# Protecting the In-Between

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# Statement of Goals and Impacts

*How to Defend Yourself* is a play by Liliana Padilla that centers around a group of seven college students who come together to form a self-defense class after a girl on campus gets sexually assaulted. Among these seven is the character I will play this fall, Nikki. Nikki is a shy and quiet girl who is hardly heard on the first day of class. Throughout the play, we see several days of their self-defense classes take place. New bonds and friendships are formed as characters reveal their inner desires and thoughts. In the play, everyone has a close friend, a "pair" of their own. Nikki is somewhat of an outsider and is the only student who comes in alone to the class. Throughout most of the play, although she finds her own footing, she stays in the background. She is an observer and not much of a contributor. But in what she does contribute, she is always kind and funny and wants to fit in. At the end of the play, Nikki gets assaulted after a day at the pool. She wonders why she couldn't defend herself, even though she had done everything right. From the beginning, I have strongly identified with Nikki. I do not care to be the center of attention and do not mind blending into the background. But sometimes there is nothing I'd love more than to feel that I can fit in in the middle along with others.

We are mid-way through the rehearsal process. When reading the play before rehearsals began, I noticed the unique rhythm of the script. The play is formatted similarly to a piece of poetry. Sentences are separated into multiple lines, and characters interrupt and overlap one another in fast-paced conversations involving a certain rhythm. As we began diving into scenes, I found that Nikki often breaks from this rhythm. She is off-kilter and many of her lines become interruptions to the flow. This pattern of hers has been strangely difficult for me. I have often

struggled with understanding the nuances in language, and it would be easy to be passive about Nikki's use of language, since she also struggles with fitting into the rhythm. However, that would be too easy and wouldn't honor Nikki. It wouldn't be what Liliana Padilla intended for the script. After diving into early rehearsals, we found that it's not that she has no rhythm, but rather she goes with the beat of her own drum. Although she is shy and quiet, she is uniquely charming and funny. I want to be deliberate in the way that I weave in her patterns of speech versus the rest of the characters within the show.

In my "Speaking Shakespeare" class, I often found that I disregarded how Shakespeare had broken up the text in his monologues and scenes. I would run straight through the ends of lines and into the next as though they were prose. This habit ignores the intention of the author to have a character speak specifically in verse instead of prose. At the end of the show, Nikki has an intense monologue after being assaulted by a man. Padilla writes this scene with some parts in blocked paragraphs that characters speak simultaneously while others are chunks of dialogue, similar to prose. Since it is such an intense scene, it requires attention to pacing and rhythm, knowing when breaths are taken and how long pauses are. I know every show will be different. However, one of my goals is to be intentional and deliberate about how I use language with Nikki. I hope to incorporate some of the skills I learned from my Speaking Shakespeare class, like marking up scripts and understanding rhythms and emphasis, to help fulfill my goal of learning to work with the script's specific language. By being able to mark and develop the script, I will have gained an important skill for my future in acting that will carry me through future shows.

I have rarely been one to call myself a dancer. Balance, coordination, and grace are not my strongest areas. Going into the production, I am aware that a lot of movement and new

techniques will be introduced to us during the process. After getting into some rehearsals and read-throughs, I now know I have an added challenge of dance choreography. Throughout the show, there are some small breaks in reality where the women in the self-defense class burst into a dance that reflects the inner little girl of each character -- the young version of ourselves who imagines us as a ballerina, a princess, or a fighter. Our inner child shines through in a combat dance sequence and a Swan Lake ballet that has left all of us actors excited and very nervous. Although we are a bit scared of dancing in front of the audience, there's an inner child in us who would love to dance. Part of having grown up is letting go of that fun and carefree version of ourselves that would go all out to dance pretty like a ballerina or throw hard punches and pretend to be fighters. This gives us that wonderful opportunity.

Though the choreography is fun, it is something that scares me. On our first rehearsal for the ballet, one specific move, the pirouette, landed me on my back several times. I eventually became somewhat afraid to perform them for fear of falling down. I was given many tips from our wonderful choreographers, but it's a move I'm still working on. After observing me, one of them told us to spot the wall. We were supposed to find a distinct spot on the wall that we would focus on as we turned. As we spin, we keep our eyes on the spot, turning our heads quickly when necessary to return to that focus point. This point of focus is meant to keep us steady and to give us some directionality. In ballet terms, it is called "spotting" -- a technique used by dancers during the execution of various dance turns. Nikki doesn't have a point of focus throughout the show. There is no one to keep her steady and support her. There are distinct pairs and friends within the characters: Brandi and Kara (the sorority sisters), Mojdeh and Diana (the best friends), and Andy and Eggo (the fraternity brothers). They are each other's point of focus. They offer

directionality and support. There is so little we know about Nikki's life and thoughts because there is no one there for her to focus on. No one to give her a direction.

Since Nikki struggles with this metaphorical point of direction throughout the play, it makes me especially want to excel with these dances. They are interpreted as complete breaks in reality. Therefore, I want the dances to reflect Nikki's inner desires to not only be a ballerina or princess or fighter, but to be graceful, to stand out, and to be pretty. In real life, she doesn't allow herself the opportunity to feel these things. In the stage directions for the ballet, it says, "Nikki is a ballerina. They are all ballerinas." Nikki is finally in the spotlight, and I want her to be able to shine in these breaks from reality, so, my choreography is something I want to work on. We plan to continue practicing the dances on our own, but will also have our dance captains hold rehearsals for the routines when we are all together. We will watch videos of ourselves to really get an idea of how the audience sees us so that we can make adjustments. I will listen to the music in my own time because I know tempo is something I struggle with. Mastering dance routines while staying in character, remembering my lines, and staying safe is something that will contribute to many future shows and build my confidence.

With our fight choreography, I am mostly excited to learn on-stage fighting, as well as learn actual defense during some of our rehearsals. Since this type of movement is not something I am used to, I have joined a personal defense class this semester and have started working out more at the gym and pool to make myself stronger. I have been going to the gym more often than usual, but still not very often. I go with a friend so that I feel more at ease. By going with others who normally go to the gym, I have gotten to learn how to use more of the machines and grow comfortable with them. My self-defense class is twice a week and I find it very fun and engaging. We started off with learning a lot of drills and exercises to improve our senses and

learned to trust our guts. We have finally begun to move on to hands-on work. Starting with escaping from wrist grabs. Soon, we will work our way up to arm manipulations, getting out of headlocks, and other physical training. I am excited to do more work and strive towards getting better every day with strength and self-defense. It has been a bit of a struggle to make changes to myself, but I have always known that if I want to continue acting as a career, there would be jobs and projects that would require more training and perhaps changes to my lifestyle. I have never considered myself someone who can truly stick to actively pursuing a goal. I can tend to give up easily or decide that I am fine with what I am currently, convincing myself there is no need for change. However, I hope to truly accomplish my training while building my strength and confidence, as it would make me feel like I genuinely pursued a goal. Having the evidence that I have completed this goal will make me more excited to complete future goals and to push myself further. Heavy movement pieces like the ones in *How to Defend Yourself* have always been something I have strayed from, but working towards these movement-focused goals will allow me to be open to pursuing more movement pieces in the future.

This project is important to me in the long term because after Purchase I would like to be a working actress. I plan to become part of an agency in New York and move into or near the city after college. I would love to have a steady, well-paying, and flexible job that allows me to work full-time but take opportunities to audition for projects in the city or elsewhere. This opportunity to work with guest director, Ash Marinaccio, from New York will hopefully provide a different production process and experience from what I've encountered at Purchase. I would like to see how she runs rehearsals and the questions she asks of us. I will also gain knowledge from the types of ideas she brings to the table. Already, Ash has decided to film our ending montage sequence and we got to work with cameras and learn how film shoots work. This

allowed us to learn what film projects could be like and see if it's something we're interested in for the future. The rehearsal schedule is quite intense, and this is the first full-length Purchase production that has cast me in a major role. I find it a bit daunting, but the challenge will push me to be a better actress. I will have to learn how to properly, and efficiently juggle classes, homework, rehearsal, and work during the production process. Learning more about time management and what I am capable of versus what I need to work on will help me be better prepared for a future of acting professionally.

When I read the script for *How to Defend Yourself*, I became incredibly passionate about the story. I chose this production because of how the women are depicted. I love that they all had real stories, desires, and fears that I don't see often represented in the plays and cinema today because the topics are too taboo or 'mature.' But the truth is, women do have thoughts about sex, and desires they want to fulfill, and they often have deep conversations about these topics with those closest to them. People in the audience need to see themselves represented and *How to Defend Yourself* provides a missing piece for girls and women. After our first read-through, we talked as a group and so many of us women had found parts where we related to the characters, their stories, and experiences. Some of us experience these feelings and wants and are also victims of violence. However, we wonder if we are alone in our experiences. This play tells us that we are not. We hope our audiences know that they are not alone and that they are seen. This show is being put on by a group of college students playing college students. We know the exact thoughts, feelings, and stories of these characters because we are them. We identify with these characters and this story and now we go out into the world knowing that we are not alone. Within this production, we will find friendship and community, and make peace with the child within ourselves.

# Protecting the In-Between: The Fight Against Anti-Asian Violence

In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us made sure that the first thing we grabbed before we left the house was a mask. A mask for protection against the deadly virus. But for some, the mask didn't just serve to protect them from the virus, it protected themselves from the perceptions of other people. My Nana would wear her mask to protect herself from COVID-19, but she also hoped that if she kept her head down and didn't look people in the eyes, she could conceal the fact that she was Chinese. Hiding was something that I didn't have to worry about. I never thought to use my mask to conceal my ethnic identity.

To many people, I look white, but to my family, I am hapa: a Hawaiian word that refers to someone with a mixed ethnic heritage, usually with some Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry. During the pandemic, I realized how stark the contrast is, the difference between being mixed and white-passing versus being mixed and non-passing. When you are mixed and white-passing, there is no fear. You don't wear your race on your face. I get the benefits of my culture and my looks. I have never been discriminated against for being mixed, but I also get to experience my culture and traditions with my family. My appearance was never something that put me at risk while I was in a public space. When anti-Asian hate was on the rise during the pandemic, I never had to worry for myself. However, there was a part of me that worried for my Nana, my mother, and my other family members who presented as Asian. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Asian Americans could feel the tensions rise as more and more anti-Asian hate crimes were reported. Men and women were being attacked in the subways, on the streets, and in their own communities. The Washington Post noted in an article that, "There were 746 attacks targeting

people of Asian descent in 2021, up from 249 a year earlier and the most ever recorded in a single year" (Nakamura). This was the largest jump the federal government had recorded since they began tracking the data over 30 years ago. The message to Asian Americans was clear: public space is not for you. How do you defend your right to exist? How do you protect yourself in a public space? How do Asian American women fight back?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was dangerous rhetoric used around Asian Americans and the virus. Many people were scared because the virus was deadly and unknown. Because the origins were found to be in China, it became the target of criticism. Although China did play a part in downplaying and omitting certain information about the origins of COVID-19, the truth is that it did not matter where the origin was — people just needed someone to blame. At the height of the pandemic, then President of the United States, Donald Trump, began to use racist rhetoric when discussing the virus, employing terms like "Kung flu" and "Chinese virus". These expressions brought up deep fears within the nation. Non-Asian Americans have long believed that Asians are a source of infection and contagion and that they are disease carriers. As the virus spread, the unrest grew. Many people knew that there was a limit to what you could do to prevent the virus; it was not something fully controllable. When people lose control over their circumstances, fear arises. Violence soon follows. Because of the origins of COVID-19, the violence fell upon Asian Americans. The uncertainty that was felt throughout the pandemic merely amplified the need to assign a scapegoat for it all. Fear played a big role in the rise of anti-Asian violence and playing the blame game offered a sense of control amidst the chaos. Perhaps that made it less scary.

Throughout many of the articles I read, there was a mention of this "in-between place" Asian Americans get placed into. Hua Hsu writes in his article, "The Muddled History of Anti-

Asian Violence" that, "It's hard to prove bias in a hate crime, and it's typically done by showing how a particular crime draws on recognizable histories of violence or neglect" (Hsu). He believes that Asians and the violence they face end up in an "in-between place" because people don't fully understand the history of anti-Asian violence. When people do not understand the long history of this violence in America, they then do not see Asian Americans as actual targets or as people at risk. White Americans can understand racism and violence against black and brown people within our society. However, they tend to place Asian Americans in a category similar to white people. Cathy Park Hong explains in her book, *Minor Feelings*, "Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status: not white enough nor black enough; distrusted by African Americans, ignored by whites…" (Hong 9). We are not seen as a minority, but if Asian Americans feel the need to hide their race then there is a disconnect between the experiences of Asian Americans and the understanding from other Americans. If others do not understand, violence and hate against Asian Americans will be kept unnoticed and nothing will change. Violence against Asian Americans will be labeled as just violence and not seen as a deeper part of the hatred towards Asian Americans. Just three years ago, in March of 2021, 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long drove to a massage parlor in Atlanta where he shot and killed four people. He then continued to two spas where he murdered four more people. Of the victims, there were seven women and one man. Six of the victims were Asian. Long has since been convicted and sentenced to life in prison. However, in "The Atlanta Shooting and the Dehumanizing of Asian Women," Jiayang Fan explains that at the time of the shootings, police were hesitant to label the murders as hate crimes and that Long did not have a racial motive. The most frustrating thought, however, was that "Jay Baker, the spokesman for the sheriff's office in Cherokee County…described Long's actions as the result of 'a really bad day'" (Fan). The inability to

acknowledge the racial motivation behind Long's murders highlights the way "Asian" and "American" identities are disconnected. The way white Americans view Asian Americans does not match the Asian American experience of racism and violence. This disconnect stems from the "in-between place" that Hua Hsu mentions. Because Americans do not understand the history of violence against Asian Americans, this reinforces the in-between and keeps Asian Americans perpetual foreigners — people unable to belong or be completely understood within American society.

In her chapter, "The Chinese Are Coming. How Can We Stop Them?" Erika Lee dives deep into the history of Chinese exclusion. Examining impacts on immigration, race and class relations, and more. In the mid-1800s, there was an influx of Chinese immigrants into the United States largely due to the discovery of gold in California. As more immigrants came, unrest grew among groups of white Americans. Chinese laborers were taking many of their jobs and becoming a large and invaluable part of the farm economy in California. The perceived idea by white working men that Chinese men were taking their jobs upset them and they wanted the Chinese out. Furthermore, the Chinese men seemed to bend the boundaries of masculinity at the time, wearing their hair in queues and dressing in loose-fitting traditional clothing. Chinese men also began to work largely in laundries, restaurants, and other areas that were typically deemed as jobs for women. When around 900 Chinese prostitutes came to the United States in 1870, more division was made between the West and East worlds. The prostitutes posed a "sexualized danger" that could drive a wedge in the relationships between men and women but also could disrupt domestic ideals (Lee 145). It was made clear that the Chinese were going to be a moral and racial threat. The growing hostility towards Chinese immigrants led to the Chinese Exclusion Act that passed in 1882. This act essentially banned all Chinese laborers for ten years. Many

Chinese workers left the United States after this act had passed, which Lee believes may have been due to the rise in anti-Chinese violence in the West after the act of 1882. When the ten years had passed, the act was amended, banning laborers for another ten years. Once that time was up, Congress passed a bill that essentially, once again, banned all Chinese laborers "and extended exclusion to all insular possessions of the United States, including the Philippines." Then, the Exclusion Act was extended again in 1904, but without a time limit. The act was only repealed in 1943. Even still, from 1943 until 1965, there were limitations put on Chinese immigration, with only 105 Chinese immigrants allowed into the U.S. each year (Wang).

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first immigration policy of its kind. It was the first to place significant restrictions on immigrants but was also the "first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race, nationality, and class" (Lee 144). It showed the complete belief of white Americans that the Chinese and other Asian Americans were unassimilable — that they were far too different to belong in America. This thought has continued into today's society. The Chinese Exclusion Act was not something I had ever learned about in my classes, and it never struck me how long this ban had been in place and only how recently it was repealed. There are people today who were around when this ban was still in place. The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, only four years before my Nana was born. My great-grandfather had already moved to the United States from China around 10 years before the Act was repealed. These kinds of laws and bans have long-term effects on those they restrict. Many Chinese families entered the United States as paper sons and daughters. These were people who entered the U.S. illegally with forged papers that claimed they were related to other U.S. citizens of Chinese descent. Many families today still do not know the full truth about their past. Interviewee, Byron Yee discusses in Wang's "Chinese-American Descendants Uncover Forged Family Histories,"

how he learned that his father was a paper son. “Some of [the information in old immigration files] were based on truth, and some of these were lies," he says. "And I think that's part of why the Chinese never really talked about it, because they don't want to talk about the lies." (Yee, qtd. in Wang). These types of histories have impacted my family in ways that we honor and acknowledge but also in ways we reject and can only whisper about.

There is a gap between the words “Asian” and “American”, literally and metaphorically. That little gap embodies the “in-between place”. A lot can live within this little space. For my family, we feel the gap in many different ways. My Nana embodies the “Asian” side and my grandfather embodied the “American” side of my family. They passed a part of themselves down to their three children, including my mother. My family is part white American and part Asian American. The difference between the two is easily felt. In the words of my aunt, “Asian is culture and traditions. American is competition and capitalism.” My family has always struggled with the alienation that comes from being part Asian American. There are Asians, there are Americans, and there are Asian Americans. We feel that we do not fully belong on either side, my cousins and I feel it even more so — seeing as we are white-passing and don’t “look” Asian American. To other Asians, we are not Asian enough, but for many others, we are also not American enough. This liminal space can be a dangerous place. Somehow, Asian Americans within this space are never fully protected, never “enough” for either side of their identity. Where do we belong? How do we fit in? In a society that rejects us, we learn how to protect ourselves within it and defend our right to exist within any and all spaces.

My Nana isn’t sure whether she feels vulnerable because she is elderly or if it’s because she’s a woman, or maybe if it’s because she’s Asian. However, she feels that living in Arizona and being Asian impacts her ability to feel safe. (I can say that it’s not something I ever notice or

pay attention to — how many Asian people are there in the room?) But it's something my grandmother takes note of anywhere she goes. She doesn't believe she would have felt as vulnerable if she were living in San Jose or Hawaii again since there was a much larger Asian population when she lived in those areas. She didn't feel so out of place. She told me a story about an incident at a Texas restaurant where a name was being called to pick up an order. No one answered. She looked around at all the people waiting for their orders and no one moved to grab it. The employee called the name again. Nothing. The next time the employee called the name aloud, she looked straight at my Nana and spoke louder and slower at her. My Nana never responded of course, because that was not her name. She believes there is a slight difference, but she feels that she cannot say someone did that because she is Asian. "I just *feel* it and … I don't know if what I'm feeling is true. Or am I just imagining it?"

In order to get another perspective, I interviewed my cousin, Kaylee. During the time of the pandemic, she was about 18 years old. When we talked about vulnerability, her main idea was that she feels comfortable and safe in places she knows, with people she knows. She grew up in Las Vegas and still knows the area incredibly well, believing she could get around the city without needing much of a map. However, around the time of the pandemic, she went away to college in New Jersey. She feels that although she has gotten used to the area, she still feels more unsafe in New Jersey because she doesn't have a car and doesn't know the area and people as well. Something interesting she had brought up was how she feels vulnerable in her own body. Kaylee has asthma and old injuries from dance that can flare up, and when they, do she can feel more at risk because her body isn't at its best. We talked about some of the stories we heard about anti-Asian violence, specifically in New York and she told me, "In 2020 I went to New York with my friend. We were in the subway and we joked about not standing too close to the

train platform because someone might push us. We laughed because it was a joke, but it wasn't really." Avoiding standing too close to the platform is something even I am cautious about.

In my senior show, *How to Defend Yourself*, the characters within the show learn self-defense after a girl on their college campus is sexually assaulted. I played Nikki. To me, Nikki was Asian American. For much of her backstory, I had put her in the context of my own upbringing — growing up in a part Asian and part American family. Nikki struggled with finding comfort in the new space with new people in the class. She always stood slightly outside of the group, wary of getting too close. This is something I have also struggled with in my life. In a space for Asians, I do not feel comfortable. I joined an Asian and Polynesian Ancestry club on my own campus and stopped going, partially because I believed I wasn't Asian enough to fit within that space. Even in a group of white people, I feel more like I fit in, but it isn't enough to allow me to be at ease. Something is off. In Cathy Park Hong's book, *Minor Feelings*, she describes the Asian American existence as, "Asians lack presence. Asians take up apologetic space. We don't even have enough presence to be considered real minorities" (Hong 7). Nikki feels this in many ways, she isn't enough for either side of her identity, so it is easier to try not to take up space. The journey of Nikki is one that I loved to play. She begins so shy and quiet, unable to be heard. But as she learns more self-defense, she grows more comfortable with her voice and body and allows herself the freedom to take up space. Looking back now, I like to imagine her as learning to defend her own in-between space. For Nikki, it was not only about learning physical self-defense but learning how to protect her existence within spaces, and how to take up room in public spaces that may not protect her. To defend an in-between space is to be constantly alert and aware. There can be fear in knowing you have to protect yourself from harm, but there is also strength that comes from it. It is not discouraging because you must defend

yourself, but empowering because you are a fighter. In the third scene, Nikki wears a Wonder Woman t-shirt, she is at her peak and volunteers to try a new move in class. In the drill, she takes over a man and pushes him off her— surprising everyone including herself. At every performance, the audience would clap after that moment. Nikki had become a warrior, her own Wonder Woman.

Jiayang Fan interviewed many Asian American women for her article, "Asian American Women Fight Back". These women were all a part of a New York self-defense class specifically for Asian women. In the face of rising anti-Asian violence, many stories in Fan's article described a sort of loss of the quality of their lives. Asian women who would not go out past a certain hour at night, women who stopped running, who hid their faces in the streets, and others who now carry self-defense devices and are nervous when out in public. But despite fear, they have found ways to be empowered in their lives through self-defense. For every woman interviewed, Fan lists their name, occupation, and age and then provides a photo of the woman. Looking through their faces and stories, these were women who looked like my cousins, women who were the same age as my Nana, and women who reminded me of my family. The photos of these women didn't show them looking scared. In fact, most of them had a smile. They look strong and they stand tall. Behind their eyes, some of them look a little tired, but there is so much courage. What separates them from Nikki is that these women took the classes because they already knew and feared that they could become a target of anti-Asian violence.

Fan asked Elizabeth OuYang, a 61-year-old civil rights lawyer, what she believes is the reason behind the violence against Asian American women. OuYang mentions misogyny and also discusses how many people do not want to report the crimes because "the exact motivation of a perpetrator can be hard to know and even harder to prove. Unconscious biases run

deep" (OuYang qtd. in Fan). This statement reminded me of what my Nana had said, being able to *feel* something, but not really knowing if what you think is correct. More often than not, Asian Americans' feelings and instincts are likely correct. Alberta Yan, a 34-year-old corporate lawyer says, "Racism has always been a part of the Asian American experience." It has always been felt, and with Asian Americans becoming more of a target, these feelings have become larger fears. Elizabeth Yan, a 36-year-old hedge fund manager who is a part of the self-defense class used to love running but stopped because "I had this vision that a car was going to try to hit me because of what I looked like." As I kept reading Fan's article, it amazed me how many similar stories and thoughts I hear from not only the women within the self-defense class but also from women in my own life. Vinnie Zhang, a 24-year-old web developer, had echoes of what my cousin Kaylee said to me. Zhang believes that the most dramatic change she has had over the past few years is the change within herself. "I am aware of my own fear when I'm alone. I am aware of my own perception of other people as sources of harm. Whenever a man passes me on the subway platform, I instinctively back up against a wall" (Zhang qtd. in Fan). When Asian American women become public targets, they learn to defend themselves. This can come in many ways, but physical self-defense is a vital skill. Although there are limits to what these self-defense classes offer, gaining strength, knowledge, and courage is invaluable. Despite the fear and worries that anything could happen to them, these women are willing to try and fight for their right to just *be* within public spaces.

I took a self-defense class on campus during my time in *How to Defend Yourself*. We learned many vital skills and important moves. We started slowly, simply learning mottos such as, "the best defense is awareness," and "successful self-defense is not having to use it at all". As we progressed we learned how to escape wrist grabs and how to use our voices to deter

potential attackers. We were all eager of course to learn the exciting hands-on defense tactics. Escaping from headlocks, chokeholds, and bear hugs was something exciting. But like the women from Fan's article, I think some of us, especially some of the women in the room, had a deeper fear around the class. *What if it doesn't work?* For a question on our physical final, we had to get ourselves out of a bear hug if someone grabbed us from behind. I was paired with a male classmate who was almost a foot taller than me. My professor's words from the start of the semester came back to me. He had told us that anyone, no matter what size, would be able to protect themselves from anybody — *if* we knew the steps and did them correctly. I took a breath, let him grab me from behind, and did the steps. I did them correctly. I failed. We tried again and my classmate had a looser grip this time, allowing me to pull away. At the end of the final, we could talk to our professor and see our grades. He told me I had gotten a perfect score, and that I had done everything correctly. I questioned him and asked about the time when I couldn't get out of the bear hug. He told me it didn't matter if I got out, just that I did the steps correctly. But in real life, an attacker will not go easier on you, they won't help you and loosen their grip. And if you do the steps correctly, but don't manage to get out, there are much worse consequences.

In *How to Defend Yourself*, my character, Nikki, joins the self-defense class because she wants to feel strong, she wants to learn how to protect herself. She goes on this amazing journey where she learns she can do things she never believed she could. She finds friends and surprises herself with her strength. She takes up space. But in the end, she gets assaulted by a man after going to the pool. She is angry, hurt, and upset. She did everything right. She followed all the steps and did everything perfectly to protect herself. But it wasn't enough. She believes she wasn't enough. Because we cannot control everything, we know we cannot control the violent actions of others. These others place blame on those they see as not like themselves: people who

are different from them, people they see as a threat. America's long history of Chinese violence and exclusion has had a dangerous impact on the country we live in today. The rhetoric we see given by our politicians and peers, the laws that have been passed as a means to "other" a group of people, and the blame placed on these "others" have all contributed to the violence Asian Americans see today. These kinds of bullies are people who try to restrict the freedom of others, of women, of Asian Americans. Members of the in-between space know that no defense is perfect. We cannot prevent the actions of other people, but we can try to protect ourselves. To do so is to be a warrior. There is strength within that, no matter the circumstance — whether you try and succeed or try and fail, so long as you try. In response, these Asian American women could have hidden or moved away, but they chose to try and fight. They have fought for their in-between space and their right to exist in all spaces. Because they have been told they do not belong anywhere, they now fight for their right to exist everywhere. Asian American women have found renewed hope within their communities and strength in self-defense. We cannot control the actions of others and the violence they inflict, but we can learn how to defend ourselves.

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# Reflection Essay

Four years ago I wasn't sure where I was going to end up. 2020 was one of the most challenging years for me. Just as I was supposed to come into my adulthood and say goodbye to my high school career, a global pandemic hit. There were many things I missed out on. Prom, final performances, graduation, and my first year on a college campus. While I dealt with loss, I also dealt with the fear of the unknown. Unsure of what would come from the pandemic, what life would be like after, what my future held. Four years later, I still do not know what the future holds. Grappling with uncertainty is difficult, but it is nothing new. In 2020 I took one big leap. I decided to accept admission into a college 2,000 miles away from home.

The first year wasn't so bad because I didn't have to go anywhere. I had the comfort of my own home and bedroom to keep my company. Everything was pretty easy. I felt like I had college figured out. Then in the fall of 2021, I lost my footing again. I took so long to pack my things up for college because deep down I didn't want to go. I was scared. Looking back at pictures from my four years, I find a video from August 25, 2021. It's my bedroom, my pets, my car, my house. Pieces of myself I didn't want to miss or to forget. Now it's May of 2024 and my camera roll is filled with pictures of my apartment, my friends, and my campus. People and places I don't want to leave. I had no idea four years ago what Purchase would come to mean to me. Ever since I left Arizona, I have felt torn between two homes. I cry leaving my family in Arizona and dread leaving my friends in New York. It's a phenomenon unique to those with two homes.

The repeated sentiment I hear about Purchase College is that it's the people who make the experiences incredible. I have found that I agree. It's not that we do not have wonderful

experiences and opportunities and places here on campus, but it's that they wouldn't be special without the people involved. Throughout my time here I have taken part in numerous plays: *Mac Beth*, *The Attic*, *Judy's House*, and of course, *How to Defend Yourself*, along with some others. I have studied abroad in Norway to learn about climate change practices and stayed in a cabin by a fjord in the Arctic Circle. I took my first train rides and solo trips into New York City during my time here. I saw my first major snowfall and have been in love ever since. I got to see the seasons change and watch daffodils and buttercups grow in our fields. All of this, although incredible to me, would not mean the same without the people I experienced these things with. The other study abroad students who swam in the fjords with me, my classmates who sat with me on the trains, my roommate who was the first to alert me when the snow came and tell me to bundle up, and my friends who picked flowers for me. It's the people that make it special. This was no different for *How to Defend Yourself*.

The cast of *How to Defend Yourself* consisted of seven main cast and three understudies. Due to the heavy subject matter, we became unbelievably close very quickly. With such subjects as sexual assault, abuse, desires, and thoughts, there was a lot of nervousness during our first read-through altogether. We were scared to even say some words aloud because of how blunt the script could be. Most of us had met each other at least once before, but these were intense things to say to almost strangers, even if it was in the script. We got through with assurance from our director and with our wonder stage management team telling us that they were there for us, whatever we needed. A large disclaimer was given to us all. We want you to be comfortable. Whether this meant taking a break, a breather, stepping out, stopping, or talking to someone, it was okay. Each rehearsal would leave us just a little drained. Emotionally, physically, and mentally.

Dancing was not something that came easy to our cast. We struggled, especially with ballet. It was exciting though, the idea of getting to do a ballet with our castmates who were slowly becoming our great friends. Whenever our choreographers were gone from rehearsals for a while, we wondered when they would finally come back. When learning the dance we (I) fell a lot, we forgot steps, we lost tempo, and we mixed up signals, but we had fun. Each dance rehearsal would leave us aching and out of breath but we were having the best time. I normally shy away from dancing in front of others. However, by this point, we just had so much love and appreciation for each other that it didn't matter if we embarrassed ourselves. When the show and tech weeks came closer, we organized early rehearsals just to practice our dances. We named people as dance captains and diligently watched videos of ourselves, critiquing our tempo, our faces, and our movements, just wanting to be the best we could be. We were reminded that these were breaks from reality and that we could be little kids again. And that's something we all crave at some point. Just to be a kid again. To be carefree and fun, to not care so much. And in a show with such heavy subjects, we welcomed the fun (but stressful) dance breaks. Just as I had hoped, we got to be girls again.

The majority of us in the show were women in our senior year. This time in our college career is a tough one. Trying to grasp onto whatever childhood part of us we have left while understanding that we are now adults, to also coping with the fact that we're *really* about to be adults dealing with "the real world". Although this show brought up many pasts for people, it also was very healing. We talked relatively openly about our past experiences, our experiences with men, and our experiences of being a girl. We were told to look for old baby pictures and videos as we thought we would try to incorporate them into our ending video montage. At this time, my mom happened to have converted old home videos into digital files online. I looked

through dozens of videos. There was one of me around age two. An inflatable water set is blown up in our backyard. My father positions me above the water and gently pushes me so I glide across the water. I giggle and tell him, “Again! Again!” and my mother’s voice warns me to be careful in the background. In another video, I am around five. My sister sits next to me on a tire swing. My dad twists the tire swing and lets it go, sending us spinning and laughing. There are so many videos and memories I can’t recall. Dance recitals, pumpkin Halloween costumes, my mother holding my hand as I stumble through the playground, swimming with my aunt, and family vacations. In one video, my sister and I prepare for our last day before winter break. We stand outside our school as our dad records us. He asks us how we like the school and our teacher, and how we feel. At the end, he says, “Wave to yourself!” Seven-year-old me gives him a weird look and waves. “That’s dumb,” little me says. I couldn’t help myself, I laughed and burst into tears.

Being at the end of my college career, everything seems so sentimental and nostalgic. I want to tell every teenager and sophomore I see to take their time and enjoy their classes, do all the fun parts of college, and to really learn from everything. I have taken a variety of different courses and have felt that each one has provided me with a true learning experience and opportunity for growth. My self-defense class has shown me how strong I can be, giving me a newfound confidence that makes me want to ask everyone to put me in a headlock, just so I can show them how to get out of one. It taught me that strength and power aren’t always necessary to defend yourself, sometimes just poking your finger in someone’s ear is enough to get them away from you. (This is true!)  I have also had the wonderful opportunity to take part in so many wonderful acting classes on campus. One of the most impactful classes I took was a Michael Chekhov technique class. Part of his technique is to imagine a specific event and experience it in

real-time as an actor. In my audition for *How to Defend Yourself*, I had to give Nikki's ending monologues after she had just been assaulted. This isn't something I have experienced, so I imagined what she had just been through and what had happened. Then, I held that within my body and went through the lines. It was the best audition I had ever given. My hands started shaking, my throat closed up, and tears welled in my eyes. I was quite surprised with myself. Because of my training in that class and embodying the feelings and emotions of that moment, everything came out not just in words but in my body as well.

Being in *How to Defend Yourself* has been one of the most wonderful opportunities in my career. I had the opportunity to work with people who made me feel safe and provided an important reminder of why I love the work I do. Why I chose to be here in the first place. During the show, each night we could feel the audience connect with us. We felt it in the laughs during dance sequences, in the applause when Nikki mastered a move, and in the gasps and sniffles during the emotional moments. Knowing that we made the audience feel something and connect to it was the most rewarding part of the show. Each of us cast members was so connected to the show, as we had put so much of ourselves into it. We were vulnerable in ways we hadn't been on stage before and we learned how to connect with our inner selves and heal parts of us we didn't know needed to be mended. All those younger versions of me in those home videos, the high school graduate me unsure of what path to take, and the sophomore year version of me who cried seeing her parents leave - were with me throughout my time here at Purchase. They were found in parts of Nikki and shone through in all her different scenes. These experiences and versions of me will always be a part of everything I do, throughout my life.

Performance Senior Thesis

SUNY Purchase

Actor's Portfolio

# SUNY Purchase Acting Credits

| Production | Playwright | Role | Year | Director |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Macbeth* | Erica Schmidt | U/S Lady Mac & Banquo | 2022 | Chelsea Muller |
| *What If If Only* | Caryl Churchill | Present | 2022 | Edie Gregg |
| *The Attic* | Yoji Sakate | Mother & Ensemble | 2023 | Michi Barall |
| *How to Defend Yourself* | Liliana Padilla | Nikki | 2023 | Ash Marinaccio |
| *Doctor Doctor* | Taylor Esposito | Astor | 2023 | Taylor Esposito |
| *The Greatest Love Story* | Shamar Lee | Scarlett | 2023 | Shamar Lee |
| *My Ghost & Me* | Jay Maher | Sam | 2024 | Jay Maher |
| *Judy's House* | Jorin Clougherty | Betty & Evangeline | 2024 | Cayd Barrera |

# *Mac Beth*

Playwright: Erica Schmidt

Director: Chelsea Muller

Role: U/S Lady Macbeth & Banquo

Year: 2022

*Mac Beth* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's famous play which focuses on a group of girls who decide to put "Macbeth" on in the woods. Although seeming to all be in good fun and play, the dynamic takes a dark shift and ends in true violence as the tale of "Macbeth" becomes a reality.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Banquo, Nicole Castillo, Rossy Veras, and Dixie O'Connell as the Witches.

A picture of the set for *Mac Beth* outside of the CMFT in the amphitheater.


A picture of the cast and director.

# *What If If Only*

Playwright: Caryl Churchill

Director: Edie Gregg

Role: Present

Year: 2022

*What If If Only* is a short one-act play about Someone struggling with grief and loss. She is visited by incarnations of the Present and the Future who help her cope with her loss and understand that all we have is the present and that the future is ever changing.


The poster for our version of *What If If Only.*


L-R: Judit Queral Perramon as Future, Brisa Nunes as Someone, Edie Gregg our director, and Kiana Hindi as Present.

# *The Attic*

Playwright: Yoji Sakate

Director: Michi Barall

Role: Mother & Ensemble

Year: 2023

*The Attic* is about a phenomenon called “hikikomori”, where typically young people will remove themselves from society and live in attics. The show features multiple vignettes that highlight the stories of the “Attic People” and what has brought them there.

L-R: John Richard Mateyko as Son and Kiana Hindi as Mother.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Mother and John Richard Mateyko as Son.

Kiana Hindi as Mother.

1st Row L-R: Kiana Hindi, Belle Wood, Kim Crossway, Ahona Dias, and Tionne Watson.

## *How to Defend Yourself*

Playwright: Liliana Padilla

Director: Ash Marinaccio

Role: Nikki

Year: 2023

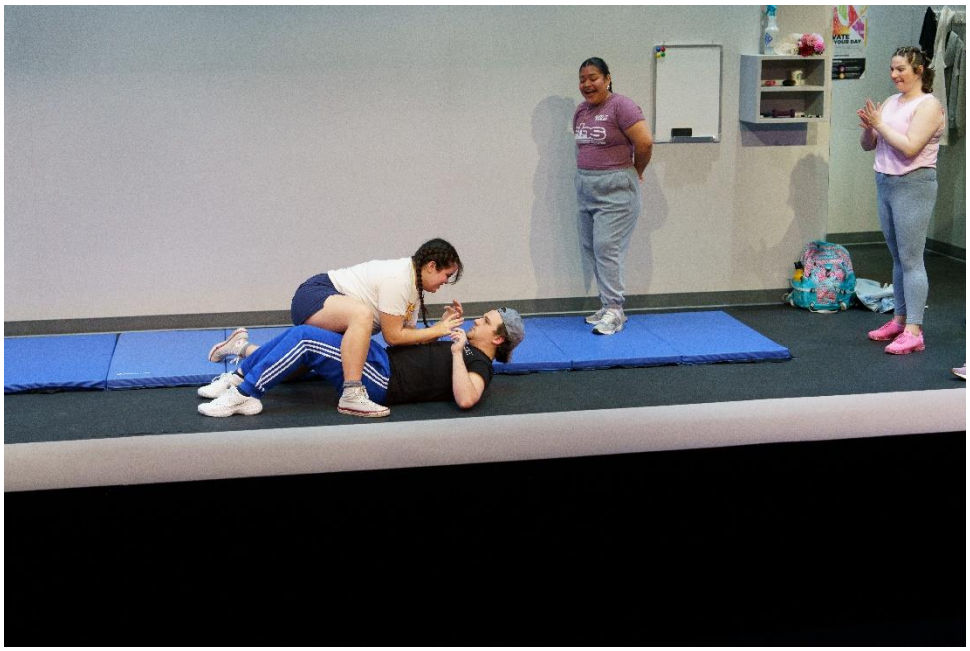
*How to Defend Yourself* is a show about a group of college students who join a self-defense class after a classmate of theirs is sexually assaulted. Each student in the class grapples with their own desires, guilt, and past experiences as they learn to defend themselves.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Nikki and Emma Baker as Brandi.

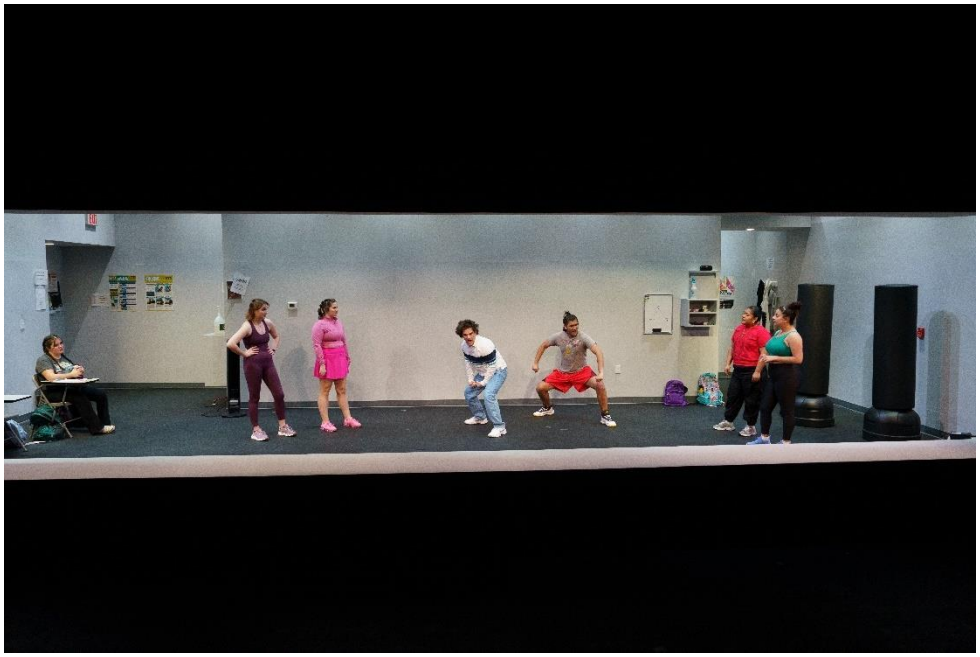
L-R: Izzy Hamboussi as Mojdeh, Winnie Hurd as Kara, Kiana Hindi as Nikki, Solangel Galindo as Diana, and Emma Baker as Brandi.

L-R: Kiana Hindi, Emma Baker, Solangel Galindo, Winnie Hurd, and Izzy Hamboussi in *How to Defend Yourself.*

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Nikki and Solangel Galindo as Diana.



L-R: Kiana Hindi as Nikki, Brandon Belcher as Andy, Solangel Galindo as Diana, and Emma Baker as Brandi.



L-R: Kiana Hindi as Nikki, Winnie Hurd as Kara, Emma Baker as Brandi, Brandon Belcher as Andy, Jackson Sorice as Eggo, Solangel Galindo as Diana, and Izzy Hamboussi as Mojdeh.

L-R: Winnie Hurd as Kara, Brandon Belcher as Andy, Kiana Hindi as Nikki, and Emma Baker as Brandi.

# *Doctor Doctor*

Playwright: Taylor Esposito

Director: Taylor Esposito

Role: Astor

Year: 2023

*Doctor Doctor* is a short film about a girl who encounters another young girl in a dream. This girl warns her to get out of her bed and hints at something sinister within the house and family.

L-R: Belle Wood as Alice and Kiana Hindi as Astor.

L-R: Belle Wood as Alice and Kiana Hindi as Astor.

Kiana Hindi as Astor.

## *The Greatest Love Story*

Playwright: Shamar Lee

Director: Shamar Lee

Role: Scarlett

Year: 2023

This short film is about a young woman getting ready for her wedding day. She starts to have doubts as she sees her childhood friend and old feelings for one another are brought up.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Scarlett and Shamar Lee as Merrick.

Kiana Hindi as Scarlett.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Scarlett and Shamar Lee as Merrick.

## *My Ghost and Me*

Playwright: Jay Maher

Director: Jay Maher

Role: Sam

Year: 2024

This short film is about a young man who lives with his younger sister, who is a ghost. This documentary style short film features what it's like to live with a ghost but also the grief and burden of living with someone you couldn't save.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Sam and Jay Maher as Rory.

Kiana Hindi as Sam.

L-R: Kiana Hindi as Sam and Jay Maher as Rory.

# *Judy's House*

Playwright: Jorin Clougherty

Director: Cayd Barrera

Role: Betty and Evangeline

Year: 2024

*Judy's House* is a play that focuses on a family packing up their aunt's belongings after she passes away. The family uncovers secrets of her past and sexuality as they grapple with their own feelings around loss and identity.

A picture of cast and crew during bows.

Front row L-R: Franki Mastrone, Ainsley Schuth, Kiana Hindi, and Matthew Lazzarino.

Back row L-R: Isabella Moncada, Jackson Sorice, Michelle Cuteo, Judit Queral Perramon, Audrey Redmond-Run, and Leah McCafferty.

Kiana Hindi in Betty's costume.

L-R: Franki Mastrone (Avery/Judy), Kiana Hindi (Evangeline/Betty), Ainsley Schuth (Theo/Pat), Matthew Lazzarino (Oliver/Larry), and Cayd Barrera (Director).