ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	RESPONSIVE WILD: REDISCOVERING, REDEFINING, AND REALIGNING
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The central question of, what *is womanhood?* anchors this work. Within that wondering and examination is research into feminism, in conversation with rock and roll and 1980s MTV, gender studies, queer studies, and dance studies. The interrogation of MTV as a superstructure for notions of White femininity operates as a site of exploration for the White heterosexual male gaze. This extends into a rediscovery of rock and roll history, and the Black and Queer women (also considered by this work as 'original' feminists) who laid a foundation for rock and roll's future. Through choreographic practice and Queer methodology, questions of womanhood and femininity, Queerness, and feminism, are explored through movement. Memory, lived bodily experiences, community, and the sensations and desires connected to them, are centered in this creative process. Queer and feminist writers accompany this journey; rock and roll functions as a canvas for the exploration of ferocious and mammoth movement; metaphors of physics facilitate the choreographic research into

identity as it shifts and navigates fluidity and transformation. Each of these ideas swirl, collide, and manifest through choreographed movement and writing; leading to a new and realigned question: *What is Queer Womanhood?*

RESPONSIVE WILD: REDISCOVERING, REDEFINING, AND REALIGNING

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2021

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Introduction

"We don't want her in this group, she'll bring everyone down," my dance studio director said to me. She had started giving me rides in. Our houses and the hole-in-the-wall dance studio I'd begun training at were close in distance. My mother would often feel too sick or too tired to drive me to class, and my dad worked long hours. I'd been going into the studio with my director to work as a teaching assistant in exchange for discounted classes. I wanted to be a dancer and to be in dance classes more than anything. As we got out of her car, my director continued, "She won't really care if she isn't moved up to that level anyways. I mean...you know why she's really coming in...she just wants to get to look at all the girls."

I was fourteen years old when this director, who was also my only dance teacher at the time, said this to me. My friend, the girl she was speaking of, was eleven. I can't remember what happened before or after that moment. But the feeling that crept up from inside me I'll never forget. It was an aching heat that welled up in my stomach and an icy grasp pausing my heartbeat. It was fear, shame, confusion, guilt, and anger all at once. It was not knowing the word for what my instructor was describing but knowing that inside that dance space and that dance community, whatever *it* was, was bad.

Queer would be a word I learned about later. In that moment, a Queer girl was not accepted or welcomed.[1] Even at eleven years old, she could be 'seen' for what she was: gross and weird. Queer could be watched from above and all around and cast out of the group of 'normal' girls. Dance, to me, was supposed to be about community, gathering together, and joy. That hole-in-the-wall dance studio was all I knew and all I had at the time connecting me to the dance world, providing me with glimpses into a future as a dance professional. So, I swallowed the well of aching heat and let the ice in my chest thaw out on its own. At that time, unable to comprehend or name any of my feelings, the best thing to do was to keep dancing, to stay focused on my moves.

I was an expert at this kind of focus, tuning everything out and remaining in my own world. My mother was sick with chronic illnesses that affected her physically and mentally, with both my younger sister and I, who were barely two years apart. As soon as I was out of the womb, I was learning how to care for myself. I learned to find ways to escape wildly and fearlessly through movement experiences and dancing. This fearless escape through movement, and the sensations and desires that were connected to it, lead to the creative process and the questions I examined in my thesis work.

What is womanhood? was identified as a possible research question for my choreography by my thesis chair, Crystal Davis.[2] She offered this during feedback after my performance of *Zoso*, a work that explored themes of femininity, feminism, and the relationship I had with my mother.[3] Through movement and text, I told the story of a mother and daughter bonded through a lifetime of chronic illness by rock and roll music. I told a story that I felt would be seen as beautiful. I performed a story about a connection between a mother and daughter; about the beginning of the end; about a healthy, supportive, relationship; about sadness and grief that was turned into happiness and understanding.

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[1] I will capitalize Queer throughout this paper when it is in reference my identity, and the identity of another Queer person or community. I will also use it when referencing my body of research and choreographic process, which is deeply informed and generated through the lived experiences of my identity.

[2] Crystal Davis, Assistant Professor of Dance, Head of MFA in Dance Program, School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, November 2018.

That story was a lie. And though it wasn't an intentional lie, it would take me until I'd moved through the performance of that research to realize what the story truly was. I had seen things the way I needed to in order to protect myself, my love, and my resiliency. I had made that dance to escape and give myself a story that I so desperately yearned to have actually experienced. I escaped into dance, high physicality, and the music of rock and roll.

Looking back on that work now, I see how fiercely I was searching for something, trying to dig something up from deep within. I was trying to connect the pieces of my lived experiences to my desires for movement and my research curiosities. The question of *What is womanhood?* felt like a space where the historical, personal, political, and abstract could come together in my choreographic research. I couldn't resist going deeper with this question and allowing it to shift and expand itself. New questions generated from the original: about femininity, feminism, rock and roll voices, women in protest, the category of ‘woman,’ gender studies, and the examination of: *Why am I afraid to be a Queer woman?*

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[3] *Zoso,* Choreography and Performance: Krissy Harris, Lighting: by Paul D. Jackson, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park, November 19, 2018, https://www.krissyharrisdances.com/zoso.

My research journey would show me I had spent enough of my life mimicking and accepting definitions of womanhood and femininity from my external world. The connections I was seeking were not on the outside; they were within me. Inward was the direction I needed to travel. I would have to go back in time and into points of memory, while critically questioning my present, and the possibilities for the future.

Feminism and women, gender, and sexuality studies became the bodies of research that gave me strength to go inward, and to keep up with my questioning. Feminism is a time traveler. It moves through and exists within the past, present, and future all at once. When I work with feminism in the present moment, I’m connected to my past experiences that filled me with sensation. These sensations motivate and fuel my intentions for the future. From everyday interactions to massive global movements, feminism is in action everywhere. My choreography in process, practice, and performance is feminist. It is also inherently Queer. This thesis paper will take you through my experiences, memories, found research, and methodologies, wherein feminism and Queerness come into being my responsive and wild choreographic companions.

Chapter 1: Buck Jumps, Rock and Roll, MTV, and Heteronormativity

Buck Jumps

I wanted to bound forwards and upwards into the air, while still feeling tethered to the point from which I had launched from in the souls of my feet, the back of my legs, the length of my spine, and the hairs of my neck. I desired to charge forward through the space and devour all of the terrain in front of me; to be right at the edge of bottoming out upon landing. I desired to suspend myself in the air, even if it was only for a brief moment; rebelling against gravity and feeling as if time stopped. At some point in my dance history, I began craving opportunities to travel through and take up as much of the dance space as possible. I can't locate in my mind's eye the exact moment that this craving began. I know the beginning of it lives somewhere where I felt opposition, disagreement, frustration, and a repression of a vital part of myself.

Yearning to Mammoth Dance

I remember my ballet classes as a teenager and in college, where there would often be a binary 'men's group' for ballet sequences or variation practices. The male-identifying dancers would travel *mammothly*, far and wide throughout the dance space. My fellow female-identifying dancers and I worked towards the illusion of lightness, precision of intricate footwork, balances, tight turns, and performances of flexibility. The work of ballet felt immensely physical to me, requiring significant body strength. Yet, my movement rarely took up as much space as the performances of the male-identifying dancers did. There was a predetermined, ethereal, virtuous, White feminine aesthetic I was training to achieve. Yet, I wanted to experience momentum and expansiveness. I wanted to feel powerful, commanding, and ecstatic. I found those feeling states somewhere within my imagination and body's sensations, as I experienced the physicality, musicality, endurance, and strength required for ballet. But it wasn't exteriorized in the way it was for the boys and men. These feeling states lived deep inside my internal world, with my lost and hidden Queerness.

A Fear of White American Womanhood

A cisfemale person, since childhood, I have felt a strong identification with rock and roll music and performativity. The superhero White-male rocker archetype, and their embodiment of agency and power contrasted the images of predominantly White women to which I was continually exposed to through popular media. The images of mostly White women on the covers of *Cosmopolitan*, *Teen Vogue*, *Vogue*, and *Elle* magazines terrified me, as I saw them as representative images of what I was destined for as I 'became a woman.' The images of women in popular performance mediums carried a sexualized femininity that was objectified and consumable.

"I think we should dye your hair blonde, don't you?" my mother asked me for the hundredth time. "No." I yelled at her, with my thirteen-year-old resentment, from the front passenger seat of our car. "But you'll be so much more attractive to men and you'll get noticed more," she said. I stayed silent. She pushed again. "Don't you want boys to like you?" she asked. I leaned my head against the car window, tears stinging my eyes, until we got to the parking lot of the dance studio. Relief filled my bones as I rushed up the stairs to class.

The embodiment of womanhood in dominant U.S. American popular media felt out of alignment with my own bodily sensations and desires. What was communicated to me about womanhood through media and in social settings also confused the legacy of strong, resilient women within my family. I remember singing at the top of my lungs and dancing to rock and roll songs with my mom, who felt lucky when she could have one full day out of bed. Many experiences of connection and engagement I'd yearned for, I could access through the music, performance, and community of rock and roll. I was ecstatic when I was cast as George Harrison in our elementary school's rendition of The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*. It was thrilling to be cast as Harrison, where I could be tomboyish and have it celebrated. I identified with the voice and performance of George Harrison much more than the archetypes of femininity that I was socialized towards, and feared having to become, in everyday life.

Holding In

"You look like a lesbian," he yelled at me as I walked out of the building. I stopped still, as everyone in the group I was walking with began to laugh and make fun of what I was wearing. Basketball shorts, a tank top, and running sneakers. I laughed too, to protect myself, from how anxious, disordered, and alone I felt in that moment. Severe anxiety and acute panic attacks had set in towards the end of high

school and into that first year of college; yet I was thriving on the outside with dance and school. I was finally feeling confident about myself; I was getting somewhere I'd always yearned to be with my dance training and performance, and I had a group of friends to connect fully with. Each friend in the group was in a heterosexual relationship with a cismale-identifying person. Each person in the group had a mother that I witnessed regularly showing up for them physically and emotionally. I wasn't in a relationship of any kind at the time, as I'd always felt much more secure maintaining ultra-independence.

The Diagonal

The diagonal feels powerful. It is the rockstar of the proscenium and the cinematic performance. Dancing with the diagonal, as a facing or a travel pathway, is dancing in the space where the past, present, and future meet. It is right where what is behind you, in front of you, next to you, above you, and beneath you, can reach a still point and square off. Within the diagonal line, confusion, grief, blurriness and messiness of navigating identity can find a balance point, a framing, a clear path. The diagonal is linear, masculine, clear, stated. Like the 1980s shoulder pad, the diagonal encases, frames and accentuates the body's unique architectural design. The diagonal is mysterious, asking what might have come before and after it's visible path. It aligns with my wonderings about femininity, womanhood and queerness; From what angle or degree do we take in a person, their journey, their actions? Where does it start? Where is it suspended? Where is it clear? Where is framing? What does it connect to?

The three-dimensional body is simultaneously exposed and hidden when facing off with and traveling along the diagonal pathways of a performance space. As if the floor is slanted by the diagonal course of travel, the back body expands and widens with the gust of determination. As she charges, the front body ignites with a forward prowess; the sides of the body contain the shifting and reorienting layers of muscle, tissue and organ. In contact with lighting that illuminates the diagonal positioning, areas of the body are revealed, hidden and subverted all at once.

Why Rock and Roll?

Why rock and roll? My visceral, wild, fluid love for the music, performance, history, and legacy the form carries with it; and the way it has accompanied my life experiences and navigation of my identity. Rock and roll music champions wild imagination, freedom, alternative realities, boldness, zaniness and amalgamation of dynamics and qualities. It connects ideas of the past, present and future. It's rumble and vibrations are resilient, spontaneous, stoking, and expansive. In the music of rock and roll, I find agents of desire, embodiment, and sensory pleasure that cascade out through shaking and shifting rhythms, into community gatherings, celebrations, and movement experiences. As a dancer there is a personal virtuosity and bombasticness in the performances of rock and roll artists that inspire me. The emotionally affecting instrumentals and lyrics of the music awaken empathy and deeply felt, sensation-based exploration of sounds and imagery.

Rock and roll from the 1960s through the 1980s connected me to an imagined community that I was never a part of. I started to wonder about the strangeness of that, and where that sense of nostalgia came from. What was it about the sound, vibration, rhythm, and vocals that provided me the sensations of escape and connection? The emotions, desires, cravings, and yearnings that I had creatively and personally, could find a home within rock and roll's music. Immersing myself in rock and roll's complex history would open up ways for me to analyze normative and patriarchal constructions of womanhood and femininity. For the majority of my girlhood and young adult life, I was mimicking the dominant and normalized expressions of female cisfemale gender identity. At the same time, I was learning about pain, trauma and empathy, through the chronic illness and physical disabilities of my mother, and the trauma passed down through generations of our family members.

I followed or ran away from what was prescribed to me as femininity and womanhood, all the while admiring the strength, determination, and resilience of womanhood that I witnessed in my family. I buried parts of myself that I was not given the space or time to experience. The intensity of reoccurring familial trauma often necessitated a fractured self-isolation and self-protection, in order to cope and take care of myself. I wonder about the longing, yearning, and escapism that I both seek out and cultivate in my choreography and performance, as possible responses to those experiences, and thread lines leading to my engagement with rock and roll music.

Why Rock and Roll and MTV?

It's the end of August in the year 2018. I'm a first-year MFA Dance student, and my cohort has been given our first set of prompts for our choreography class.[4] I work for hours in the dance studio to all of my favorite 1960s, 70s, and 80s rock and roll music pieces. I'm nervous and ecstatic for the first showing of my MFA Dance career, and keep pouring out idea after idea, struggling to commit to any of them. I create and practice movement scores. I set short sequences of choreographed movements, and then abandon them to generate new material. I play with creating ballet variations to Cher songs. I hurl my body into the floor and through the space to Led Zeppelin and Ozzy Osbourne. I scream, "I was just trying to be a professional woman!" I draw in my notebook. I make up gestures about a woman I miss, admire, and want to hold. In between it all, I keep coming back to the mammoth, loping jumps that bound across the downstage diagonal line. Even while working on ideas with zero intention towards jumping or the diagonal path, I continue to arrive back in the air. I'm charging forward down that diagonal line, moving through repetitions of jumps that would later come to be nicknamed 'reindeers' and 'bucks.'

Along with our movement prompts for choreography, we were asked to generate text with our movement. For this, I followed my curiosity of researching, and then working into lines of text, various global events that I viewed as having had an indirect impact on my connection to dancing. MTV had to be there. "August 1, 1981. MTV launches. Ladies and gentlemen, rock and roll" was the first line of my choreography’s text, as I slowly moved through the fluid gestures portraying a woman dancing at a rock concert. MTV was the U.S. American cable channel that revolutionized music and television on a global scale.

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[4] Graduate Choreography I, taught by Professor Sara Pearson at the University of Maryland, School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies, College Park, MD, August - December, 2018.

Born in the 1990s, with the heart of my White-American teen years in the early 2000s, I knew MTV as the channel that connected me to the most popular music and music videos of the time. It featured rock and roll groups that I connected with, having grown up listening to rock and roll at home, such as Good Charlotte, Yellow Card, The Killers, The White Stripes, and Hoobastank. Though I loved rock and roll, MTV also exposed me to the ‘cool’ pop and hip hop mainstream music that my friends were listening to, such as Christina Aguilera, Jay-Z, Missy Elliot, and Usher. It was through exposure to these genres and music videos that I became interested in becoming a dancer.

To me and my friends with access to the network, MTV was home to the Video Music Awards (VMA’s) tradition, which we’d have sleepovers to watch the week before school started. It was also home to a number of reality TV shows such as “Punk’d,” “Cribs,” “Rob & Big,” “My Super Sweet Sixteen” “Jersey Shore,” and “16 & Pregnant.” The media of MTV showed us examples of how we should be, what we could be, and what ways of embodying and performing our identities were desirable in popular American culture.

At age thirteen, after seeing the youth hip hop and break dancers in the “Work It” and “Gossip Folks” music videos of Missy Elliot, I was inspired to start taking dance classes with a serious focus on becoming a professional performer. I would stay up all night teaching myself the moves of the Missy Elliot dancers, creating my own routines to Missy's music. My mother found out about a nearby dance studio's not-too-pricey hip hop and breakdancing classes. I enthusiastically started attending, while giving myself my own lessons and training sessions in my bedroom. I idolized Missy Elliot and her tracksuit uniforms. For one of my self-choreographed routines to "Gossip Folk," I used my allowance to purchase an Echo Red tracksuit from the junior's section at Macy's, so that I would look like Missy and the teen dancers in her videos. I convinced my parents to sign me up for a beauty pageant that was advertised at our local mall, where I could perform my routine in the talent competition portion. I won fourth place out of ten. This gave me the fuel to keep training and performing. I showed my "Gossip Folk" routine at every camp and middle-school talent show event for a year, and any time my dance teacher would let me after class.

Regardless of how my self-made routine looked from the outside, to me there was vibration, bounce, a sense of resiliency, and high physicality. I felt strong, connected to my body, and connected to a famous icon and their community of fans. When I danced to Missy Elliot's music videos, when I danced to the music videos and songs I discovered through MTV, I could escape to somewhere that felt unrestricted and all-embracing. I felt free to be myself.

I did not have any knowledge of MTV's connection to the 1960s, 70s, and 80s rock and roll that I had grown up listening to with my family and jamming out to with my mom. It wasn't until my research for this very thesis project that I would discover MTV's history as a strategic and operational force within the rock and roll industry. I had no idea that Missy Elliot and her dancers were airing on a network that became a superstructure through its commodification of a homogenized, misogynistic form of

White femininity and womanhood.[5] I was naive to the racist and sexist ideology of rock and roll. Its complex history, and the Black Queer women of blues music where rock music's foundation ignited, was veiled.

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[5] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in Media and Cultural Studies, ed. Douglas M. Kellner, Meenakshi Gigi Durham (United Kingdom: Wiley, 2012), 115-116. Here I am using the term "superstructure" as it connects to Marxist cultural theory, wherein the economic system underlying a society results or is reflected in an institution, concept, or culture.

Chapter 2: Analysis of the Heterosexual White Male Gaze

The Strategic Birth of MTV

My research into MTV and rock and roll continued to expand and progress. I dove headfirst into the history of MTV and discovered its operations with the rock and roll industry. MTV's official debut as a U.S. American cable channel was on Saturday, August 1, 1981, at 12:01 am Eastern Time. The network kicked off its first broadcast with footage of Space Shuttle Columbia's countdown and liftoff, followed by the John Lackman voiceover of, "Ladies and gentlemen: Rock and Roll," and the Apollo 11 spaceflight launch and moon landing, where an astronaut saluted a technicolor MTV flag.[6] "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the Buggles shortly followed the launch, as the first music video to air on the network.[7] The cultural boom of MTV music video in the 1980s changed the lives of teenagers around the world, providing the voice of a generation, the 'MTV generation'.

MTV developed into a global force, connecting billions of people worldwide through television broadcasting. In its early years, MTV included hours of continuous music video, live concert broadcasts, and commercials centered around rock and roll music. For those with access to the network, its programming brought forth a new era for popular culture iconography, performance of gender identity, and stylization of bodies. And who do we see as the main icons, the heroes within these music video performances? Whose voices are matched with imagery that glorifies and elevates their bodies? Predominantly, it is the performance, bodies, and voices of White male rockers. They are elevated and glorified, dominating the cultural landscape of the 1980s rock and roll era.

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[6] "1981 August 1 MTV Hour One (Without Videos)." MTV Network, YouTube video, 11:43. Aug. 1, 1981**.** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1QDSmflFtM. Accessed 23 Sep. 2018.

[7] Reuters, "Apollo 11's Astronauts Snapped Photos for Science — Then Came MTV," VOANews.com, Science & Health, July 17, 2019. Accessed December 20, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/science-health/apollo-11s-astronauts-snapped-photos-science-then-came-mtv.

My draw to the rock and roll was the music's sound, vibration, expressivity, and the idea of its communities, and the virtuosity of the performers. Rock Icons like Jon Bon Jovi, Jimmy Page, Stevie Nicks, and Janis Joplin had a personal virtuosity to their performance and embodiment of the music. When I listened to the music, I could simply rock the fuck out and enjoy the internal, emotional drivers and body sensations that it evoked. Yet, as I took a closer look at the imagery of rock and roll, aware of MTV's strategies for the genre, I saw rock and roll separate from the sensations and performativity that fascinated me. I realized that I was looking mostly at White male bodies and White masculinities.

Why, and how, had this happened? How did that history connect to or make sense with the MTV I knew as a teen, that connected me to Missy Elliot, whose work inspired me to become a dancer? How is it that I and so many others were consuming this media without question? And what were all of the women doing?

A New Generation of Target Audience

Bob Pittman, the MTV network's lead concept planner, identified a target audience of White adolescents and young adults, ages twelve to thirty-four.[8] MTV was the first of its kind to attempt to capture the teenage market, and the network sought to capitalize on this opportunity.[9] Pittman believed that by bringing together television and rock and roll, MTV's target audience would be "culturally united by the circumstance of their historical synchronicity with two proven and popular entertainment attractions of the era."[10] The rock music of the time catered to young White males, and the gender and racial representations that could appeal to them were crucial to the capitalization of MTV. This led Pittman to choose rock and roll music as the focal point of the network's televised music videos. An important layer to this choice of audience-genre intersection is that of masculinity, and the attachment of masculinity to the category of White male and middle-class.[11]

Subsequently, the target audience of the MTV network focused on the White-male adolescent experience and promoted a sense of personal identity acquired through dominance.[12] Directly engaging MTV's White-male teenage market, music videos featured White male ‘fantasy worlds’ in which men had access to spaces with women in service of their desires. Centered around the attractiveness of this type of rock music ideology to adolescent males, MTV produced images of predominantly White women for the consumption of their target audience. These women were often performing service roles such as dancers, strippers, cheerleaders, secretaries, fashion models, background dance entertainment, or accessories to a main performance of a White male rock group.

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[8] Lewis, Lisa A. "MTV's Industrial Imperatives," in *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 19.

[9] 1. Temporal, Paul. "The Birth of MTV," in *The Branding of MTV: Will Internet Kill the Video Star?* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd., 2008), 4.

[10] Lewis, Lisa A. Ibid., 20.

[11] Jack Halberstam, "An Introduction to Female Masculinity," in Female Masculinity (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 2. Halberstam argues that "masculinity becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body." As the White male middle-class teen was the target audience of early MTV, Halberstam's theory is supportive to my analysis of MTV.

[12] Banks, Jack. "Constructing Video Dreams: Music Video in a Commercial Culture," in *Monopoly Television: MTV's Quest to Control the Music,* (Colorado: WestviewPress, 1996), 4. Banks' text discusses adolescent self-identity attached to the acquisition of goods "providing group affiliation." "The promotion of a personal identity that can be purchased is the primary

White Male-address Versus White Female-address

Media studies scholar Lisa A. Lewis offers the ideas of “male-address” and “female-address" in MTV music videos.[13] Though Lewis does not name Whiteness within her definition terms, I will rename them as White male-address and White female-address, to better encapsulate MTV’s marketing strategies for White adolescent audiences. White male-address concerns the attention of White male audiences, and the leisure activities of White male-adolescents as part of a contextual system of signs and symbols. The signs and symbols within 1980s MTV music video “cultivated an address to male youth” and White adolescent male leisure activities and entertainment.[14] These symbols are created through representations of White

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function of rock videos.” This research gives context to information I am gathering on MTV music video.

[13] Lewis, Lisa A., *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). Lewis’ work argues that MTV was a route to feminist expression for female artists, and through incorporation of symbols of female empowerment, actually empowered teenage girls. I do not agree with this, though I found her definitions of “male-address” and “female-address” useful in my analysis of MTV music videos, though I did rename them for my research as White male-address and White female-address.

[14] Lewis, Lisa A. “Male-Address Video (1983),” in *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 43.

male privileged access to cars, motorcycles, late night street activities, and White women. This racial and gendered address is aligned with the marketing strategies of MTV; the network's success and promotion rose as it fed into the capitalist consumerism of White middle class teenage boys.

White Female-address concerns the attention of White female audiences, the representation of White femininity, and White women as gendered subjects.[15] In comparison to White male-address, White female address was nearly void throughout 1980s MTV. The preeminent landscape of the White male fantasy world featured "coded images of the female body, and positioning girls and women as the objects of male voyeurism."[16]

MTV featured mostly White women and representations of their experiences, which centered around binary female and male gender categories and homogenized heterosexuality. Women of color were present in MTV music videos, but far less frequently than White women were. Dressed in minimal clothing, their physical attributes highlighted by costume, lighting and camera angles, the women in MTV's rock videos often played the roles of backup singers and dancers for White male musicians, dance entertainment, strippers, secretaries, librarians, cheerleaders, models, or nurses.[17] While the White men embodied power, strength, and dominance, the White women and women of color embodied subordination, fragility, and decoration.

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[15] Lewis, Lisa A. "Female-Address Video (1980-1986)," Ibid., 109-110.

[16] Lewis, Lisa A., "Male-Address Video (1983)," Ibid., 43

[17] 1. Banks, Jack. "Constructing Video Dreams: Music Video in a Commercial Culture," in *Monopoly Television: MTV's Quest to Control the Music,* (Colorado: WestviewPress, 1996), 3.

Welcome To The Jungle

When I was fifteen years old, a group of my young White female-identifying friends performed to Guns N' Roses' "Welcome To The Jungle" (1987) as a 'jazz' dance style piece.[18] I'd heard the number talked about for weeks through our friend groups at my high school. It was their big, 'cool,' 80s number (the piece was made in 2006). There were two elements that made this dance a big deal and the talk of my high school: 1) The small trampolines that the dancers jumped off of throughout the piece, so that they could ascend up into the air and arrive in split-leg positions; 2) The 1980s rock style costuming of skin-tight neon green and leopard-print unitards, headbands, eye glitter, and hair blown out in the fashion of the 1980s White women's style.

As a fifteen-year-old girl, who loved the music of Bon Jovi and Guns N' Roses, I thought this dance was nothing less than epic. I heard the power of the electric guitar, saw dancers running through the stage space and jumping into the air, movement that was virtuosic, and lots of energy and theatricality. The audience wooed and applauded throughout the performance. I hadn't seen much dance performance other than what was available to me in my hometown dance studio, the dancing in music videos, popular movies, So You Think You Can Dance, and the Lithuanian folk dance I participated in. To me, this experience was significant, and I wished I could've been a part of the performance glory that I perceived the dancers to be experiencing. I wasn't listening closely to the lyrics of the song, though I was definitely hearing them and taking them in within the context of the whole performance. I was experiencing them as part of a whole system of images and performance production.

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[18] The form of jazz dance that I'm referring to here is the homogenized jazz dance that is popular in many predominantly White dance studios across America. It is taught with the influence of commercial dance and popular culture aesthetics, without acknowledgement or training in the African and African American history of jazz dance and Black performance traditions. When I encountered this version of jazz dance as a child and a teen, it was usually taught by a White teacher to all-White dance students.

Fast forwarding to the present moment with my research. The lyrics of "Welcome To The Jungle" seemed like a site for taking this teenage memory and questioning what was holding up the power of the song and performance. This meant examining an arena of rock and roll that MTV was manipulating as part of its marketing strategy: glam rock. Glam rock, also known as "glitter rock," arose as a genre of rock and roll in Britain during the 1970s.[19] David Bowie, T. Rex, Queen, and Elton John were some of the leading icons of British glam. In the 1980s, the genre gained popularity in the United States, and drew from hard rock, pop rock and heavy metal styles, creating derivative forms known as glam metal, pop metal, and hair metal. As a 1980s phenomenon, glam rock also reflected a shift in "the social dispositions towards sex and gender relations and becomes a trademark for masculinity in transition."[20] So where and with whom did that leave femininity?

Glam rock and glam metal were movements that resisted the mainstream of 1960s psychedelic rock and rebelled against the sociopolitical landscape of the 1960s rock and roll culture, to find “individualized escape through stardom.”[21] In 1960s psychedelic rock, the identities of performers were meant to be the same as their hippie, fluid, counterculture audience and there was an emphasis on antiocularity and antitheatricality.[22] For the hippie, psychedelic, counterculture rock groups such as Jefferson Airplane and the Mamas and the Papas, antiocularity and antitheatricality was connected to the resistance of dominant culture and mainstream media, which “produced socially influential images.”[23] Performances emphasized a deeply internal, and deeply individual experience, and their “authenticity” was connected to the sound of the music, rather than the spectacle or iconography of rock and roll.[24]

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[19] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender & Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 39-53.

[20] Lilyana Sharlandzhieva, "Dudes Look like Ladies. Analyzing Sex and Gender Issues in Glam Rock," Munich, GRIN Verlag, 2016. https://www.grin.com/document/364581.

Glam rock and glam metal embraced the spectacle of the fantasy rock star world with theatrical performances, costuming, and makeup in its concerts and music videos. However, for all the play on individuality, a liberation from convention, and identity movements, the majority of psychedelic rock icons were heterosexual White males.[25] Glam icons challenged the gendered identities of psychedelic rockers, offering a framework wherein male identity could find a range of acceptable expressions. The costuming and designing of glam rock icons and bands were “bricolages of bits of masculine and feminine gender coding.”[26] They offered a variety of design ideas around masculinity, femininity, performances of gender, and mythologies around White female and male bodies.

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[21] John Williams. “The Rise of Glam Rock,” New York Times, Nonfiction book review for SHOCK AND AWE: Glam Rock and Its Legacy, From the Seventies to the Twenty-First Century by Simon Reynolds, November 28, 2016. URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/books/review/shock-and-awe-glam-rock-simon-reynolds.html

[22] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender & Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 16-17.

[23] Philip Auslander, Ibid., 15.

[24] Philip Auslander, Ibid.

[25] Philip Auslander, Ibid., 18-22.

[26] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender & Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 67.

However, even with powerhouse female performers like Suzi Quatro, glam rock and glam metal was a White male-dominated cultural form. It created and enforced a tradition of the glorified display of the White male body, often as a spectacle of masculinity. The majority of women that were a part of this performance form existed as weak, incomplex, objects of desire.[27] Take this lyric excerpt from the beginning of T. Rex's "Bang a Gong (Get it on)" (1971):

> "Well you're dirty and sweet
> Clad in black don't look back and I love you
> You're dirty and sweet, oh yeah
> Well you're slim and you're weak
> You've got the teeth of the hydra upon you
> You're dirty, sweet and you're my girl
> Get it on, bang a gong, get it on..."[28]

Aside from the incoherency and nonsensicalness of the lyrics, the woman described, who isn't even allowed the category of woman, for she is described as a dirty and sweet 'girl', is presented as slim and weak and about to be devoured by a water monster. But the White male rocker is also telling her he loves her, that he, as he fantasizes himself as this water monster, is about to 'get it on' and have sex with her. And they'll bang a gong because, isn't that going to be so great? That isn't a horrifying image at all. I guess that's why there isn't any mention of the woman's agency, pleasure, power, or even consent in the lyrics. Yes, I am accessing sarcasm here.

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[27] Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender & Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 195.
[28] T. Rex, "Bang a Gong (Get It On)," Marc Bolan, Fly (UK), Reprise (US), Electric Warrior, 1971, glam rock.

And then sixteen years later, “Welcome to the Jungle” was created by Guns N’ Roses.[29] Here’s an excerpt from the lyrics, that about twenty years later, a group of fifteen-year-old girls were dancing too for an audience, without question:

> “...Welcome to the jungle, we take it day by day
> If you want it you're gonna bleed but it's the price to pay
> And you're a very sexy girl, very hard to please
> You can taste the bright lights, but you won't get there for free
> In the jungle, welcome to the jungle
> Feel my, my, my serpentine
> Uh, I, I want to hear you scream...”[30]

The imagery in these lyrics is violent and threatening. The lyrics equate the White male rocker’s penis to something that is serpent-like, demanding that the woman feels it within her body, while also telling her that she will bleed, as if it is her responsibility to make a sacrifice of her body through this sex act. The jungle is a metaphor for the White male body, through which the woman is a passive receiver of sex, without any agency for her own pleasure or personal safety. Somehow, about two decades later, a group of fifteen-year-old girls were dancing to this song and its horrendous lyrics. And somehow, I thought it was awesome. Somehow, I didn’t even hear the words lyrics or notice their misogyny.

But it’s not just a ‘somehow.’ As a feminist, I look at structures or systems functioning with people, and ask what is holding the structure together or propping it up, and how could power be operating. I know that these lyrics were not produced, performed, or circulated, without various forms of power dynamics. I had also been asking myself a similar question about my queer identity, while I was searching for the confidence to affirm my queerness to myself and others, and also trying to understand why I hadn't become Queer self-aware until my late twenties.

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[29] Guns N’ Roses, “Welcome To The Jungle,” Geffen, Appetite for Destruction, 1987, glam metal.

[30] Guns N’ Roses, “Welcome To The Jungle,” Ibid.

There are power dynamics that were a part of this in my external and internal worlds. Through my gender studies research, I found Judith Butler's work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* The work offered feminism a way of thinking about homogenized depictions of gender expression and sexuality. It offered me a way of drawing connections between the White male power narrative in the lyrics of 80s glam rock; and the internal heteronormative power dynamic that was operating within myself:

> "This is the predicament produced by a matrix that accounts for all desire for women by subjects of whatever sex or gender as originating in a masculine, heterosexual position. The libido-as-masculine is the source from which all possible sexuality is presumed to come."[31]

The heterosexual matrix that Butler is describing, is where sexual desire is assumed to come from a masculine position, and a person's sex and gender originates from the position of heterosexuality. In "Welcome to the Jungle," the female body is only sexually receptive to the heterosexual male libido.

As a symptom of 1980s glam rock production, "Welcome To The Jungle" thrives within the heterosexual matrix. The desire the White male rocker expresses for a woman, or as he calls her, a "very sexy girl," is constructed to come from a homogenized masculine, heterosexual position. The notion of femininity that these lyrics prescribe, attaches that femininity to a woman's body, and reinforces stereotypes of femininity, in service of the White-male masculine position.

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[31] Judith Butler, "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix," in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 2007), 72.

Analyzing the lyrics of glam rock with Butler's heterosexual matrix theory connected me back to my own struggles with my Queer identity.[32] Engaging with the theory of the heterosexual matrix was a route to understanding the homogenizing of White male heterosexual constructions and its impact on notions of femininity, and the socialization of women's gender roles. Hegemonic constructions of femininity that were attached to the female body and the category of 'woman' were created in relation to, or in binary opposition with, heteromasculinity. An awareness of the heterosexual matrix was another route inward to understanding what womanhood can be, where I could continue forward defining my fluid and expansive Queer identity from within.

Image Systems

> "...I wilted to pressure from the label. 'Got to have a girl in the video, mate.'...For that moment, that became the ideal of rock videos…"[33]
>
> - Alvin Niven, Manager, Guns N' Roses

> "...We were like, what are you talking about? We're a rock band, get a hot chick and put us onstage. It was the era of big rock music. I wanted to make it."[34]
>
> - Kip Winger, Winger

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[32] Dr. Sydney Lewis, "Magical Black Femmes: Constructing Black Femininities" (Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, January - May 2020).

[33] 30. Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum, "I'd Like to Thank My Cheekbones," in *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Revolution (*New York: Dutton, 2011), 341.

[34] 30. Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum, Ibid., 347.

How is it that MTV captured its target audience through stereotyping of female and male identities? Nick Adams, Director of Programs for Transgender Media for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), states in the Netflix documentary Disclosure: “We are creatures who want to see our stories reflected back to us. Starting with cave paintings to 3D IMAX. We want to see ourselves reflected back to us in a story.”[35] Popular culture music videos encourage viewers to associate what they see performed “with desirable emotions and values” that they connect into their daily lives.[36] MTV’s concern was for the White middle-class audiences that were most likely to have access to the network, and within that their target was the White teenage male.

Young adults were viewing the style and implicit values of predominantly White female and male identities as constructed by 1980s MTV, while associating their self-esteem and positive emotional state with what the individuals in those music videos were embodying. The stereotypes of White women and men in these music videos are normalized as ‘popular’ or ‘cool’ to viewing audiences. The image systems of 1980s MTV portrayed embodiments of passive femininity and womanhood through mostly White women’s bodies, and that was broadcasted at a heavy rotation to millions of adolescent viewers. This audience consumed these stereotypes and representations of femininity, artificed as genuine, authentic, and ideal cultural expression, over everyday experiences of women from a variety of backgrounds.

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[35] Nick Adams in Disclosure, directed by Sam Feder, (June 2020; Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen (original title), Netflix, August 2020), Online streaming documentary.

[36] 1. Banks, Jack. “Constructing Video Dreams: Music Video in a Commercial Culture,” in *Monopoly Television: MTV’s Quest to Control the Music,* (Colorado: WestviewPress, 1996), 5.

Ideas about the way we see, our viewpoints, and our vision "have dominated many philosophical accounts of how knowledge is created at least since Plato's famous allegory of the cave."[37] English art critic John Berger considers "ways of seeing," where seeing is an act of choice, and the relation between ourselves and what we see is constant.[38] "Eyes are not passive instruments of seeing, they are actively organizing the world"[39] Our ways of seeing function as a production process for our knowledge.

The images in 1980s music videos do not operate in isolation, they function as a series, as parts of a whole system of popular media. When individual images of an action or occurrence are presented to an audience within a series of images, through a heavy rotation, within a homogenized popular culture, there is an erasure of boundaries for what is taken in as an image that can be harmful to a particular identity or group of people.[40] As points of inquiry for the harmful yet homogenized constructions of femininity in 1980s MTV music videos, I will analyze the music videos "Girls, Girls, Girls" (1987) by Mötley Crüe, and "Girls on Film" (1981) by Duran Duran.

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[37] Monika Rogowska-Stangret, "Situated Knowledges," last modified March 22, 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html.

[38] John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, and Richard Hollis, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1973).

[39] Monika Rogowska-Stangret, "Situated Knowledges," last modified March 22, 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html.

[40] *DREAMWORLDS 2: Desire, Sex, and Power in Music Video*, directed by Sut Jhally (1997; Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2002), DVD.

“Girls, Girls, Girls,” by Mötley Crüe (1987)

Mötley Crüe’s music video, “Girls, Girls, Girls”, features the all-White male band members as dominant figures perusing streets and strip clubs, while layering in repetitive images of White women performing as pole dancers and strippers. This research does not seek to discount or argue against pro-sexuality movements and empowered pole dance. It focuses on the objectification of women whose performances as strippers were devised to serve the entertainment of the White male MTV market. In an interview discussing the production of the music video, director Wayne Isham states:

> I’d never been a strip club guy. But hanging out with Motley, I became a strip club guy. And they wanted to shoot “Girls, Girls, Girls” in a strip club. So I went to every strip club in LA and scouted locations...Pole dancing was new, so we found a girl who knew pole dance. At a certain point though, we realized the strippers couldn’t really dance, so we had to hire professional dancers who could actually move in time to the song…[41]

Isham’s crude testimony speaks to the dominant ideology of MTV’s White male rock and roll culture. Women were used in the production of music videos as commodities. They were only as useful as the sexualized entertainment their bodies could provide the network’s target audience. The only roles the women perform in “Girls, Girls, Girls" are that of strippers and pole dancers on top of a stage, inside of cages, or in a dressing room, for a White male audience.

The opening image of “Girls, Girls, Girls” is a close-up camera shot of a White woman’s buttocks and legs wiggling from side to side, outfitted in fishnet stockings. The shot slowly zooms out to reveal that the woman is performing the role of a stripper inside of a club. The camera then cuts to the Mötley Crüe band members, fully clothed in layers of black leather, riding their motorcycles to the strip club. Once the band arrives at the club, we see quick cuts of film that show the band's aggressive movements to occupy space, including the flashing of a switch-blade knife to claim their front row seats at the club, the cheering on of almost naked or topless women from an all-White male audience, and Motley Crüe making physical contact with strippers and pole dancers as they please, on the stage and in their dressing room. The movement of the women strippers involves performative gyrating motions of the pelvis, flipping of the hair, releasing the head back as they arch their backs, crawling on hands and knees towards the audience, and sliding up and down poles.

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[41] 30. Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum, “I’d Like to Thank My Cheekbones,” in *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Revolution (*New York: Dutton, 2011), 342-43.

As the video progresses, Mötley Crüe continues traveling to different strip clubs where we see more women dancing topless, crawling, and gyrating very close to the band members.[42] Images of strippers dancing and performing are delivered drive-by style, to match the journey that the band takes on their motorcycles from club to club, easily accessing women who will perform for their desires. The performances of the stripper or pole dancer is to the obvious satisfaction of Mötley Crüe's White male gaze, and the targeted White male voyeurism of MTV's audience. The bodies and performative movements of the women are set up to be seen the way that Mötley Crüe sees them, as White, as desirable, and for the benefit of hegemonic heterosexual White male desire.

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[42] Mötley Crüe. "Girls, Girls, Girls." *Elektra Records and MTV*, YouTube video, 4:34. Apr. 13, 1987**.** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2XdmyBtCRQ. Accessed 23 Nov. 2018.

When we see the women's bodies, the camera's framing and angles, accompanied by specific lighting design, focuses the audience's eye towards their legs, pelvis', buttocks, and breasts. These areas of the body are accentuated by string bikini bottoms, tight-fitting leotards, and ripped fishnet stockings. The makeup, lighting design, and quick camera shots of the many women makes it appear as though all of the strippers and pole dancers are White women. Any of the women with a complexion that is not obviously identifiable as White, or hair that isn't blonde or brown, are featured with extra lighting and less closeups of their body or facial features. While performing, the women do not occupy much of the space around them, even when in a larger stage space. They arch their backs, bend backwards over chairs, tilt back their heads, suggestively squatting with their thighs open, caressing their hair and their bodies, often while making eye contact with Motley Crüe band members. The White male band members take up as much of the street and club space as they please, including the women's dressing room. The eye contact the women make with the band while performing their roles gives up the space of their performance and their bodies' expressions. The stripper's performance is not her own, it is for the White male spectator's eye and pleasure.

In isolation from the MTV and 1980s glamour, the images of "Girls, Girls, Girls" are degrading to women, deny women agency, and homogenize a performance of White femininity and womanhood. They also portray physically aggressive and intimidating behaviors of White men and their masculinity to dominate and take control over women's bodies. However, these images are operating through an entire series of images within the music video, where viewers see Mötley Crüe voraciously enjoying themselves decorated in the popular glam metal aesthetics of the time. Their expressions of White masculinity and dominance over women is celebrated with aesthetics and theatricality. The many images of the female and male bodies are retained by the audience through a continuum of negative images to positive images. Consequently, the meaning of one expression of femininity is derived from an entire system of expressions, within a specific sociopolitical power structure where women are objectified, controlled, and dominated. Through the seeing of these images within the entire system of images operating in the music video, the frequency of the video's rotation on MTV, and the frequency of rotation of videos with similar imagery, these images of femininity and women become normalized.

"Girls, Girls, Girls" visually portrays two distinctly different sets of textual signs and symbols for White male leisure activity and White feminine cultural expression. The latter embodies submission, decoration, entertainment, and limited access to space. The former represents dominance, privilege and power. Mötley Crüe has privileged access to the streets, transportation, and spaces where women are contained for them. The women of the video are only seen performing inside of these spaces, their environment confined to that which services the male spectator. "Girls, Girls, Girls" demonstrates an example of how 1980s MTV music videos produced constructs of femininity and female stereotypes that are in the service of White men and homogenized heterosexual male desire. The video is also a site for analysis of the 'gender bending' aesthetics of the glam rock and glam metal genres that maintain a male-to-female hierarchy. Masculinity, and the heroic masculinity of the rock icon is attached to the White male body. Femininity that has been linked to White and female and is appropriated to the White male bodies through stylization such as long hair and eye liner. This application of feminine aesthetics only further elevated the White male power of Mötley Crüe, continuing their appeal to MTV's target audience, while continuing to objectify women's bodies.

"Girls on Film," by Duran Duran (1981)

Another example of MTV's image systems and their constructions of femininity involves Duran Duran, an all-White male, new wave band from the United Kingdom.[43] They topped the United States Billboard charts in the 1980s. "Girls on Film" was the title and music video of Duran Duran's third single. It was originally released on July 13th, 1981 in the United Kingdom.[44] One month later, MTV launched, and "Girls on Film" received heavy airplay through MTV programming. The version of the music video played by MTV is highly censored in comparison to the original, which was banned by the UK's BBC network. In an interview about the production of "Girls on Film", lead band member John Taylor states:

> There's no plot to 'Girls on Film'. The only plot was to set up some sexy scenes with girls. You don't need a plot to make a cool video. You just need something that catches the eye, that's sexy or amusing. Sometimes it's enough just to have style."[45]

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[43] Here, "new wave band" is in reference to the bands that emerged in connection with the 1970s and 1980s rock and roll genres. They often included influences from pop music and electronic sounds.

[44] Duran Duran. "Girls on Film." *Shepperton Studios and MTV* YouTube video, 3:24. 1981. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCjMZMxNr-0. Accessed 9 Nov. 2018.

[45] Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum, "Girls Sliding on Poles," in *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Revolution* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 70-71.

The women in the music video perform the roles of a masseuse, a model, a cowgirl whose ‘horse’ is the body of a Black male performer (he carries her on his back piggy-back style), and entertainment dancers. All of the women in this video are White. Almost all of the men are White.

The beginning of the music video opens with Duran Duran performing on an illuminated platform stage. For the entire duration of the video, the band remains in the elevated stage space, their performance enhanced with lighting and camera shots of 1980s glam aesthetics. All band members are fully clothed from top to bottom. They wear grey and white jackets over striped shirts, and long white flare-style jeans. They are also fashioned with the iconic David Bowie glam rock hairstyles, accompanied by bandanas and scarves. We see the band performing for only a few moments at a time throughout the music video. The movements of the band members are simple, connected with the rhythm of their instruments and song lyrics. There are moments of bouncing to the beat of the music; one member bounces side to side as he plays the tambourine. There is a subtle rocking and reverberation in the lead singer’s body, seen mostly through the torso and shoulders. The physicality of the band members’ bodies performs a sensibility of ‘cool,’ matched with stylish costume and lighting design, and quick-cut camera shots. The performance and design elements set us up with the all-White male band’s superiority and center’s their identities within the video.

When the women of the music video appear, the camera zooms in for a closer visual of their bodies and faces. Almost all of the women’s costuming reveals most of their bodies, especially the hips, buttocks, and legs. Their movement consists mainly of walking, posing, lying on their backs, giving a massage, riding as if on a horse, strutting, flimsy dancing, or falling. In one scene, a White woman performing the role of a model, saunters down a catwalk bridge, as the camera angle draws the viewer's eye towards her arched lower back, elongated legs, and swinging hips. Suddenly, and for no identifiable reason, the woman falls into a kiddy-pool, that is at the end of the catwalk. She remains lying in the pool, appearing helpless, until a White male performing the role of a lifeguard arrives. The lifeguard proceeds to give her a notably sexualized version of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, including a satisfied look from the lifeguard towards the camera. The model comes back to life, without any struggle or regurgitation of water, and begins to passionately kiss the lifeguard.

At the end of the video, several White women are dancing with male partners, who are all White, with the exception of one Black man who is featured performing theatrical dance steps and lifting one of the White women into the air with glee. The women dancing, who appear to be groupies of Duran Duran’s, take up very little space with their movements, mostly wiggling their torsos and loosely swinging their arms to the beat of the music. At times the White women are bumped, or clumsily caressed by the White male dancers. Keeping up with the marketing strategies of MTV, a White teenage male appears at the end of the video, and one of the White dancing women begins hugging and caressing him close to her body, performing an enthusiasm for his presence on the scene. The teenager’s facial expression shows visible excitement and pleasure. Featured only through the recurring motifs of service roles and entertainment, the White female bodies of “Girls on Film” are fully objectified, and depicted as fragile, baseless caricatures of women. Their femininity is attached to a White female body, functioning as performative entertainment for the White male desire and audiences.

He Probably Loves Mötley Crüe

"Do you teach here?" the older White man asked me. I was working the check-in table for an event, the "TDPS Alumni Mixer & Scholarship Reception" at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.[46] Guests included people from the TDPS Board of Visitors, alumni, and individuals who were likely to give money to the program. He had picked up his tickets with his older White friends, but was lingering, leaning forward over the table toward myself and my friend as we were working. We were both young White graduate student women. "Yes, I'm teaching a ballet class this semester." I answered. "Oh, so do you teach any of those combination classes, like ballet and pole dancing?" he asked with a smirk and a meddling tone. It was more than apparent to me, from his tone, his embodiment of White male permission and spatial occupancy, and the smirk on his face, that he was not referring to the competitive, empowered pole dancing that many women practice and perform today, with ferocious agency and body autonomy. "No, we don't offer combination classes here." I said insipidly.

After making another unsuccessful attempt to engage us, the man continued to the main event activities. My friend and I laughed it off and continued with our work. I didn't get the man's name, and I never cared to. It was a good reminder that while I was researching feminism and gender studies, and excited about my work with rock and roll and MTV, White male misogyny is never too far away in my own daily life. As feminist scholar Sara Ahmed says, "A significant step for the feminist movement is to recognize what has not ended."[47]

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[46] "TDPS Alumni Mixer & Scholarship Reception," for the School of Theatre, Dance, & Performance Studies, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. February 21, 2020.

I wondered with annoyance, *did our program really invite this guy? Is this someone who our program gets any money from?* I had recently applied for a TDPS Board of Visitors scholarship for summer study opportunities. In that application, I specifically noted the women and Queer identifying people that I wanted to use the scholarship funds to study with at a professional-level dance festival. Thinking that this man might have any connection to that scholarship money or be representative of a group of individuals that may be providing money for our program, I thought to myself, *that application was probably a waste of my time.*

At the time, I didn't know the entire makeup of the TDPS Board of Visitors, or who was involved in their scholarship decisions.[48] However, that interaction left me questioning the money attached to the Board and to TDPS funding. I questioned if events such as that one were meant to entertain and uphold some kind of cash flow from individuals like this sexist White male. I was exploring how White male misogyny was operating in MTV and rock and roll. In my focus on that, I'd lost sight of the fact that I'm within an institutional system that historically has privileged the White heterosexual cismale and their sense of power and autonomy.

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[47] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.
[48] University of Maryland, School of Theatre, Dance, & Performance Studies Board of Visitors: https://tdps.umd.edu/board-of-visitors.

Noted Arguments

A limitation I have in this research is that I was not alive in the 1980s, and therefore cannot know what was behind the personal choices of the women to perform in MTV music videos of the time. What is overwhelmingly apparent in the music videos themselves, and in the testimony of individuals who held power positions with the MTV network and rock and roll industry, is the use of White women and the construction of White femininity to appeal to White male adolescent audiences.

The repetition of these images of women and expressions of femininity was pervasive in MTV media then and still is in media now. There are feminist arguments such as sex-positive feminism, that discuss how the performances of women in the domains of pole dancing, pornography, burlesque shows, and striptease culture, are exhibitions of the choice and agency women have to express their sexuality, and the right to experience pleasure in all aspects of their lives.[49] The 1980s marked a new sociocultural chapter of sex-positive feminism, where freedom of sexual expression and seeing women as "sexual subjects in their own right" was viewed as an essential part of radical to women's freedom.[50] However, the roles of women in 1980s MTV video performances were constructed to service the pleasure of White male band members, within a homogenized, patriarchal, heterosexual framework. The performances of women in these contexts did not center their bodily pleasure, portray agency or complexity, or empower narratives of women of color and women of the LGBTQ+ community. The women in the sexualized scenarios of MTV's videos were objectified for the capitalist benefit of a White male-dominated media network.

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[49] Kerry Griffiths, Femininity, Feminism and Recreational Pole Dancing (New York & Canada: Routledge, 2016), 19-23.

[50] Elisa Glick, "Sex Positive: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Politics of Transgression," Feminist Review 64, (2000): 19–45.

There is also variety of scholarly discourse that supports the ways in which MTV played a positive role in the career of female musicians who faced various forms of systematic gender discrimination and bias in the music industry.[51] Examples of these musicians include Pat Benatar, Tina Turner, and Madonna. It has been argued that the music videos of these women were extensions of female empowerment and supported women's liberation. The trajectory of these artists' careers through MTV media, did expose and defy "socially constructed limitations on girls who want to have fun."[52] The music and performance of Turner, Benatar, and Madonna inspired, and continues to inspire girls and women on a global scale.
Still, the prominence of White male rockers, far surpasses the number of White women and women of color in leading performances on MTV. The network promoted a few women's careers, but ultimately objectified women, creating problematic stereotypes of womanhood and femininity. The White male was still the aggrandized and heroic rocker, while the network divisively inscribed femininity onto White female bodies, fostering a framework that normalized harmful stereotypes of women's gender roles.

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[51] Lewis, Lisa A. "MTV's Industrial Imperatives," in *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 3-6.

[52] Lewis, Lisa A. "MTV's Industrial Imperatives," in *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 109-119.

Chapter 3: Seeing the Internalization

Christina Aguilera and Wrestling with Boys

"You can't have sleepovers with Ben anymore. And no more playing wrestling games either," my mother told me. "It's not appropriate for a girl and you're getting too old for it." I was eight, and my best friend Ben and I loved to reenact the wrestling we saw on WWE TV.[53] *Even though it wasn't stated outright, and I lacked the language for it, I could understand through how I felt that my mother was referring to something about my girlness, Ben's boyness, and sexuality. What I was being told didn't match up with how I felt about my friendship with Ben or my choices with my body. He was my best friend, we had fun together, and I experienced so much joy and laughter when we hung out.*

Sometime after that, I looked at the Christina Aguilera poster hanging up in my bedroom. I saw the imprint of my lips where I had kissed the poster after putting on bright red lipstick. I used to kiss her every night before I went to bed. Suddenly, fear and shame spread up through my stomach and down my back. Something was wrong, or bad. With the poster, or with me, or both. I ripped it down and soon replaced it with a poster of the Backstreet Boys.

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[53] WWE Network, World Wrestling Entertainment Inc., professional wrestling entertainment channel.

Back Attitudes

The back attitude balance. There was something about the action and positioning of the movement, it's White cispatriarchal aesthetic and archetype pre-determined for centuries by choreographers, that connected me to a feeling of isolation. It was powerfully moving when Ballez creator Katy Pyle, while teaching their ballet class, encouraged us to take the form "that was for so long performed for someone else's desire" and work with it for our own desires.[54] I am still, in the present moment of writing this thesis, curious about my personal connection between the back attitude balance and a sense of isolation. Feelings of discomfort, pleasure, fear, strength, uncertainty, and pride all mix together when I execute the movement.

In my creative process for my MFA dance thesis concert, *Responsive Wild*, I played with repetition of stepping into a back attitude balance, facing my downstage diagonal.[55] I would repeat this at least twenty-three times, and then allow myself to lose count, or stop, or transition to another movement sequence. For years in my training and performance, I had executed back attitude turns and balances for the desire and pleasure of somebody else, to fulfill someone else's goals or needs, rather than my own. The choreography of these back attitude balances was a form of defiance, of resistance, of a demand for the audience to look at the vigorous physical work that the balance requires.

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[54] Katy Pyle, Pro-level Ballez Class. April 2020. "Ballez Creator Katy Pyle is a genderqueer lesbian dancer and choreographer who began Ballez in 2011 to explore their complicated relationship to the cishetero patriarchal form of ballet, and to make space for their own, and their communities', presence within it." https://www.ballez.org.

[55] *Responsive Wild*, Choreography: Krissy Harris, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park. November 19 & 20, 2020. For this balance, either my right or left leg was crossed in front and worked with as my balancing leg. Either my right or left leg was crossed behind in a back attitude position. Croisé back attitude balance is the hegemonic ballet terminology for this movement in dominant Western and Eurocentric pedagogy.

When it came to the performance event of *Responsive Wild* in November of 2020, I had a different physicality and timing to this balance sequence than when I started working with it in 2019. Instead of the work opening with the back attitude balance repetitions, they were performed in the middle of the opening scene, after a short section of improvisational movement that played with swooping, circular body movements. I hit each balance at a faster speed with less suspension at the top. I pulled myself out of the problem of the back attitude balance repetition, by dissolving out of the back attitude form and balance.

My arm movements dissolved from ballet fourth position placement, into long, fluid, overhead swooping reaches across the center line in front of and over the top of my body, as I began to travel around the stage space. I shifted from pushing my body upwards and down onto a balance point facing my front diagonal, to accessing spatial pulls through the diagonals of my upper body, while motivating my lower body forward and through the stage space. The discomfort, pleasure, fear, strength, uncertainty, and pride of this movement idea was still ever-present. The movement was a way of being inside of questions: questions of my performance, of my identity, memories with the ballet form, and of why I was continuing this repetition of isolation for months on end.

It wasn’t only the repetition of choreographic choices and movement physicality that I was continuing. I continued to circle back to ideas about the heteronormative White male gaze and the representations of women in 1980s MTV. I had jumped off from my original question of *what is womanhood?* I became more intrigued and curious about how ‘woman’ is constructed, and what powers decide how we think of and see ‘women’ in our Western, U.S., patriarchal, capitalist, society. Engaging with feminist theory would continue to circle me back to the landscape of rock and roll in 1980s MTV.

The Belly of the Monster in AC/DC and Def Leppard

> “This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and the late White, one of the many nasty tones of the word "objectivity" to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies, that is, here, in the belly of the monster, in the United States in the late 1980s.”[56]
>
> — Donna Haraway

In her work, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, feminist scholar Donna Haraway, identified and gave a form to the sociopolitical landscape of the United States in the 1980s. This ‘belly of the monster’ depicts a White cispatriarchal dominance that was normalized and homogenized.[57] I was struck with intrigue for Haraway’s metaphor, as it connected to the representations of women and femininity I continued to uncover in 1980s MTV culture. There, the monster’s belly was at the buffet for sexism and misogyny, that linked femininity to woman, White, and heterosexual.

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[56] Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Feminist Studies 14, no. 3 (1988): 581.

[57] While I am focusing on the 1980s here, I am not arguing that it is the only time, in the past or the future relative to the 1980s, that this White, male, cispatriarchal, domination occurs. It is outside of the scope of my research to analyze every decade of US history for this landscape.

A component of my rehearsal methodology for *Responsive Wild* was playing with the lyrics of popular 1980s rock songs as pieces of text. I focused in on the hard rock and glam metal arenas for this, where I continued to find depictions of women in these lyrics as inactive, heterosexual sex-objects, and femininity that was attached to the female body and passivity. I experimented with ways of isolating specific lyrics with a goal of exposing and calling attention to their misogyny. We worked with microphones and forms of deadpan word delivery.

I guided us to imagine that we each saw a beautiful woman we desired and decided that these lyrics were exactly what should be said to her, to express our feelings of love or lust. I continued playing with ways of emphasizing words and tone of voice, and whether or not there was any 'umph' behind each word, as it would have been in the song's performance. Ultimately the two song lyrics incorporated into the performance were AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long," and Def Leppard's "Pour Some Sugar On Me." I stripped away the hard rock instrumentals, the glorified White male bodies, the arena performance setting, the elevated stage, and the 80s stylized costumes, make up, and lights.

"You Shook Me All Night Long," by AC/DC (1980)

In the third scene of *Responsive Wild*, the stage lights brighten from a midnight-in-the-woods setting, as the familiar-but-not-so-familiar music of AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long" begins to play.[58] A tree branch lowers from the ceiling, where myself and my fellow dancers grab our mics from. The tree branch rises back up, and we take our positions downstage left in a triangle formation, facing the downstage right corner. The opening instrumentals of "You Shook Me All Night Long" begin to wrap up, and just as we are about to hear lead vocalist Brian Johnson sing the first verse, the music cuts out. Performer Maggie Laszewski, continues with the lyrics, speaking them into her microphone. Her dry, plain, and blunt delivery of the lyrics was an intentional counter and oppositional affectation to AC/DC's performance of the song:

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[58] AC/DC, "You Shook Me All Night Long," Angus Young, Malcolm Young, Brian Johnson, Atlantic, Back in Black, 1980, hard rock.

> "She was a fast machine, she kept her motor clean
> She was the best damn woman that I ever seen
> She had the sightless eyes, telling me no lies
> Knocking me out with those American thighs
> Taking more than her share, had me fighting for air
> She told me to come, but I was already there
> 'Cause the walls start shaking, the Earth was quaking
> My mind was aching and we were making it…"[59]

Performer Hana Huie and I joined in for the chorus lines, with the same counter-dynamic affectation as Maggie, while holding the same musical timing of the lyrics with our speaking of the words: "And you shook me all night long. Yeah, you shook me all night long."[60] The isolated version of the lyrics disrupted the many elements of production that had elevated the song to popularity. This delivery of the lyrics made space for the words to be heard, with the goal of pointing out their misogyny and White maleness. The stark interruption of the music track, followed by the deadpan reciting of the lyrics, created a dissonance within the performative moment. It disrupted the trajectory of the hard rock track and its lyrics.

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[59] AC/DC, "You Shook Me All Night Long," Ibid., as performed in *Responsive Wild* by Krissy Harris, Hana Huie, and Maggie Laszewski, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park, November 19 and 20, 2020.

[60] Ibid.

"You Shook Me All Night Long" is a site where the depths of Haraway's monster comes alive. The words "she had sightless eyes, telling me no lies" suggests a woman that is there purely for the White male rocker's consumption.[61] It conveys an emptiness and a lack of desire or vision for the woman's own desires or needs. Equating the woman's body to "a fast machine" that keeps "her motor clean," literally describes her as a piece of service machinery.[62] The phrase "knocking me out with those American thighs" specifies a nationality yet is vague in racial and ethnic description. Given the context, where AC/DC was a band of White-male rockers, performing heterosexuality, and working for the entertainment of the White-male fan base of MTV, the "American thighs" mentioned in these lyrics are those of a White woman.[63] The lack of specification of race or ethnicity in this lyric allows Whiteness to function as an assumed dominant and centered identity.

This lyric was another point of connection to Haraway's *Situated Knowledges*, where the words operated from an unmarked position of Whiteness maleness. The Whiteness of the woman's thighs is unmarked by race in word, while simultaneously being marked in word as American, where the contextual signs all point to Whiteness. A racist position is subverted while sexism is exposed, through the categorization the White male as dominant, and White woman as subservient. The lyrics of "You Shook

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[61] AC/DC, "You Shook Me All Night Long," Angus Young, Malcolm Young, Brian Johnson, Atlantic, Back in Black, 1980, hard rock.

[62] AC/DC, "You Shook Me All Night Long," Ibid.

[63] AC/DC, "You Shook Me All Night Long," Angus Young, Malcolm Young, Brian Johnson, Atlantic, Back in Black, 1980, hard rock.

Me All Night Long" homogenize a sexist White femininity, in the racist, White male-dominant, 1980s belly of the monster.

"Pour Some Sugar On Me," by Def Leppard (1987)

In the third-to-last scene of *Responsive Wild*, I applied same process used for the performance of "You Shook Me All Night Long" to dancer Hana Huie's performance of Def Leppard's "Pour Some Sugar On Me."[64] The lyrics were isolated, and the iconography of Def Leppard interrupted, by Hana's lone speaking of the lyrics into a microphone. The opening of the song track was played as Laszewski and I ran towards each other, jumped into the air, and chest bumped before exiting to the edges of the stage space. The track's instrumentals revved up for the first verse of the lyrics and the music once again cut out, as Hana began speaking the lyric's words.

Similar to the delivery of "You Shook Me All Night Long," Huie bluntly spoke the words of the lyrics into the microphone, still following the original musical timing of the song. As they continued, isolated footage of the women in "Girls, Girls, Girls" was projected across the back wall of the stage space. The footage was displaced from the image systems of the original music video, just as the lyrics from "Pour Some Sugar On Me" were isolated in Huie's delivery of them.

As a design element, the word 'sugar' was projected onto the stage floor, in neon yellow typography, along the diagonal from upstage right to downstage left where Huie was standing.[65] This choice was made to highlight "sugar" as a subversively sexist metaphor for femininity, wherein the female body and female sexuality is transactional, consumable, and in service of someone else's satisfaction.

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[64] Def Leppard, "Pour Some Sugar on Me," Joe Elliott, Rober John Lange, Phil Collen, Steve Clark, Rick Savage, Mercury, Hysteria, 1987 (UK); 1988 (US), glam metal.

For the purposes of the performance of Responsive Wild, only specific excerpts of the lyrics were spoken. Here, I will analyze the performed lyrics and a few more lines of the original lyric verses:

> Step inside, walk this way
> You and me babe, hey hey...
> Crazy little woman in a one man show
> Mirror queen, mannequin, rhythm of love…
> Sometime, anytime, sugar me sweet
> Little miss innocent sugar me, yeah, yeah...
> You got the peaches, I got the cream
> Sweet to taste, saccharine
> 'Cause I'm hot (hot), say what, sticky sweet
> From my head (head), my head, to my feet
> Do you take sugar? One lump or two?
> Take a bottle (take a bottle), shake it up (shake it up)
> Break the bubble (break it up), break it up...
> Pour some sugar on me
> Ooh, in the name of love
> Pour some sugar on me
> C'mon, fire me up
> Pour your sugar on me
> Oh, I can't get enough
> I'm hot, sticky sweet
> From my head to my feet, yeah…[66]

I see an all too clear picture of Haraway's 'belly of the monster' within these lyrics. From Def Leppard's music video of the song, featuring an all-White audience and close up shots of White women's faces, along with the known cultural practices of MTV at the time this song was created, it is more than arguable that it is a White woman or 'queen' that they are describing in the lyrics.[67] The monster's appetite is satisfied again through the tethering of femininity to White, woman, and sweetness. Linked to the image words of 'mannequin,' 'sugar,' 'sweet,' and 'peaches, 'a White woman and her sexuality are depicted from a heterosexual White-male dominant position. These words also speak to the consuming of the White female body to serve the satisfaction of the White male body.

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[65] Taylor Verrett (Projections Designer), Zavier Augustus Lee Taylor, Jacob Hughes (Assistant Projections Designers), *Responsive Wild,* The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park, November 19 and 20, 2020.

[66] Def Leppard, "Pour Some Sugar on Me," Joe Elliott, Rober John Lange, Phil Collen, Steve Clark, Rick Savage, Mercury, Hysteria, 1987 (UK); 1988 (US), glam metal.

The opening lyrics of the song: "Step inside, walk this way… You and me babe…"[68] immediately set up the White male rockers of Def Leppard, and by extension, all White men, as the dominant, commanding group within the song's narrative. "Crazy little woman in a one man show" conveys the image of a White woman who is small and inept, confined to the White male experience of pleasure and entertainment.[69] "Mirror queen," "mannequin," and "little miss innocent" portrays a White female identity that is decorative, baseless, and superficial.[70] "You got the peaches, I got the cream. Sweet to taste, saccharine […] Do you take sugar? One lump or two?" positions the White male body and its satisfaction as desirable in excess.[71] These words also function as a metaphor for the male body's sexual experience and ejaculation.

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[67] Def Leppard, "Pour Some Sugar on Me," YouTube, originally recorded in February 1988, directed by Wayne Isham, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UIB9Y4OFPs. This music video is one of two that were created for "Pour Some Sugar on Me." The version I'm referencing for this research is the second version, created for American MTV. The first version was filmed in Dublin, Ireland, that features the band playing inside of an uninhabited home, while a White woman, playing the role of a construction worker, demolishes the house with a wrecking ball (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrZRpXoKoFQ).

[68] Def Leppard, "Pour Some Sugar on Me," Joe Elliott, Rober John Lange, Phil Collen, Steve Clark, Rick Savage, Mercury, Hysteria, 1987 (UK); 1988 (US), glam metal.

[69] Def Leppard, Ibid.

[70] Def Leppard, Ibid.

There is a complete absence of any description, imagery, or metaphor of the experience of the woman's body, her satisfaction, pleasure, and physical experience. This works to disempower female identity and body autonomy. "Take a bottle, shake it up… Break the bubble, break it up… Pour some sugar on me" goes back to the commanding of a White woman by a White man to fulfill a service roll.[72] Sugar is also a consumable good, and its use here implies the consumption of a White woman's body. The lyrics of "Pour Some Sugar On Me" are void of a woman's agency in her physical body and sexuality. There is an assumed heterosexuality and Whiteness of the woman in the lyrics, operating as a form of power for the White male rocker and White male body. In "Pour Some Sugar On Me," Haraway's ' belly of the monster' thrives.

From Slamming Pillows to Slamming Skirts

Following the Covid-19 pandemic and the confusing and devastating loss of social interaction, physical contact, and live dance experiences, the slamming of pillows was recommended to me by my acupuncturist Melinda Rolph, through a Zoom telehealth appointment.[73] As described by my acupuncturist, banging and slamming a pillow on a mattress or related surface was derived from Qigong practices.[74] It recognizes emotional energy and the flow of our body's energy as vital to all of our human processes, and integral to our daily functions. By slamming a pillow onto a surface such as a mattress or couch, the energy of the side and back body, referred to informally as the 'flanks' is cleared and replenished.

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[71] Def Leppard, Ibid.
[72] Def Leppard, Ibid.
[73] Melinda Rolph, L.Ac, Inner Strength Acupuncture & Wellness. Meeting April 10, 2020.

The 'flanks' include the area of the back body that houses our liver, kidneys, gallbladder, and adrenal glands. These organs process our emotions related to stress, such as anger, frustration, and grief. These emotions can get 'stuck' inside of their home organs, leading to stress, chronic pain, and disease. Rolph explained to me that in her work, this practice is often recommended to mothers, who are often in situations where they have to "hold in their frustration for the sake of their child."[75] I found it both intriguing and ironic that I had the opposite experience growing up; I had to hold in, hold back, swallow down, stow away, be quiet, be 'nice,' wear the skirt, cross my legs, sit still, self soothe. The slamming of the pillow releases these 'stuck' emotions, and by extension the toxicity and disease that the accumulation of them can lead to.[76]

While engaging with my personal practice of pillow slamming, I observed the shifts in my energy as I experienced cathartic release. I was both fascinated and humored by the ecstatic slams and whips, and what they revealed to me about my internal world, and the interconnectedness of my emotions to my adrenal glands. I felt a visceral connection of my pillow slamming process to my choreographic research, and I wondered how I could bring it into the choreography of *Responsive Wild*. The image of repeating the same process with skirts kept revealing itself to me in my imagination. I trusted my connection to these ideas, my desire to build this process into my work, and the radically Queer process of it all. I activated the skirt as a vehicle for releasing anger and range, working with it as an ensnaring symbol of Western feminine identity.[77]

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[74] "What is Qigong?" National Qigong Association, accessed April 13, 2020, https://www.nqa.org/what-is-qigong-.

[75] Melinda Rolph, L.Ac., Zoom meeting and consultation, April 18, 2020.

[76] "Adrenal Glands," Johns Hopkins Medicine, accessed April 13, 2020, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/adrenal-glands.

The skirt was utilized as both a costume and a prop. As a costume piece, our skirts were worn over our pants for some sections of *Responsive Wild*. At different points in the performance, we would remove or put the skirts back on.[78] The skirts were not used to dress-up, look nice, sit still, and meet the expectations of Western hegemonic femininity. When worn in the performance of *Responsive Wild*, they were a part of boldly expressive actions that expanded throughout the dance space. The performance of the skirt, as both a costume piece and a slamming object, prioritized the energy, responses, actions, endurance, and expressive potential of the person engaging with it.

The explorations of the skirt slamming took on many variations and durations of experimentation with my dancers. The skirt slam practice also manifested in my choreography through the structuring of movement scores that focused on expansiveness through the back body; cathartic fluidity of movement quality; within set movement, coaching the imagery of shifting the organs as well as the placement of the bones that house them; and playing with ways of accessing catharsis.

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[77] Here, I am referencing the skirt within Western U.S. identities, to focus on the hegemonic tradition of skirts as representative of femininity and the female body. It is outside the scope of this thesis paper to delve into the global history of the skirt, and its purposes and functions across different cultures.

[78] Ashlynne Ludwig, *Responsive Wild* costume designer.

The exploration grew into wild and ridiculous sequences of skirt slamming. It became such a taxing and cathartic experience, that we couldn't continue to successfully move through other sections of *Responsive Wild*. Our fatigue and laughter would defeat us. As a response to this, I distilled the skirt slamming idea down to what served the arc of the performance and supported our endurance capabilities (which was significantly impacted by the wearing of masks that, at times, would limit our capacity for deep breathing and elevate our body's heat).

As my skirt slamming research expanded and contracted in the rehearsal space, I continued to dive further into feminist thought that supported my felt connection to the practice. I identified connections with my lived physical experience of girlhood, womanhood, and my suppressed Queer-self with the idea of feminist rage. In a podcast discussion through the Feminist Public Intellectuals Project, scholar Paula Moya discusses the experience of anger from a women-centric perspective:

> " [...] most women associate anger with powerlessness because that is how we experience it. And how we experience it is not a matter of our individual natures or qualities or feelings. It really points to this deep structural and systemic problem of power...without the knowledge and experience that anger brings—our societies cannot understand these experiences that we have as individuals or as communities and as a society."[79]

In our Western, American society, women are not socialized to experience or recognize their anger's potential for positive transformation or change. Rage and anger are rational, emotional responses to certain experiences of events and circumstances that fill the body with sensation. As Black lesbian writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde puts it, “Anger is loaded with information and energy.”[80] When suppressed, rage and anger feed toxicity in both the internal and social body. I consider rage and anger internal emotions that contain a wealth of knowledge that, when channeled, can lead to powerful change within an individual’s experience of their identity and within communities.

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[79] "Eesha Pandit and Paula Moya Discuss Activism and the Academy with Carla Kaplan and Suzanna Walters," *Ask a Feminist*, part of the Feminist Public Intellectuals Project. National Women's Studies Association Conference in San Francisco, California. November 16, 2019. Accessed on Feb 1, 2020. http://signsjournal.org/pandit-and-moya/.

I began to wonder about the action of the skirt slamming as a response to the limiting and suppressing convention of the skirt itself, and the rage and anger I felt in my own body as I navigated my questions of female identity and womanhood. I viewed the skirt as a symbol for restriction and suppression of a range of women’s identities and physical experiences. I also questioned the idea of the women’s skirt, and my perspective of it, within the action of the slamming: *Do I feel anger or resentment about the skirt, or is it what I associate with the skirt? I love dancing in the skirt designed for our Responsive Wild costumes but cannot stand wearing skirts otherwise. Why? Can I wear a skirt without gendering myself? Is there a way wearing a skirt could be empowering? Why am I so fascinated with this skirt slamming idea? When will I move on, and just make up my mind about the skirt?*

As I type these questions, I realize, they parallel the questioning I had around my Queer identity. I can reread them right in this moment and replace the concept of the skirt with the concept of being a Queer woman. Try rereading the questions above for yourself and replace ‘the skirt’ with ‘Queer identity,’ and see what you notice. For me, it hits the same points of sensation and frustration living inside of my gut.

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[80] Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” Women’s Studies Quarterly, Vol. 25, no. 1/2 (1997): 280.

I allowed these questions to cycle, with the intention of moving with the questions in performance. Our skirts were vigorously, repeatedly whipped and slammed onto pieces of cardboard, or onto the floor beneath us. The sound of the skirt was loud, disruptive, satisfying, and evoked audience laughter. When performed at the beginning of *Responsive Wild*, the skirt-whipping was accompanied by the music from Ludwig Minkus' *Paquita* ballet. The light tones of the music, and its associations with ballet and the White, weightless, ethereal female archetype, represented the confining, narrowing, sexist-racist descriptors and categories of women that exist throughout our Western world. The full bodied, full throttled, relentless, persistent, cathartic skirt-slamming contrasted the music and its classical representation. It was driven by the desire to release emotion, achieve a cathartic state of being, and revel in complete physical exhaustion.

Towards the end of *Responsive Wild*, the skirt slamming took on a slower and heavier timing. This rhythmic organization and repetition of the skirts was paired with the revealing of images of women in protest from around the world. These images included women protesting the war in Vietnam, present-day protests of gender-based violence in South American countries, protests of the Black Lives Matter movement, and recent organized protests of France's radical feminist group: FEMEN. The shift of intention, emotion, the timing of the skirt slamming, and its connection to these images, became a way of summoning and responding to those women in protest.

The skirt slam transitioned the emotions of anger and rage into weighted grief, loss, and a sense of dissonance. This section, in process and performance, became a meditation on the interconnectedness of sexism and racism, and where the resulting rage and anger can be a vehicle for uniting women through protest and resistance.[81] Exploring feminist rage became another site for continued research into women, gender, and sexuality studies. Gendered power dynamics and forms of women's oppression are still thriving across the United States and across the globe. I have shifted further into an exploration of how women may come to anger and rage through different life experiences, and how we can harness that rage and anger into movement that resists, shifts, and changes oppressive power structures. How can the releasing of our rage, through physical practice and group movements, lead to a purge of the oppressive constructs explicitly and subversively upheld in institutional systems?

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[81] Hess Love, "White Supremacy, Colonialism and Fatphobia are Inherently Linked to Each Other," Wear Your Voice Mag, November 21, 2018, https://wearyourvoicemag.com/white-supremacy-colonialism-fatphobia/.

Chapter 4: Redefining and Realigning

Tracing Connections: Physics Ideas

As a choreographic modality for *Responsive Wild*, I centered the body's sensations and desires as sources for rich knowledge production. I wanted to facilitate movement research with my solo dancing body and my dancers that promoted a nonhierarchical relationship with the internal/external body, and a heightened awareness of the body's impulses within movement. From working in my solo dancing body, I had found an excitement towards moving with a sense of weight, momentum, volume, and playing with gravity and inertia. A mode of physical practice research that I identified as home for these explorations was Contact Dance Improvisation.

Contact Dance Improvisation is also commonly referred to as Contact Improvisation (CI). Through training at the Contact Dance International Film Festival in Toronto, Canada during the early research stages for my thesis project, I came to value the insertion of the word "dance" into the form's title, as a way to signify when using the form specifically with dance performance, choreography, and practice.[82] Contact Dance Improvisation is an improvised dance form based upon communication amongst bodies that are in an engaged relationship with the physics laws that govern motion, such as gravity and inertia.[83] Through its engagement with physics concepts, Contact Dance Improvisation explores the body's sense of and application of: weight, momentum, inertia, volume, gravity, and rotation. Applying CDI as a modality facilitates a heightened awareness for my body's sensations, and the nonhierarchical relationship with my body that I was curious about.

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[82] The Contact Dance International Film Festival, Toronto, Canada, June 28- July 2, 2019, https://contactdancefilmfest.com.

It was the engagement with the physics ideas of CDI that ventured into my research and rehearsal process for *Responsive Wild.* Following that curiosity in both physical and written research, brought me to the companion relationship that physics and feminism have with each other. In her book *Primate Visions,* feminist scholar offers that "feminist and scientific discourses are critical projects built in order to destabilize and reimagine their methods and objects of knowledge, in complex power fields."[84] Applying general physics concepts as metaphors for movement was a way for me to generate a choreographic process where sensation-based movement and imagery was centered. I could continually generate, shift, and expand my choreography and methods through the experience of internal bodily sensations and the imagery of physics events.

I found a connection between rock and roll performance and physics ideas within my research. The calibration and recalibration of energy, and the explosive experimentation within performances of psychedelic rock and roll groups, such as Led Zeppelin and Jefferson Airplane, were like physics processes such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Those forms of energy and play embodied the kind of dancing I desired to explore and generate with my choreography and physicality. This was tethered into my desires to explore femininity from a physical place; to explore feminism through movement, imagery and sensation. I longed for highly physical sequences, where dancers could swoop, bounce, and boom through the space. I was looking for a way to cultivate the energy, boldness, vibrancy, and agency that I consider to be intrinsic to femininity.

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[83] Daniel Lepkoff, Contact Quarterly (contactquarterly.com). Access ongoing since 2017. https://contactquarterly.com/contact-improvisation/about/index.php.

[84] Donna Jeanne Haraway. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989) This specific excerpt is also found in *Angry Women* by Andrea Juno and V. Vale.

Working with physics metaphors also became significant in my collaboration with the *Responsive Wild* scenic, projection, lighting, costume, and sound designers. The concepts simmered into the performance setting with large off-kilter tree trunks, and suspended branches, and illustrious, evocative lighting concepts. The costume design incorporated fault lines that connected to the architecture of the trees and branches. Projection designs featured lightning bolts striking across the stage floor, and distorted and vibrant images of static. The excerpts of rock and roll music that I mixed into my sound design, incorporated sounds of electromagnetic waves and earthquake rumblings to the score. In both the choreographic process and design collaboration, working with physics as a metaphor for my artistic direction of *Responsive Wild* empowered an overall embracing of constant change and shift throughout the process, within the challenges and fatiguing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The physics concepts that I began working with in my research were: polarity, environmental gradients, and rotational kinematics and vibration. Polarity is a quality or condition inherent in a body that exhibits opposite properties or powers that are attracted toward a particular object or direction, in diametrical opposition.[85] Environmental gradients concern gradual change in abiotic elements through space and time, such as shifts of altitude, temperature, depth, ocean proximity, and naturally occurring boundary lines.[86] Rotational kinematics and dynamics, intersect and layer concepts of rigid body, rotational energy, and inertia.[87]

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, safety precautions including keeping six feet of distance from each other in rehearsals and performances, did not facilitate the use of physics ideas through CDI. I continued with the physics concepts as metaphors for movement with our individual dancing bodies. When working with set movement sequences that I had generated and taught to my dancers, I layered in the physics concepts through prompts, tasks, and structured improvisation scores. This worked to draw out emotional tones, qualitative dynamics, and sources of initiation unique to each dancer's body design.

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[85] Walker, Jearl, Halliday, David, and Resnick, Robert. *Fundamentals of Physics*. 9th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011.This definition is based on research around magnetic polarity, and heavily references the Merriam Webster Dictionary online. This definition serves my research in that it is broad and applies to the attribution of qualities and metaphor that are a part of my choreographic process. I am aware of the other definitions of polarity in chemistry or in reference to political climates.

[86] 2. V. Carter. "Environmental Gradients, Boundaries, and Buffers: An Overview," in *Wetlands: Environmental Gradients, Boundaries, and Buffers*, George Mulamoottil, Barry G. Warner, Edward A. McBean and University of Waterloo Wetlands Research Centre (Boca Raton: CRC, Lewis, 1996), 9-17.

[87] "Physics Exam Prep" Massachusetts Institute of Technology OpenCourseWare. Accessed November 1, 2019.https://ocw.mit.edu/high-school/physics/exam-prep/circular-motion-rotation/rotational-kinematics-dynamics/#Rigid%20Body%20Kinematics. I have come to this definition and application of these terms after analysis of definitions available through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology website, and which parts of those definitions connect to my choreographic process.

Environmental Gradients: A Shifting Identity

As our rehearsal process moved forward, and I continued to navigate increasing pandemic limitations, I closed in on environmental gradients as a key metaphor for movement generation. In *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* Haraway discusses the imagined boundaries wherein a person's sense of self and their interactions with their social world exist: "What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies."[88] Environmental gradients have boundaries that shift with time and conditions and are displaced from within a landscape. The imagery of environmental gradients, and their churning, unearthing, and shifting of interior and exterior boundaries, connected to the sensations and emotions that I was experiencing as I navigated a transforming and questioning identity.

I view identity in the sense that feminist scholar Paula Moya does, as "that which emerges in the interaction between how a person perceives herself and how she is perceived by others, and the ideological constructs that come from this."[89] Our identity, and our sense of it, is rooted in the sensations that we experience as we move through our lives and our sociocultural interactions. Our identity is built from a multitude of experiences, all of which can be broken down, deconstructed, pummeled over, detangled, recycled, or washed anew. Identity continually shifts and realigns itself throughout our lives. It informs how we make sense of our world, how we move through relationships, and embody ideas and actions. The internal landscape that I felt shifting, reorienting, sinking, and reforming, came alive through my choreographic process, and working with environmental gradients as metaphors.

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[88] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (Feminist Studies 14, no. 3, 1988), 575-99, quoted in Monika Rogowska-Stangret, "Situated Knowledges," last modified March 22, 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html.

[89] National Women's Studies Association Conference in San Francisco, California. *Ask a Feminist*, part of the Feminist Public Intellectuals Project. November 16, 2019. Accessed on Feb 1, 2020. "Ask a Feminist: Eesha Pandit and Paula Moya Discuss Activism and the Academy with Carla Kaplan and Suzanna Walters."

While researching this idea through movement with my dancers, I articulated my felt connection of environmental gradients to a shifting relationship with one’s identity. I often related this to emotions such as grief, anger, and frustration. I prompted us to think of the internal, emotional landscape of the body as catapulting and expanding through the external, performative landscape of the body. I guided us in locating houses of emotions within the body and sourced from those sites to generate movement. We researched these sites as sources for initiation that could drive us through the performance space. I focused us in on initiations that come from the middle and lower centers of the body and lowest center of gravity in the body: the pelvis, layers of abdominals, kidneys and adrenal glands, spine, and obliques.

To bring these explorations into cohesive sequences of choreography, I selected and set specific movements generated through these explorations. To take this research into an external, performative place, with the goal of achieving bold and vibrant performance quality (which also came to be known as ‘putting in the wild’), I tasked us with the following: interrupting our own sequences with vibration, shaking, sudden rerouting of bodily pathways, thwarting the body off its center, and playing with how the body’s weight can move generously and with a sense of abandon through the space.

During our exploration of the environmental gradient and identity metaphors, I scaffolded in tasks inspired by somatic poems I had written. These poems were generated through a deep listening practice to the sensations of grief, anger, and longing that were intertwined with my identity navigation. I read phrases from the poems and asked the dancers to create a movement response from that text. This process yielded movement that was anchored in physical sensations, desires, and emotions, while remaining unique to each dancer's choices, agency, and identity.

The metaphor of environmental gradients then further traversed into my methodology for coaching the performative choices of my dancers. I guided the dancers to connect to the bodily sensations and imagined ideas they experienced, and to lean into the present moment of how they were experiencing the physicality of the choreography. Like femininity and womanhood, the response to the movement, and the performance of the movement, could remain fluid and shifting.

Vibration: Searching for New Possibilities

The general, formal definition for vibration is the oscillation of the particles of an elastic body or medium, when disturbed or displaced from its equilibrium condition, and allowed to respond to the forces that tend to restore equilibrium."[90] In my solo research for *Responsive Wild*, the ideas of vibration, rumbling, and shaking continued to surface in my dancing body. Vibration became a source of reflexive questioning and inspiration for my choreography. The experience of vibration felt connected to the feelings of anxiety, frustration, and confusion that were circulating within me, as I tried to build my own ideas for being with femininity. Engaging with vibration through my entire body felt relieving, satisfying, and deliciously exhausting. The quaking and clashing of the experience felt familiar and almost comforting, even though the energy exertion of researching full-bodied vibration and shaking, and movement that could emerge from it, completely drained me.

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[90] A. B. Pippard, "General introduction - author to the reader," in The Physics of Vibration (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-6.

Through the engagement and performance of vibration, I could play with and challenge the sensational experience of disrupting my own equilibrium, and how forceful of a response I could have to this disruption. I enjoyed continuing the vibration to the point of spasmatic repetition, that exhaustion. I was trying to find a way to excavate and unearth a piece of myself that was buried deep down inside of me. I wanted to depart from fear. I wanted to, literally and metaphorically, shake off all of the emotions and confusion that at times felt like a gnawing rat inside of my body. I type these words now and find myself reflecting on how this research was so incredibly Queer. It fascinates me that even within that process, I still struggled to acknowledge and affirm myself as an LGBTQ+ person. I let the rat gnaw and tried to hide behind my research questions about femininity and womanhood.

When outside of the dance rehearsal space, I continued to infuse my research of vibration through women, gender, and sexuality studies, and came across the idea of yearning, as Black feminist scholar bell hooks describes it. In her collection of essays, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics,* feminist scholar bell hooks names yearning as a shared experience across cultures:

> "...as I looked for common passions, sentiments shared by folks across race, class, gender, and sexual practice, I was struck by the depths of longing in many of us...I began to 'hear' that longing for a freedom to control one's destiny… Surely our desire for radical social change is intimately linked with the desire to experience leaguer, erotic fulfillment, and a host of other passions."[91]

The words of hooks still resonated within my body and my creative process with vibrational movement. I reveled in the idea of longing and yearning for connection that could have such an intensity it could cause a rumble and a quaking in the body. My research with vibration and the highly physical dancing that could be connected to it was charged by hooks' words. I wondered about vibration as a manifestation of yearning, striving, and determination.

A component of vibration, the oscillation between physical states of harmony and chaos, became a theme that ran throughout *Responsive Wild.* I created movement scores that shifted between slow and controlled actions, where the body maintained connection to its vertical axis, and then swooping, bouncing, ang spiraling off of its vertical access. Throughout this process, I guided the dancers to conceptualize the vibration in two ways. One way was imagining the vibration as cadence; where, even the most cellular, subtle vibration, travels through layers of tissue, organs, muscle, bone, and out through and beyond the performer's kinespheres. The second was the imagined idea that each movement the dancer carried out had the ability to rearrange the architecture and structure of the space, as an earthquake or a hurricane would. What if our dancing could slash through, shatter, and collapse the walls and the ceilings of our performance arena? This imagery connected back to and collided with the imagery of environmental gradient shifting.

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[91] bell hooks, yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics. (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 12.

A Disrupted Research Question

The ideas I was forming around the metaphors of environmental gradients and vibration began to shift my original research question. I began to feel at odds with it. I disliked even saying the word womanhood out loud. It felt like seeing a close friend or family member who was ill. You know, when they start to look like someone you don't recognize? They've psychologically and physically shifted in some way. Asking myself what womanhood was, was like looking in a funhouse mirror at myself, all warped, twisted and exaggerated in reflection. I was even struggling to look at myself in a regular mirror. Something was shaking up and gauging through, and I was getting lost in all of it. Within this disorientation, two new questions began to surface: *How are women shaping ideas about women?* and *What do I mean by 'women'?*

Chapter 5: A Rediscovering and Realigning of Womanhood

Mistaken Rock and Roll History Lessons

When I was a junior in high school, I followed my love of rock and roll music into an elective social studies class on the history of rock and roll.[92] The course began with what the White male teacher identified as the start of rock and roll's history, The Beatles. There was mention of one or two female rock musicians such as Janis Joplin, but 'the history' of rock and roll in the U.S. was taught as: The Beatles, The Beach Boys, the Woodstock music festival, and The Rolling Stones. It would be another decade, and through funding as a Dance MFA graduate candidate, until the origins of rock and roll history, and the ways that Queer Black women who shaped it, would be revealed to me.[93] I wonder how knowledge about these women and their identities would have informed my relationship to rock and roll, and my relationship with myself. I wonder how knowing of their performance work and music lyrics would have intervened with the harmful and homophobic words of my former dance teacher.

Time Travel: Meeting the Queer Black Women of the Blues and Feminism

About a month before beginning graduate school, at the early edges of my Queer identity questioning, I discovered Audre Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic: Erotic as Power."[94] A copy was given to myself and fellow dancers in a workshop with dance artist Jasmine Hearn.[95]

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[92] I am not able to give the exact name or date of this class, due to lack of records from my high school. The class occurred sometime during the years of 2007 and 2009, at Plymouth South High School in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

[93] Dr. Sydney Lewis, "Magical Black Femmes: Constructing Black Femininities" (Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, January - May 2020).

> "As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters."[96]

Lorde's words provoked a questioning of the paradigms and dominant ideology of my experience living in a White male-dominated, patriarchal society, as a White girl and a White woman. There were innumerable times throughout my life where I had felt an omnipresent pressure to respond to the sensations, emotions, and desires housed within my body, by holding in, holding back, pushing down, and burying them away.

I started to question how much of my perceptions of myself and the category of 'woman' were relegated by a White-male dominant society; where mass media presents images of women's bodies and portrayals of women's identities to be palatable and consumable by men. "[...] we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic.”[97] How much experience of my life could I have been missing out on, by not fully trusting in my body's sensations as knowledge, as sources for questioning my external world; and in not looking at my body and its responses as producers of knowledge?

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[94] Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, originally a paper presented at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoke College, August 25, 1978.

[95] Jasmine Hearn, "fantasy feeling and the erotic," (MELT workshop at Movement Research, Danspace Project, New York, NY, July 2018).

[96] Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in Sister Outsider (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 49.

Lorde describes the ways that the erotic functions as joy and as a pathway for bringing women together, within a society that is set up to divide people by race, sex, gender, and class: “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.”[98] How many women were being kept from each other, from sharing in experiences and emotions, from supporting one another, by divisive White-male patriarchal constructs? My encounter with Lorde’s essay planted the seeds for questioning how I had come to conceive of my femininity, gender, and sexuality. How does womanhood and femininity come into being? To what extent was my relationship with womanhood and femininity defined by my external world?

I went on to read the full text of Lorde’s *Sister Outsider.*[99] Through my graduate elective course credits, I followed my desire to further steep myself in feminism and written works similar to Lorde’s; I enrolled in Dr. Sydney Lewis’ Women, Gender, and Sexuality course, “Magical Black Femmes: Constructing Black

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[97] Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in Sister Outsider (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 49.
[98] Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Ibid., 51.
[99] Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider (United States: Crossing Press, 1984).

Femininities."[100] There I discovered the work of a variety of Black Queer feminists, gender studies scholars, and critiques of hegemonic constructions of femininity.[101] This course is also where I was introduced to the Queer Black women of blues music.

In the performances and identities of these women were origin stories for rock and roll, feminism, and Queer identity. When I discovered the musicians Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and Bessie Smith, I thought to myself, *Damn! These blues women were the original feminists!* As Angela Davis puts it, "The blues women openly challenged the gender politics implicit in traditional cultural representations of marriage and heterosexual love relationships."[102] Popular rock music of the 1960s -1980s was dominated by White men, with music expressing heterosexual cisfemale-to-cismale relationships and desire. The blues women of the early 1900s post-abolition of slavery era, turned heteronormativity up onto its head. They exposed stereotypes of women's roles, and depicted women who were "tough, resilient, and independent women who were afraid neither of their own vulnerability nor of defending their right to be respected as autonomous human beings."[103]

The writings of Black and BIPOC femme identities that we analyzed and discussed in "Magical Black Femmes" inspired me. The authors boldly critiqued femme, butch, and lesbian identity when they were created in relation to a category, rather than through agency of the self. *Oh, and let me be clear here; I work with the term 'femme' as a Queer identity. I am not in alignment with individuals who use the term 'femme' with respect to an aesthetic style or performativity yet identify as heterosexual or 'straight.' Doing so works to erase LGBTQ+ history.* The works of these authors created a space for theory to facilitate inquiry that interrogates femininity, when it is being defined by a normative power outside of the body moving with it.[104] I found a space of refuge in this course; the Queer and feminist works we studied provided an imagined space, where my Queer and lesbian self could engage with the insights of these authors.

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[100] Dr. Sydney Lewis, "Magical Black Femmes: Constructing Black Femininities" (Harriet Tubman Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, January - May 2020).

[101] Cheryl Clarke, Patricia Hill Collins, Brittney Cooper, Angela Yvonne Davis, Jack Halberstam, bell hooks, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Nikki Lane, Dr. Sydney Lewis, Elizabeth Ruth, Hunter Ashleigh Shackelford, Sabrina Strings, Alice Walker.

[102] Davis, Angela Yvonne Davis, "I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama: Ideology, Sexuality, and Domesticity," in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998), 15.

[103] Davis, Angela Yvonne Davis, "I Used to Be Your Sweet Mama: Ideology, Sexuality, and Domesticity," in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998), 15.

In her essay, "Quantum Femme," writer Elizabeth Ruth paints an elusive and complex picture of femme identity:

> "She's a time traveler moving faster than the speed of sound, linking past, present, and future. Bridging across the galaxy between straight and bent. Between woman-loving and woman-hating. Between the pages of a book. She's here to remind the galaxy that it *is* possible to be more than one half of any duality, more than just an extension, an opposite: male/female. Rational/emotional. Butch/femme."[105]

I was in awe of the dynamic, expansive power that Ruth ascribed to a femme identity, femininity, and Queerness. Identity in Ruth's terms is a narrative, a memory, and a lifetime of experiences. It is interconnected with the past, present, and future, and it confounds patriarchal binaries of heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Engaging my research questions about identity with Ruth's writing brought up ways of imagining and being in my Queer femininity that was free from heteronormative binaries and ideals. Femininity and identity are action, energy, and engagement with the whole body. It is fluid and continually shifting. Both Ruth and Lorde’s writing are to me queer theory in action, provoking questions of the paradigms that shape dominant ideology and gendered constructs of womanhood. With a queer theory lens, I produce modes of questioning for how I am conceiving of womanhood and femininity, up against how hegemonic culture and society may be constructing and ascribing them.

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[104] Elizabeth Ruth, "Quantum Femme," in Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity, ed. Anna Camilleri, Chloë Tamara Brushwood Rose (United Kingdom: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003), 14.

[105] Elizabeth Ruth, "Quantum Femme," in Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity, ed. Anna Camilleri, Chloë Tamara Brushwood Rose (United Kingdom: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003), 16.

A Queer Body of Choreography

The Queer method of my choreographic process reveals itself in the ephemeral nature of the work, born out of my willingness to constantly shift, reorient, and reorganize my choreography in response to what my environment, my dancers, the sociopolitical circumstances we work within, and the dancing itself reveals to me. When I think of my methodology, I think of a collage process, where multiple images, ideas, questions, sounds, sensations, and emotions are brought together into my choreographic process. Rather than relying on pre-designed structures and methods of theoretical and choreographic disciplines to mimic, I center my body’s sensations, curiosities, and intuition, as guides of my process. Through a scavenger hunt and collaging of rock and roll performance, feminist and queer theories, and physics concepts, my Queer modes of working come together and fuse into various dance and design elements. These elements come not only from me, but from my dancers and collaborators, whose voices are central in my overall process.

Collaboration is the anchor for the effervescent and resilient disposition of my creative process and modes of performance direction.

In her essay "Femme Butch Feminist," writer and activist Jewelle Gomez discussed the poem "Althea and Flaxie" by Black feminist Cheryl Clarke. Gomez's response to Clarke's work pointed out the ways that "girls have been relentlessly and brutally channeled into the servitude of vanity [...] in order to maintain a focus on: 1) embracing the market; 2) pleasing men; and 3) stopping us from changing the world."[106] Gomez demonstrates the representations of women that work to organize us into strict gendered social categories, for the needs of male patriarchy and consumption. She goes on to say how Western society "made manacles out of lipstick, pantyhose, mini-skirts, and magazine covers" which was ever-present through the 1980s MTV media that I was researching, as well as in the dominant images and messages that I saw in media and daily social experiences.[107] Gomez also articulates how feminism "circled us back to the idea of informed choice."[108]

Agency is what Gomez is getting at, in both womanhood and the embodiment of femininity. Homogenous constructions of female identity in Western society diminish the complexity that every woman moves with and narrow the ways that women can exist and take up space. Gomez's work connected to my analysis of 1980s rock music video. In that space femininity was not emboldened with agency. The women were ubiquitously operating within a White male-centered divisiveness, where their femininity was defined for them. Weaving these ideas into my choreographic process, I check in with myself on how I am working with femininity in movement as an agent, as a chosen way of knowing and experiencing from within, as an active force. Femininity is its own entity; in its subject form, it is not created in relation to another category, body of performance, or group outside of the subject body.

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[106] Jewelle Gomez, "Femme Butch Feminist," in *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*, ed. Ivan Elizabeth Coyote, Zena Sharman,(United Kingdom: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011), 67-69.
[107] Jewelle Gomez, Ibid., 67-69.
[108] Ibid.

Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* offered a way of thinking about identity, where it "might be best described as a process with multiple sites for becoming and being."[109] I remember feeling a sweeping relief in reading these words, as I realized that identity was not something we inherently know and understand from a certain age, or by a certain age. Identity is a lived experience that continually unfolds and changes as we navigate our way through life. Taking Halberstam's theory further, if identity is a process and a space for becoming, then so too is femininity, womanhood, and queerness.

A New Discovery of Self

The work of Queer, feminist, and gender studies scholars is where I found a space to answers to the questions I had about myself and my personal history. They offered theoretical and imagined spaces where I could uncover pieces of my identity; where I could make sense of the notions of womanhood and femininity that I felt misaligned with. For years I had been struggling with accepting and affirming myself as a Queer/lesbian woman, because of varying degrees of shame, confusion and lack of resources. My research unveiled the misogynistic, heteronormative, and White-patriarchal ideology that keeps women from being empowered to center and trust in the body's knowledge, through desire, sensation, and internal responses to experiences.

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[109] Jack Halberstam, "An Introduction to Female Masculinity," in Female Masculinity (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 21.

Continuing my journey with the work of these scholars, writers, and activists, I arrived at a new version of my original question, and new insight: *How and where does womanhood come together within me?* Femininity is energy and action, Queer is my way of being, womanhood is a landscape of experiences. None of this is 'definition' or fixed, rather these are ways that I move through and engage with my life and my dancing-making.

Where are the Rest of the Rock and Roll Women?

A significant research source for *Responsive Wild* was the text *Angry Women* by V. Vale and Andrea Juno. I was captivated by the interviews with Diamanda Galás and Lydia Lunch, two radical, feminist, American female performance artists.[110] I went to my Spotify music app to find and listen to their music.[111] I found them both while searching their names individually, though there wasn't too much available on Lydia Lunch. Having full awareness at this point of the White-male dominance within rock and roll, I decided to try an experimental search. I typed into the Spotify search bar "greatest rock songs." The first playlist that popped up was titled "Greatest

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[110] Andrea Juno and V. Vale, *Angry Women*, ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale (New York: Juno Books, LLC, 2000).
[111] Spotify, https://www.spotify.com/us/home/.

Rock Songs of All Time" created in 2017.[112] It features 100 songs by artists such as Lynyrd Skynyrd, Queen, The Beatles, Ozzy Osbourne, and Jimi Hendrix. Every single song is by a male rock artist or rock group and, except for Hendrix, they are all White males. Yet almost every song on the playlist includes lyrics about women, femininity, and women's sexuality.

Another playlist, titled "100 Greatest Rock Songs Ever," followed the same pattern, with the exception of one song by The Cranberries, and one song by Evanescence.[113] Continue searching with "rock" in the title, and you will find the same trend through a variety of playlists such as "Rock Classics," "1960s Rock," "All Out 70s," and "Rock Icons."[114] With the exception of the inclusion of a Jimi Hendrix album cover, all of the cover photos of these playlists feature images of White male rockers, their albums, or their iconography. The cover photo of "Greatest Rock Hits" features the backside of a naked White woman with platinum blonde hair.[115] A cross with an arrowhead at the bottom of it is painted along the length of her spine; the arrowhead at the bottom is on top of her sacrum, and points directly at the opening of her buttocks. I did see the names of a few White women rock and roll artists and bands, such as Janis Joplin, Pat Benatar, or Joan Baez pop up for one or two songs within the playlists, but the results are overwhelmingly filled with the names of White male rock groups.

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[112] Spotify, s.v. "Greatest Rock Songs of All Time," last modified November 7, 2017, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1judQMRdp2ZD8FJK3oml6m?si=khxDKpYkSXSgqwS2_Q_Ubw.

[113] Spotify, s.v. "100 Greatest Rock Songs Ever," last modified December 18, 2017, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6my6DxXMJAp4w3YdvHIDAE?si=gb3zozOUQ_KdUWzwovzWtg.

[114] Spotify, s.v. "Rock Classics," last modified August 17, 2020, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DWXRqgorJj26U?si=PPPkFmacScSib-gCgI4s8w; Spotify, s.v. "1960s Rock," last modified January 18, 2018, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WUKbwZ593DEcc89V6rHl6?si=5qmRJIAvRYyfHqdHwNhKMQ; Spotify, s.v. "All Out 70s," last modified February 6, 2021, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DWTJ7xPn4vNaz?si=1SJuXyyIRA6bHNjZZsHg9Q; Spotify, s.v. "Rock Icons," last modified March 10, 2021, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5jNrphFqELVsvxDR3ZwSAx?si=qHvlyPFFR8yUbVZEWIBELw.

[115] Spotify, s.v. "Greatest Rock Hits," created March 29, 2016, last modified February 21, 2021, https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5tN2mia5oAezCN63H4odJa?si=RFQd969iRyGROJF07w4e4Q.

There are playlists featuring all female rock artists, such as “Women of Rock,” but they are separated out from the general and majority rock and roll genre playlists that came up through the search. I could only find female-identifying rock and roll artists, if I searched with their names or specific criteria. How ironic. As a Queer woman, my life experience has been parallel. I had to look around very intentionally and specifically for the signs that may present themselves that a woman I was encountering was in the LGBTQ+, that I was with a group where Queer womanhood could be comfortably talked about, or at the very least, that I could share my Queer and lesbian identity. If I want to attend a dance class or event where LGBTQ+ are actively and proactively included, or where at the very least there will be less referencing of gendered or heterosexual partnerships or lifestyles, I have to know of or search very specifically for such a class or dance artist.

A continuation of my Spotify playlist research experiment, I turned to the digital archives of Rolling Stone and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. In 2010, Rolling Stone published it’s “100 Greatest Artists” music list.[116] This included music groups outside of the rock and roll genre, but was composed mostly of artists within the rock genre. Of all 100 artists on the list, just seven were all-female groups or female artists. Just three of those seven were women of color. Only one of those women, Aretha Franklin, made it into the top ten. The top five of the 100 artists were all male, with one artist of color: 1) The Beatles, 2) Bob Dylan, 3) Elvis Presley, 4) The Rolling Stones, and 5) Chuck Berry. The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame has inducted 338 artists over twenty four years (1986-2020).[117] In 1986, its first official inauguration year, it inducted sixteen music artists, and all of them were men.[118] Eight of the Hall of Fame's induction years (1986, 1992, 1994, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006) did not include a single female artist or all-female rock group.[119] The average number of inductees is five to seven per year, and only one or two inductees is ever a woman or all-female group. After searching through all 338 inductees, I found 35 individual female artists or all-female rock groups that had been inducted.[120] I would also argue that, though it is the "Rock & Roll Hall of Fame," many of the women, such as Madonna and The Ronettes, were relegated to categories such as 'R&B,' pop, or

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[116] Rolling Stone, “100 Greatest Artists: The Beatles, Eminem and more of the best of the best,”
last modified December 3, 2010. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/100-greatest-artists-147446/bob-marley-2-29640/

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[117] "Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Inductees," Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, accessed December 21, 2020. https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/a-z

[118] Eight, or half of the sixteen artists were white male artists, the other half were black male artists. "Class of 1986" Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, accessed December 21, 2020. https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/classes/1986

[119] Some inductee groups, such as The Mamas & the Papas, Ike & Tina Turner, ABBA, and Blondie, did include a female artist in the group. However, they were not working individually or honored without predominantly male members included.

[120] Aretha Franklin (1987), The Supremes (1988), Bessie Smith (1989), Carole King, Ma Rainey (1990), Lavern Baker (1991), Etta James, Dinah Washington (1993), Janis Joplin, Martha and the Vandellas (1995), Gladys Knight and The Shirelles (1996), Mahalia Jackson Joni Mitchell (1997), Dusty Springfield (1999), Billie Holiday (2000), Brenda Lee (2002), Patti Smith, The Ronettes (2007), Madonna (2008), Wanda Jackson (2009), Cynthia Weil, Ellie Greenwich (2010), Darlene Love (2011), Laura Nyro (2012), Heart, Donna Summer (2013), Linda Ronstadt (2014), Joan Jett & The Blackhearts (2015), Joan Baez (2017), Nina Simone, Sister Rosetta Tharpe (2018), Janet Jackson (2019), Stevie Nicks (2019), Whitney Houston (2020)

'soul,' which has connections to rock and roll, but not the sole category of rock music.

I tried out listening to "The Birth of American Music," episode three of a podcast series part of The New York Times's "1619 Project."[121] The "1619 Project" project was created to commemorate and observe the 400th anniversary of American slavery. In "The Birth of American Music" episode, the narrator discusses American music's history of appropriation of Black music and performance.[122] However, there is not one mention of Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her fellow pioneering women of rock and roll.[123] The title of the podcast includes the word 'birth' and yet it only focuses on the men of American rock history. It was and still is infuriating to me. This fury and its sensations were important to my research though. It was taking me on a detour that expanded my beginning research questions around womanhood and representations of femininity. I was now asking *where are the women of rock and roll?* And by 'women' I mean the feminist women, the Queer women, the women pushing back; the movement makers, the tide-changers, and the time-stoppers, and the radical redefiners. By 'where' I mean what ideology was operating to keep them so out of the mainstream view; it seemed to me that they were still hidden away, only found by very specific research tracings and discourse traversing. *Why?*

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[121] Nikole Hannah-Jones, Mary Elliott, Jazmine Hughes, and Jake Silverstein. 2019. "*The 1619 Project,"* New York Times Magazine, last reviewed September 4, 2019, published August 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html

[122] Wesley Morris and Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Episode 3: The Birth of American Music," in "The 1619 Project," New York Times Magazine. Last reviewed September 6, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/06/podcasts/1619-black-american-music-appropriation.html

[123] Evelyn McDonnell, Women Who Rock: Bessie to Beyonce. Girl Groups to Riot Grrrl (United States: Running Press, 2018).

Sister Rosetta Tharpe's "Rock Me" (1938)

Sister Rosetta Tharpe is the pioneer of the electric guitar, and a trailblazer for rock roll music. Tharpe is often referred to as "The Godmother of Rock and Roll."[124] For me, this title may give audiences a sense of Tharpe's influence in rock and roll, however it isn't representative enough of her work and legacy, especially in comparison to the constructed superhero archetypes I see of White-male rocker personas. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's acknowledgement: "the first guitar heroine of rock & roll," is a far better title, though the Hall still failed to induct her until 2018.[125] Elvis Presley is considered "The King of Rock and Roll."[126] Janis Joplin is considered "The First Lady of Rock and Roll."[127] Both Presley and Joplin stole their music from Willie Mae (Big Mama) Thornton. Presley and his label took "Hound Dog" and became famous for it; Joplin and her label took "Ball and Chain."[128] Tharpe was undoubtedly a founding innovator of rock and roll music. We would not have the rock and roll music we have today if not for her work. So, let's just call Tharpe for what she truly was, the Heroine of Rock and Roll.

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[124] Jessica Diaz-Hurtado, "Forebears: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, The Godmother Of Rock 'N' Roll," last modified August 24, 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/08/24/544226085/forebears-sister-rosetta-tharpe-the-godmother-of-rock-n-roll.

[125] "Sister Rosetta Tharpe," Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/sister-rosetta-tharpe.

[126] "Elvis Presley," Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/elvis-presley.

[127] "Janis Joplin - First Lady of Rock and Roll," Biography.com, https://www.biography.com/video/janis-joplin-first-lady-of-rock-and-roll-12674627794

[128] Willie Mae (Big Mama) Thornton, "Hound Dog," recorded August 13, 1952, Peacock Recording Co., Songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller; Willie Mae (Big Mama) Thornton, "Ball and Chain," released 1968, Arhoolie Records.

I consider Sister Rosetta Tharpe to be not only a heroine and original rock and roll star, but also an original feminist. Tharpe was a Queer Black woman, and her music, lyrics, and lifestyle challenged normative ideals of Black women, performers, and White-male dominated rock and roll culture. She trail-blazed and pioneered ways of creating and generating music with the electric guitar. Her music inventions bridged connections across the genres of gospel, folk, blues, and jazz.

Tharpe's music and lyrics inspired my movement research in the rehearsal process of *Responsive Wild.* The soft crackling of the old album recording sound, with Tharpe's powerful, vibrant voice, awakened a sense of nostalgia and longing within me. My imagination time traveled with her music. Moving to her song "Rock Me" felt like fitting into a warm hug of a long-lost friend, a long-wanted mother, a long-dreamt romance; there was comfort, carry, and swing; there was a beautiful Queer ephemerality to it.[129] A femininity was alive in the song, that was Tharpe's own, produced, embodied, and shared by Tharpe herself. This femininity was sheer contrast to the femininity of the White hetero-male rock lyrics and imagery of "You Shook Me All Night Long" or "Pour Some Sugar On Me."

I wondered what would happen if I centered Tharpe's "Rock Me" within my dance making process. What happens when I center the voice of a Queer Black woman, and listen, and allow her music to guide me? Guided by my sensations and emotions, I continued following my Queer methodology and trusted in my body's connection to "Rock Me" and Tharpe. There was a duet that I had been building with myself and performer Maggie Laszewski for *Responsive Wild.* The process of it started with movement research; we continued applying physics as metaphors for movement, and I layered in the idea of the exposure and subversion of our internal and external bodily landscapes. I gave both of us the task of researching these two ideas, and then generating short sequences of choreography from that research. As I shaped out our duet section, themes of longing, searching, distance, and nostalgia emerged. I viewed the movement as occurring through two individuals, who were having similar experiences with longing and questioning, at different points in time.

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[129] Sister Rosetta Tharpe, "Rock Me," recorded 1938, Decca Records, 10-inch record.

I experimented with Maggie and I running our duet choreography to "Rock Me" without too much 'fixing' of the material. We did this without pre-attaching steps and movements to specific counts or timing of the song. Maggie and I danced while staying emotionally and energetically connected to each other, feeling out the Tharpe's music as we moved. It felt as if we were mapping out a small world within the overarching world of *Responsive Wild*. I felt an instant connection of the choreography and our performance energy to the music and lyrics of "Rock Me." That same feeling of warm, comforting hug came up as I both danced and observed the choreography in action. The femininities of our bodies in performance and Tharpe's "Rock Me" were tethered together as fluid energies. The duet performance became a meditation on femininity, longing, and distance.

A Brief Note

An important note I will share here on the access to and use of Tharpe's music: Through the institutional support for *Responsive Wild's* performance, the individual rights for Tharpe's "Rock Me" were paid for by the University of Maryland's The School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies. Any negotiation for the music rights to all the music used in *Responsive Wild* was taken care of by our production manager Jennifer Schwartz.[130]

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[130] Jennifer Schwartz, Production Manager, School of Theatre, Dance, & Performance Studies faculty and staff, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. I communicated with Jennifer Schwartz (a.k.a Jenn) throughout the production of *Responsive Wild*, and specifically about the music pieces I would use. She secured the rights to the music for our live, online stream performance through a blanket music rights contract of TDPS and The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

Chapter 6: Community Moves

Coming Together

Making dances is about building community. When I'm choreographing a work, I am bringing people together around a specific performance vision. This process is personal, social, historical, and political. There is a collectivity of people, ideas, voices, and responses inherent to the creation of a dance work. In her book *Living a Feminist Life*, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed states that a collective "is what does not stand still but creates and is created by movement."[131] In *Responsive Wild*, the movement of the collective was: My body of choreographic work, the dancers, the work of the production team; the lighting, sound, costume, projection, and scenic design work; and the communication amongst all of those involved around the performance.

It is a system of concentric circles, where individuals are planning, generating, revising, and organizing together to accomplish a fantastic, one-of-a-kind dance show. As the choreographer and artistic director of a dance production in a global pandemic, I moved with the questions of: How can I factor into my process the constant negotiation of personal health and safety risks, limitations, and anxieties of a global pandemic? What do my dancers need from my leadership so that they can fully engage and remain highly physical within the choreographic process? What of the production and administrative side do I need to keep in mind as I manage my choreographic vision? What are the best ways to listen, respond, and collaborate with my design team?

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[131] Sara Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life (United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.

Responsive Wild asked an enormous amount of my dancers creatively, physically, and personally. It demanded high physicality, risk taking, being up for constant change, working with the dense and confounding stress of COVID-19, a willingness to work with improvisation, and a willingness to work with collaborative movement generation that would have to face ruthless editing. I ask my dancers to dive into my process with me, to follow me into the 'unknown' of dance making, where my guides were my sensations, imagination, curiosities, and desires. Though excited to dance and perform when so many dance spaces and venues were closed, we also had to become comfortable moving with the confusion and grief that followed us into the space. We were each dealing with varying degrees of loss, isolation, and stark disruption in our lives.

I was creating a live Dance MFA thesis work within a global pandemic and would be one of only two choreographers in the history of the University of Maryland who would choreograph and direct a fully produced, live dance performance.[132] My mentors and the majority of our program's personnel were apart of university activities and any thesis processes through Zoom, while I generated not only new choreography but an entirely new way of being in creative process, on site.[133] I was carving out a new path for live choreographic process, without anyone to give advice from previous experience with a global pandemic and such strenuous circumstances. Those of us in the dance and theatre spaces were like rock stars. We were making dance history. For *Responsive Wild* to work, community, collaboration, and teamwork had to be centered.

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[132] Rose Xinran Qi was my fellow dance MFA colleague, the choreographer and artistic director for *Ghost Bride*. Both *Responsive Wild* and *Ghost Bride* performed live at the University of Maryland School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies on November 19th and 20th, 2020 following all pandemic safety precautions, and live streamed to outside audiences.

[133] Zoom is a virtual video conferencing app. Its technology was widely accessed across the globe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. https://zoom.us.

Dancers and Misogyny in Practice

Through my experiences as a cisfemale identifying dancer in hegemonic Western and Eurocentric dance forms, I lived and saw the ways that women-identifying dancers are conditioned to give, and give, and give to a process. Our needs, concerns, and questions will take up too much time, pose a problem, or make us seem ‘difficult’ to work with. We are taught to follow systems and rules for dancing and social behaviors that will assure that the choreographer or teacher notices us, likes us, acknowledges our dedication; and awards us special performance roles or recognition in the dance space. ‘All attention is good attention,’ was a common phrase amongst my female identifying friends throughout my undergraduate dance years. Even negative and shaming comments meant you were being seen. The authority in the room ‘just wants you to be the best that you can be.’

Move! You cows! A White male-identifying choreographer barked at a group of us, as we travelled across the dance space in a rehearsal for a ballet work. I took classes as a young girl and young adult where my body was coached or sometimes forced into stretches and positions of discomfort; myself and fellow female-identifying dancers were picked on for aesthetic details or differences; or ridiculed in front of one another, to inspire competition for the main authority of the room's approval and favor. What is curious to me is the misogyny within all of this, yet it was exhibited by women-identifying teachers and choreographers I encountered, sometimes more than the male-identifying teachers and choreographers. What was this teaching me about femininity and womanhood?

Discovering Postmodern Dance — It's Like Rock and Roll [but that might not be a good thing]

In my early twenties, after moving to New York, I discovered postmodern dance and release-based movement practices.[134] I quickly fell in love with the physicality of these movement arenas, the celebration of the community experience in class, the methodologies that centered process and personal experience, and the emphasis on the body's sensations and desires as guides for movement choices. The spaces I ventured into as I followed my curiosity for postmodern dance forms were also where I started to meet artists that openly identified within the range of LGBTQ+ identities.

There was also more play on gender-bending aesthetics and clothing choices of individuals in these dance classes. Clothing style in postmodern dance forms was liberating for me. At the time, I saw the common dance outfits worn by postmodern dancers as being about comfortability in movement and body safety, as well as affordability of clothing, rather than showing off a body archetype or aesthetic. I was shifting away from the classical ballet, modern, and contemporary dance cannons that I had been conditioned to through following what was available, accessible, and known to me during college. Though I loved dancing, I often felt frustrated and 'misfit' in my identity, expression, and desires in classical forms. In the postmodern dance spaces I was coming into contact with, there was a sense of openness, community, and free-form choice making.

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[134] Here I am referring to the postmodern dance that emerged from predominantly White dancers and choreographers in the U.S in the 1960s, and focused on process over product, modes of improvisation, and considered the possibility for all movement to be dance movement. The work and practices of Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Nancy Stark Smith are connected with my working definition of postmodern dance practices.

Postmodern dance felt like what I imagined the 1960s and 1970s rock and roll music scene to be. In fact, many of the classes I attended worked with the folk and psychedelic rock genres that I was fascinated by and listened to regularly. In all of this, I was beginning to explore a relationship to my femininity through movement that was emboldened, daring, sensation-based, and hyper-playful. I was meeting many other women who enjoyed dancing in this way too, as it was also different from their experiences of Western classical dance training and curriculum. Many of these connections felt ecstatic and satisfying: the collective jamming sessions; groups of us getting together in whatever way was possible, to collaborate and perform work; performances in a variety of spaces and a variety of audience sizes; places of gathering to share experiences and resources; support and collective action for civil and human rights; celebrating individuality and fluidity in class, workshop, and rehearsal spaces. "Man, you dancers in New York are like the rock bands we grew up with," my mother said to me on a visit back home. "If there was a garage, they were playing in it. If there's a studio or a place for you to be making your dances, you're doing it!"

Yet, as I continued my journey with postmodern dance culture, I started to experience fleeting moments of a faint but sharp buzz. It would make noise in my shoulders, the back of my neck, and the pit of my stomach. It was similar to the buzz of a dentist's tools. You want to ignore it, but you can't deny it's presence or having to interact with it. For example, I began noticing the frequent use of the word 'family' by teachers and choreographers in spaces where they held authority. At first, the word and its use elicited a sense of connection, and a desire to return back to those specific dance spaces. However, as time went on, the more I heard it the more it started to bother me. *How are we a family when we all have to pay to be here?* I would wonder. *The person throwing out the word 'family' is the one who is profiting off of our money and participation.* The postmodern dance field's survival largely depends on the payment of its community members for classes, workshops, festivals, performances; it also often depends on free labor of individuals in projects, apprenticeships, and internships.

Fast-forward several years later to my thesis research in graduate school. I'm researching rock and roll, and I'm identifying parallel experiences within the postmodern dance culture I experienced and encountering problematic experiences for feminism. Rock and roll often exemplified a community in performance and progressive political ideals, but that community was dominated and structured by White men and heteromasculinity, and performances were predominantly occupied by White people. It didn't look like much of a different scene in the New York postmodern dance spaces I had been attending. Uh-oh.

Another point of scrutiny began to reveal itself upon reflection; in postmodern dance, the number of women I'd encountered competing for performance opportunities, teaching positions, funding for projects, or the mere possibility of a helpful professional connection, largely out-numbers that of men. Especially if you're a dancer starting out in the field, authority in the spheres of leading dance companies and choreographers often comes in the form of 'who you know,' and who knows you; what undergraduate or graduate program you attended, what classes you can afford to attend to be 'seen,' the internship or apprenticeship you're able to get (which in my experience is, again, often based off of who you know and who your friends are, which was often tied back to what college or classes you were able to attend) and there is still barely enough compensation to go around for dancers and dance organizations.

Feminism was challenging me to think about what phenomena could be operating to uphold a structure or group. Through my personal experience, reflection, and observation, I recognized that a major form of currency operating within the postmodern culture was social capital.[135] Like the thriving beauty industry in U.S. popular culture, the postmodern dance industry needs us to need it. I myself made several dances while living in Brooklyn, New York, where I couldn't afford to pay my dancers while having to pay for the rehearsal rental space. But the performance opportunity that the dancers would have was enough of a trade-off for where we were in our professional experiences, and what opportunities were available to us. My experiences within the postmodern dance scene flooded back to me through memories and connections with my research. I would fill with adrenaline and agitation as I engaged with feminism and rock and roll, while realizing the power dynamics encompassing my experiences in postmodern dance. “Feminist work is often memory work,” as feminist scholar Sara Ahmed so beautifully puts it.[136] The connections would rush through me in waves, as I questioned what I’d thought of as a spectacular community. *Is the community actually problematic?*

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[135] Lena Dominelli, Women and Community Action 3e: Local and Global Perspectives (United Kingdom: Policy Press, 2019), 41-43.

Questioning the Community’s Power

I remembered the times I had worked with White male choreographers, where the ‘just say yes’ mentality was normalized. One choreographer in particular, would often walk up to the group of us who were generating or rehearsing material, and ask us about trying out a movement idea. Before we could answer or have time to process a response, they immediately followed the question with a *just say yes!* The group of us he would say it to was composed almost entirely of female-identifying dancers, at least twenty to thirty years younger than him. The first time I experienced this abuse of social power and choreographer-to-dancer privilege, it brought up a burning sensation in the pit of my stomach. I also felt incredibly confused, because the *just say yes-ing* always followed a positive, joyous ‘community’ jam-like experience, and myself and others were aware that we had a choice to follow or disagree.

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[136] Sara Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life (United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2017), 22.

However, I didn’t activate my own agency, and neither did anyone else, though a few of us later discussed our opposition for the language. Was it because of the lack of time given to respond? Was it because of the majority of head nods and following of the rest of the group? Was it because I was a woman and he was a man? Was it because we were mostly White dancers in the space? Was it because I was afraid of losing an opportunity, a chance, or wasting my money to travel to and participate in the process? In the sensations of agitation, confusion, and guilt, of events such as these, feminism was finding me.[137]

Still, I had a long way to go before I would fully realize, make sense of, and figure out how to critically question the power dynamics in those dance spaces. At the time, dance for me was about joy, and I was excited to be in any class or rehearsal experience I had the opportunity to get to. I was blinded by the ‘community’ of postmodern dance, where I was finding friendships, creating connections, exploring queer expressions of femininity, and jamming out; I was drawn to the “star-systems” and glory of the postmodern dance companies and choreographers, similar to that which is embodied by rock and roll performance and iconography.[138]

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[137] Sara Ahmed, “Feminism is Sensational,” in Living a Feminist Life (United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2017), 21-42. In this chapter Ahmed considers feminism to “begin with sensation: a sense of things.” This directly connected to my research through the body of what feminism is, that it is rooted in personal experience with power dynamics and group politics; and that the internal experience of sensations and emotions someone has as a result of experiences can be a springboard for feminist action and intervention.

[138] Clare Hemmings, Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), 75.

The Community Demystified and Broken Down

At the peak of my excitement for the postmodern dance community and culture, I attended an event for professional dancers where I'd participate in various choreographic research and performance projects. I will share here, one specific and pivotal experience that occurred, though it was entangled within a web of similar experiences throughout my time there. In one of the performance processes, the two authorities in the room were a cisfemale-identifying choreographer and a cismale-identifying choreographer. From the community and collaboration elements that the event and choreographers themselves had promoted, I had thought this rehearsal space would be the epitome of community, connectivity, fluidity, and jamming. I also expected that the two choreographers wouldn't be working within a traditional gendered dance hierarchy, where the female typically assists the male; I'd assumed they were collaborating as co-choreographers.

However, as the process continued, I observed the female choreographer primarily doing the labor of the male choreographer's vision, through demonstration, movement generating, and organization of the cast. The male choreographer mostly observed us, and occasionally made remarks about our bodies in movement; after a movement sequence where our legs went into several fluid extensions, he commented on his desire to be on quaaludes while watching us. *This feels gross.* I thought to myself. However, I noticed the female choreographer laughing with him, and the outer unresponsiveness of the rest of the dancers in the room, so I pushed the moment out of my mind. I kept myself focused on the excitement of the project, and my opportunity to be a part of it.

As the process continued, I was astonished at how the female choreographer would continue to abide by the male choreographer’s authority, often nodding at his words, smiling at him, or speaking to him with enthusiasm and compassion. I never witnessed her challenging his methods, and I wondered if she didn’t see how they were possibly harmful to her. I observed my body’s fight-or-flight response to the gendered and sexist power dynamic between the two choreographers. This dynamic seemed to me to be loosely reflected in the dynamic of us as rehearsal participants. I experienced relationally aggressive behaviors such as gossip, side glances, eye rolling, or words of intimidation. *What the hell am I doing here?* I remember wondering, as I took a moment to step out to the side in one rehearsal, after being bullied by one of the women dancers.

I stood back to observe and try to make sense of the whole inner workings of the group. *Am I missing something?* I kept asking myself. There was a collective shrugging off through an ‘it's just dance’ and ‘that’s just the way they are’ mentality that we as dancers embraced. This did not feel like the ‘community’ or the ‘family’ that I was expecting. I still feel frustration and shame over not knowing how to better handle the situation. How did these gendered power dynamics become so normalized? And why did I feel that my only response could be to ignore it, or focus harder on my own dancing?

During one of our working days, I got lost in my own stress with the rehearsal environment and wasn’t sure of what our directions were. I attempted to follow and mirror the choices of the male-identifying dancer in front of me. Suddenly the music stopped, and the female choreographer yelled, “Krissy, what the hell are you doing?”

You're going in the completely wrong direction!" As she continued to mock me in front of my peers, the male choreographer just sat and stared. Humiliated, I escaped back into the work of the movement.

At the end of rehearsal, the female choreographer called me over to her; I thought that it was for a moment of coming together, but instead she berated me again for several minutes in front of the male choreographer. I desired to respond, but I was frozen. All I could feel was the tension of being so embarrassed and hurt. My body and mind had normalized experiences like this, throughout my childhood, adulthood, dance training, and professional career. I was also frozen by my own utter confusion and shock. The shock being that I was experiencing this where there had been such a performance and embracement of community, collaboration, familiality, and collectivity. I would later come to understand the normalization of these patterns from authorities within dance spaces that occurs across communities of dancers, from teacher-to-student and choreographer-to-performer power dynamics, are in fact abuses of power that can be emotional, psychological, or physical.[139]

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[139] Janine Cappello-Bryan, Matthew Eldridge, JoAnne Lafleche, Sue Porter, Rhonda Roberts, Bonnie Robson, Meg Saxby, Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health, "Concerned about Abuse and Harassment on Tour? Some Things to Think About," last modified in 2020, https://dance-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/page_uploads/Harassment%20paper%20Jan%202020.pdf; Jo-Anne La Flèche, Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health "Big little secrets: Traumatic Experiences in the Dance World," last modified in 2019, https://dance-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/page_uploads/Traumatic%20Experiences%20in%20the%20Dance%20World.pdf; Paula Thomson, Victoria S. Jaque, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Psychopathology in Dancers," Medical Problems of Performing Artists, Vol. 30, Number 3, (2015), 157-62.

To add to my humiliation, I later walked into a yoga class, where the female choreographer and several rehearsal participants were in attendance. As I sat down on my yoga mat, I witnessed the female choreographer making fun of me and reenacting her actions towards me, engaging several other dancers, as they laughed with her. *This is getting twisted,* I thought, as I tried to hide myself in a yoga pose. *Why are they doing this? Aren't they supposed to be an example for community and leadership?* The choreographer then looked towards me, saw that I'd overheard her, and came striding over. "I was just joking around with them," she said with a perfectly stereotypical feminine sugar-sweetness. To do what I felt I needed to do to protect myself, so that I could get through the remainder of my time and commitment to our rehearsals, I laughed along with her. *I think I've made a big mistake following this crowd,* I said to myself. *It's time for me to get the fuck away from all of this, before I turn into someone I don't want to be.* A few months later, I applied to graduate school to pursue my dance MFA degree.

In that experience, feminism found me like lightning splitting the earth. It found me in the disappointment, frustration, anger, and confusion that filled my body with sensation. I'd felt those sensations so many times before, but never thought I'd experience it there. Feminism found me when I realized that there were forms of power and group politics operating, that I wanted to intervene with but didn't know how to. It found me in my reflection of this experience with trusted friends and dance colleagues, and discovered it wasn't unique to their experiences in postmodern dance either. In fact, similar experiences had happened with a number of women-identifying dancers that I knew, with the same two choreographers, and specifically with the female choreographer.

Yet, from my point of view, there was hardly any challenge of or standing up to the problem. I wondered if the social capital and networking of the choreographers was so imbued that they could, in a sense, treat other people however it served them, or whomever was witnessing them. Were they holding enough power in the community that many dancers were simply accepting and tolerating the behavior, accepting it as part of the reality of postmodern dance culture? *Why and how was this all so normalized, and tolerated to such a high degree?* I realized my own mystification with postmodern dance. The liberating feelings of release and momentum that were a part of its physicality and group movement, the sense of connection and community, the awe of the heroic rock star performers on stages, and the community of people that gathered around them; none of it operated without the undisrupted power dynamics of the community.

As my mystification shattered over me, I felt I had arrived at an ending or a type of a death. A death of a part of myself, of relationships I had built, of a connection to a community that I had longed for and put years of time and labor into. Alternatively, it was actually the beginning of a new chapter for my dance research and my life. It was the kindling of what feminist scholar Monika Rogowska-Stangret calls a "feminist situated knowledge," a searching "for new, unexpected, unthought-of, and surprising forms of knowledge production."[140] It was what would lead me to venture further into gender and queer studies. I followed the sensations of anger, shame, and confusion to research into feminism and its relationship to group power dynamics. Here now, reflecting on my thesis work, I see clearly how vital this experience was for me to find my way into a new choreographic journey with feminism and my queer methodology, with women, gender, and sexuality studies, and with my Queer/lesbian identity.

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[140] Monika Rogowska-Stangret, "Situated Knowledges," last modified March 22, 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html.

Stepping into your identity means attending to your instincts and 'gut' sensations. "It might require you to give up on what otherwise seems to give you something; relationships, dreams; an idea of who it is that you are; an idea of who it is that you can be."[141] What feels unsettling, the tiny burning tap on your shoulder, or the hum in your chest that alerts you, is what needs to be listened to. Acknowledging what is causing the unsettling, and leaning into that knowledge, could change the way you exist in the world and the relationships you've had for years. That can be terrifying.

Reclaiming Community in Relationships and Practice

For my thesis research I was highly intentional in the ways I kept my leadership and artistic direction as far removed as possible from the cismale, patriarchal, sexist dogmas I'd experienced. While working in a global pandemic, when a life-threatening illness is circulating throughout our country, the last thing that my dancers or I needed is toxic stress or unamplified voices. We had a great deal of work that I wanted to accomplish. My dreams for *Responsive Wild* were big, but it would get done within a structure of feminist compassion. While creating and directing *Responsive Wild*, I took my experiences and worked with them as a mode of questioning. These questions operated as a guide for remaining sensitive to the power dynamics and group politics that will always exist in group processes, and the authority I carry into the space as a choreographer. *How am I thinking about the bodies and identities of individuals in the rehearsal and production process? How is my process supporting the needs of those bodies and identities, as I make performance demands of them? What ideas about femininity and women in leadership do I want to empower in my process?*

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[141] Sara Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life (United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2017), 28.

Rogowska-Stangret considers a feminist situated knowledge as that which enters into "power-sensitive conversation"[142] The dancing body is sensitive and reflective of the various social-cultural-political power relations that it operates inside of. The movement we produce in rehearsal is a way of situating the body and its performance, in the context of those power relations. The movement of the body that occurs within my rehearsal process is both a responsive expression and a form of knowledge to the environment and power dynamics of the room.

In *Responsive Wild,* I designed and played with improvisation scores that centered the dancers' experience of bodily sensations, action, and pleasure. From those scores, I shaped and set sequences of choreography, informed by the unique choices and movement qualities the dancers produced. Throughout the building and piecing together of choreographic sequences, I ensured space and time for the dancers to research the movement, while observing the pathways, choices, and risks they were taking. I looked for the ways in which their dynamic movement qualities, as they began to jump out in the repetition of material, could inform how I molded and solidified sections of the dance. When we moved together through set material, the 'unison' movement of the choreography was non-hierarchical. It was community movement that was about coming together through a shared experience of physicality and movement qualities.

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[142] Monika Rogowska-Stangret, "Situated Knowledges," last modified March 22, 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html.

I found that within my rehearsal process, my dancers needed space and time within our rehearsals to process and work with the choreography; to walk outside and breathe without a mask on; to take a break when moments of panic over the pandemic struck, to talk through schedules and emails that became overwhelming without in-person communication; to voice questions and share responses to what movements and sequences we were working with; to check in and rearrange rehearsal scheduling and timing as we navigated a semester of school work in a pandemic.

Sometimes my dancers benefited from a specific warm up led by me to get into their bodies for rehearsal; sometimes we needed to warm up individually while chatting and giggling; sometimes we needed to jam out to our favorite songs; sometimes we needed to start rehearsal running wildly through the space and slamming skirts to get out our frustration and stress. On a few occasions, it was necessary for me to acknowledge the fatigue that was present in our bodies, and that we could work productively at twenty to fifty percent of our full physicality. There were rehearsals that needed to be a walk-through or stumble-through of the choreography, so that our brains and bodies could have some time to process sequences. It was helpful in certain moments for us to collectively step back from the intensity of the movement and connect more to each other through conversation. My number one priority within *Responsive Wild*, was to center my dancers and their physical, mental, and emotional health. I wish that I could say that this idea wasn't radical.

Through all this, I got to know the ways in which my dancers can inform how our community builds and moves. I learned that, though it went against past guidance I'd received during meetings about my research, I didn't need to be more selfish about my research. I was determined to defy the idea of selfishness, while holding true to the exploration of my identity. Through my personal experience, I'd come to the conclusion that the dance world has enough selfish individuals, focused on their agendas and the "vanity-envy culture" and "competitive individualism, star systems, and hierarchies of privilege," that I could focus on generosity and learning, while establishing my own way of setting boundaries and demands.[143]

I can build a rehearsal and research community that works to make time and space for what my dancers may be carrying into the room with them. I can be clear about what we need to get done, the type of focus and energy that is required, while also factoring in what is voiced by my dancers as needed for their bodies and spirits. Working with a back-and-forth methodology of centering my voice and my ideas as the choreographer, then decentering myself to center my dancers, facilitates a process that amplifies voices, rather than putting them on mute. It creates a pathway for holistically healthy bodies in rehearsals, free from psychological or emotional stress caused by the rehearsal environment. As I'd witnessed first-hand in my family, and experienced it for myself, that kind of stress can lead to chronic fatigue, illness, and serious mental health issues.

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[143] Clare Hemmings, Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), 75.

I chose a radical queering of the choreographic processes to which I'd exposed myself to in U.S. American ballet and modern dance lineages. What happens when, instead of centering myself and my experiences throughout the entirety of a rehearsal and performance process, I intentionally center my dancers and collaborators? What happens when, rather than gathering around the choreographer, the rock star, the idea of performance notoriety, we gather around the creative idea? These questions are my modes of Queerly asking how care, compassion, and love for others can operate as powerfully for my choreography as my vision for the performance.

Conclusion

When I began the rehearsal process for *Responsive Wild* and the writing process for this thesis paper, I thought the two projects would be a culmination of my research. I thought I was on my way to an ending. As I moved through the last buck jumps of our closing show, and as I moved through the writing, I realized I'd only just opened a door. And the woods outside are wild. I have more memory work to do. I have more works of Queer and feminist scholars to engage with. I did find the radical women of 1960s, 70s, and 80s rock and roll, like Betty Davis and Patti Smith. I'm continuing to time travel, finding the rest of the Queer women too. Women, gender, and sexuality studies is a realm where my dance research has situated itself. It is a realm where I've been able to access healing, and to see the need for compassion and healing across many identities and communities.

My current projects are in both live dance performance and digital interdisciplinary art; *Frequency Machines* and *HERed*. They continue to explore femininity as an energetic force and expansive entity. I'm still looking at the popular media of MTV and the 1980s. Now, I'm considering the gendered power dynamics within the LGBTQ+ communities of that time. Why did gay men get the "Y.M.CA" as an anthem, while the Queer women and trans people of U.S American popular culture, were barely visible or represented? Working with feminism and Queerness as enduring and shifting agents of change; as anchors for how I consider and empower bodies and sources of knowledge through dance; I have arrived at a new lifetime of research.

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