

The Girl Games:

Power in Femininity and the Gen Z Revolution

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Statement of Goals and Impact

One of my personal goals that I hope to accomplish by working on this project is to get acquainted with being a producer on a show. I never thought I'd be in charge of a production. even though I'm not really, it's a producer role and I'm not the one with all of the ideas. It will be fun to contribute as an actor to scenes and characters. I always dreamed of dancing in musicals and eventually that would lead to becoming the dance captain or even a choreographer. I hope to include some type of dance or choreography in this show as well. I would like to further my acting skills and have in depth, complex characters and scenes that challenge me. I really hope i will learn from my experiences and the characters I play as an actor. I love watching interviews of actors from films or Broadway shows talk about getting into character or doing their research to dig deep into the character and the story and really become the character. I love hearing how they transform themselves and get to know them like they are another real person. I think it's really cool when an actor will refer to something that happened to their character and then they say "me" like it happened to them. I find that very inspiring and I really look forward to being able to seamlessly transform into my characters like they do. I also look forward to being more involved with crew than I've previously been in other shows. Being on stage has always been my focus in the theatre world, but the behind-the-scenes aspects have always interested me. I remember watching my friends in crew be in charge of spotlights, painting and moving sets, spiking set pieces or actors on the stage, and calling the show's lights and sound cues in middle school and high school. I was always conflicted, wanting to be a part of both, but knowing I couldn't be in two places at once. In college I met some of the most talented crew members. I was blown away by the dedication and love they had for their work. I have such a respect for the people that constantly work to not only make a show better but get it on its feet altogether. I am interested in seeing the ways that I can contribute as a producer. Since we don't know the real

story yet, there's no concrete roles that everyone has. I have been inspired by many of my older friends at Purchase who have worked on many projects with me. I wonder who will take on what roles beyond our main titles, and I'm excited to see where this goes.

Since our show is still in its' earliest stages and the plot is yet to be written, there's an uncertainty with all the roles we will each play, especially as senior project collaborators, that is both daunting and exciting. I think about this project as a way for myself and everyone we work with to learn and grow in new ways, and I'm excited to see where we end up. I have been inspired by so many of my older friends at Purchase, especially the ones who I have gotten to work with on multiple projects. Watching them work in their respective elements, especially when I was a freshman, taught me so much. I hope to take their resilience, optimism and intelligence with me on my own senior project journey.

Another significant part of this project is the specific type of theatre that it is. Before college, I had never heard the word "devised" in terms of a theatre piece, so the concept is still new and exciting to me. A devised piece, where the script, plot and characters are built from the ground up as the rehearsal process goes along through collaboration and improv, offers something new and special. The idea of it is to shape something naturally, to uncover the story you will tell, right there with the people that will be working on it for months, or even years, together. I love the aspect of collaboration that is vital in this process and that we and our cast will each have a guiding hand in the process of creating the show that we get to perform. Being on board for this means I get to be a part of the creation in real time, and I find the potential to express any story we come up with very appealing.

As I mentioned, collaboration is really a big part of what I'm looking forward to for this project. I love that it's not just focused around one person's vision, the director or the playwright,

but it's the result of the effort of every actor that comes across it. I love the idea that everyone's input has the potential and power to mold it into its final form. I can't wait to contribute to our vague skeleton of a show that we have right now and see what ideas we all come up with. I'm eager to be able to contribute my ideas and tell some part of a story that means something to me. This level of collaborating with people is challenging as well; I will have to become more flexible with ideas, as usually if I come up with something that I really love, it's hard for me to take suggestions or change things about it. Embracing that uncertainty and the guarantee that nothing will stay the same will be hard, but with the support of my collaborators and the knowledge that we are coming up with ideas together will help guide me.

Thinking about the future and what I want myself and the audience to learn and take from this project is a bit daunting for me. This project was not my original idea; Kat and Daniel are the ones who came up with the project, pitched it and know it and its potential impact the best. So, when I was brought onto it, I had to make it personal. I had to think about ways that I personally could influence this project and therefore, what I wanted to get out of it. Then, what did I want the people who came to see it to think of it? But first, I thought of how this project could help me grow as an artist and how I could challenge myself, specifically in the context of theatre.

The concept of playwriting has always been intriguing to me, as I've been writing short stories and coming up with ideas for book series' since I was in middle school. It's become clear to me over the years as I put myself more into the light of theatre creation that writing, whether it be for plays or any other type of creative writing, is something I will pursue for the rest of my life. There's something so satisfying and deeply fulfilling as a creative person in creating stories, inventing characters and finding intricate ways to express emotions and ideas through dialogue and sometimes even stage directions or the thoughts of a character. Keeping that in mind, every

opportunity to improve my skill in writing, or specifically in this case, creating a story or character, is one that I eagerly take on. For me, writing is not just a hobby, it is a creative journey. The more I write, the more I discover about myself as a writer, how to bring depth and connection to a story and simply how stories work, even if I don't realise it at the time. This project offers me such a unique chance to work on exactly that, sharpening those creative skills in the dynamic relationship we will have with the project. I believe that will be instrumental in helping me become a more nuanced, thorough and overall skilled writer.

Looking at another area in the creative field that this project offers assistance in is improvisation. Improv is something in which I am much less experienced, and to be honest, it is very intimidating. In the past, I have tried to avoid it as much as possible, in both acting and dance, something that has been a part of my life for 18 years. The idea of coming up with conflicts, scenes and characters on the spot, creating something out of nothing in real time, especially before an audience, even if they are people I know and am comfortable with, performing without the security of a script is scary. I realise though, that improv is an incredible skill to have in theatre. It teaches you how to react, how to create realistic dialogue and trust your instincts. I can understand how knowing how to improvise on the spot can unlock a different part of theatrical skill and grow your creativity and spontaneity, and I know that if I just get myself out there and do it, it will push me to grow in the process. Although I still dread the prospect of improv in rehearsals, I know that becoming more acquainted with it will drag me out of my comfort zone and eventually lead me to be a more comfortable and versatile actor and writer.

My admiration and, honestly, starstruck awe for improv, particularly in comedy, comes from watching shows like Saturday Night Live and Whose Line Is It Anyway? when I was growing up, and more recently discovering the comedic wonder that is Game Changer on the

streaming service Dropout. There's something I find so captivating and impressive about watching actors and comedians come up with scenes or characters, sometimes even one-liners or silent physical comedy, with only seconds to prepare an idea. It requires lightning-fast thinking and adaptability, especially if they are riffing with another person. There is a certain fearlessness they all possess that I believe is the key to having that skill. The way the people I watch can turn simple ideas or prompts into something that can make me laugh for hours and create jokes that my friends and I, and people around the world, reference for ages after they speak it, is endlessly fascinating to me. I've always enjoyed their creativity, but as I got older and realised just how much talent and skill has to go into something like that, turned into that fascination, which turned into genuine respect and the want to be able to do that myself. Through this project and the improv that will be vital to the process, I hope to be fearless enough to improve my own skills so I can get to my role models' levels one day. I know it will be uncomfortable, but I know that challenging myself will ultimately benefit me greatly.

When I think about the final product of what we will show audiences in April, what comes to mind is something contemporary and impactful. It's something that exudes charm and a deep sense of community, not only in the stories we create but also in the relationships we build behind the scenes in the cast and crew. It's important to me that this show has that unified feel because that can clearly be reflected in the show that the audience sees. I have seen and been a part of shows where the cast doesn't speak to each other outside of rehearsals, there are issues, there is no camaraderie, and it is painfully evident to the audience. In the same way, it's obvious when the cast members of a show are friends. When a cast has that sense of togetherness and support, it shows within the acting and storytelling. It lets the project really shine, and that leaves a deeper and more meaningful mark on the audience. I want to create those feelings, the

connection between all of us that lets the project be received in the way it's meant to. Lastly, I want it to be a comfortable environment for everyone involved and, for the cast specifically, something to look back on with satisfaction and comfort, not only for the show we put on but the relationships we build as well.

Original shows offer an opportunity for so many people to be involved, especially since this is devised theatre, allowing them to inject bits of their lives, personalities and stories they want to tell into it. That way the stories and characters will feel real and personal, and when a character is personal to the actor, that could reach out to the audience and connect personally with someone out there too. There is something so powerful about a character that has taken inspiration from the actor themselves; it adds depth and resonance, making the story more impactful on the whole. This reality and authenticity we are trying to create has the potential to leave an impression that lasts beyond the performance itself. At Purchase, the sense of community is evident throughout the campus. Here, people share their ideas, beliefs and passions and the common thread of creativity binds everyone together. With that atmosphere in mind, this piece feels like a perfect fit. The show will focus on human connection, giving a good reflection onto the friendship, authenticity and the collaboration experienced behind the scenes. This production is looking to lift up diversity, community and shared experiences in a way that Purchase students will hopefully resonate with and take with them.

Another big part of this is the specific type of project that it is. Before college, I had never heard of 'devised' in terms of a theatre piece. I am excited that I am on board for this one because I love the idea and the concept of what the story will look like and the idea of creating the show as it's being worked on.

The third goal of mine is to improve my skills in playwriting and improv specifically in theatre. I believe that writing, plays or anything else, is something I will stick with, so any chance I get to improve will be beneficial. Improv is not something I have experience with, and I will admit that it scares me. But I also know that it is an incredible skill to have and hone and it is always incredibly impressive when it's done right. Growing up watching Saturday Night Live, Whose Line Is It Anyway and recently the YouTube series Game Changer has developed a fascination and respect for improv, comedy especially, and I hope my experience with it will prosper from this project.

Research Essay

The summer of 2023 was a big one. I was about to start my senior year of college, and the Barbie movie came out. But my twenty-first birthday wasn't the event that was celebrated worldwide, *Barbie* was. Girls everywhere decided what kind of Barbie they'd be, curated the perfect outfit, and streamed Barbie-approved playlists in preparation for the release of the most iconic movie of the summer. In brightly colored outfits out of place for the latter half of Barbenheimer, the girls laughed at the witty jokes, cried for the last twenty existential minutes, and got that aching feeling of early 2000's Barbie nostalgia. But there was also a stunning new sense of community. The realism of what we'd all watched was heavy on us, but there was collective awareness of our shared experiences as women. In the pink-toned July days surrounding the release, you couldn't go a full day without hearing or offering an enthusiastic "Hi Barbie!" Its innocence held a beautiful reminder that we were part of a bigger picture. Barbie had done her job again and brought women together.

Since then, the greetings have faded, but the knowledge we share is still present. The next summer earned the appellation of "brat summer" with the release of Charli XCX's album *brat*. Her addicting club beats mixed with existentialism was a refreshing hit to the music industry and our record collection. Listening to those songs on the beach with my best friend turned into a conversation about its lyrics and what it meant to us. While watching Brittany Broski's podcast, *The Broski Report*, I've cried about the beauty of life, gender inequality, and self-love along with her. I rooted for Ilona Maher on *Dancing with the Stars* with my closest friends, and her fierce drive to be herself was magnificently influential to us, especially as dancers. These moments aren't coincidental. It's part of a cultural movement. Recent pop culture pieces like Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*, and Charli XCX's *brat* have led to an influential shift in feminist role model

representation- from hyper-feminine, “girlboss” figures to layered and realistic characters. This essay will discuss how modern female icons in contemporary film, literature and music are accepted and desired by Gen Z because of their authenticity; they are powerful because of their flaws, and not despite them.

To fully understand and appreciate this evolution, we can look at the role models of the past. The women presented to audiences throughout all mediums as “feminist” were limited in their agency. They could be upset, but not get angry. They could hold power, but had to look attractive doing it. These women were stunted by their clean presentation, silent rage and inability to make mistakes. So, growing up, girls had these idealized characters that were labelled as “girlbosses” with no room for character development or complexity.

Sitcoms came into light in the 1940’s. In 1957, *Leave it to Beaver* premiered and Beaver’s mother, June, represented the epitome of the postwar American housewife- she was always in a dress, high heels and wore perfect makeup. She was a stay-at-home mom, cleaned the house and always had dinner ready when her husband came home from work. The character Alice in *The Honeymooners* showed a similar poise with her neat dress and apron, doing the shopping, cooking and cleaning, but was more grounded and realistic, while her husband caused all the problems. *I Love Lucy*, however, was revolutionary. In the 50’s, it was incredibly rare to see a woman be the main character in media and be so different from the rest of the female characters audiences had seen. Every main storyline was centered around Lucy, usually accompanied by her best friend Ethel. Lucy was her own person; she would do things for herself and by herself, she worked hard to be an actress, she even wore pants.

If we’re talking about role models in the 50’s, Lucy Ricardo is a strong example that holds up overall today. What was so important about her character is that she showed emotion.

She would yell or get upset, she would cry, and sometimes she would use that to get what she wanted. She was funny, quick-witted, and not afraid to be herself without worrying about how she would appear to other people. Lucy represented a real woman on screen, giving women a real person they could connect with and relate to. And while her husband is Lucy's co-star, it's just that: they are co-stars. An article titled "Stereotypical Women's Representation in the Film Industry" says, "Media plays a key role in spreading awareness among women, uncovering their potential, challenging the male-dominated world and making further social change." (Fedorova) With Lucy being the titular character, portrayed as equal to her husband and being such a crucial character in the show, we can start to see the beginnings of change.

In the 1970's, we continue to see real transformation. *Star Wars* comes out with Princess Leia being a strong and independent character. Although it's a leap for feminism in film and Leia still being a praised feminist today, there was still work to do. When we reached the 2000's, we find a plethora of examples to use, from Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde* crushing the label of the "dumb blonde" to *Mean Girls* showing realistic high schooler dynamics while simultaneously implementing harmful stereotypes having to do with body image, female queerness, toxic popularity, and "catty" girls. Disney Channel and Gen Z girls' hearts were overtaken by the series *Hannah Montana*, the pop star and icon from 2006 to 2011. Young girls loved this example, despite the heavy focus on appearance and popularity; it continued the wave of realistic female characters, issues and relationships.

As Gen Z gets older and more educated, they begin to develop personal values and ideals, with some defying what they learned from media as children. TikTok has fueled the fire, especially after the publicity of the #MeToo movement. Conversations emerge on the social media platform about what Gen Z's role models were like, how viewers wished they were

different, and calling out media that previously or continues to perpetuate harmful stereotypes. It is also important to note that the characters I have discussed are white women. Representation for women of color has been historically less prevalent than the representation for white women.

Moving into the twenty-first century, writers and actors are bringing authentic stories featuring non-white women to life, broadening the spectrum for all women to be represented. TikTok has also been a major contributor to promoting the rise of POC media, as any person, any story and any commentary can reach millions at a time. People have pointed out racial inequality and gender differences with statistics and proved that gender is a construct that you can interpret in any way that fits you. In the article “Oh, How I Love Being a Woman”: Post-feminism and contemporary femininity on TikTok” the authors state “Recent research indicates the potential of TikTok to disrupt normative-gendered narratives given the active form of short video content created and distributed on the platform... [TikTok] has also enabled communities of women to destabilize gendered expectations via satire and information-sharing in various domains, such as motherhood and academia... It has also been suggested that feminist debates occurring on TikTok [facilitate] communication more successfully, and with less digital hostility, than other platforms.” (Patouras, Tanner) The conversation around the gender gap is just as prevalent as always, and it’s especially driven by the educated and outspoken young women. TikTok only highlights them and their power. Gen Z girls are not afraid to stand up for what is right- they will fight for the necessary changes in media that children younger than them will consume.

Gen Z is all about breaking the cycle and they have a fierce hold on their beliefs. Since they have the power to criticize media, they are using it, and the world is no stranger to what the better half of Gen Z values. The media that Gen Z feminists appreciate is full of accurate representation. People just want to see themselves represented in books and on screen. Girls

don't want idealized and perfect representations of a woman; they want raw and real issues and personalities to be explored. The same is true for highlighting realistic feminine representation through women of color. That's why characters like Shuri, America Chavez and Kamala Khan from the Marvel franchise (*Black Panther* 2018, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* 2022 and *Ms. Marvel*, TV Series, 2022), Maddy and Rue in *Euphoria* (2019-), Fleabag from *Fleabag* (2016-2019), Lady Bird in *Lady Bird* (2017), and even Moana and Mirabel from the Disney franchise (*Moana* 2016 and *Encanto* 2021), along with the ones I will analyze further in this essay, are put on a pedestal. They are flawed and dynamic. They are messy, full of emotion and trauma. Seeing women that are not only the protagonists of their stories, but also being far from perfect can be life-changing for girls who are still trying to figure out their own lives. Young women put so much pressure on themselves to have a flawless plan for their future by twenty, but the recent representation of women reminds them they can slow down. Gen Z's alliance with these characters has been powerful and moving to watch come to the surface.

Film, literature and music are three of the biggest industries of media distribution and they play an important part in influencing Gen Z's values, passions and interests. Movies, books and music are so diverse, and you can derive a substantial amount about their respective audiences by deconstructing their meanings. The discussion in this paper will reveal Gen Z's alliance with the modern and authentic feminine characters of recent years. Through a study conducted at UCLA, Holly Ober gathers that "teens want to see authentic, inclusive and positive storytelling, and [the study] emphasizes a need for the entertainment industry to shift away from aspirational content that does not prioritize diversity. Teens' rejection of traditionally aspirational content that valorizes higher social status and material gains may also signal a substantial shift in contemporary teens' evolving definition of success that is different from previous generations."

(Ober) The characters Gen Z wants to align themselves with are grounded, imperfect and real. While analyzing specific pieces of media within these fields, we can capture the motive behind the call for change in representation.

Returning to the summer of Barbie, I will relate the key points of the movie and what it did for people. The movie takes place in Barbie World, a heart-shaped girls-run-the-world utopia that is a hyperbolized antithesis to the patriarchy that we live in. The Barbies are the predominant members of society, while the Kens are featured less within the Barbies' lives. In the Real World, 15-year-old Sasha is the Bratz doll among Barbies, the cool girl who rejects the idea of Barbie as a whole, after remembering from her childhood how the doll, "Stereotypical Barbie" played by Margot Robbie, "represents everything wrong with our culture", pointing out how the company indirectly promotes unrealistic body ideals, although sometimes outright, for example the 'Slumber Party Barbie' from 1965 that included a scale reading 110 pounds and a weight loss book with the advice, "Don't Eat", sequentially making girls and women feel bad about their appearances, comparing themselves to the dolls. Barbie then meets Sasha's mother, Gloria, who reminisces about her childhood Barbie dolls and the three end up on the heartbreaking, wholesome, authentic and moving journey that we know as Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*.

Looking at the film's reception, reviews and critiques, it is evident from the statistics that the movie impacted thousands of people. Specifically, there was an overwhelmingly positive response from young women. Gen Z girls loved the movie, they felt seen, heard and connected. Some scenes in the movie really resonated with female viewers, scenes like Barbie's first introduction to a real city, her breakdown, her visit to a gynecologist, and all the references to women living under a male-dominated system. Of course, where there is positivity, there must be negativity. There was a lot of misogynistic backlash from people who didn't "get" *Barbie*. In an

article for Collider, author Claudia Picado says, “The variety of reactions to the film itself, especially to its satirical exploration of the patriarchy, proves the very point the film sets out to make. Conservative reactionaries unsurprisingly slammed the film for its "wokeness," a term regularly misappropriated to tear apart any piece of media made by or star women, people of color, or any marginalized group.” (Picado) The movie’s goal was to normalize seeing women at the forefront of a society.

Many of the critiques seen all over the internet, some made even before the movie was released, claimed that it was unfair and hurtful how the Kens were kicked off to the side, and when they tried to take over, they were shut down by the Barbies. This proves the point that, by subverting the gendered dynamics of the patriarchy, *Barbie* sheds a glaring light on the way women exist under the patriarchy. With this being so out in the open, men could see themselves in the position they put women in, and with that, realize that the way men can make women feel is not great. It allowed male viewers to feel how women feel, but they just did not realize that connection and that the norm that has been put into place can change. *Barbie* was not radically feminist and inherently man-hating, it was a thought out and genuine call for action through empathetic realization.

Mattel released the first Barbie in 1959 by Ruth Handler, and as the movie tells us, “She changed everything.” (Gerwig, *Barbie*, 2023) The first Barbie doll, in her iconic striped bathing suit and bouncy blonde ponytail made 300,000 sales in her first year. Since then, the company has gone on to employ Barbie with 150 jobs, created dolls with different skin tones, body types, disabilities, and hair textures, and casted Barbie in 43 movies from 2001 with *Barbie in the Nutcracker* until the 2023 release of Gerwig’s *Barbie*. The transition from the iconic doll to a full live action feature film and thriving franchise reflects the power held by the women who are

standing up for women's rights and representation. The original dolls were old-fashioned- literally and conceptually. In the 1980's, Black and Latina dolls were released, but they weren't officially 'Barbie'. Dolls of different races weren't fully integrated into the company until much later, along with Barbies that had hearing aids, wheelchairs and inclusive bodies and hair types.

The company's original idea had good intentions, giving Barbie the chance to be a role model to women across all fields, literally, having every job, yet it was held back by her only depiction, Stereotypical Barbie, being white, blonde, thin, and able-bodied. At the end of the movie, Barbie realizes she's no longer perfect. This, along with the company being much more inclusive today, lets in a version of Barbie that women have needed for a long time. In a paper talking about *Barbie's* marketing, Vladyslava Havrylenko discusses how the movie appealed to the nostalgia of the now grown-up fans. "It emphasized that, regardless of age, the allure of Barbie's world, filled with glamour, fashion, and adventure, was still as captivating as ever. This approach not only engaged the nostalgia of the audience but also stirred a sense of excitement about experiencing Barbie's timeless charm in a new and cinematic dimension." (Havrylenko) The nostalgia and deep realism of the movie was something that really connected with people. Seeing your childhood Barbie-doll-brought to life experiencing the anxiety and existentialism that comes with human life, alongside Barbies that looked like you, had qualities like your own, and were in careers like yours that finally took the name "Barbie" is healing in a way that is not easy and straightforward to accomplish.

America Ferrera beautifully portrayed the stressed, grounded and hopeful mother, Gloria, in the movie. Towards the movie's end, Barbie's anxieties and apparent failure to rescue Barbie Land from the Kens' patriarchal grasp and she breaks down, saying "I'm not perfect anymore." (Gerwig, *Barbie*, 2023) Gloria then talks to Barbie, agreeing with her mentality and candidly

illustrates the harsh duality of being a woman. Gloria comforts and encourages her, telling Barbie that being a woman is impossible with how many societal rules have been put into place. Esra Talu says in her article “Gloria's poignant words in *Barbie* shed light on the unfair burden placed on women to answer for men's bad behavior, emphasizing the need for equality and justice.” (Talu) This fully encapsulates the feeling that Gloria's monologue gave people. The struggle of being a woman today in the society that is against us is scary and real. That is why the Barbie movie was so important. In an article on Psychology Today, Erin O'Connor writes, “The social nature of development outlined in theories of social constructivism is also beautifully outlined in Barbie. For example, Stereotypical Barbie's identity is shaped by the expectations of others. She is told that she is a princess and that she is supposed to be perfect. However, as she meets other people and experiences the real world, she begins to question these expectations and construct her own identity.” (O'Connor) This article talks about psychology in the movie, and how revolutionary it was to watch Barbie choose to be real instead of perfect. It gave women a sense of hope knowing that if the most perfect woman ever created, amongst all her struggles, chooses to be real and herself, then they can too.

Barbie uses existentialism and the power of choice to explore how women handle being women. Barbie herself starts to realize she's thinking about death, something that is not common for Barbies. Barbie connects with Gloria over issues and problems that they now have in common, since Barbie is more realistic than ever and does things like crying and experiencing anxiety. Feeling existential is something that is more common than you, within your existential spiraling, would think. A lot of women, when thinking about their lives and their purpose, experience difficult thoughts. The movie soundtrack is a tool that is used to display the growing existentialism within Barbie, the character herself and the movie. The song in the opening scene

titled “Pink”, describes waking up in a perfect pink world, Barbie seeing her friends, and having an easy day. The song features lyrics like “What you wearin'? Dress or suit? Either way, that power looks so good on you. Hey, Barbie, I like your style. If that was really a mirror, you'd see a perfect smile.” (Lizzo, Pink) The song is cute and fun, while also playfully breaking the fourth wall, as the movie does cleverly and constantly. When Barbie starts gaining human thoughts, the opening song comes back in a different way. Barbie’s shower is too cold, she falls out of her Dreamhouse, her milk is rotten. Because Barbie is becoming self-aware, her world is falling apart around her. The song returns, but instead of lyrics like, “P, pretty, I, intelligent, N, never sad, K, cool,” (Lizzo, Pink) it changes to “P, panic, I, I'm scared, N, nauseous, K, death!” (Lizzo, Pink (Bad Day))

The songs of *Barbie* are very important. They drive the story and can serve as dramatic irony and comedic relief. One of the most iconic songs that came with the release of *Barbie* was Billie Eilish’s “What Was I Made For?” When Barbie meets her creator, Ruth Handler, she reassures Barbie and tells her the story of why she made Barbie. Ruth says the line, “Take my hands, now breathe.” (Gerwig, *Barbie*, 2023) Then the song starts playing, a beautiful, slow piano melody that is now recognizable to every girl, ends the movie please a beautiful collage of women, mothers and daughters, sisters, friends. They are young, old, every race, every difference, every religion. Everyone is smiling and they're happy. The scene is an uplifting and almost bittersweet way to show that despite all of the injustice in the world against women, we constantly use our connection and our love to survive and persist beyond that. The song features the lyrics “I used to float, now I just fall down, I used to know, but I'm not sure now, what was I made for?”, “Looked so alive, turns out I'm not real, just something you paid for.”, “I don't know how to feel, but I wanna try. I don't know how to feel, but someday I might.”, and “When did it

end? All the enjoyment. I'm sad again, don't tell my boyfriend, it's not what he's made for. What was I made for?" (Eilish, What Was I Made For?) These lyrics show how powerful thoughts, self-reflection and societal standards can be on a person.

Barbie is not a real person, as Gloria put it, she's a doll representing a woman, but even she is experiencing these heavy and painful ways of thinking. She says she's not pretty anymore, she says she's not perfect. "What Was I Made For?" reflects Barbie's fears of not being good enough and her realization that she has been used, she's taken her perfect life for granted, and she accepts that women are not respected as they are in Barbie Land. When Eilish sings the line "Don't tell my boyfriend, it's not what he's made for." (Eilish, What Was I Made For?) This exemplifies how men do not have to worry about the same things that women do, because the same pressures and expectations are not placed on them.

The antithesis to Barbie is a woman who is living in the real world, authentic and proudly imperfect, is represented in Charli XCX's sixth and newest album *brat*. The album includes tracks like "Mean girls", "I might say something stupid", and "Girl, So Confusing" feat. Lorde, went to No. 3 on the Billboard 200 and painted over the previous summer's *Barbie* pink with *brat* green. Charli's latest album goes through her inner thoughts, anxiety and general life experiences. There is a good balance between Charli breaking down and simultaneously feeling good about herself and making fun songs just because she wants to. Charli's lyricism is raw and realistic, it feels like you're listening to a friend's three a.m. voice notes when she's overthinking. Many people expressed their love for the album in how relatable it was, something that young women want more of.

One of the album's tracks titled "Girl, So Confusing" was one of these songs that felt like reading a page out of Charli's diary. On *brat*'s deluxe edition, along with three new songs, every

song was reintroduced with a musical feature such as Ariana Grande, Tinashe and Billie Eilish. “Girl, So Confusing” feat. Lorde was the most well received and widely praised. The song starts with Charli saying that “it’s so confusing sometimes to be a girl... how do you feel being a girl? ... Man, I don’t know I’m just a girl.” (Charli XCX, Girl, So Confusing) It was common knowledge to fans that the song was written about Charli and Lorde even before the feature was announced. In the song, Charli talks about how people tell her the two look similar and should make music together because it would be groundbreaking. It continues through Charli’s inner dialogue around her relationship, or lack thereof, with Lorde, saying, “Yeah, I don’t know if you like me, sometimes I think you might hate me, sometimes I think I might hate you, maybe you just wanna be me” (Charli XCX, Girl, So Confusing) in only the first verse. She talks about trying to connect but then feeling awkward since they are such different people and artists. The chorus ends with “Can’t tell if you wanna see me falling over and failing. And you can’t tell what you’re feeling. I think I know how you feel”. (Charli XCX, Girl, So Confusing) These lyrics show Charli beginning to realize that maybe there is a chance at a bond and that maybe they aren’t so different.

In the original song, Charli continues the second verse saying how Lorde’s poetic lyrics and her own dance music are so different and points out that opposites can attract. She invites Lorde into her music and accepts that despite personal worries all in her head, this collaboration and friendship is possible. In place of this verse, Lorde sings three verses to Charli in response to the voice note she received. Lorde’s first verse says, “Let’s work it out on the remix” (Charli XCX, Lorde, Girl, So Confusing), agreeing to sort things out and talk about the issue before it got any worse. “I was so lost in my head and scared to be in your pictures. 'Cause for the last couple years I’ve been at war in my body. I tried to starve myself thinner, and then I gained all

the weight back... I never thought for a second my voice was in your head.” (Charli XCX, Lorde, Girl, So Confusing) Lorde talks about struggling with her own self-image and going through the same thing Charli was going through; she was overthinking and assuming that she had no place in Charli’s “awesome” life.

Lorde’s second verse ends with “And now I totally get it. Forgot that inside the icon there’s still a young girl from Essex.” (Charli XCX, Lorde, Girl, So Confusing) Once Lorde hears Charli’s feelings, she begins to feel more comfortable, the same as Charli. Lorde’s addition to the song ends with “And when we put this to bed, the internet will go crazy, I’m glad I know how you feel, ‘cause I’d ride for you, Charli.” (Charli XCX, Lorde, Girl, So Confusing) This is a song with a beautiful arc showing these two women overcoming industry stereotypes and their own minds causing them to make things up. Charli XCX’s *brat* in its entirety is a love letter to the girls with anxiety, who think too hard, who don’t have their precise five-year plan, for girls who don’t care about getting married, about how people view them, or about being the stereotypical image of femininity. In her article discussing the authenticity of brat summer, Jeevan Georgina Hammond says, “This made space for those who don’t belong to mainstream girl-ness that favour traditionality... But beyond making space for wayward ‘girls’ on the internet, Charli’s *brat* is satisfying a growing cultural yearning for guidance and leadership within this subcultural space.” (Hammond) This further proves the switch from accepting any female role model we could get to fighting for authentic women represented in media, beautifully shown through the lyrics of *brat*.

Some current Gen Z trends are pushing self-care, self-love and self-respect, and music is considered as self-care constantly. TikTok videos featuring ways to rejuvenate your look with skincare, recharge your energy with music, and reminders to take time for yourself are common,

and a welcome difference from the mindless doomscrolling we are all guilty of. Creators on TikTok tell Gen Z girls that they have power. They are encouraging the improved idea that what is most beautiful is a powerful and authentic woman. Emily Rivera says in her article titled “The Gen Z Effect” focusing on music and social media, “What sets Gen Z apart is... they gravitate towards influencers who reflect their values and lifestyles, rather than those who appear overly polished or scripted. This generation values transparency and genuine connections, which is why they trust influencers who are open about their lives and honest in their reviews. For example, when Emma Chamberlain talks about her struggles with anxiety or her love for sustainable fashion, her followers see her as relatable and trustworthy, rather than just another celebrity.” (Rivera) The common thread through the new representation of Barbie, Charli XCX’s vulnerability in *brat* and relatable and authentic creators like Emma Chamberlain is the process of discovering themselves as women and being unapologetically their own. Girls love to see that; the allure of finding comfort in a person because she’s like you is strong enough to change things, even if that change starts small, in their personal lives.

Music, as I have discussed, is powerful. Many female artists have been and have raised their voices in supporting women as the imperfect, beautiful, and powerful people that they are. Gen Z’s alliance with artists like Phoebe Bridgers, MARINA, Doechii and Taylor Swift is impactful and revealing. The growing strength within Gen Z is apparent, and they are finding this empowerment in music. MARINA, previously known as Marina and the Diamonds, is a British singer known for being fiercely feminine and not letting anyone shut her down. Her music is a mix of pop, rock, and electric dance music. Gen Z was widely familiar with her songs in the 2010’s such as “Are You Satisfied?”, “Primadonna” and “Bubblegum Bitch” from her 2012 album *Electra Heart*. Marina is a prime example of the new female icon, with how she knows

who she is and her grounded lyrics lie “I feel like I’m the worst, so I always act like I’m the best”. (MARINA, Oh No!)

Doechii is a newly recognized talent in the industry. She has topped the charts consistently since she released her album *Alligator Bites Never Heal* in August 2024, then swept the Grammys the next year with a thunderous performance, featuring dancers performing flawless choreography and a medley of her songs, and a Best Rap Album win. Doechii’s songs offer more evidence of the freedom that surfaces when women express their true selves. Doechii is a big purveyor of respecting herself and her accomplishments, in “Nissan Altima”, saying “I got haters, I got fans, I got stans in the stands, do they love her or they hate her? Either way, they spendin' bands” (Doechii, Nissan Altima) and the lyrics,” “I am a black girl who beat the statistics, fuck the opinions and all the logistics” (Doechii, Yucky Blucky Fruitcake), and accepting when she’s at a low, letting herself take time to get back up: “”, “Fast forward, me, 2023, I'm stackin' lots of cheese and makin' money, My grass is really green, and- Honestly, I can't even fucking cap no more, this is a really dark time for me, I'm goin' through a lot.” (Doechii, Denial is a River)

Taylor Swift released “The Man” on her 2019 album, *Lover*; which is a song featuring her anger around the gender difference in treatment, especially in the workplace. She talks about how men are not critiqued as harshly and pointing out how what men say, more often than not, goes, with the line, “When everyone believes ya, what's that like?” (Swift, The Man) The chorus of the song, “I’m so sick of running as fast as I can, wonderin' if I'd get there quicker if I was a man. And I'm so sick of them comin' at me again, 'cause if I was a man, then I'd be the man.” (Swift, The Man) Some fans have expressed their disapproval of the song, calling it cringy, performative, or not the best way to comment on the topic.

Performative feminism is a severe accusation but also not unrealistic. Celebrities can use their platforms to promote feminism just to get engagement from a bigger pool of listeners. In a study done at the University of Galway, Erin O'Connor makes her point on it, saying, "This distinction between so-called 'real' feminism and 'popular' forms of feminism features in most criticisms of celebrity feminism, which has been accused of diluting feminism down to its most agreeable form, even misappropriating it at times. However... these criticisms presume there is an 'authentic' feminism that exists beyond its celebrity manifestations." (O'Connor) Taylor Swift wrote *The Man* based on issues that she faces in her own life in the way that she knows best: through song. She uses that medium to voice her distaste for the hate she has received simply for being a woman and criticize the way the industry, and really anyone, compares her to men or disregards her success because of her gender. The song, many fans agree, is a poignant response to an uneasy issue that needs to be talked about, delivered in a catchy song with realistic lyrics.

However, there are songs that fall into the opposite reception with Gen Z, songs about issues that resonate with and are appreciated by a wide audience. Paris Paloma, a 25-year-old British singer, released the song "labour" in 2023. It is a haunting song describing themes of abuse, both mental and physical, surrounding the idea of equality in relationships. She uses imagery of a medieval setting in the lyrics and in the music video, depicting Paloma serving dinner for a fictionalized husband, to allegorize the emotional damage in unfair relationships, comparing tending to overwhelming property, a barren bed chamber, and women themselves as nymphs, virgins, nurses and servants to men weaponizing incompetence and being emotionally disengaged or violent. "The capillaries in my eyes are bursting, if our love died, would that be the worst thing? For somebody I thought was my saviour, you sure make me do a whole lot of labour." (Paloma, labour) The poetic lyricism is met with a beautiful melody; the simplicity is

emphasized as more women's voices join her in singing the end of the song. The song was used on TikTok as the soundtrack to a trend where users would caption the videos with "Run like a girl." The videos include clips from movies or television shows where a woman is running from someone or escaping a situation. Whether it's sprinting to the police to expose an abusive partner or father, freeing herself from a kidnapper in crime television, or even running to save their own lives from monsters or magic, the trend showcases how the featured women are flipping the stereotype, showing that "run like a girl" means "run for your life". This TikTok trend, Paris Paloma's "labour", the countless other women in the music industry and the young women at the forefront of the movement are proving that women are not the problem and they are capable and willing to fight for change for themselves and for every girl that experiences the world after them.

Women put power in everything they create. All that they want is equal opportunity and fair responses to their work. Women relating to, criticizing and finding power in movies, books and music is a good thing, and it's about time. Gen Z doesn't want the picture-perfect Barbie anymore, they want to see her break and pick herself back up, they want to see Katniss using her emotional strength to get her through trauma, they want to see Charli being messy and okay with that. Watching women in media be represented as put together and perfect is tiring. That's why these examples, with their vulnerability, wrong choices and humanity are so important. These characters are so strong, and so loved, because they are human. They're mirrors; they show us a version of ourselves.

Gen Z wants to remind others, especially girls, to put themselves first, that fitting in is boring, and that not knowing your next move is okay. Recently, TikToks went viral telling Gen Z girls that they're not even in season one of *Friends* or *New Girl* yet. The main characters in those

TV shows are in their mid-twenties to early thirties in their pilot episodes, and these videos let young people know that they have time and their lives are only just getting started, referencing familiar character. When girls think of Rachel, Monica and Phoebe in *Friends* and Jess and Cece from *New Girl*, it's important to remember that they are five to ten years ahead in experience. Then you can relax, knowing that if the characters that you know are still getting their lives together, then so do you. Gen Z remembers that they are in control of their own futures, that they can slow down once in a while and in fact, it is important to. Gen Z is changing the narrative, letting women and girls learn that it's okay to be themselves, to embrace their flaws, and indulge themselves with a nice bath and an Aperol spritz.

Through every type of media Gen Z has transformed what their idea of a woman should be and are continuing to change the way women are represented, embracing flawed traumatized and authentic sides of these layered figures. Speaking out about inaccurate and harmful portrayals of female characters and in favor of strong and real ones that girls want to see more of has done so much. There is so much advancement in media already, and it's due to women speaking their minds.

When we analyze female role models like Barbie and Charli XCX, and content like Doechii and Paris Paloma's music and how Gen Z responds to it, we can see the evident demand for empowered, unmisogynistic feminine figures. Young women want to see women in power, women in the writer's rooms, women directing movies, women telling women's stories. They are aware of the inevitable criticism but are pushing for people to realise that everyone should be receiving the same treatment. Women can make music as good as men, write movies as good as men can, hold office, lead a family, run a company, play sports and express their opinions just

like men can, if not better. Women do it while they tell underrepresented stories and accentuate their power.

Gen Z girls are changing the world. We are tired of the injustice that we face and the misrepresentation we are given and expected to appreciate. We demand lived feminine experience, complexity, and honesty. The shift in received media is one that illuminates girls and their authenticity, and there's only room for more and better in our future. The figures we want to see aren't living somewhere unreachable, but they are living next to us with a power that will make all women, together, untouchable.

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The Station Reflection

The station is a short, devised festival piece that takes place in a subway station. It's my, Kat and Daniel's senior project, Kat is the director and Daniel and I are both actors and producers. The inspiration behind the station was wanting to focus on and showcase the different types of human connection.

Producing the show was really stressful in a bunch of ways, but it was also really fun. I got to do a lot of stuff I never thought I would. Being somewhat in charge of a production was stressful because I knew people were counting on me, and it was my senior project so there's also that pressure.

The second big thing was that I have never worked on a devised theatre piece before. Devised theatre is basically when you make up the script as you go, everyone gets to contribute and write the script together, and the rehearsals incorporate a lot of improv, which is it's definitely not my specialty. But other than that, it was really cool to come up with what we wanted this show to look like and then the specific scenes with the cast. I had a really fun time coming up with my characters and writing scenes together. Also I have to talk about the cast. It was so much fun to work with them and so easy too, I never felt out of place or judged or anything like that. It was just a bunch of creative people working together, bouncing ideas off of each other and honestly just having a great time. It was great when the ensemble came in too, and a lot of them were my friends, so it was really nice to get to work with people that I knew already. We got really lucky with our cast.

I was also in charge of the social media which was important and fun. That was not the first time I ever ran a productions Instagram so I already knew what I was doing, but I had a lot

of fun in creating a new vibe for this show. I got to create a gofundme and advertise our bake sale, then also create “meet the cast” posts and do a lot on Canva. It was all really fun and a good creative outlet for me.

When I think back to where we were at the beginning of rehearsals I'm shocked we got anywhere. We started out by Kat asking us what we thought about when we heard the word subway, and then we'd make lists of things that we wanted to see happen in the show. There were some ideas that we knew right away that we needed to incorporate, like the runaway bride and a subway rat. We made a lot of observations and then we tried to connect them to people and how we could transform all of this into theatre.

What rehearsal would look like would be about an hour of improv based on a short prompt from the previous rehearsals. Kat would pick a prompt from the list and then people would volunteer to be a part of that scene for the day, Frankie would set a timer for 5 minutes and Kat would say action. We'd improv and record the scene and believe it until later when we picked which of the improv scenes we wanted to continue working on.

I had a really fun time with Bella creating “Long Time No See”. Improv is not my strong suit so I had a really hard time really saying anything in the scenes that I was a part of but as I got more comfortable with my cast mates and me and Bella had talked about what our characters backgrounds were and what they would act like, it became easier during one rehearsal I said the line "Sorry, did you say Colombia?" and everyone burst out laughing. That line was one of the first ones that we knew how to be in the scene. This scene was great because it was just like how I treat my friends in real life, so it was easy to act like I've been reunited with this girl I used to be best friends with and haven't seen in years. Bella and I loved creating backstories for these characters, how they met and connected and what their friendship was like.

My favorite scene was called "The Stranger The Better" and it was a dance between me and Daniel to "Someone New" by Hozier. I'm a dancer, I've been dancing since I was 3 and ever since I came to college, I knew that I wanted something dance related to be part of my senior project. I'm honestly a little bit surprised and just so grateful that I got that opportunity. I pitched it pretty close to the beginning of the creation process and Kat and Daniel were on board right away. And then it became my favorite scene.

It took us a while to create, there were one or two rehearsals where we sat there the whole time trying to think of the story we wanted to tell and also a song to use. But then I thought of "Someone New" and I felt everything just click for us. Then we had to come up with a story, which is interesting because there's been so many iterations of what this scene looked like. But we finally went with two people in the subway, my character Andie, a dancer that just got back from rehearsal, and Daniel's character, Jaiden, who just got off from work and is tired, and the train gets delayed. It's this cool kind of scene where you're not really sure if this is actually happening in the show or it's an imagination type of thing. They start dancing on their own, eventually notice each other, and then there's this cute little love story that unfolds.

At the end the flower guy, our reoccurring character, gives Jaiden a flower and then the audience gets to see him decide to give it to Andie or not. Daniel and I choreographed it together, with the help of Kat and Frankie, our stage manager, and I absolutely love how this scene came out. I always wanted to play someone in a cute wholesome love story type of thing too. There's so much to say. It was just so much fun.

My favorite part of the process was creating my characters. I realized I had unlimited choices and I had so much fun coming up with traits and information about them, even what their favorite ice cream or colors are. Three of my characters had inspiration from real people in my

life behind them. I named my “Long Time No See” Gabrielle after one of my closest friends I made at Purchase. She is a photographer too, like my character and I took inspiration from her passion. It was nice to know, just myself, the connection I had with this character because of her inspiration. I enjoyed writing this scene because it made me think about how my friendship with Gabby would be in a few years after college. My dancer character Andie is dedicated to my childhood dance teacher Marianne Anderson and Michelle was dedicated to my mom, that name being the title of a Beatles song. I wanted to dedicate this show to these people because they are so important in my life and I’m so grateful for all they have taught me, the support they have provided, and the opportunities they have given me.

My whole experience on The Station was so great. I learned so much from my amazing castmates, watching them perform and create inspired me to work harder. I learned a lot from the mistakes we made and how we realized how real this all was, and we had to figure things out on our own. I will cherish this experience and take the skills I have now into my life, in the theater and out. That’s what’s so great about The Station, it’s so realistic that it can apply to anyone and any situation.



Kat, Daniel and I after the first round of auditions.





Us, missing Bella, at cue to cue.



after opening night!



Bella and I in the subway station making observations as field research.



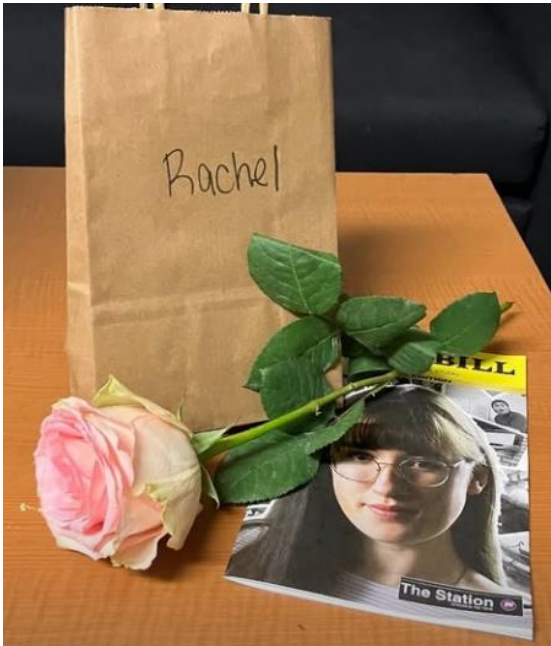
The whole cast!



I wanted to bring this tradition that we did in high school to college.



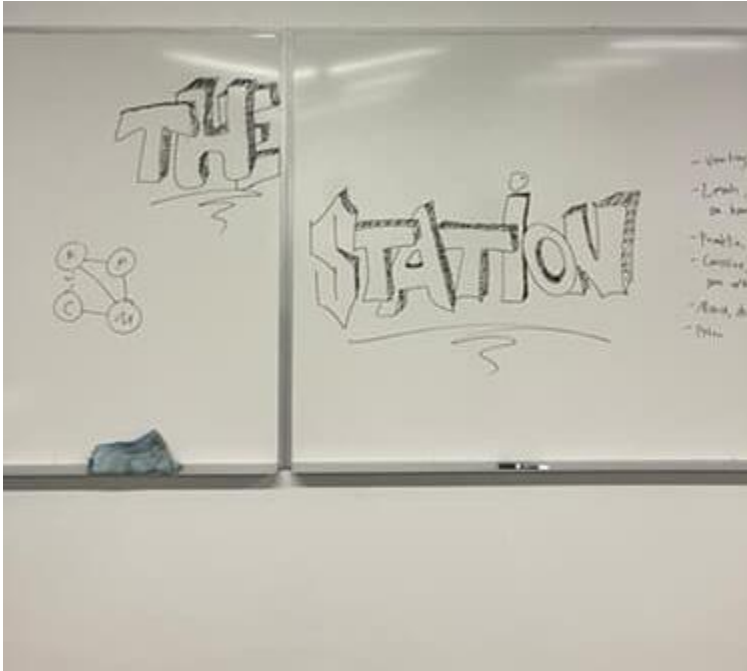
my signed poster



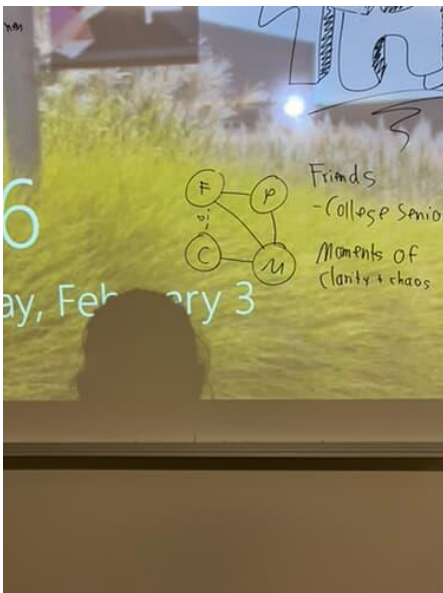
My bag with the custom Playbill that Frankie made and the rose that Billy gave to each of us.



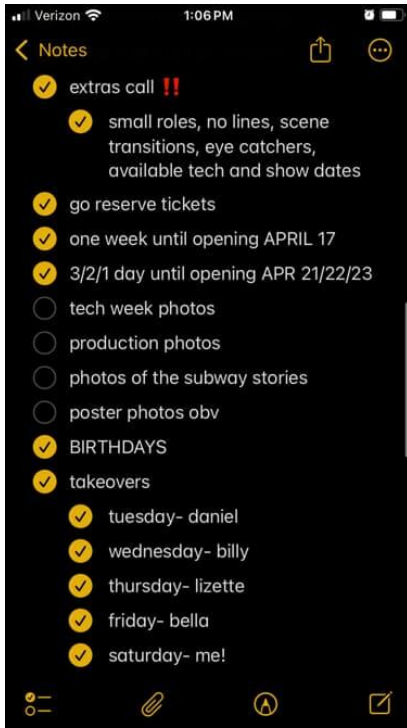
Us appreciating Governess of floods' set while also getting cute promo for the Instagram.



We always chose a different way to write the station on the CMFT whiteboard.



Figuring out characters relationships for the drunk college kids the scene



Tracking what I needed to put on the Instagram as the social media manager

These next two pages are my character analysis for all four of my characters: Gabrielle, Caroline, Andie and Michelle- who was originally named Kenna. Kat had us do writing exercises to create our characters and she asked those questions like what would they have on their night stand, what is their biggest fear and what is their greatest wish in life. I also used this to create back stories for myself and to come up with costume ideas.

Verizon 1:07 PM

< Notes

the station characters

caroline 🧡

soft smiles, trust issues, cardigans, dancing in the rain, pretty colors, cult classics, sharing milkshakes,

stats	21, art history/creative writing double major, friends with Maria from college, crush on Franklin
personality	introverted, girls girl, kind, creative
style	street style, comfortable, headphones
interests	SZA, RnB, the smiths, the 1975, drawing, watching thunderstorms
job	bookstore cashier/student

outfit idea: pink stripev lona sleeve. yellow

Verizon 1:07 PM

< Notes

outfit idea: pink stripey long sleeve, yellow button down, harry jeans OR pink stripey long sleeve, big ahh t shirt and harry jeans
final fit: fruit tee, black skirt, denim jacket, black tights, pumas, harry tote
OR long denim skirt w no jacket

Verizon 1:07 PM

< Notes

Gabrielle 🧡

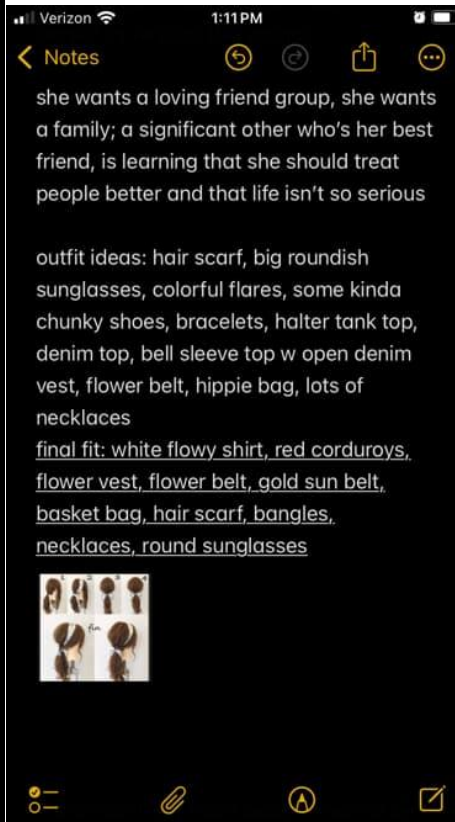
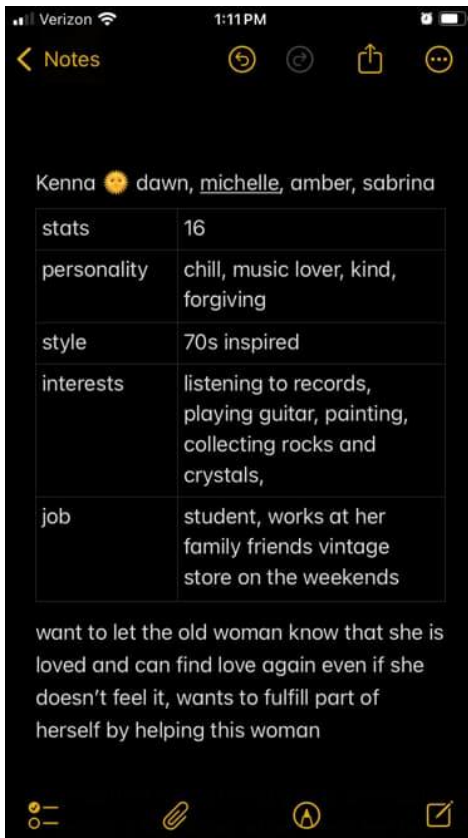
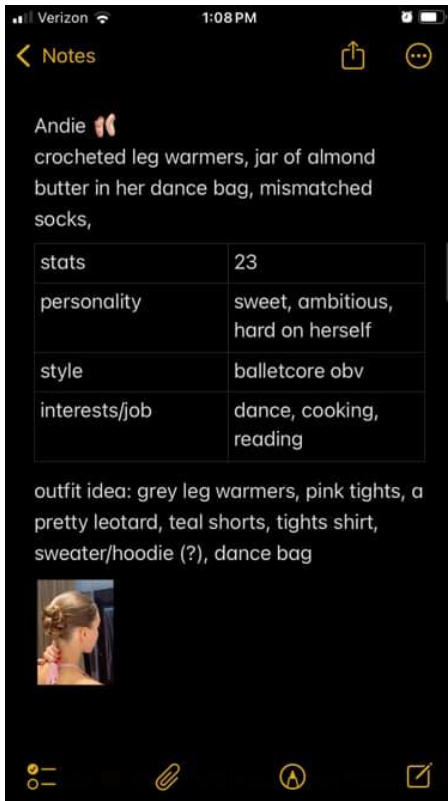
vanilla ice cream, bows in her hair, piles of magazines, morning yoga, Chanel perfume, old movies, reading on the train, vintage dresses, flowers from her boyfriend, messy sketchbook

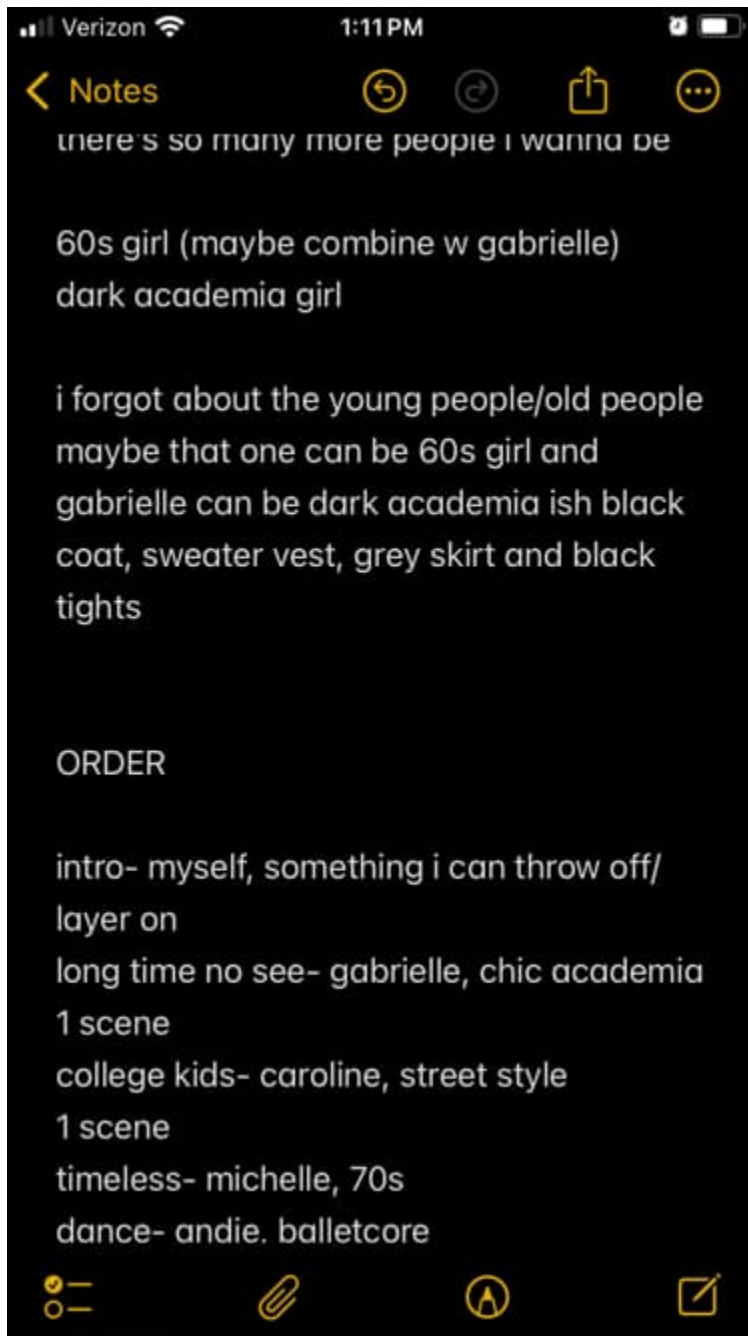
stats	27, grad from Columbia 6 yrs ago w a dg in fashion merchandising, dating Thomas, has 18yo brother Henry, from Chigaco, lives in east village, left a toxic friend group in college,
personality	confident, observant, cheerful
style	classic, black and white, academia inspired
interests	photography, fashion, traveling
job	photographer at Vogue

Verizon 1:07 PM

< Notes

outfit idea: white sweater vest, black or gray skirt, black tights, kitten heels, long black coat, bow in hair, gucci bag !! brown flower notebook
final fit- white button down, cream vest, brown DA skirt, black tights, pumas, gucci bag, white bow, book





Deciding on the characters and costumes and mapping out my quick changes.

Notes

layering

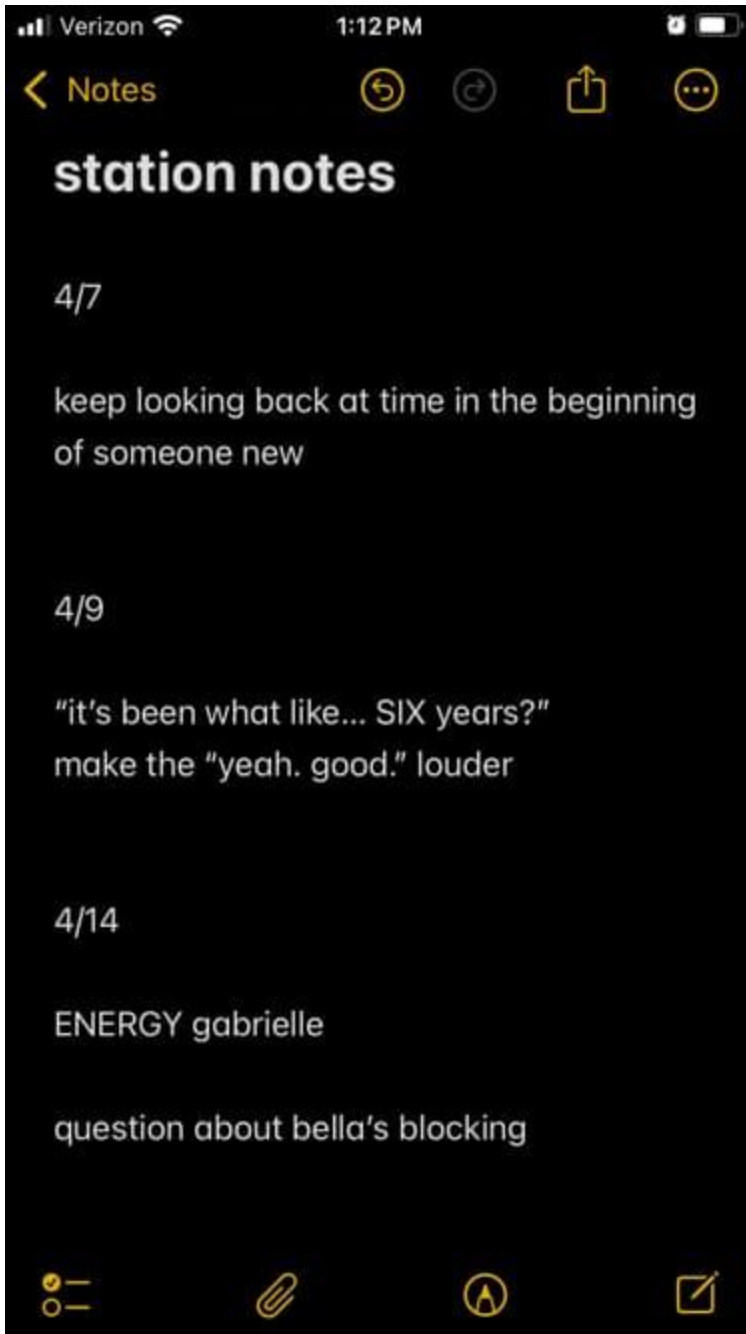
over	top	bottom	under
cream vest	button down	brown skirt	black tig
(denim jacket)	fruit tee	black skirt or denim	(black tiş
flower vest	white flowy	red corduroys	-
purpley sweater or pink zip up, white sleeves	leotard	teal shorts	pink tigh

Notes

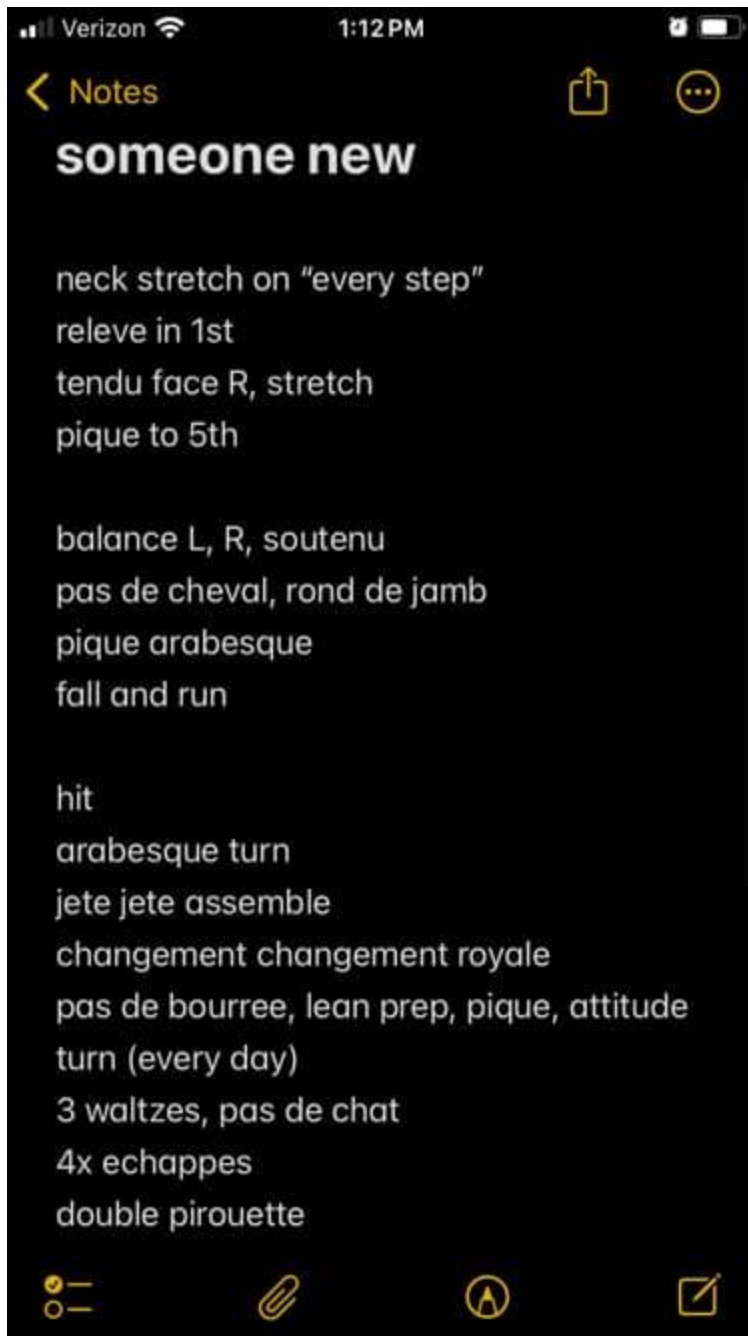
layering

	bottom	under	accessories
m	brown skirt	black tights	gucci, bow, book (put in bag)
	black skirt or denim	(black tights)	harry tote
	red corduroys	-	basket bag, jewelry, hair scarf, sunnies, belts
	teal shorts	pink tights	legwarmers

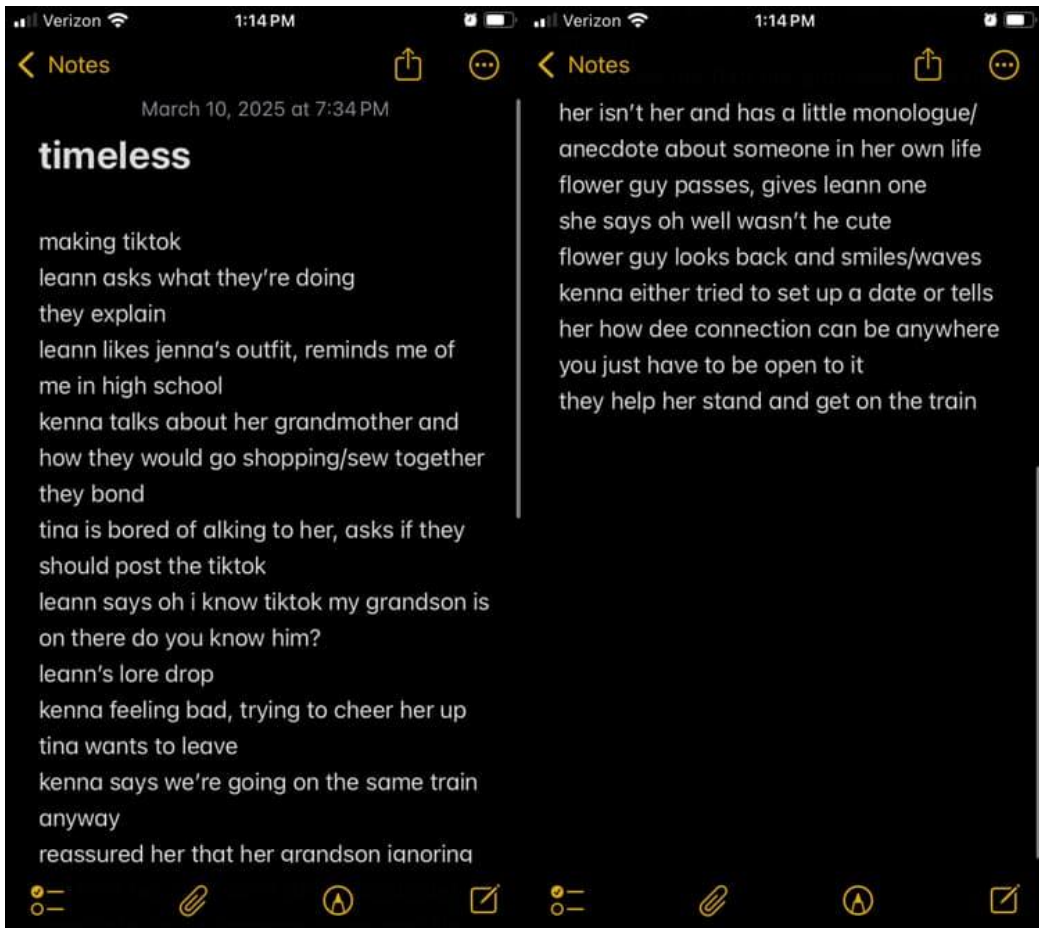
Planning out how to layer my costumes for quick changes since we would be on stage behind our set the entire show.



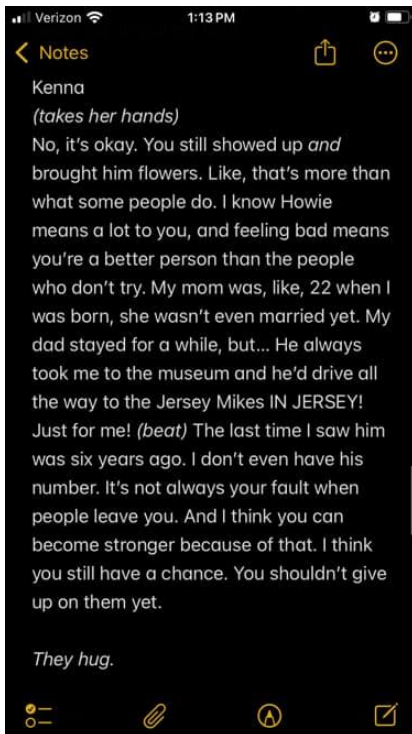
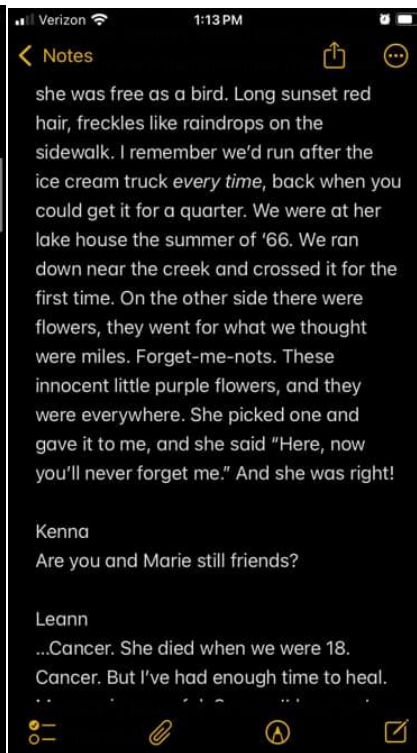
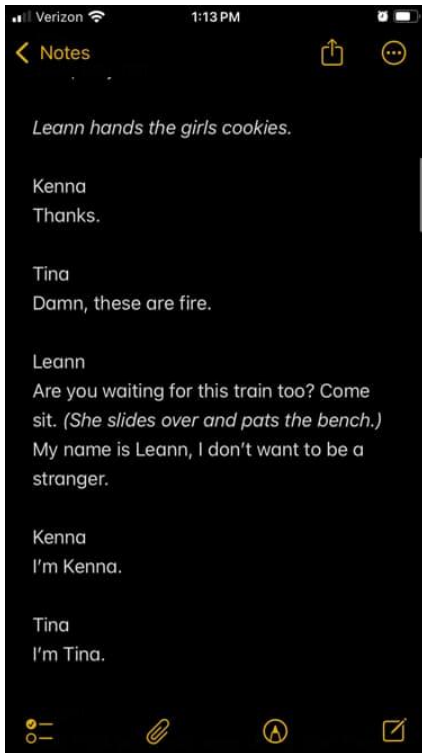
Some notes during rehearsals before tech week.



Choreographing my section of the dance.



An early outline for the scene with the young girls and the old woman.



my first draft of timeless, before we had to cut it down

for time