds onto all the fat bodies that are stereotyped into these niche categories. The sad part is that I felt like I can't even give a fourth option. In a perfect world, the fourth option would be to play a character that was written to be fat, but the hard truth of the world is that there are very limited fat characters in theatre to begin with. Why must we misrepresent fat people in the characters we make or assign them because of the false restrictions society says they have. Apparently every fat person is either funny, ugly, a villain, or deeply traumatized (or all of the above) because that's the only form of representation we get in theatre. Stereotypes and lack of representation of fat bodies in plays, creates this dynamic that feels like we need to be hidden, and that's where self-discrimination comes in. When a fat person is so used to either not being cast at all or being cast as the funny friend, the greedy bastard, an old person, or the opposite of their gender, that they start thinking that's all their good for and only audition for the small parts with these stereotypes. Because then there's also this other dynamic that, "Thinness is also associated with the concept of 'good acting'" (Bouthiette, 3). Why do we create this dynamic? Why do we force fat people to hide? Why is fat just one category? And why is that category just thrown away

because of an assumption? It almost seems impossible to be seen as a fat person on stage because very rarely are there characters made for fat people, very rarely are fat stories told in the theatre space in a positive way because society created this stigma that makes the whole topic altogether frowned upon. Throughout my years of auditioning for shows, I've heard the term “normal” when talking about thin bodies.Why is there this stigma that thin bodies are “normal?” Where did this come from? No body is “normal,” they're all different and that's the beauty of it, that's the art of human nature so why do we strip that away by labeling one specific body type as such? It doesn't make any party feel good. You're either normal and just like everybody else or you're abnormal because you are a drastically different size from everyone else. This should be celebrated, but instead it's discriminated against.

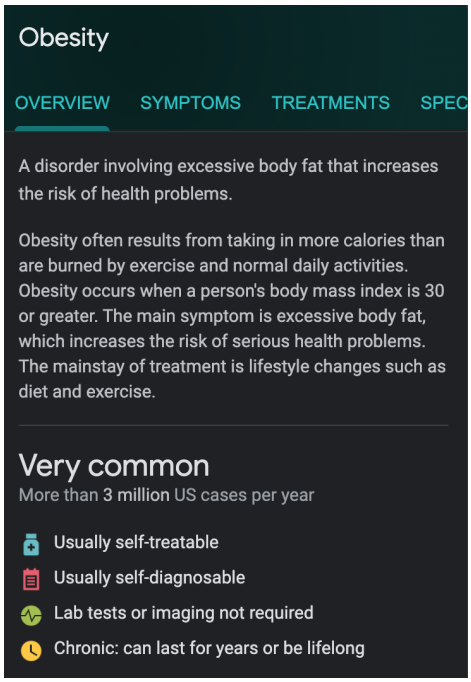
No body deserves to be discriminated against, nobody deserves to be discriminated against.

In order to change this discrimination, something needs to happen, more fat voices have to be heard, more fat bodies have to be seen, more fat stories need to be told. JuliaGrace Jester addresses fat representation in theatre and the importance of understanding when the representation is negative.

> To address the representations of fat women and to begin understanding the theatricality of fat performance, we need to see how fat women are portrayed as leads, how fatness is performed and represented, and how plays can demonstrate the objectification of fat women. These representations of fat women, though they can be transformative and empowering, are complicated by the tendencies both to oversimplify the means of overcoming fat discrimination and to rely on comedy as a means for addressing what are difficult and serious issues for fat women. (Jester, 250)

Like JuliaGrace Jester states, we need to address the representation of fat bodies. To start, I want to talk about a character whose only existence in the play is to be laughed at. Martha Dunnstock from *Heathers:The Musical* by Kevin Murphy and Laurence O'Keefe is a character who seems to be the "comic relief" in a dark story. In every scene she's in, she's made fun of and laughed at because of the size of her body. Although this character is made to be fun and has a character enough to have her own song, her personality seems to stem only from two things: she's fat, and she's the protagonist's best friend. This character seems to only be in the show to keep it going, to be bullied because of her weight so that the protagonists can seem like the hero when she stands up for her.

The next character isn't a woman but does equally suffer the blow of fat discrimination in the most dehumanizing way. Augustus Gloop, a 9 year old that in his character description is descriptive to be "obese" and "greedy." These two words go hand in hand when downgrading a fat person. They're "greedy" because they eat too much and they're "obese" because apparently that's the scientific, "nice" way to say fat. ""Obese" is an unpleasant word from the Latin *obesus,* meaning "having eaten until fat"" (quoted in Gay, 12) there's nothing nice about a word that got tangled up into being a "disease" a "disorder" that's "chronic" and needs to be "treated." In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* a play based on Roald Dahl's book and dramatized by Richard R.George, Augustus Gloop is a child made to look greedy because he likes to eat sweets. The message this play gives is that because he is greedy, his fate is to be punished.



They punish him when it's not even his fault, he's a child. Why are we making children look bad because they like sweets? The main protagonist is the complete opposite from him, further digging in to make Augustus an embarrassment because unlike him, Charlie is thin, humble, and doesn't ask for much.

I'm glad that there's representation of fat bodies in plays, but these fat characters negatively affect how people view us and deepen stereotypes. Although there's not many, the voices of fat stories are out there. There are featured roles that are realistic but still fail to give fat people full humanity. *Fat Pig* by Neil LaBute (2005) is a play that tells a true fat story. It tells the beautifully raw and terrifying truth of trying to find love when you're fat. Helen, the main character, is written to be played by a fat actress, and is a woman who presents herself boldly and without doubt. She lives like any other person because why should she not? She then meets this boy named Tom who falls in love with her and as the story goes on, we start seeing through his perspective, how absolutely in love he is with her, how what he learned of how "fat woman should be" is proved wrong. But like every fat person knows, there's another side to it- a negative one. Tom's friends disapprove of his relationship with a fat woman and make fun of her and him for stooping so "low." So, Tom lets the fear of breaking the stigma win and adds onto it by being embarrassed about dating a fat woman. He breaks up with her to save his reputation. As Jester notes, "This Play points out the pressures placed on fat women by society and the difficulty of overcoming the stereotypes and discrimination heaped on fat people." (Jester, 252.)

Another play that does a good job of telling the rawness of fat stories is *The Whale* by Samuel D. Hunter. This play is about a fat man named Charlie. Although his whole character is just being fat and ashamed to the point that he hides in his house, the play shows the raw truth about how the world negatively views fat people. These views can be damaging to the point where fat

people feel disgusted, embarrassed, and ashamed of themselves. This play beautifully shows and tells the relationship a fat person has with food, how they feel ashamed to eat and disgusted about how people view their eating habits but keep going back to binging because that's the only comfort we are familiar with. It's a comfort that also punishes us because we feel that's what we deserve. It's different when a character like Augustus Gloop is punished vs Charlie because Charlie was the one who punished himself over other people's views and his own guilt which is a true fat story that fat people can relate to, while Augustus Gloop is punished by others because of his actions and forced him to feel ashamed because others felt disgusted by him. Stories like Charlie's are important to show on stage because it tells his story in the rawest form, telling the most "disgusting" parts of being fat to create awareness because that's the truth. It's not disgusting, it's real. These characters create awareness of the fat agenda and finally give fat actors the room to have something be about them and accommodate to them, not the other way around.

But to make room for fat bodies and fat characters, we have to make room for all varieties.

There are some parallels with queer studies. Allison Taylor on *What's Queer about Fat Studies Now?* explains the connections between fat studies and queer studies and how they both advocate against political judgments about how a person should live their life. A queer person is forced to hide in a room full of people that don't accept them. Being fat can feel the same way except it's potentially more raw and vulnerable, because you can't hide your body from the public. It's exposed and out for the world to discriminate against every time you leave your house. Taylor opens up the conversation to really challenge your way of thinking by quoting Meleo- Erwin

> That rather than basing fat politics on the assertion of 'proper' health behavior [ie. 'healthy' eating and exercise habits], thereby defining fat activism as inclusive only of

> those who are most palatable to and reflective of the mainstream world, fat politics should take as a core mission the troubling of normative ideas and ideals of health… and argue for a more complex, multidimensional and nuanced framing [of health]

With this I expand my idea of challenging the outside eye. Instead of judging fat bodies and assuming what they can't do, accommodate and stretch your mind. Find the solution of making them fit in our thin world. Challenge yourself by seeing fat people's existence as an exciting time for activism, because they aren't the problem, the idea that they are too big to fit in our image is the problem. Even though this character is not written to be fat, I wanted to ensure awareness about making sure fat queer bodies are also being seen on stage by portraying Paula Cori in *Fefu and her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes. This idea is what helped me to build the "normal" character of Paula Cori and make her fat. Paula is an openly queer character so the idea of coming out was prominent especially when you include the shock factor of some audience members not knowing her love interest would be a woman, specifically in this time period. Adding on the extra layer of making her fat was like a double feature and made my experience of playing her extremely vulnerable.

Fefu and her Friends by Maria Irene Fornes was written in 1977 and is set in the 1930s. This play follows eight women as they gather for the discussion of a charity event. Though these women may look and present themselves to be happy and perfect upfront, behind closed doors they are suffering. Paula Cori specifically is a woman who suffers from a broken heart. After breaking up a manipulative relationship with Cecilia Johnson, she writes about the situation in a reflective manner. Although her heart still longs, she still knows what's best for her and stands up for herself when Cecilia tries to step into her life again. Paula is a strong humble woman who unlike the other women, lived a poorer lifestyle. She worked hard for who she is today and even though a lot of

obstacles get in her way, she knows what she wants, she knows who she is: a smart queer woman with an artistic eye.

Playing Paula Cori as a fat queer woman was a refreshing point of view especially with everything I stood for and against. Playing her opened up the idea that making a “normal” complex character fat is impossible and it doesn't change anything about her personality. I stood against fat discrimination by not hiding my body and stepping on stage as a main character, standing against fat discrimination in theatre by playing a strong woman with a deeper personality than just being funny, greedy,old, ugly, the protagonist's best friend or the person to be made fun of. Standing for the revulsion and making a change.However, to make a change you first need to know about the revulsion.

The fat body is considered to be “revolting” in many ways.As Jenson notes, revulsion can have two meanings, “Revolting has two relevant meanings, the first being a synonym for disgusting, and the second referring to something as being part of a revolution, an act for a change.” (Jester, 250*)* Revulsion is the definition of the fat body when no one tries to see it differently. The perception of fat bodies can be related to hyper positivity, seeing the fat body as something that is “brave” when perceived as an act of fighting against fatphobia. This is absolutely not true.. I am not “brave” for just existing, my existence shouldn't be seen as a revolution. Revolution should not be found in an existence, it shouldn't be pinned on one group of people. Revolution is only successful when it comes not just from those who are oppressed but those who are allies and those who are not affected. You can't lift others up when you're not even on the pedestal to begin with, you have to know what you’re fighting for first, and know why it’s a problem before you start standing up for it. The “problem” is that people let this idea of how fat bodies should be treated depict the whole community and now that's the only definition of them.The revolution that theatre needs is to let

people exist and be seen without Their identities being seen out of the norm. Let fat bodies exist on stage without needing a reason, Let fat bodies act without dehumanizing them. Let fat bodies exist.

Fat isn't revolting, it’s a revolution. I want to make a change in how fat bodies are depicted in media, in theatre, in life. We need to think about how fat people are represented, recognize it as a problem and then change that. Fat is beautiful, too. Fat can and should be shown- we can’t be judging a person and their capabilities just because of the size of their bodies, but first we have to give them the room to prove themselves. Revolution is something I want to make exciting, it's exciting to be revolted by something because then that means it fascinates you. This is the recurring theme in the play of *Fefu and her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes. This play is about grief and pain and how long a person can keep it to themselves before it bursts. The act of revulsion is like that; how long can a person handle the backlash of constantly being loathed by society until they burst? Why do we even create that atmosphere to begin with? Why must a body type be labeled as revolting? Because it's fascinating.

In the opening of the play, there's a scene where Fefu and Christina have a conversation that perfectly explains what it means to be revolted. Christina, a conformist who is uncomfortable with the idea of stepping outside of what's expected of a woman, has a conversation with Fefu, the complete opposite of Christina. Fefu is loud and bold and often fights with the depiction of what's expected of her as a woman.

FEFU. (With mischief) It revolts me.

CHRISTINA. You find revulsion exciting?

FEFU. Don't you?

CHRISTINA. No.

FEFU. I do. It's something to grapple with.-What do you do with revulsion?

CHRISTINA. I avoid anything that's revolting to me.

FEFU. Hmm. (To CINDY) You too?

CINDY. Yes

FEFU. Hmm.-Have you ever turned a stone over in damp soil?

CHRISTINA. Ahm.

FEFU. And when you turn it there are worms crawling on it?

CHRISTINA. Ahm.

FEFU. And it's damp and full of fungus?

CHRISTINA. Ahm.

FEFU. Were you revolted?

CHRISTINA. Yes.

FEFU. Were you fascinated?

CHRISTINA. I was.

FEFU. There you have it. You too are fascinated with revulsion.

CHRISTINA. Hmm.

FEFU. You see, that which is exposed to the exterior ... is smooth and dry clean. That which is not... underneath, is slimy and filled with fungus crawling with worms. It is another life that is parallel to the one we manifest there. The way worms are underneath the stone. If you don't recognize it... (Whispering) it eats you.-That is my opinion.-Well, who is ready for lunch? (Fornes, 114)

I see this conversation as an interpretation of how fat bodies are seen, where Fefu is the voice of reason trying to educate the correct way of celebrating this idea of being fascinated over

a body type that conventionally revolts people. Christina is the revolted, challenged by this depiction of an idea they've been taught already. With this idea, there’s room for a change, you just have to be open to the idea that revulsion can be exciting and with this excitement it can be changed for the better. There's room to make revulsion a revolution. Fat bodies don't need to be hidden away, they should be celebrated and illuminated with a brighter light.

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Technical Essay

The process of senior project and the overall journey was not one that was easy, I'll be honest and say that it was probably one of the hardest times of my life; mentally, physically, with my friendships and my relationship with myself. It was a challenging time, but not fully in a bad way. This journey challenged me as not only an actor but how I held and presented myself both as an actor and as myself. There were a lot of really dark times through this process but also a lot of light. I feel as if this process made my mind, my heart, my acting, my choices and myself, tougher, stronger.

At the start of the process, my peer Lillian Perez and I were so passionate about putting up a genderswapped production of *Proof* by David Auburn, Lillian came to me about the idea the summer before we were juniors and ever since then we would bounce ideas off each other and work early on to ensure that's what we were going to do for our senior project; we were so sure- no if ands or buts. Many if, ands, or buts later, we were denied. It was devastating to say the least, to have something we were already so passionate about be dropped suddenly off the face of the earth. With only a week now to find a project to be a part of, I'll be honest and say it was overwhelming, I was scrambling to find a project that would make me just as passionate. That's when I found out we could make the mainstage our senior project and they were already holding auditions for *Fefu and Her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes. I wasn't familiar with the play so I looked into it and soon I found myself so attached to the stories and these characters. I remember reading it with Lillian while we were waiting backstage of a production we were doing at the

time, and saying something like “this is it… we need to be in this show.” So, we worked hard for these auditions and got in and I finally started to feel passionate again.

I remember really admiring Paula Cori because she was gentle but tough at the same time. She was how I felt the word beauty was described: tough and knew how to hold herself even when people beat her down. But because she was a love interest and had a kissing scene, I felt like I wouldn't even be an option so I didn't even try for it. Instead, I tried out for Julia. I remember feeling like I needed to try out for Sue or Cecilia because they were “less important characters” that fit in the stereotype I was always so used to being cast as but I remember having a breakthrough the night before auditions. Why was I letting the stereotypes win? This is my senior project. I should be able to at least try to challenge people's views about me, so I swore to myself I wasn't going to hide myself and I was going to branch out by trying out for the leads. I honestly wasn't expecting it to go well, I guess this was the first time I let myself try out for a character I actually wanted and didn't stoop low because I guess stooping low before getting placed low takes away some of the pain because then I “did it to myself”. Without even realizing however, I was still stooping low, because for some reason I still had it in my mind that there was absolutely no way I was going to be casted as the love interest. But then callbacks happened and the unexpected got put on my plate, I was asked to cold read for Paula Cori. I remember getting emotional before I even opened my mouth because I couldn't fathom the fact that someone might have seen me as such a beautiful character. Reading that monologue for the first time was like a breath of fresh air, I felt every word. I don’t think I've ever felt prouder of a callback than that moment, especially when Rachel Dickstein congratulated me on how natural it came to me.

Before I made *Fefu and her Friends* my senior project, I tagged along with two other seniors, Mauricio Gonzalez who wrote his piece, *Piñata* and Nicki Castillo, who was going to act as the main character, Addison. I'll be honest, even though my time "collaborating" on this show (if you'd even call it that) was very short, it taught me a lot about the industry; you're not always going to like the show you're working on. I'm never one to talk badly about another but after working on this show, I realized that if I didn't speak up it wouldn't bring awareness. I feel very very deeply when I say that I feel there should be a requirement of an original piece being written and proofread before it is chosen as a senior project, and I especially feel that there should be a requirement that the student who writes this play should either be a playwriting minor, have taken more than one class and/or should not be also acting in this piece, especially if they're also writing characters for other collaborators that are also acting in said piece. All of these happened to be reasons that added onto a big issue with this show. I felt as if the writer began writing only for himself and totally dropped the characters of the other actors in his collaboration team. There was one point in the process of the playwright writing this play where the ending he came up with completely stripped the character of greed away, and having been the actor who was playing greed and having my thesis at the time being *"how greed is different in men vs women and how that depicts on the stage"* this made it very hard for me… and I soon no longer felt like *I* was playing a character named greed but instead was working with someone who was greedy. "Collaborating" on this piece felt impossible, I along with my other collaborator, Nicki Castillo felt like this wasn't even our project anymore because the writer never collaborated with us on choices, never came to us with any of the technical aspects we as collaborators needed to work out together, never listened to us and our ideas, never collaborated

with us period, To the point where it felt like it was *his* senior project and we were just there. So after a while of trying to accommodate but only being disappointed and further let down, I finally had enough and stepped down from being a "collaborator" on this piece. That process was honestly very smooth to my surprise, I was very appreciative that I was able to make Fefu and her Friends my senior project again, because having worked on the character of Paula for a month, I had learned so much about her and knew that I wanted to know this character deeper.

Having the opportunity to be able to work on such a mind bending, heart wrenching, beautifully horrifying story like Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* was one I will <u>always</u> remember. During this whole process, it felt like I was *always* working on it, always thinking about it and discovering things about the play and the atmosphere and my character. The craft of this play and the dynamic we were building in our production was unlike anything I've ever been a part of, I found myself discovering new things and going *"wow"*. Paula Cori has touched my soul and I was truly given an honor to be able to portray a beautiful character like her. This process opened my eyes to a lot of things, not only just the beauty of the writing and characters but also the whole process itself. This production was the biggest production I've ever had my name connected to, with such a big crew and company bringing it all together. I truly felt like I was a part of a *team,* one where everyone that was onboard was so incredibly invested and we were able to make something so tricky and hard, so *smooth* and beautiful.

With character work came the realization that I was finally doing the thing that young Joann dreamt of, I was playing the love interest. Reflecting back on playing this character, I wish that I was able to be in the audience to watch a fat actor play such a character and that this was an inspiration for some, maybe a conversation for others, because that's how change starts…

there's a problem, you let it be heard, act upon it and then let the people talk. I hope my presence on stage and at this school was one that could hopefully make even the smallest of changes.

Did I meet my goal?

I don't think this goal was made to be “met” because to make a change you have to keep doing the work, keep making it aware and voiced that it’s a problem, and keep putting in the effort to make the change. I don't think the stigma will ever truly go away. I can say however that I've met this goal in myself. Playing the wonderful role of Paula and going against theatres stereotypical ideas about fat people was enough to finally stop stereotyping myself, that inner fat discrimination that got in the way and made choices for me. Being able to play this character and all the other characters I've played this year that went against the stigma finally showed me my capability upfront and broke me from my shackles that society helped lock. Finally, I was given the chance to prove to not only others but myself, that I can do it and my body is not the problem, I'm not the reason why I don't get these roles… It's society.

A Walrus In The Body Of A Crocodile
By MJ Kaufman
Fall mainstage 2021
Role: #2/Emma

Mac Beth
By Erica Schmidt
Spring 2022
Role: Mac Duff

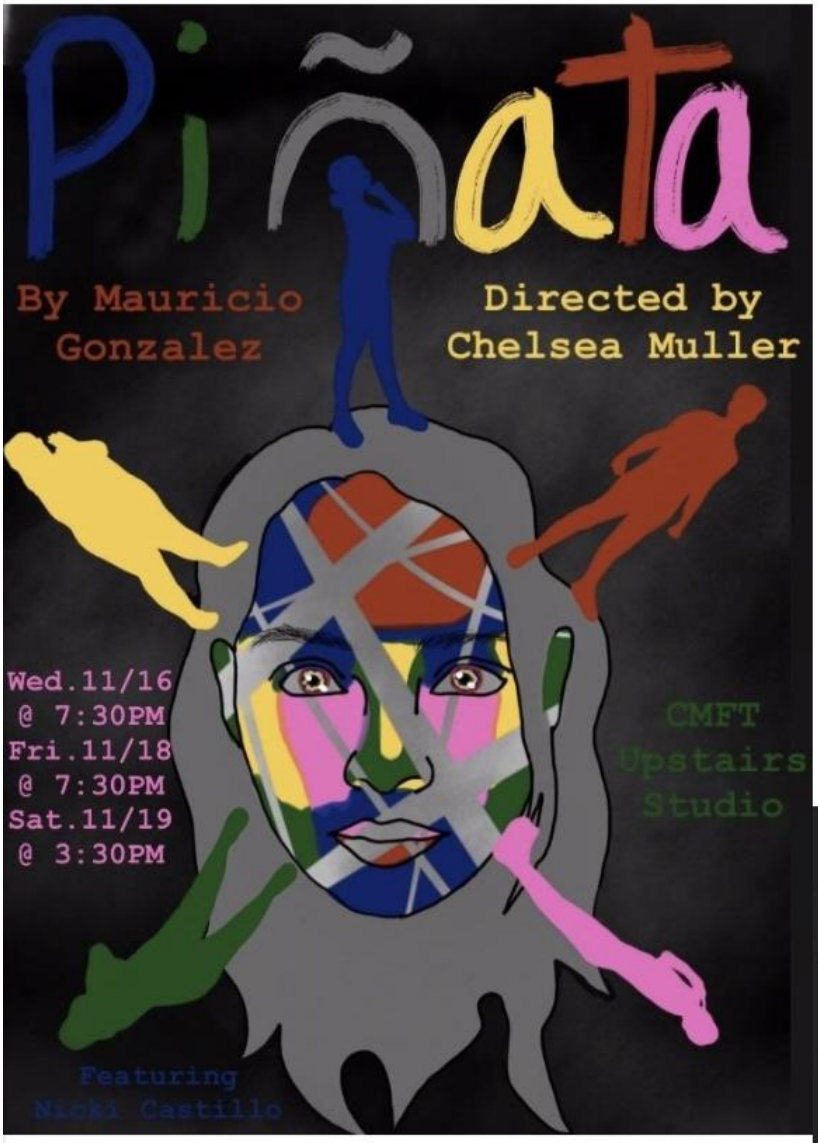








Fefu And Her Friends
By María Irene Fornés
Fall Mainstage 2022
Role: Paula Cori



Pinata
By Mauricio Gonzalez
Festival Piece 2022
Role:Greed

The Attic
By Yoji Sakate
Spring Mainstage 2023
Role: The Gentleman

Proof
By David Auburn
Independent Project 2023
Role: Catherine