Teaching the Untaught:
Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Needs in Sex Education

By Isabela Carmina Ragano

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First Reader: Andrew Saito

Second Reader: Michi Barall

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Navigating Challenges Through Character Embodiment

I hadn't thought that my senior project would be something so raunchy, provocative, and deeply personal. But since I read *Collective Rage* by Jen Silverman, I knew instantly that it *had* to be. *Collective Rage: A Play in Five Betties*, or otherwise known by its full length title, *Collective Rage: A Play in 5 Betties, A Queer and Occasionally Hazardous Exploration; Do You Remember When You Were In Middle School And You Read About Shackleton And How He Explored The Antarctic?; Imagine The Antarctic As A Pussy And It's Sort Of Like That* is the culmination of my career at SUNY Purchase. It will be put on the CMFT (Center for Media, Film + Theatre) stage April 3rd, 4th, and 5th. My senior producers are Briana Reid and Rebekkah Ruffin. It's imperative that it be impactful, truthful, and thought provoking to both me and the audience. Tackling Jen Silvermans' show as an actor and a producer is something I deeply enjoyed and would do again. Up to this point, I have only worked on projects as an actor, and the chance to do something else is something I've been aiming to do for a while now. I will be a part of the ensemble as Betty #2, and I will also be sound designing. I have a few different goals for this project. I want to enrich my craft and develop more rigid methods. I'd like to develop a healthy work-life balance, and not let the busyness affect my mental, and find a score that enriches the themes *Collective Rage* has.

Acting Goals

In terms of acting, I am pushing myself deeply out of my comfort zone. My character's arc is building up the courage to look at her vagina for the first time. I believe in the words of Jen Silverman and what I'm saying on stage, and I don't want my personal relationship with

anyone in the audience to subconsciously alter my performance in anyway. On the same side of the coin, just the sheer amount of conversation about my characters' vagina makes for a vulnerable performance. When asked what this represents by my director, I was at a loss for words because I truly feel as if you must ask, you don't really get it. (I'm aware and do acknowledge my director asked me this for an acting exercise which greatly helped me at the time). I'm sure for some people it *literally* resonates with them, and for other people I'm sure it will remind them to treat their bodies with a little more love. Betty 2's part in the play is deeply vulnerable and intimate and I think it makes it even more powerful, so my task is to make it empowering, not shameful.

I have a goal to push the audience out of their comfort zone. There are many moments in the show that make for a slightly uncomfortable viewing by making audience members to re-think their preconceived notions of sex, love, and inner peace. Those three are intrinsically connected in *Collective Rage*, and in life. The play puts into question what our faults are, and why. Discomfort isn't a bad thing. Going along with that, I also want it to be tastefully done. Because of the subject matter, it's easy for the content to be perceived as immature or crass. The goal is to spin those words on themselves and ask why our first thoughts are that it's immature and why it's crass. What about watching this young lady on this stage makes me feel this way and why? When was the last time I felt this way about my body or felt brave enough to say any feelings about my body out loud. I'd like it to be a radical form of acceptance that bridges on liberation. I want people to leave this show rethinking their preconceived notions about sex and their body. It is a celebration of *all* bodies, everywhere. To be alive and to be able to love is what we're celebrating in this show. I guard Betty #2 with my mind, my heart and my soul. I'd like to

be brave enough to put on not a caricature of a wealthy lonely socialite, but someone real who could walk down the street next to you or serve you a cup of coffee.

At the end of the play, Betty 2 comes on stage as betty 2's pussy. Franki Mastrone, my director, and I spoke on how we want to approach this very scene. More specifically, how we want to tackle how our version of Betty' 2's It's important to us that it isn't tacky or camp. While this show is in some ways camp, it's a very specific type that is niche and you must work for. We didn't want a style of camp that is in your face or obvious. We were thinking about me coming out in an all-black blazer. Franki had an idea of my character in some sort of floral piece as to resemble a flower. No matter what we ultimately decide on, I want it to be intuitive and taken care of.

The production team has had many conversations about what type of working space we want this to be. We have decided it should be cohesive and a free thought-to-page space. While we honor the roles we play, it's important to my peers and I that *the whole company* has a space where we can freely speak about our opinions surrounding *Collective Rage*, whether it be something that directly affects us or not. It's everyone's show, and we want it to reflect that. For example, while casting, our director opened the dialogue to the rest of us about who we thought was the best fit for each role and why. It initiated many heavy-hitting questions about our wants for the play, and we easily figured out what design choices and which actors would work best for the production we are trying to put on.

Musical Goals

Another goal is to get rid of my anxiety about singing on stage. I am a musician, and I rarely combine acting and music because I get very different things from both crafts. Acting comes very naturally to me, and I get a form of escapism from it. To combine the two has never

been appealing to me. It would convolute both arts for me. This being said, there's a song that Betty 2 uses to describe her feelings on the world. It wraps up the show beautifully, and I want to do right with it. For this, I am forcing myself to play my guitar and actually sing the song the way it is in the script. There is sheet music, so it will not be original. By doing this, I will hopefully allow for a more authentic, personal and intimate exploration into Betty #2. Singing and bringing my guitar on stage will be more impactful than reciting a traditional soliloquy because it will showcase another side of myself, I have not yet shown the audience; I.E my singing voice, my guitar, and this song that I (Betty) wrote for *them*. I want to be more truthful in my acting. Uta Hagen says that when she's on stage, she always felt like her, never really like a character at all. That is what I'm trying to bring to my performance. The freedom which Silverman gives the actor allows for more diverse and specific choices. She isn't specific in terms of the actual defined space, nor in the way that Betty 2's vagina makes the appearance. It's based around the actor, and how we can make their performance more present and personal.

Queer Themes

This show is obviously advertised as a very queer show. It literally stars five lesbians. A conversation we had from the start was the goal of conveying real gay people. Not gay people just written for the masses. We have this tendency for gay stories to be deeply tragic, always meaningful, centered around the queerness itself. This is something we want to try and disband in the future as creators of all kinds. *Collective Rage* is a show about real women in the real world. It deals with serious topics. It's also incredibly funny, lighthearted, and even whimsical at times. It's important that were giving young gay women a voice. Not specifically young women, all queer + POC peoples. We're lucky that we attend SUNY Purchase, an incredibly progressive school, so it's not like we're doing anything groundbreaking by doing a queer piece, but it is still

something fresh and important because of the language. We feel as if we can add to the amount of important queer pieces that go on at this school.

The Trevor project is a nonprofit group that was founded in 1998 by Randy Stone, Peggy Rajski, and Celeste Lecsense. They are the creators of the 1994 short film *Trevor*, a story about a thirteen-year-old boy who attempts suicide after being ostracized by his friends because of his sexuality. I'd go as far to say they are one of the most popular nonprofits, considering they were the first suicide prevention hotline for the queer youth. My team and I are very keen on supporting this nonprofit through donating all of our costumes. They do work for gender affirming clothing, so it's a little thing, but just the idea of helping one young person is more than enough for us. We plan on utilizing the Salvation Army in Port Chester, along with the Goodwill Bins scattered across the city, and some L train vintage if need be. Along with this, if we need, we will ask our cast to bring some items, such as shoes.

I want people to be *moved* by what we're making. *Collective Rage* is relevant and has something direct that everyone can relate to, especially people on this campus. It teaches imperative things to young womanhood that all people, regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, class should see. Here at SUNY Purchase, I think we're all dying for relatable content, whether we know it or not. I have the utmost faith in my team and I that we will put on one of the most memorable senior projects that's come out of the THP department so far. *Collective Rage* will resonate with all audiences, in a deeply unique way.

At a time where students are hungry for authenticity and safe spaces to explore ideas and thoughts, *Collective Rage* does exactly that. This show directly speaks to the queer experiences our campus grapples with every day. Like the collegial experience, *Collective Rage* pushes boundaries, fosters connection, and challenges us to grow.

Teaching the Untaught: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Needs in Sex Education

The history of sex education across the globe is littered with wildly different perceived notions of what should and should not be taught to children or teens. Most of us know not to touch a stove because it's hot and we know that jumping from a 40-foot cliff isn't the best idea. Why don't most of us know what a period is and how it affects people with vaginas? Misinformation and old wives' tales about sex are spewed everywhere. The deep seeds of misogyny, racism, and sexism take a strong role of sex education within the foundation of the United States of America. This is due to lack of funding for comprehensive sex education, conservative politicians' campaigns, misogyny, and a desire of control over women's bodies. We see these repeating factors that continue to harm us to this day. I will discuss the two main forms of sex education in the U.S.; Comprehensive Sex Ed and A.O.B (Abstinence Only Based). I will be reviewing the promises and outcomes to both styles of teaching. Sex Education politics are always changing, especially with the addition of technology and sex education online. The introduction of online anonymity has been a major upgrade in terms of accessible, 24/7-hour support, with doctors being accessible at all hours. Alongside this, the topics of women's hygiene and pleasure are finally starting to become consistent in the conversation about sexual health. All these subtopics are intertwined, causing a cascading domino to fall on the crisis that is sex education today. Comprehensive, inclusive sex education needs to be accessible to all for the betterment of the general population.

History of Sex Education in America

When discussing the history of sex education, it is important to note that a significant gap still exists in 2025. As of February, only twenty-four states have laws that mandate sex education in schools. That's less than half of the country. Even within the states that do have it mandated, the quality, accuracy and comprehensiveness vary greatly. While some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go to ensure that all young people across the country are equipped with knowledge that keeps them safe and empowered. *(S.I.E.C.U.S 3).*

The first version of sex education our country had was called "Sex Hygiene Practices" in 1913 Chicago by a woman named Ella Flagg Young. She was the first female school superintendent in Chicago history. Sex Education was obviously a very radical thing to be taught at this time, and the Catholic Church shut down her program within only a year of her debuting it. It centered around a few core principles: a biological understanding of reproduction, prevention of STI's (Sexually Transmitted Infection) abstinence, and traditional gender roles. She was and still is considered a feminist, even though she is a bit conservative. Nothing retaining to sex education was brought up again until we entered World War I and the only reason it did was because it was affecting our fight in the war. The country realized we had a major problem when a total of 10,000 soldiers being discharged due to something they called "VD", which stands for Venereal Disease, which is what we now call an STD. The White House concluded the soldiers would not have caught the STD's if they had been better educated about it. This led to the founding of A.S.H.A (American Social Hygiene Association) in 1914. They decided to publish pamphlets pertaining to personal hygiene. One of the most important pieces, called "The Sex Side of Life" published in 1914 was written by Mary Ware Dennet. It was a progressive, illustrated pamphlet. It was so radical that she got taken to court for obscenity under

the Comstock Laws. The teachers that taught sex education were biology teachers, nurses, or possibly people from A.S.H.A.

During the next twenty years, the efforts were continued to be made. Nothing notable happened until in 1944 when FDR became president. During World War II, mass production of penicillin was made available to the public. Penicillin is monumental in terms of medical care for STDs. It was used to treat syphilis and gonorrhea. After it was put on the market, the rates of the disease dramatically plummeted. This was also the introduction of sex ed films. Some examples of some classic films the *Human Growth* (1947), *The story of Menstruation* (1946), VD*: time to end the silence* (1976).

In 1960, when the FDA (Food and Drug Association) finally approved the birth control pill after years, even decades of trying. Margaret Sanger was one of the trailblazers of trying to get the birth control pill legalized. In 1950, she teamed up with Katharine Mccormik, a wealthy suffragette who funded the research. This is what most historians mark to be the start of the American sexual revolution. Of course, with revolution comes resistance. In 1968, a pamphlet titled "Is the School House the Proper Place to Teach Raw Sex?" written by Billy James Hargi's Christianity Crusade. Its' contents included a deep and judgmental critique of S.I.E.C.U.S (see page 2), referenced Christianity and the Bible often, and remarked that sex education programs were a part of a deeper Communist agenda (*Fredisorf 2).* The literature even goes as far a to describe the materials as "instant transvestitism". The pamphlet started circling around public schools, which led to an uproar in southern and Christian communities. It sold over 250,000 copies in just the first three months. (*Fredisorf, 2)* Harigi claims that over one million copies were sold. This was a key document in the fight the conservative right had against sex education.

In 1982, when Ronald Reagen was president, his administration team introduced the Adolescent Family Life Act, which put 1.5 billion taxpayer dollars from 1981-2010 towards abstinence-based sex education, which, to this day, has been the biggest impact on the sex education curriculum. It was the first law to be made that centered around teen pregnancy, with a moral goal. It completely shifted the tone in politics and the cultural conversation about teen pregnancy. Most importantly though, it paved the way for AOB education. In the states that this was taught, it had absolutely zero impact on the teens refraining from sex. Not only this, but they also have the highest abortion rates in the country. In 2009, when Barack Obama became president, he cut the funding for abstinence programs by two thirds, and for the first time in American history, the government began funding comprehensive sex education. This is the second biggest impact on the sex ed curriculum we know today. He began funding for programs that covered contraception, STI's healthy relationships and sex. He started the TPP (teen pregnancy prevention program), which led to groundbreaking lows in teen pregnancy rates in the country. Obama helped set a national standard.

Sex Education Today

In 2025, both comprehensive and abstinence-based programs are equally funded. Going forward, there are many open discussions about the future of sex education and how we can build upon what we have now. There should absolutely be free tampons and pads in all bathrooms, despite possible signage on doors. Ideally, accessible Plan B's and emergency contraception. Today, women can get some of these tools depending on where you are from in the country and if there might be a Planned Parenthood near you. Vasectomy normalization is starting to get spoken about in the conversation about preventative measures. They are safe, reversible, and accessible.

Women's health education is also one of the most fundamental aspects of sex education. This period is the first place to start. Our menstrual cycle controls a lot of our brain and body functions. The monthly cycle is consistent, even when we are not bleeding. I know a lot of women who are very educated but are clueless when it comes to the inner workings of menstruation. How it affects our mental, physical, and emotive state of being. This is because of the systematic issues I've been discussing, a cultural stigma and shame, medical neglect, among other factors. The average woman spends 7 years of her life bleeding.

How women handle their period differs based around where you live. Globally, about 2.3 billion people lack *basic sanitation services*, and in lesser developed countries, only 27% of people have water and soap they can wash their hands with. A lot of girls must use rags, old clothes, sometimes even leaves because there just is no other option. This leads to missing school and an exponential increase in possible infection. And that is just for able-bodied people. For women with special needs, menstruation is more than often a subject they know little to nothing about because of the lack of education and care. There are organizations, such as UNICEF, that have outreach programs to help these girls get taught the specific education they need. This is far and few between, considering the time and money it takes. The integrity of girls *needs* to be maintained and honored, and how we do this, yet again, is through education. In America, most girls learn about their period during their high school or middle school. Traditionally, the boys and girls split up. The girls get taught about tampons and pads. The boys get taught about their upcoming physical changes, and their reproductive system. The issue, as we have seen, is that it varies greatly state by state. Some schools have comprehensive educational forums, and some have ill informative, fear mongering, and inaccurate information about menstruation.

The Orgasm Gap

The Orgasm Gap is the perfect example of this. The Orgasm Gap is the statistical disparity between heterosexual men reaching their sexual climax notably more often than heterosexual women. *Education is yet again the answer to this question.* When we hear words like labia majora, labia minora and clitoris they are just sound technical and difficult. In "Viva la Vulva, Why We Need To Talk About Women's Genitalia," Stephani Shoop-Warrell quotes "The clitoris is a primary sexual organ. The vagina is a separate structure with a completely different purpose. But we are only really taught about the latter. For men, structure and purpose are overlapping." The two (structure and purpose) are intrinsically linked. It is not just men who are lacking the education, women too are not aware of many of main functions of our bodies. This often leads to shame. The number of wives' tales that are still passed around about the workings of our body are copious. Some examples are that women can't get pregnant when they're on their period, if your pregnancy bump is low, it's a boy, if its high, it's a girl. In ancient Greece, there was a genuine thought that the uterus could float up and affect a woman's mental health. The root of the word "Hysteria" is from Greek word "hystera" which means uterus. If I were to list all the misconceptions about women's bodies, this thesis would be hundreds of pages long.

The History of Abortion and Where We Go from Here

Abortion rights are always changing ever since *Roe V. Wade*, in 1973. Roe is a pseudonym used to protect the woman at the center of the case. Even though abortion does not directly affect sex education, sex education directly affects abortions. I feel as if I were not to mention abortion in this paper, that would be like writing about wine and not mentioning grapes. Forms of abortion have been around since the start of time. It should be

notably clear that no matter what laws are ever made or broken, people with vaginas will always find ways to terminate pregnancy. I turn to a Loretta Rose quote; “We have always done what was necessary.” From everything to crocodile fecal matter to cayenne pepper, women have always tried to find ways to manage their fertility. There are two main types of abortions; a medical abortion and a surgical abortion. They are exactly how it sounds, medical relies on a pill you take to induce an abortion. Surgical abortions, if without compilations, are always outpatient, meaning that you do not have to stay overnight. When I say surgical abortion specifically, I mean the removal of the pregnancy tissue.

In 2022, *Roe V. Wade* got overturned. The court argued that the constitution doesn't explicitly mention abortion- which means that the state of women's bodies is up to the state. Here is a brief overview of where abortion is most and least protected from most to least in descending order; the most progressive and supportive states are Oregon, Vermont, Delaware, New York, Maine Connecticut, New Mexico, Michigan, Illinois Montana, Washington, and Chicago. Obviously, the restrictive states are the Republican states, such as Texas, Illinois, Alabama, and so on. We can hope that *Roe V. Wade* will rise above like it has done in the past, but with President Donald Trump taking office once again, the possibilities are extremely low. Mike Pence once called Donald trump to be “the most pro-life president that ever has been in office.”

The first mention of abortion is in Chinese folklore, where Emperor Shennong is said to have prescribed mercury to induce abortions. The first legitimate medical record we have is from the Eber Papyrus, a medical test dating back to Egypt in 1550 BC. It is said that during this time there was some sort of plant fiber that was used by women as a tampon

prototype. When coated with honey and dates before inserted, the pregnancy would be terminated. From this point onto now, such various amounts of self-inflicted abortions have been tried and popularized. When most of western society thinks of this, they think of the infamous horrific hanger ordeal, which, yes, is something women have done for centuries, does not encapsulate the creative, noninvasive, and at times, lethal efforts that are made to terminate a pregnancy. In the beginning, many abortions were non-surgical and just relied on preexisting activities. Physical tasks, such as weightlifting, climbing, diving, even just extraneous labor. Other ways were fasting, or getting blood drawn. Many of cultures have a different form of wearing a girdle or some sort of restrictive belt, such as the Māori people of New Zealand. They used compression of the abdomen, ritual baths, certain seeds including tutu, poroporo, kowhai, among others. There is a variety of other creative ways, such as a massage abortion that started in ancient China (that's still practiced today), where they apply pressure to certain parts of the stomach to cause the termination of the pregnancy.

Abortion is a basic human right. One specific story from Dr. Manisha Kumar from Doctors Without Borders, took place in Lesotho, a smaller village in South Africa. One day, an eighteen-year-old girl came in extremely sick. Dr. Kumar stated she was obviously in septic shock. When they were examining her, they found sticks and leaves inside her vagina from an attempt of a self-inflicted abortion. They treated this with IV fluids, intravenous antibiotics, and rest. There are stories like this that happen every day across the globe.

Technology and Sex Ed

Sex education in the US has undergone tremendous change in recent decades, all thanks to technological changes. Sex education in schools was traditionally carried out in a

very conventional style with textbooks, lectures, and pamphlets serving as the sole sources of information. But sex education has transformed in numerous ways. Technology has assisted the learning and teaching of sexual health in America, altering the accessibility of information, the quality of education, and even the character of how youth interact with sexuality. One of the most significant ways is by increasing access to information. The internet has made it possible for individuals to tap into an enormous array of information. Social media offers diverse perspectives on sex. Kids are tapping into these sources on the internet as an addition to what they are learning in school.

Sex educators, physicians, and activists utilize these sites such as P*lanned Parenthood, Scarleteen, Sex Etc., Amaze*, etc. to create content that is both informative and entertaining. These videos tend to provide answers to fundamental questions about puberty, birth control, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and healthy relationships. They use humor and real-life situations to deliver the information. In addition, the anonymity of the internet allows people to explore sensitive topics without any fears, enabling them to ask questions they would be afraid to ask face-to-face. While the internet has leveled the playing field in terms of gaining access to information, it has also created many problems. The lack of regulation on the internet means that everything that is published there is not necessarily accurate, reliable, or medically sound. Misinformation regarding sexual health can be spread in literal seconds.

Social media websites also sometimes have unrealistic standards on body image, your sex performance, and romantic relationships. Kids are sometimes unable to discern between accurate information and misinformation, which can end up being very damaging.

Technology has also made it possible to develop sexual health apps that help fill gaps in knowledge. Applications like Clue, Flo, and Planned Parenthood's "I Decide" offer detailed information about reproductive health and tracking features for sexual activity and emotional health. The applications are particularly helpful for people who may not get comprehensive sex education in their communities.

In some regions of the U.S., there is little or no sex education, so these apps help people to become their own educators and make well-informed decisions regarding their bodies and how they want to use them. While technology has certainly increased access to sexual health information, it has also raised questions about the influence of the internet on developing sexuality. The amount of pornography on the internet is a significant problem with people of all ages. With unrestricted access to explicit content, teenagers can have skewed or unrealistic views of sex, which can end up hurting them or their partner(s) in the long run.

Additionally, the growing reliance on phones for sexting and online dating also raises a lot of new conversations in terms of consent and certain sexual boundaries. Teens send naked photos or sext without knowing the potential implications and outcomes. There are the risks of cyberbullying, getting their nudes leaked, or legal charges. Parents and teachers must find ways of handling such issues in the context of virtual technology so that young people are aware of the importance of consent, privacy, and respect as they engage in on-line sex acts. Due to the poor quality of some schooling, most institutions and organizations have introduced virtual sex education. These courses typically include web-based classes, interactive modules, and virtual classrooms in which students learn about sexual health in the

comfort and safety of their own home. Online sex education courses have proven to be particularly useful during the pandemic.

While these online courses have been successful at offering accurate education, they still have some drawbacks. First, not all students have the initial access to technology required to take online courses. Also, virtual programs lack the interactive elements that can be so valuable in a delicate topic such as sex education. Classroom learning seems to provide opportunities for students to question, discuss, and engage with other students in ways that virtual sites may not be able to provide.

In total, American sex education is paramount to the health and well-being of young people. Differing programs across the country provide strikingly different approaches and outcomes when it comes to sex education. By providing information about contraception and sex, we can prevent unwanted pregnancies. We also acknowledge technology has made information more accessible. In the future, it is essential to prioritize a range of complete, accurate, and comprehensive sex education made available to all students, enabling them to make proper sexual health and relationship decisions.

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Between Laughter and Rage: My Journey as Betty 2

I am really glad that *Collective Rage* is over. I know that's probably not ideal, but with every role, especially one as serious as this, there is a certain shedding that needs to occur. This play was hands down the most challenging, anxiety inducing, riveting, courageous thing I have ever done. I faced questions about the craft that I had never thought about before.

Producing and Acting Simultaneously

Throughout the process, I carried something Margot Robbie quotes. She says that she "would never act in something she didn't produce". I was eager to experience *Collective Rage* as a producer and an actor. Standardly, actors are usually the last cast decision (obviously), so it was cool to see what was going on before we chose the rest of the company excluding Beck, Briana and I. About halfway through the rehearsal process, I was having serious issues with my performance. Issues that I had never had within a role before. Producing and acting at the same time were definitely very hard for me. I really loved all the tasks that came with producing. And acting is my calling. Why was it so hard to do both? After some time, I realized that as a producer, we are involving yourself with things that the actor should do everything to avoid. Would she read to the audience as I intended? If not, what would the audience think of her, and would she be as serious to me as she was to them? When acting, you should not involve yourself with such things. When I was Betty 2, I was worrying about her as a producer, not an actor. I was more concerned about my outer workings, rather than the inner workings.

When it comes to legitimate performance issues, such as voice, body and projection, there were a few different crannies I ran into. Betty 2 is very out of touch with her body; that's the whole point of the show. It centers around her looking at her vagina for the first time on

stage. As Isabela, I've always been confident in who I am and what I offer. It was incredibly hard for me to make he physical change to someone who does not obtain these qualities. It was easier for me mentally, but the connection to my body was not working. While yes, the words were coming out of my mouth and I was finding my truth in the moment, my body did not react. Which meant it was terrible, in my personal opinion. This was a hard barrier for me to overcome because frankly physicality has always been simple for me. I eventually got over this by buckling down. I don't really know what I did. I just tried really hard for a while and I guess it got better.

Overcoming Betty 2

It was about 70% through the process when I realized how scared I was of Betty 2. I was scared of her courage, her ignorance, her growth. I had a phone call with professor Michi Barall which changed things for me. She was giving me feedback, and she said to a) channel more clown work b) to have more fun, and something else that struck me viscerally. “Betty is deeply brave. She’s a lion.” How did I not realize that? As an actor, when you play a part, *and I firmly believe this*, it can be very hard to distinguish yourself from the character you’re playing. You are encouraged to use first person pronouns when speaking about them, and you use your personal experiences, feelings and truth for them. Everyone has their own method, but mine is very personal to me. I can't not think about my character almost all the time. So, when I'm out of the theatre, that doesn't mean that the character is out of me. The study constantly persists. I’d prefer to be these actors who clock in and clock out, but it's just not me.

Betty 2’s Puppet

There were two voices I had to conquer for Betty2. Regular Betty and Betty’s hand puppet. Betty’s regular voice was a bit easier than her hand puppet. (which I will talk about later

in the reflection). Bouncing between Bettys voice- which was already higher that my regular register, and her puppet, which was a comedic screech, was a hard feat. When I first started the process, I pitched the idea that I did not need to use different voices. This was very quickly shut down by my director Franki. I thought about doing a lower voice, but that didn't resonate with her puppet. My interpretation was Betty's hand puppet was her intrusive thoughts, the devil on your shoulder, whatever preferred verbiage. It was supposed to be annoying and hard to listen to. After coming to the realization that many of my worries stemmed from fear of being perceived as silly, the voice was easy to find. I would be perceived as silly no matter what. I'm a grown woman talking to a sock on my hand. It's simply ridiculous, and it's supposed to be. This was intentional, to provide a deeper range of accessible emotions for the audience.

I was going through this life-changing alteration on stage every day for months. It was tiring and it was consuming. The craft always is, but this was in a different way. I was bearing a part of myself to hundreds of people that I had never met. I still get scared when I think about what I did and how I did it. I realize now that I was and am deeply honored, humbled, and eager to give myself to those people. Yes, it terrified me. But if I'm not terrified, then what am I doing in the theatre? Ease and comfort are not something I look for in my acting. Once I got to work of Betty 2, creating and nurturing her, it was apparent to me that this was the deepest, honest work I had done up to this point in my life. I have new standards for myself, my craft, my future collaborative teams and the art I make in general.

On the production end, it was fairly simple sailing the whole entire time. Based on the feedback I got from the other senior projects producers, we definitely had the best producer-work split. There was not one specific producer who did more work than the others. I'd like to acknowledge that *Collective Rage* was Briana's idea and none of us would be here without her.

She was definitely the main producer. That being said, her, Beck and I equally split up all the work. For example, math is not my strong suit. Beck and Briana picked up our budgeting, while I delt with various other tasks that were called upon us. The biggest conversation we had to have as a company was about our playbills. To purchase the playbills, it was a large sum of money. Some of the members were not immediately on board, but we eventually came to a common middle ground. The producers all felt very strongly about having a paper playbill, considering how most playbills are accessed online.

The company had a few hardships, as companies always do. I had a feeling that this would happen considering that A) I was going into a cast with all women (not that men can't be this way) and b) the big personalities that were involved. When we locked in our previous director, we were elated that we got her. However, during our first ever production meeting, we were told that our AD and our director switched roles due to the busy schedule of Natalie Nova. This was a bit of a shock to all the producers considering neither of them had told us this prior to the meeting. This incident was probably one of the biggest things we had to overcome as an ensemble.

During our rehearsal process, we had a lot of technical challenges we had to overcome. With our scenic director dropping out in the beginning, we were off to a bit of a rocky start. When things got closer to tech, it was an attempt and a half to get into the CMFT building. I emailed Peter Sprague to get the keys, who told me to email Mark, who told me to email Peter. This ended in neither of them being able to give access to the theatre due to a staff members' resignment. We had to get the building manager involved, who also did not have permission, so then we had to contact the University Police Department. From this point, they could not get it open either, so it was a CTS issue. So, we had to jump through around seven hoops to just get

into space. This frustrated me personally, because it was unneeded stress. For our faculty viewing, it was the day of the power outage, so that had to get canceled. In hindsight, I'm glad it happened so my professors could experience the show with the audience. I feel as if it captured a lot of the magic of *Collective Rage.*

The Song

My character ends the play with a song. For the last twenty minutes of the play, a span of four scenes, I am on stage. This was one of the hardest parts *of* the hardest parts. I had the most performance anxiety about this song than I have ever had with anything else in my life. At one point, I had thought about reaching out to Jen Silverman, the playwright, and asking consent to deliver the song as a monologue. Which makes no sense because I was a musician before becoming an actor so it's not like I was going into it blind. I've played guitar for about four years now, and I've been singing for over a decade. I have more than adequate training. Something about intermingling these two crafts was very intimidating to me. For the first few times during rehearsal, I was so nervous that I started shaking. This led to my fingers literally not being able to play. I did end up buckling in and doing the song to the best of my ability, although as creatives it does often feel as if we're never really satisfied with our work. Frankly, I prefer it that way. There's always more work to do. This show taught me that. As actors, we always hope we can spend more time getting to know a character, but the time is always limited. It's our job to get the most feasibly possible truth during that time. I was satisfied with my performance as much as I could be. I've been hearing a lot of really great feedback, and that is good. Not just about my performance but about the show in general.

If I could do this whole process again, I would spend more time practicing my song, and more time studying other women who are uncomfortable in their bodies. The physicality still

didn't really click for me. It's so easy for me to see myself within all the characters I've played before, but this woman really stumped me. All the other Betties are *types* of women. Betty 2 is by far the most specific, layered and raw character. Showing myself to the audience in that way was almost a spiritual experience. I will forever be indebted to Jen Silverman for creating this world, Briana Reid for bringing this play to my attention *and* being one of my best friends, Beck Ruffin for being a beacon of peace, humor, and love since I've known them. My co-producers' relationship is something that will remain very special in my heart. It was a very easy thing to be around those two people every day for months. I am really glad that I pushed myself to do this and I will hold it in my heart forever.

Proof of Process

Link to Full Show: https://youtu.be/Y4VmxRZD9EU


Playbill Photo (Credit: Micayla Heron)

Promotional Photo (Credit: Micayla & Micheal Heron)

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