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Eliza Krakower April 10, 2017

Between a Rock and a Jazz Hand: A Personal Journey of Movement Style and the Female Experience

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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During the progression of my dance journey at Emory over the past four years, I have experienced a myriad of emotions and questions around dance. From my foundation in classical ballet and jazz training during my youth, to the academic study of movement in the Emory dance department, I have embraced, questioned, doubted, and found power, acceptance, and expression through dance.

The purpose of this research is two-fold: 1) To investigate the process of morphing Fosse-inspired musical theatre jazz into contemporary modern dance, and 2) to query how various dance styles can be objectifying and/or empowering to women. As a part of my process, this exploration travels through an examination of several dance forms (contemporary modern dance, Gaga, Rockette precision jazz, and Fosse style jazz) and culminates with an original 20-minute work featuring a cast of seven dancers in the Emory Dance Program, including me. The work was performed in the Dance Studio at the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts on Friday, March 24th and Saturday, March 25th 2017. Through this process I have enhanced my understanding of my own insecurities and vulnerabilities, and I have worked tirelessly to face the difficult questions emerging from my exploration. Observations and analysis throughout the year-long process, combined with study of historical context, and reflections and feedback from the performance itself, have provided the framework for this paper.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I began this project to query my own embodied history, to discern how different types of movement can inhabit one body. Having struggled to reconcile inner conflicts between art and entertainment, between theater jazz and modern, between objectification and power, I longed for a creative path in which I could ponder these inquiries through movement. Without realizing it, the focus of this thesis has been in development since my youth. Over time, and with experience, the movement styles to which I am drawn have evolved, and my questions have become deeper and more challenging to address. Questions continued to emerge throughout the process of creating this work. As a result, the issues researched are all deeply personal and pertinent. This project explores how the process and product of manipulating movement affects the female experience.

II. NEW TEXTBOOKS

I did not come to Emory to dance. In fact, I specifically saw college as a time to begin to phase dance out of my life, to move onto more "serious" pursuits. I had grown up juggling dance and academics, always feeling tension between them and seeing each as a constant detractor and distraction from the other. Even as I was researching colleges, however, I wrestled with whether or not I was truly ready to give up dance. If I was honest with myself, deep down I felt a strong drive to follow dance as a career. I had the desire to be on New York City stages singing and dancing, and yet I found myself at a top university, about to let go of all that to study health. I questioned whether I should have gone to a school more specifically geared to the performing

arts, or if I should even have gone to college right after graduating high school at all. Was I wasting an opportunity to be a Radio City Rockette or Broadway performer in the way that I had dreamed of my whole life? I had spoken with faculty in the Emory dance department and observed a class when I came to visit, but after hearing the dispiriting news that Emory had a *modern* based dance program, I pretty quickly turned up my nose and wrote off the option of double majoring in human health and dance.

Modern was absolutely my least favorite of the fifteen dance classes I took each week in high school. It was the boring one. The one that I saw as unnecessarily abstract and felt went over my head. Several years, and many semesters of modern later, I now acknowledge the irony of my naiveté. Back then I did not have any interest in taking part in a dance form that seemed anathema to the kinds of movement to which I was drawn. I saw dance as a means to tell a story, and express myself, and I could do that in jazz and ballet. Modern confused me and seemed to purposefully conceal meaning from the audience. I felt it boasted a certain air of pretentiousness in which I was not interested in delving.

When I arrived on campus I felt defensive about my dance background. During my first year in Emory Dance there was very much of an "us vs. them" mentality amongst my freshman class of dancers. There were those who quickly acclimated to the modern dance lifestyle, taking modern in their first semester, learning the Bartenieff Fundamentals, finding their head-tail connection, and getting cast in the most abstract pieces in Emory Dance Company. Then there were those who resisted jumping into an academic dance curriculum, choosing to get involved in more recreational dance-related activities such as the student-run performance group AHANA. I fell into the latter category. And I developed a bit of a chip on my shoulder because of it.

In my first semester I enrolled in jazz and ballet classes, primarily because I did not want to lose my technique. While there are many subset styles of both jazz and ballet, they are two highly codified forms. You pretty much always know what to expect when you walk into a jazz or ballet class, no matter where you are in the world. I did not take these classes to learn something new, or discover anything about myself, I took them as a means to maintain my physical body and practice the kinds of dance that I enjoyed, while focusing on my academics. I was comfortable in these styles; they made me feel good.

Surprisingly, during that first year, I started finding myself drifting from dance. As the freshman fifteen wreaked havoc on my slender frame, I struggled to enjoy ballet the way I had in the past. I became obsessed with how off everything looked in the mirror, which seemed to reveal more of my leotard and tights clad body than I wanted to see. Going from rigorous ballet classes five times per week to only modestly challenging classes at Emory twice per week was not helping me maintain my physique and technique the way I assumed it would. In fact, it all felt so different and less appealing that I ended up taking a year off of ballet after that first semester. I still loved doing jazz, and kept up with that for several semesters, but I had to admit that sometimes it made me feel a little bit silly. Friends and strangers walked by the WoodPEC dance studio every afternoon while I was in class. They stared in the big glass windows, unable to ignore the blaring pop music and room full of college women shaking their hips and skipping across the floor to the likes of Katy Perry and Brittney Spears for college credit. Was this what I really wanted to study at Emory University? Feeling that there was a blatant lack of respect for non-modern dance styles within the Emory dance community, and the academic scene at large, made me uneasy. While I had been quick to write off the study of modern dance in the beginning, my curiosity and my body convened to pique my interest. Maybe I had outgrown the

styles of dance I was used to. Maybe I had surpassed what they had to offer me. After all, we do not come to college expecting to read the same textbooks or do the same types of research we did in high school. And while we may focus on the same subjects, we would expect a deepening level of investigation and a different approach in our understanding of the material. Maybe it was the same with dance, and perhaps opening myself up to modern was the key. Thus I began to acknowledge the potential merit of exploring dance more academically.

Introduction to Emory Dance Company

During my second semester I auditioned for, and participated in Emory Dance Company (EDC) for the first time (I auditioned my first semester as well, but was not cast in any of the pieces). In the spring, the company produces an evening length contemporary modern dance concert choreographed by students in the upper level choreography class. I was cast in a piece choreographed by then sophomore James La Russa. The experience was enlightening. I had done both "contemporary" and "modern" before in studio and competition settings, but never had I been exposed to real "process-based" work.

In studio dance, whether its taking class to gain strength and technique, or participating in rehearsal to perfect pieces for recitals and competitions, the experience is almost always product-based. The teacher comes in with the steps already created, the decisions already made, and sets it on the bodies. There may be some room for interpretation. You might get to pick your ending pose, or add your own flair here and there, but the process itself only exists in an effort to get to the predetermined end product of one person's vision.

Product-based dance making serves an important purpose, and has led to some of the most celebrated and recreated works of art. Many of the great ballets and variations that are

staged all over the world are derived from product-based processes. The works are often passed down, whether from a dancer who had performed the role previously, or from a notated score, or simply from a YouTube video. While the choreographer may have originally created the work for a specific ballerina and tailored the steps to her talents, the piece was not made for the sake of making something; rather, it was created to become a spectacle consumed by those who came to see it. And, in the likely scenario that you are not the prima ballerina for whom the work was originally created, the piece was not made for you or with any of your input. It is a compilation of historical movements that you get to try on, imitate, and experiment with. There is something very timeless about embodying these works. One can become a part of the history. Growing up with a dance education that relied on this model provided me with clear benefits and challenges. I could tell when I was progressing, and it was clear when and why certain steps or concepts were not clicking for me. But what this standard of imitation and regurgitation emphasizes is the ability of one person to execute the ideas of another. And in doing that, I believe the creative experience is stifled.

My experience in EDC taught me how to create. Though I was not the choreographer, and had a limited knowledge base of modern dance styles and techniques, I was exposed to the possibility of making movements given prompts from the choreographer. Using ideas, phrases, words, and even nonsense to generate steps and create a range of dynamic qualities to play with opened up a whole new world of dance for me. Choreography itself came to mean something entirely different to me than it did before. I no longer saw the choreographer as a step maker, but as a director, and this intrigued me. For the first time I began to see contemporary modern dance for what it could be for me: a means through which I could investigate and explore ideas.

Opening myself up in this way came with challenges. I had to teach myself how to be curious again. I had to allow myself to make mistakes, and falter, and really be risky with my movement choices. We were not always given clear direction of what to do or what to try. At first, this was frustrating. I was not yet comfortable enough to just start full-body vibratory shaking, or try saying something audibly while I moved, or even screaming something or singing something!

The process of approaching dance as research is how I began to cultivate my own inquisitiveness as a choreographer. And in embracing my uncertainties, my creativity was reborn. I became curious about how one can generate movement, and how I might be able to someday create a piece of work that explored its origination and evolution. I was fascinated by the possibilities, intimidated by the vastness of the unexplored territory I was entering, and wildly zealous to begin to create, all at the same time.

My first year at Emory was decorated with an array of shifts and re-imaginations of myself as both a student and a mover. By the end of freshman year I had declared a minor in dance (a year later I would change that to a major). When I reflect on that first quarter of my time at Emory it amazes me how far I have come. Immersing myself in the Emory dance department was not something I ever expected to do, but has become a cornerstone of my Emory experience. Deeply engaged and endlessly fascinated by the dance form in which I will now earn a degree, I am forever thankful for the serendipity that led me here.

III. INFLUENCES

Gaga

Sophomore year I took my first "real" modern class. I enrolled in Modern 2 with George Staib, having heard that his style of moving would likely suit me well. I immediately found I had an affinity for this style of dance. Unlike jazz and ballet classes, the class was structured differently each time we met. When you walked into the studio door you had to put all expectations aside. One could never assume we would do the same warm-up we had done the class before or that we would work on the same across-the-floor combination. Sometimes we started on the floor; lying in an X position with arms and legs outstretched, squirming like worms for thirty minutes until we somehow found ourselves vertically on two feet, dripping in sweat and undulating across the space to the beat of live percussive drums. Other times we began standing. Starting the class with just a singular thought or intention, we allowed it to guide our bodies through a progression of awakening the muscles and bones, until we were articulating all points of flexion, from the toes to the eyebrows. The process of warming up the body and readying myself for movement became a meditation, a daily ritual that I looked forward to. These classes flew by.

This type of somatic provocation helped me connect my mind to my body. As a dancer, and human in general, I struggle with my body on a regular basis. From the unexplainable aches and pains, to dissatisfactions with my flexibility and structural issues, I have spent a lot of time feeling angry at and betrayed by my own body. This type of mind-body duality is embedded in other forms of dance, particularly ballet. Classical ballet rears body image issues and negativity toward one's facility. I have experienced this in more and less severe waves at different points

throughout my training. But what I found was that while modern dance still emphasizes the importance of correct alignment and proper technique, it also fosters a one-ness between body and mind, a collaboration of thought and execution. In modern class we thank our bodies for what they are capable of, and honor what we are able to do, acknowledging that this changes on a daily basis.

It was in Professor Staib's Modern 2 class that I was first exposed to a new form of dance called Gaga. Gaga is a movement vocabulary developed by Israeli choreographer and director of Batsheva Dance Company, Ohad Naharin. Naharin developed Gaga while recovering from a debilitating back injury he suffered in his 20s that left him with permanent neurological impairment[1]. His dance form serves as a framework in which the body is awakened to all sensation. It heightens the body's intellect and provides space for enhanced range of motion and strength.

Gaga is taught in a room with no mirrors and no spectators. The teacher leads the class through a series of improvisational prompts, inviting the movers to unearth somatic discovery by offering movement suggestions through imagery and other stimuli. One goal of such a practice is to make the body available to new information and resist the familiar. Naharin speaks of Gaga in a series of paradoxes, where one must find calmness but be alert, appreciate exaggeration and understatement, and connect with the animal within while simultaneously probing the imagination.[2] In a singular hour-long class one might find herself floating through the air, making only micro-movements un-seeable to the eye, and articulating the legs and back into unfamiliar patterns of movement. An entire class might be focused on repeating a simple hand

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[1] Heymann, B. (Producer), & Heymann, T. (Director). (2015). *Mr. Gaga* (Motion Picture). Israel:
[2] Naharin, O. (n.d.) Gaga. *Batsheva Dance Company*. Retrieved from https://batsheva.co.il/en/gaga

gesture until it has lost all meaning and then regains an entirely new one, or vibrating the whole body so quickly that all preconceived notions of time and space melt away into nothingness. Guided by the instructions of the teacher, the class sojourns through phases of finely tuned cognizance connected to sections of utter abandon.

Gaga has become the primary vocabulary of study for Batsheva dancers, and Staib incorporates aspects of Gaga in both his classes and his choreography. Entering the world of Gaga and participating in this type of somatic self-discovery through movement was a catalyst that first helped me to value modern dance. By immersing myself in this study of dance, I no longer felt like an imposter, or a jazz dancer doing modern, I became a contemporary modern dancer. I learned to embrace each class as an investigation of my own capacity to move and sense. But even more than that, I did not feel like this kind of dance was overly indulgent or unimportant. It felt meaningful and critical. It felt accessible and allowed me to examine my own insecurities. I was awakened and invigorated by my own discoveries, finding power and depth in my dancing through this type of prompt-based improvisation.

The practice of Gaga would go on to inform my own choreographic explorations. Fascinated by taking a movement, and really investigating it, being fully curious about its potential and alternate possibilities of form, was a predominant theme I explored when I had the opportunity to choreograph for EDC in the spring of my junior year. Today, I would describe my choreographic aesthetic as one of athleticism and intricacy. I am interested in transitions, how we move from one stagnant posture to the next, as well as the space and dynamism that live within moments of apparent stillness and stagnancy. Prior to experiencing Gaga I did not understand the importance, or even know how to access these ideas. Gaga took my dancing and stretched it out. It encouraged me to examine the micro milieu of my own movement and bring my attention to

these significant details. I have become a more thoughtful mover and choreographer because of it.

The following is a journal entry I wrote on June 6th 2016. I had just finished a Gaga class taught by a former Batsheva dancer in New York City, at Gibney Dance Center, and was reflecting on the most salient takeaways of the class:

> Floating, feeling the ceiling on our skin
>
> Not falling into patterns or habits
>
> Pleasure is finding new habits
>
> All parts and surfaces of the body are sensing
>
> Feeling the naval lifting forward and up
>
> Spreading
>
> About the process of finding
>
> Present
>
> Fast feet and upper body, rhythms
>
> Kinetic energy builds in your skin
>
> As we count down from 10, the energy bubbles to the pores of your skin and then bursts as you move just as fully but 100 times slower, everything and every movement becomes even more important
>
> Feeling the bones lock inside the skin, or bounce within it

On hands and feet, pressing and pushing into the floor, giving in

Walking lightly or with a lot of depth in the body, as the heels strike the floor the whole foot pushes off

Widening and spreading

Researching

The Radio City Rockettes

Summers

One thing that remained a constant throughout my four years at Emory was my participation in the Radio City Rockette Summer Intensive (RSI) each year in New York City. These week-long intensives, taught by current Rockettes, provide a framework in which aspiring Rockettes are able to learn repertoire from the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, receive hands-on training in the Rockette's intricate style of jazz dancing, and experience the demanding and rigorous rehearsal schedule of the performers.

Actually, I attended the summer intensive for the first time when I was in high school. At that point I had only seen the Rockettes perform live once, not counting the numerous times I had seen them on TV, while watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade each year. About sixty girls were in the program with me that year. We learned repertoire from the show, perfected our eye-high kicks, and mastered the iconic beveled foot positions. I became enamored of the Rockette teachers conducting the intensive. Their legs alone seemed six feet tall. They spoke with eloquence and dynamism. They attacked the choreography with such strength and vigor, yet made every movement look completely effortless. I wanted to be one of them.

The primary style of dance the Rockettes perform is called precision jazz. Tara Memi, associate choreographer for RSI describes it as jazz under a microscope. The choreography is taught in a dissected manner, breaking down the minutiae of each phrase so that when performed, the group can move as a complete unit. In a typical jazz class one might be told to do a simple phrase such as step-ball-change, pas de bourrée. Hearing those words and watching the teacher demonstrate would cue any intermediate dancer to know what to do, how to execute and link the steps. Even then, however, there would likely be variation in the placement of the arms, timing of the steps, and amount of space traveled across the floor. Rockette precision jazz takes each movement, and breaks it up into smaller parts, burrowing further into the steps to find more specificity and exactness. The result of this approach allows a line of thirty-six women to all do the same movements in perfect tandem. It is how the Rockettes became the most famous precision dance company in the world.

History

The history of the Rockettes dates back to 1925, when Broadway performer and choreographer Russell Markert established a troupe of sixteen leggy ladies he dubbed the "Missouri Rockets", based out of St. Louis, Missouri.[3] Markert was inspired by an English precision dance troupe he had seen in the *Ziegfeld Follies*.[4] Known as the Tiller Girls, they are believed to have pioneered precision dance.[5] John Tiller, the director of the group, created

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[3] Clark, D. K. (2012). *The Rockettes*. (p. 3). Retrieved from http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/rockettes_essay_clark.pdf

[4] Wax, J. (2014). History of the Rockettes: Rise to the Radio City Christmas Spectacular. *Bella Ballroom*. Received from http://bellaballroom.com/history-of-the-rockettes-rise-to-radio-city/

[5] Wax

dances with lines of like-looking women, linked up elbow to elbow.[6] While precision dance had been made popular abroad (Moulin Rouge Can-Can dancers are another example), Markert was the first to popularize the form in the states, and brand it as a staple of Americana.[7] The ensemble performed vaudeville style shows, learning new routines almost weekly. Markert worked with a specific aim to create dances that were more choreographically diverse and impressive than what he had seen on Broadway.[8] Before long, Markert and his Missouri Rockets had made a name for themselves and were asked to come to New York to perform in the Broadway musical *Rain or Shine*.[9] Following this performance, they were "discovered" and were asked to relocate permanently to New York. Thus, in 1932 the troupe began their tenure at the famed Radio City Music Hall.[10] In the following years, the group underwent several name changes; first the "American Rockets", then the "American Roxyettes", and then finally, in 1934 a name that stuck, "The Radio City Rockettes".[11] By the 1960s the group had grown in size, more than doubling in cast number to thirty-six women, which remains the number of women on the line to today. Markert retired as director of the company in 1971.[12]

Videos of early Rockette choreography depict linked-up lines of lanky women briskly kicking their legs, with their high-heeled foot reaching just below eye-high every time.[13] Their upper bodies were sculpted and solid. None of the movements, neither kicks nor fancy footwork, disturbed their delicate yet firmly secured arms hovering on the back of their neighboring dancer

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[6] Wax
[7] Wax
[8] Straus, R. (2013). Russell Markert. *Dance Teacher Magazine*. Received from http://www.dance-teacher.com/2010/12/russell-markert/
[9] History of the Rockettes. (n.d.) *The Rockettes*. Retrieved from https://www.rockettes.com/history/
[10] Wax
[11] Strauss
[12] Strauss
[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvQTLn-gvs0

(Rockettes do not actually touch each other when their arms appear linked). Other videos show the performers in tap shoes, each metal plate striking the stage synchronously.[14] As Markert had intended, his choreography emphasized precision, with a generous nod to the wow-factor. The dancers traversed their stages, swiftly creating innovative spatial formations. When performing for troops on the USS Normandy in 1935, one reporter commented, "[with such] speed and accuracy they could even teach the Normandy's captain a thing or two he didn't know".[15]

Modernization

The conception of Radio City Music Hall was, itself, the result of an unlikely partnership between one of New York's wealthiest, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and a theatrical genius, S. L. "Roxy" Rothafel, who was using his talents to revive struggling theatres across the country.[16] Their joint vision was to create a revolutionary music hall in the heart of New York City that would provide affordable entertainment during a period of immense national economic stress.[17] When Radio City opened its doors in 1932, it served primarily as a movie theatre, featuring premiers of some of the most iconic films of the day, including *King Kong* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.[18] The newly acquired Roxyettes were predominantly used as a filler act. The films included intermissions during which the troupe would perform dazzling dance numbers between acts. They were not the main event, but rather, a sidepiece of entertainment for guests to enjoy. The *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, for which the Rockettes have become most known,

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[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0iV-xEaf7Y
[15] British Pathé. (1935). *Dancing Decks-Terity*. Retrieved from http://www.britishpathe.com/video/dancing-decks-terity
[16] History. (n.d.) *Radio City Music Hall*. Retrieved from http://www.radiocity.com/about/history.html
[17] History
[18] History

began as variety type show, with a feature film, an animated short film, and of course, the Rockettes. It ran during the holiday season. Still, in the beginning, the dancers were a minor part of the spectacle, coming second to the films and other live acts.

A movie version called, *The Magnificent Christmas Spectacular*, was created and aired on a special HBO episode in 1986.[19] While this production features the Rockettes, even then the women only appear on stage for three big numbers. The remainder of the show is dedicated to other performers, figure skaters, and an entire musical theatre story that unfolds in the middle of the show. The Rockettes were not the stars, but merely an attractive and impressive filler act between numbers. The choreography itself was not particularly complicated; it was primarily a series of leg kicks and wowing formation changes. It was flashy, yet lacking in development. The women wore tight, short costumes. The Rockettes were not being displayed for their talent, but rather, were the commercial face of an American ideal and tradition, a male fantasy of legs and beauty.

While there are some notable difficulties with this framework, it is important to acknowledge that the Rockettes filled (and continue to fill) an important role in society. They were entertainers, showgirls bringing Markert's vision to life and dazzling audiences with their red-lipped smiles and impressive showmanship. They were not artists, nor were they women's rights advocates. If one goes back to the early days of the Rockettes, given the political and

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[19] Alper, S. D. (Executive Producer). Miller, W. C. (Producer and Director). (1986). Christmas at Radio City Music Hall. New York, NY: HBO. Retrieved from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX5Xw4by5Gk&t=51s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-4d1v7642I&t=16s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCMvfQcnLn4&t=12s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOaEQgolT_c&t=292s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqI-WkLVucE&t=13s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guVqN7xqvII&t=242s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EX057doDvM&t=493s

social climate of the '30s and '40s, by providing audiences entertainment and an escape from the crippling realities of economic disaster and war, they were providing a real service to the community. But the fact is, being a Rockette is a job. In reality, during the 1930s when the troupe was formed, while most women were homemakers, caring for their families during a time of war and economic strife, the ladies who procured careers as Rockettes were, in a way, feminist pioneers. Very early on, the troupe was adopted into the America Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA). Being part of such a union enabled the women to demand fair pay and high quality working conditions. As individuals, these women were very progressive, even if their image was not. And when put into a present-day social context, there is a great deal of depth and richness to be gleamed from the history and development of the Rockettes.

Today

In 2006, Linda Haberman became the first woman to serve as both choreographer and director of the Radio City Rockettes and the Radio City Christmas Spectacular.[20] While the Rockettes had always been highly regarded as skilled dancers and dynamic performers, Haberman's directorship of the group marked a notable change in the caliber of dancer as well as the complexity of the choreography. Prior to becoming a Rockette herself, Haberman danced for the legendary Broadway choreographer and director Bob Fosse—more on him later.[21] When Haberman took over, one of her main goals was to make the Rockettes the focal point of the production.[22] Though Haberman is no longer involved with the show, her legacy is apparent. The proficiency of dance technique, the athleticism, and the attention to detail, have never been more

[20] Sagolla, L. J. (2010). Keeping the Rockettes in Line. *Backstage*. Retrieved from https://www.backstage.com/advice-for-actors/dancers/keeping-the-rockettes-in-line/
[21] Sagolla
[22] Sagolla

sharply honed. The most recent version of the Christmas Spectacular features the Rockettes as the main event, replete with complicated movement that showcases both talent and artistry over the course of at least seven original numbers.

With the change in directorship also came a change in Rockette choreography. Drawing on her own experience as a Fosse dancer, Haberman brought a Fosse flair to the Rockettes. Calling on body isolations, turned in legs, long lines, angular positions, use of syncopation, and music visualization, Haberman brought rejuvenation to a catalogue of choreography that had become stale and outdated. In the newer iterations of the show, the Rockettes are less like showgirls, and more akin to skilled Broadway dancers, executing difficult steps and telling a story. The Rockettes are the central focus and the stars of *The Radio City Christmas Spectacular.*

In many ways, I think the Rockettes are an underappreciated group of performers. It is easy to look at the line of tall, beautiful women, heavily made up and wearing an assortment of bedazzled costumes, and think they are indistinguishable from one another. And one might assume that they lack individuality or expressiveness. Or, there are those who look at the infallible precision of the company and equate that to simplicity, as if the kind of choreography the Rockettes perform is lacking in degree of technical difficulty. Even many dancers dismiss the group. There was a dancer at my home dance studio who once told me that being a Rockette was her backup plan if she was unable to get a “real” dance job. At this point in my life I have had many dance experiences. From training at professional ballet companies to my modern studies at Emory, to my musical theatre coaching, and everything in between, I have never worked harder than I have at the Invitational Rockette Summer Intensive.

Still, questions linger. By accepting this role, am I discounting my individuality? Am I participating in perpetuating an unacceptable notion of archetypical female behavior? Though I have found a sense of great empowerment dancing in a kick line of talented, driven women, does the history from which this troupe was established minimize its positive potential? And even with the many forward strides the Rockettes have made in how they present themselves, it remains difficult for people to categorize, and therefore respect the troupe. Are the Rockettes athletes? Are they artists? Are they robotic entertainers, interchangeable in an assembly line of Christmas cheer?

Controversy

When I opened up Facebook on December 22nd, 2017 and read that the Radio City Rockettes were proud to be performing at the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump, my heart sank. Though I am not myself a Radio City Rockette (yet), anyone who knows me knows that the Rockettes are a part of my identity. I have wanted to be a Rockette since I was 13 years old. I pride myself in knowing an unusual amount about their history. I know a little bit of almost every routine in the *Christmas Spectacular*. I wrote my college essay about the Rockettes. I admire these women as role models.

The recent election of Donald Trump brought on a slew of emotions for me. I had been very excited to be casting my vote for the first female President of the United States. Realizations about the state of our nation after the election, among them, the notion that a card-carrying misogynist was our new president, were disheartening. I believe that by electing this man we have normalized and established a toxic rhetoric of marginalization of all minority groups. Hearing that my beloved Rockettes would be dancing at the inauguration, celebrating his

governance of the United States of America, created significant discomfort. I suppose, in part, it stirred up all of my questions about who the Rockettes are and what they represent. For all of the progress, are they still just showgirls, dancing for a leering sexist?

The Rockettes as an entity are a strong group of women, who are part of the theater community of New York City. With the oldest current Rockette being in her mid-forties and the youngest just eighteen, many of these women are forward thinking "millennials". Perhaps they did not vote for Trump themselves. The multi-billion dollar company by which they are employed, however, Madison Square Garden Entertainment, is owned by New York business mogul James L. Dolan. He is a long time friend and supporter of Trump.

The announcement that the Rockettes would perform at the inauguration sparked a large controversy. While some of the dancers were disappointed and even offended that the company had authorized the performance, other women, mainly retired Rockettes, spoke out about being honored to have the company perform, and were horrified by the reaction of some of the current cast members. Only one current Rockette, Phoebe Pearl, spoke out publically about the issue. She took to Instagram to express her embarrassment and disappointment that the women would be performing in support of Trump. Pearl refused to appear at the performance, and soon after voluntarily terminated her contract with the company.[23]

Though no other current troupe members spoke to the press, a former Rockette with whom I train, Rhonda Malkin, spoke to the New York Times. She stated that many of the women

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[23] Perron, W. (2017). Why Rockette Phoebe Pearl Is a New Dance Hero. *Dance Magazine*. Retrieved from http://dancemagazine.com/views/rockette-phoebe-pearl-new-dance-hero/

in the company were upset about performing at the inauguration, particularly the women of color.[24]

The dance community responded to Pearl's act of political resistance with utmost praise and support. She was honored at the recent Bessie Awards (New York dance and performance award ceremony) for her bravery in standing up for, what she called, basic human rights.[25] I, like many others, was inspired by Pearl's act of defiance. Like me, she had grown up dreaming of becoming a Rockette and had finally accomplished her dream. I applaud Pearl for taking action despite the backlash that ensued. She bore the attacks received on twitter and other forms of social media, the eventual termination of her contract, and she bade farewell to the dream job she had finally attained. I wonder if I would have been as brave.

Bob Fosse

There is perhaps one man who had the most lasting and significant influence on musical theatre choreography: Bob Fosse. Born in 1927, Fosse possessed a natural gift for performance and entertainment since his earliest years. He was a dancing prodigy. [26] Starting out mostly as a tap dancer, Fosse began working professionally in show biz, performing regularly in the

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[24] Rogers, K, & Kourlas, G. (2017). A Trump Inauguration Casualty: The Silent, Smiling Rockettes. *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/arts/dance/rockettes-inauguration-trump.html

[25] Perron

[26] Granger, B. (2000). Fosse, Bob (1927-1987). *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*, Vol. 2, pp. 143-145. Detroit, MI: St. James Press. Retrieved from go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=emory&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CCX3409000901&it=r&asid=d43b6e130c33fb91aa903509cb2c5c42

vaudeville and burlesque circuits before he even started high school.[27] This early introduction to sexuality had a profound impact on both Fosse's personal life and career. The dark, sexually charged humor of vaudeville and burlesque, combined with the constant company of strippers and provocateur, seeped into his choreographic panache.[28] As he got older his career continued to blossom, choreographing small-scale variety shows and performing in a few Broadway choruses.[29] In 1954 Fosse made a name for himself when he choreographed his first Broadway musical, an instant smash hit, *The Pajama Game*.[30]

Fosse's unique style is a sultry, indelicate, and provocative melding of different kinds of jazz dance. His work reflects influence from many of the jazz dance greats. For example, there is a clear inspiration from Jack Cole, the "Father of Theatrical Jazz Dance", who ostensibly invented the type of jazz we characterize as musical theatre today. There is an evident drawing from Fred Astaire, whose beautifully fluid and musical choreography was widely featured in American TV and movies during Fosse's upbringing. One can see features of Jerome Robbins, another notable Broadway and ballet choreographer. He was known for crisp, technical lines and rich characters. Fosse drew upon all of these industry icons and more, combining these dynamic stylings with his own embodied experiences in dramaturgy. The result was a new style that would come to be an emblem of American musical theatre. Turned in knees, hunched shoulders, and rhythmic hip thrusts remain recognizable signatures of his work.

Despite Fosse's consistent success throughout his career, people who were close to him recount the struggles he faced both professionally and personally. Fosse was an obsessive perfectionist. Several accounts from men and women who danced with him at all points of his

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[27] Granger, pp. 143-145
[28] Granger, pp. 143-145
[29] Granger, pp. 143-145
[30] Granger, pp. 143-145

career speak to the unremitting flawlessness that Fosse so infamously required. Terrified of failure, Fosse demanded a level of excellence that was unprecedented on Broadway.[31] In her book, *Bob Fosse's Broadway*, former Fosse dancer Margery Beddow describes him as tough, demanding, and relentless, and completely unafraid to express his anger and dissatisfaction during rehearsals.[32] Fosse held a degree of power over his dancers, the women in particular, and he capitalized on it.[33] The relationship between choreographer and dancer is always a delicate one, especially when romantic feelings are involved. It can be intense and emotional, even without sexual tension. Given that his initial foray in the dance industry was in seedy nightclubs, sex and dance were never much distinguished from one another. Fosse was a known womanizer; notorious for having highly publicized affairs with dancers, models, and the like, and rarely remaining faithful to the women with whom he was romantically involved.[34] But perhaps because he was such an artistic visionary, his indiscretions were overlooked. He had probably seen ten times more naked women by the age of fifteen than his peers could have dreamed of in a lifetime. While it is not surprising that Fosse struggled to keep his love life separate from his work, this habit of engaging in both artistic and romantic partnerships with his dancers points to a unique and imbalanced power dynamic that persisted throughout his work. The sexual lens through which he seemed to view most women is reflected in his choreography.

Fosse was married three times to different women, all of who danced for him at one point in time. Fosse and his third wife, Gwen Verdon, were married for almost thirty years. Even after

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[31] Gardner, L. (2000). Lord of the Dance. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/jan/27/artsfeatures1

[32] Beddow, M. (1996). Prologue. *Bob Fosse's Broadway* (pp. xi-xii). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Drama.

[33] Rehfeld, B. (1984). Fosse's Follies. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/features/fosses-follies-19840119

[34] Gardner

their separation, they remained close friends and collaborators. But while Verdon upholds the image of devoted wife and muse, some say that due credit for her influence on Fosse's work has been withheld.[35] It has been suggested that it was Verdon's contribution to the choreography for the number "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets" from *Damn Yankees*, that made the work such a hit.[36] What does this say about Fosse, and the legacy he bares, that the seed of his acclaimed career may have been as much the work of one of his lovers as it is his own?

Though Fosse's dancers were tall, beautiful, completely captivating, and seemingly confident, I find myself wondering if the circumstance under which his choreography was developed necessitates a degree of marginalization and objectification. A power-hungry philanderer, does Fosse epitomize the oppressive male gaze? How can I feel comfortable immersing myself in a choreographic tradition deeply embedded in sexism and intimidation? Fosse's choreography was not benign in sexual subtext. Does knowing this, and participating in this tradition, say something about the feminine expectations I place on myself, women in general, and other dancers? Beyond my personal concerns, other questions emerge. Is a female dancer's empowerment determined by the circumstances in which the choreography was developed? Does an oppressive male choreographer necessarily make work that oppresses women?

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[35] Gardner
[36] Gardner

IV. THE THESIS

Beginning a Process

When I was invited to participate in the Honors program in the spring of my junior year I was surprised and daunted by the prospects. Even after I had become fully acclimated to life as a dance major, and even began identifying myself as a "modern dancer" I was still skeptical of my worthiness of such an endeavor. Unlike many of my peers in the department, I did not have a particular idea in mind that had been brewing since freshman year. And if I was going to create a thesis in dance, I wanted to pursue a project that would be true to myself and be reflective of my own experiences as a dancer and person. I struggled to identify what that could look like.

My first idea was to take two very disparate styles of dance, Gaga and Rockette precision jazz, and make a solo work that merged these two dance forms. Upon reflecting on my entire history as a trained mover, these seemed to be the two styles that have made the most profound impact on my identity as a dancer. They were two forms of dance that seem so at odds stylistically, and yet I felt an affinity toward both of them. With that in mind, a few questions I hoped to explore included: How does Gaga change a dancer? In what ways are Gaga cues similar to cues given in Rockette class, and how does a dancer access the same idea in two different worlds? How does the result differ in process vs. product driven movement development? What are the indicators to the viewer, other than music, that these are two different styles? How do these two styles fit in my dancing body?

I was invited to spend 10 weeks of my summer in New York City training in theatre and commercial jazz at Broadway Dance Center's (BDC) Summer Professional Semester. And thanks to a generous grant from Emory Friends of Dance, I was able to accept. My plan was to

simultaneously take weekly Gaga classes at a prominent studio in the city, and of course attend the weeklong Rockette Summer Intensive. This was how I would conduct my research. As I was already committed to six days of dancing per week at Broadway Dance Center, it was an ambitious plan.

When I got to New York and began my program at BDC, it quickly became evident that while taking a week off to do the Rockette intensive was doable, as it aligned with the focus of my study at BDC, it would be incredibly difficult to conduct my research in Gaga simultaneously. Having one foot in 3-inch LaDuca heels for musical theatre class in Midtown and the other barefoot in Gaga downtown did not bode well for me. A combination of scheduling issues, physical demands on my body and time, and the hardship of altering my mindset to accommodate the different approaches to movement turned out to be too cumbersome to maintain throughout the whole summer. Perhaps this realization reflected the basis for my whole project. It is hard to live in two worlds at once. The experience of having a difficult time merging Gaga and jazz style classes, let alone choreography, surprised me. And yet it helped illuminate the reality of my struggles. It clarified for me the validity of my questions, but presented a problem: Maybe these two styles really are too disparate to inhabit one body seamlessly.

My realization was distressing. By this point I had already committed considerable thought and planning to the central themes of my thesis. Regardless, I decided to not allow myself to worry about it too much for the summer. I was in the greatest city in the world, Emory Friends of Dance was generously paying for me to train at my dream program, and I was fully engrossed in learning about how to find success in the commercial and musical theatre dance industries. Though I was not actively thinking about it at the time, the training I received in this

program would inevitably play an integral role in the development of the work I would create for my thesis.

In the choreography classes I had taken at Emory, we were encouraged not to rely on music to inspire movement. As artists and dance makers, we were taught to strive to find movement inspiration through different means, as music can be too leading, and even a cop out for creativity. Choreographing to music can actually make the dancing seem less important. The movement becomes an afterthought to an already-produced piece of art. In fact, while music is a useful tool and can be added to enhance contemporary/modern choreography, it is often not an important part of at least the initial process of movement generation.

Conversely, commercial contemporary choreography and musical theatre relies almost entirely on the music. In the first week of my program at BDC I went to a seminar with commercial contemporary choreographer, Kristen Sudeikis. The class mainly focused on choreography, and was meant to empower us to take chances over the summer. The goal was to help us fully engage with our summer dance immersion and to be present. For me, one of the most striking takeaways from the seminar was when the instructor talked about what motivates each of us to choreograph and dance. Music was, for her, and many of the other dancers in my class, the main motivator for generating movement and creating dance. Having only just wrapped up my junior year deeply absorbed in Emory's modern dance medium, I still very much had my modern dance hat on. As Kristen spoke about the importance of music in dance, admittedly, I felt a little cynical and closed off. It did not feel in line with what I had learned at Emory about dance composition. I may have even rolled my eyes. I had become so engrossed in

my modern world I was doubting the knowledge and experience of an extremely successful choreographer.

With time I was able to re-inhabit this space of commercial and musical theatre dance. At first I had to force myself to engage and open my mind. I had to actively remind myself that it is OK to feel conflict between what I learn at Emory and what I learn at Broadway Dance Center. I allowed myself to embrace the discrepancies rather than scoff at them. And I tried to hold on to the many nuances of movement and articulation I learned through Emory Dance and use these skills to strengthen my movement quality. Over the course of the summer, modern dance had once again begun to recede to the back burner of my dance brain.

My summer filled with Broadway dancers and choreographers had me completely immersed in the world of musical theater. I was surrounded by top industry professionals. I had never been so inspired and excited to move to New York full time and start living my life as a professional performer. I was eager to attend huge cattle call auditions for Broadway shows and upload my videos to my personal dance website. I wanted to be hired to dance on a cruise ship and travel the world. I could not wait to find agency representation so I could book the big gigs. I wanted to do all of this now, using my momentum and everything I had learned over the summer. My dreams felt possible and I did not want to wait a whole year before I could make these dreams a reality. The last thing I wanted to do was return to Emory for another two semesters of essay writing, test cramming, and body-halfing. And of course, I would have to finally face the dreaded thesis that I had put off thinking about over the summer.

My amazing summer wound down and I made my way back to Emory for the fall semester of my senior year. Interestingly, I found I had the urge to choreograph. Not modern or contemporary, but musical theatre jazz. I wanted to try my hand at emulating the type of music-

driven choreography I had lived in for the past ten weeks. During the summer I had taken daily classes with a myriad of Broadway performers and choreographers. Karla Garcia, an ensemble cast member of *Hamilton* on Broadway, was among them. Her combinations were always my favorite: dynamic, story-motivated, and highly musical. It was the kind of movement that melded with the music perfectly. The dancing did not attempt to imitate the sound, but complimented it artfully, with every movement sitting flawlessly in the pocket of the beat, and each musical accent decorated with a subtly brilliant choreographic choice. It was unlike anything I had ever done at Emory, even in my jazz classes. I decided that if I could not stay in New York and jump into the musical theatre world right away, I wanted to bring what I had learned over the summer back to school with me.

Big Spender

At first, I did not even know what I was choreographing for. I was not sure if I was creating work to be used for my thesis, or maybe for the student-run dance group AHANA that I sometimes participate in on campus. I started experimenting. I thought about which teachers' combinations I had enjoyed most over the summer, and identified what about them was most intriguing. I reflected on why and how Karla Garcia's combinations resonated so strongly with me and how I might use that in my own choreography. One commonality I observed among all of my favorite combinations was that they were all choreographed to music from musicals, or were covers of pop songs arranged to sound more in the style of musical theatre or jazz music. Secondly, they all involved a character persona. They were not just a compilation of steps, but steps that had a purpose and revealed a bit of a larger story. They were combinations and phrases that demanded that we use both our face to express emotion as well as our body attitude to show

and tell. The steps brought us part way, but how we, as characters, executed the steps was what brought it all together. Effective performance of the choreography became much greater than the sum of the dance steps. With all of this in mind, I determined that I wanted to try my hand at creating a piece using a song from a musical that had a built-in story.

After sifting through a seemingly endless array of songs, I settled on "Big Spender" from *Sweet Charity*. While I had never seen the musical, I had seen various mesmerizing YouTube clips of the iconic dance number from the show. Originally choreographed and directed by Bob Fosse, the number oozed with the turned in feet, suggestive hip thrusts, and a combination of tight technique and reckless abandon for which the choreographer was made famous.

Despite the clear Fosse signature, the original choreography is quite minimal. Since the dancers in the scene are also typically singing the lyrics, the dance work is more about standing, slowly moving around, and slouching than technical and articulated movement. In contrast, the dancers in my piece would not be singing, so it was important to me that I take the original choreography and delve into some of the underutilized music. I saw a great opportunity to add movement.

Meanwhile, I remained somewhat challenged with regard to my thesis. I was thrilled to be choreographing again but felt increasingly little directionality about the focus of my project, and I felt the stress of not having a clear vision. When I first entertained the idea of using a piece like "Big Spender" in my thesis I was temped to discount it. I worried that a hyper-sexualized jazz number would not be perceived well by an Emory audience. I feared receiving the critique that it did not have a modern foundation or that it was empty and void of deeper meaning. And while I did not want to make a work that was one-dimensional, at the time, exploring the idea of choreographing to "Big Spender" seemed to be my only accessible avenue into generating

choreography at all. Thankfully, my advisor encouraged me to see where it took me—so I went with it.

Scrapping the notion that my thesis piece would be a solo, merging Gaga and Rockette jazz, I put together a cast of seven dancers, including myself, and set to work. The project commenced with just three two-hour rehearsals in December during which I set a four-minute routine to "Big Spender", heavily inspired by Fosse's original choreography. My dancers were amazingly cooperative, quickly adapting to a style that was foreign to almost all of them. Though each dancer was highly proficient in jazz, ballet, and modern, the specificity of movement that I demanded was unprecedented for them. I was relaying the choreography, teaching the mechanics of Fosse style (a style in which I, myself, am no expert), and requiring precision on par with what is expected of the Rockettes. It was a lot, but we made it happen. I helped my dancers perfect their beveled foot positions and master the "awkward-sexy" postures and demeanor the piece necessitated. We drilled counts and dissected leg and arm positions to an exact degree. We worked on our acting, discovering how to fully personify the character of a bored stripper.

The acting part was one of the biggest challenges for my cast. In an effort to crack open their creativity, we spent one rehearsal doing an exercise I had learned over the summer. We all took out a piece of paper and I asked them to think about their character. They came up with a name for her, a backstory, where she was right before she stepped on stage, what she is thinking about while dancing. Is she happy to be here? Is she angry with anyone? Though I had not given my dancers a specific intention of how to act in this section, it was important that they start embodying the persona of an erotic dancer from the 1960s. When they started applying these ideas, I saw a marked difference in how they danced. While I had initially encouraged them to try being blatantly sexual in both the face and body, when the dancers incorporated some

character development the face became shallow, the movement became even richer and more interesting. This shift in performance quality would later become an important detail in the structure of the piece as a whole.

Before I set the initial piece on my cast, I did not have a clear plan for where I would go next. While I was still interested in the idea of exploring contrasting movement style as a choreographic query, I began to realize the emergence of an additional layer of my research. The show *Sweet Charity* is about a young woman who works in a run down dance hall, desperately looking for love but always running into bad luck with men. The scene in which the song "Big Spender" is sung in the musical takes place in the dance hall where Charity works. The scene unfolds much like a strip tease, in which the dancers taunt the customers in the club with their provocateur.[37] In the context of the show as a whole, the scene makes sense. The play is about a woman who works as a stripper. But while the story is probably meant to be taken at face value, one could offer a feminist critique of how women are portrayed in the show and specifically, the dancing. Taken out of context of the show as a whole, I saw the possibility to use this piece to make a comment on the portrayal and experience of women.

The Emory dance department culminates each semester with an informal showcase. Various classes present combinations they have been working on and a small sample of students show choreography they have developed. Last semester the faculty invited the Honors candidates to share what they had been working on over the course of the semester. Before the informal showing began there was already some buzz going around about my piece. People were curious about musical theatre jazz being performed on the Schwartz stage, a venue that has historically been used solely for contemporary modern dance performances.

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[37] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG3VfKlfDEk

At the first note of trumpet I was already second-guessing myself. It was too late. We slumped in line, draped over the ballet bars in our Fosse-inspired poses, then continued through the dance, hitting every perfectly-timed accent and musical cue, and thrusting our hips to the beat. While I, and my dancers, knew that this piece was going to be more than just the hot sexy number it would seem at first, I felt preemptively embarrassed of how it would be perceived by my fellow dancers and the department faculty that were watching. I did not want anyone to think that I was not taking this project seriously or that I was using, ostensibly, a striptease, for an academic thesis. Though I know I should not have, I could not help but compare my work to what the other Honors candidates were presenting. They were all contemporary works oozing with intensity and important issues of politics, identity, and more. I felt keenly aware of how out of place my work seemed. But underneath all of my misgivings, and despite my vulnerability and second-guessing, I was simultaneously excited by the uniqueness of the foundation of my project.

As I began to reflect on my process thus far, I realized that not only was it fun and enjoyable for me to both choreograph and dance to "Big Spender", but I also saw an important dialogue unfolding before me that I looked forward to exposing. Questions about women as sex objects, the hyper-sexualization of dancers, and the issues around whether this type of overt-sexualization is empowering or degrading were swirling in my head. Was this type of dance exploitative to the women dancing? What did it say about me that I enjoyed choreographing and dancing the piece? And what of those watching? What were they feeling as they watched? I was flooded with thoughts. Without even realizing it, I had hit a landmine of topical issues wrapped into a singular fifty-year-old musical theatre number. Though I was still unsure of my next move,

it was evident to me that I had unearthed something relevant, something personal, something important, and something worthy of being researched further.

Upon returning from winter break, I once again faced the daunting reality that I needed to hone my ideas and start weaving my loose questions into a framework that could concretely guide the construction of my thesis project. At the time, I was not sure if the original "Big Spender" choreography I had set on my cast in December would make a direct appearance in the final product, or if it would simply serve as the groundwork, or an impetus for movement generation.

At one of our first rehearsals spring semester, I performed an experiment with my dancers. I gave the simple but vague directions to take movement vocabulary from the original choreography we had been working on, and apply choreographic devices to it. The end result would yield a totally new phrase consisting of four sets of eight-counts. Choreographic devices are studied at length in Choreography 1 class at Emory. They are techniques used by choreographers to compose movement. They include: accumulation (adding new movements with repetition of a phrase), augmentation (movements are made larger and/or faster), embellishment (adding detail to an existing movement), repetition (repeating a movement or series of movements one or more times), retrograde (performing the movements backwards), accent (adding emphasis to a specific movement), and more.

The results of this experiment were promising. Without more than just a little direction from me, the dancers did exactly what I hoped they might: they morphed the Fosse-style jazz choreography into something that looked highly contemporary. While many of the movement motifs were discernable in the newly created phrases, the product looked and felt very different

than the original choreography. Had one not known that the movement was derived from a different style, I wondered if it would have even been evident. The movement created from this rehearsal went on to inform an entire section of the piece, "Breakdown". More than anything, it confirmed for me that this type of stripping away, embellishing, augmenting, and deconstructing of the original choreography presented a wealth of possibilities. The emerging movement generation would enable me to explore a more contemporary style while incorporating motifs from the first piece of choreography.

Over the course of the next several rehearsals, I continued to have my dancers create movement through similar processes as described above, giving them different prompts each time. For example, during one rehearsal I had them apply choreographic devices to the original "Big Spender" choreography to create a phrase that traveled across the floor. During another rehearsal each dancer made up a solo using movement vocabulary from our original "Big Spender" choreography that we then taught to one another so each person knew everyone's material for future use. Although I, personally, had made all of the choreographic decisions for the "Big Spender" choreography in a very product-driven method, I was interested in developing the rest of the piece through a much more collaborative, process-based manner. When the choreographer is the sole person developing movement, she can only bring what she knows and embodies to the process. I was fortunate to have a cast of talented dancers who are each capable choreographers in their own right. I was eager to capture and introduce their affinities and stylistic tendencies as part of my research; thus creating a work made from eclectic yet coherent movement of contrasting styles. Further, as this piece resonated strongly of my personal journey, I wanted to invite space for my dancers to express their own journeys, as well. Playing the part of "movement director" more so than choreographer at times, I was interested in allowing freedom

for the dancers to develop movement for themselves. Once the movement was created, I used my artistic vision to gently shape, and mold, and structure the way in which it was danced and performed. I did not want to project my own experiences onto these six women, but rather, request that they enter this world of conflict themselves and provide their own critique or statement through movement. This is how the section "Hey, Self Talk" was ultimately conceived.

At one point in the semester, one of my dancers mentioned that she really appreciated how true to my process I was staying. She said that she never expected that taking a form of "entertainment" dance, and manipulating it, could yield such interesting movement. In many ways, this work of art that we created was entertaining. It had tongue-in-cheek irony, and sex appeal, and many characteristics that we associate with show biz. But through the morphology and manipulation, the mindless entertaining steps took on new meaning, and became the very essence of my investigation. Good art is entertaining, but this art was made from entertainment.

As the semester progressed, I felt a sense of urgency. Due to my lack of initial direction and clarity in my project focus I sensed I was behind in my process and I felt pressured for time. Fortunately, I suddenly saw my piece clarify itself in front of my eyes. Rehearsal to rehearsal I was shocked by how effective my choreographic suggestions were and how well the things we tried seemed to work. Often, I could not see immediately where the phrase would be placed, or how, exactly it would be integrated, but I knew it was movement that helped to tell my story.

I began to focus on the delineation of sections I wanted to include and I let that guide my selection of music for the rest of the piece. During all of the movement generation sessions we had mostly been working with several arbitrary instrumental scores. I was not particularly interested in keeping any of them for the end product. By the middle of the semester I became

confident that I wanted to start with the original "Big Spender" choreography. From there I planned to transition into a section using a hip-hop version of the song I had found, "Breakdown", move into something slower and more contemplative, "Self-Talk", pick up again with a big group section, "Hey, Self-Talk", then conclude with a hard-hitting finish, "Begin Again". Knowing this, I sought out musical selections that would fit the feel and tone of each section, rather than to construct the movement within certain music.

As the remaining sections fell into place, the piece took on a life of its own. I was satisfied with the choreography I had generated together with my dancers and I was pleased with the diversity of my music selection. One challenge that I continued to grapple with through the duration of the process was the messaging being conveyed by each section. I found more clarity when I thought about the five sections in isolation and gave them names. Through a great deal of reflection and talking things out with my advisor, my dancers, and my mom, I was able to solidify and reaffirm the ways in which each section of the piece was addressing some of my initial questions. I could begin to see the trajectory of the piece. It was taking shape and arcing as it took the audience on a guided exploration of my own query. I was feeling a profound sense of meaning with what was being created and I did not want any aspect of my work to seem arbitrary or haphazard. I wanted the audience to feel its relevance. I wanted it to transcend my personal journey and resonate with its viewers. I wanted it to be exceptional.

I turned my focus to *how* to approach the movement and I reflected on what I was trying to say with this piece. I knew we had the opportunity to say something significant, and I knew this work was much more than the cute jazz dance I had feared at its inception.

Hey, Big Spender

The first section of the piece is the original choreography that served as my inspiration for the entire work. The movement is minimalistic, yet highly stylized and specific. It can be taken at face value or seen as an analysis or criticism of the way in which the women are portrayed in this scene from *Sweet Charity*. While the choreography itself is extremely reminiscent of Fosse's original choreography, in the context of this work I saw the potential for rawness, a discomfort, and perhaps even a proclivity to disturb, through the puppet-like, overtly sexual movements coupled with the contrastingly empty facial expressions. When we first rehearsed this work I encouraged my dancers to put on a face, so to speak. I had them practice the seductive look that you might see from real strippers. With time it became incredibly evident that was not right for this piece. Instead, I had them indulge in a totally different look. We aimed to convey a complete emptiness in the face, contrasting with the hyper-sexual body attitude. The result was almost haunting. This was my way of setting up the interplay for the rest of the piece. These women were doing sexy choreography, but the attitude was one of utter apathy. I would expect that this is reminiscent of how an erotic dancer or even a show girl may feel, going to work everyday to do the same sexy moves for a voyeuristic audience of mostly drooling men. But metaphorically, I think this section draws attention to how any woman might feel who is experiencing continuous, although perhaps subtle oppression. Body shaming, sexist remarks, and other micro aggressions that we experience on a daily basis can weigh down a woman. We might put on a pretty face and act like nothing is wrong; continuing to oblige the unrealistic beauty expectations and double standards, but deep down it is a cumulative draining of confidence and dignity. In this section the dancers are dancing for the male gaze, but the emptiness of the eyes displays our own difficulty with this ideal. I added the "Hey" to "Big Spender" to insinuate a

need for attention. It is as if to say, "look beyond what you see, there is more here!" I asked my dancers to dance the movement especially full out and explicitly sexually, but have the face of a skeleton, a shadow of a person.

Breakdown (noun): A failure to progress or have effect

I titled the second section, "Breakdown" because it is reminiscent of a recapitulation of the first section, however, things are starting to get stripped away and fall apart. We are noticing a problem, feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, maybe, for the first time, or maybe for the hundredth time, and pulling back with both the face and the body. We are putting up our guard. We are getting passive aggressive. The definition, "A failure to progress or have effect"[38] is a nod to the female experience of constant and unremitting marginalization in the world in which we live. The feminist movement is rooted in decades of women who have fought for justice and equality. And while our suffrage exists on some levels, almost 100 years after women were given the right to vote in the U.S. it is still accompanied by a seemingly unbreakable glass ceiling, a slew of stigmas about female sexuality, and a host of daily reminders of inequality. This section, "Breakdown (*noun*): A failure to progress or have effect" reflects my frustration. I am dissatisfied with the lack of progress. For further effect in this segment, I made a last minute decision to distort the sound score so that it sounds almost like it is playing out of an old record, or a shoddy radio in the next room over. It is eerie and evocative. As the section progresses, the dancers start to slip out of their puppet-like dance and begin to inhabit a space of utter frustration and disappointment. Certain dancers cut out of the routine, simulating protest and breaking away from our normative behavior, only to be roped back in, to a place of oppression or expectation.

[38] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/breakdown

By the end, we are all collapsed on the floor, exhausted from the choreography, exhausted from having to keep repeating ourselves, exhausted from having to live up to the expectations, contorted on our backs, uncomfortable.

Self-Talk

As the third section of the work, "Self-Talk", begins, conflict boils to the surface. I wanted to incorporate a section that would starkly juxtapose the high energy, almost frenetic quality of the rest of the work. There is a lot of information and stimulation in the two first sections; adding some moments of stillness and contemplation seemed vital. As each dancer stands up and covers herself, we realize the vulnerability we each hold inside. We, the dancers, have literally been dancing in our underwear for ten minutes already, but it is as if we are just now noticing. I wanted to capture the gut-wrenching feeling of exposure, the realization of being bare. It is as if we just realized that maybe we were doing something for which we should be embarrassed or ashamed. Or perhaps it is reflective of finally allowing our vulnerability to expose itself and be seen by others. We spend a great deal of time veiling our insecurities. Whether they are about our bodies, our personality, or our intelligence, our vulnerabilities—what we are underneath all of the masking—are what make each of us beautiful and human. I do not think of the hand placements on the body as covering up, so much as drawing awareness for the self, and the audience, to different places of vulnerability. They are all over our body, inside and out. I might feel it differently on different days. Our insecurities are fluid. Unlike the first two sections, these women are not part of a collective group. Each dancer is alone and uniquely vulnerable. As we stand in the line in stillness it is reflective of that moment where you look at

yourself in the mirror and ask yourself, “What am I doing with my life?” Standing in front of the audience fully exposed and unreservedly honest.

This section also calls to mind my own conflict with the styles of dance to which I am drawn. I love jazz and musical theatre and the Rockette style. I feel empowered dancing in styles that are music driven and accentuate femininity or even sexuality. But there is always a part of me that feels ashamed of that. As a feminist, is it bad that I want to be a Rockette? The issue of individuality and perpetuating unrealistic female ideals rush forward again. Does it diminish me to aspire to be a replica of the woman next to me? I do not have answers to these questions, but their existence is part of my own inner turmoil about how I represent myself as a woman and as a dancer. This section was my way of tapping into the essence of my thesis, the discomfort, the conflict, and the internal struggle. My discord develops into a stiflingly slow solo as a means for me to further explore the uneasiness and apprehension, the tension within my own moving body. Here, at the nucleus of my thesis, I have been exposed. The sexualized jazz steps have broken down around me as I examine my boundaries and my movement in a Gaga-esque exploration. Both my contrasting movement styles and the interplay of strength and vulnerability are on display. Liberation feels fleeting and fragile.

Hey, Self-Talk

The fourth section of the piece sees another shift in mood. It starts with each dancer crossing the stage with her own material. Eventually, it builds to a cacophonous melodrama with everyone vying to be heard all at once. There are moments of stillness and hyper-awareness, which provide brief respites of calm amongst the chaos. This part of the piece might be a giving-in to what is expected or it might be a fighting back. I asked my dancers to move as if every

surface of their skin was radiating the middle finger. This section is both a yielding and a call to action, a “screw you” and a “hey, please shut up and listen to what I have to say”.

The dancers, who, had separated from one another in the previous section for the first time, are now finding each other once again. Through repetition, the section builds, but also reflects our need for reiteration and recapitulation. Never being fully heard or understood. Simultaneously, this section is entirely movement-derived from the original choreography, and morphed by the dancers themselves. The stylized jazz has melted into dynamic modern dance. We are moving bigger, and we are boundless. There is tension. Perhaps we have broken out of our societal roles as women, or maybe we are still working towards that. The movement is reminiscent of the beginning choreography, with certain gestural motifs, but the movement has been derived and adapted to convey the need for action and protest.

Begin Again

The piece culminates with the fifth and final section, “Begin Again”. The music comes in as the lights abruptly illuminate the dancers. We slouch on the bars with a look of distain on our faces. For me, this is the most powerful moment of the piece. The section is high energy, charged, and slightly aggressive. The majority of the movement is done with the dancers in a straight line spanning across the space, reminiscent of the line of vulnerability from the beginning of “Self-Talk”. Has something changed? Has the conflict been resolved? Or has nothing changed at all? Are we in the exact same place as we were before? Has progress been made, or not? I think the conclusion of the piece offers two possible interpretations. We are dancing our most fervently, muscling through each movement, and radiating discontent through every pore of our skin. We are our most powerful and, arguably, empowered. In this scenario, we

have been heard. There has been a change. We are not defined by our gender nor are we being marginalized for it. The final kick line is the pinnacle of our efforts. We are bound together, a strong network of women, impressively kicking our legs eye-high á la the Rockettes. We stop the kicking on our own accord. It is not choreographed or planned. We stop when we feel moved to do so, because we have the authority to make that decision for ourselves. Some may kick longer during one performance than another. We have the power and the control. Like Phoebe Pearl, the Rockette who spoke out about performing for Donald Trump, we have the authority to decide for ourselves when enough is enough. The music ends abruptly and there we stand: empowered, determined, successful, accomplished. The lights slowly go out as we unlink arms. Standing alone but in solidarity.

However, I also see an alternative ending here. In this other context, the kick line is the apex of our efforts but we do not stop kicking because we want to or because we have the authority to make such a decision. Rather, we simply cannot kick any longer. The struggle is too much and we give in. The struggle to be heard, to be empowered, and to be respected, is a tireless battle that is never realized. The section feels as though it is building to an ultimate expression of empowerment, but then, just as quickly, it is dismantled. Is this a never-ending battle, an unanswerable plea?

Costumes

I walked into a rehearsal one day in February and coyly asked my dancers, "Would any of you feel uncomfortable performing this piece in your underwear?" At first they all looked a bit dumbfounded. They exchanged glances with one another before a chorus of "no, I guess not" began.

In modern dance you are asked to dance in all kinds of wild things, from full body spandex unitards to burlap sacks. I still often find myself confused by why some choreographers costume their dancers so absurdly. I have seen many dances, even on the Schwartz stage at Emory, in which the dancers were dressed in minimal clothing, mostly in the form of a leotard with nothing else covering the body, or tight shirts with very short shorts. But the pieces that I have seen featuring a lot of skin almost never take on a sexual connotation. Despite the body being so visibly displayed, the nature of the choreography minimizes its sexuality. For example, I would not watch a contemporary ballet piece and assume it is about the female body just because I can see a lot of it. But with this piece, which was clearly taking on an undertone of female expressivity and the power/object dynamic, the costuming was vital.

In the musical *Sweet Charity*, the dancers typically wear skimpy dresses, have big curled hair, and are sporting heavy makeup. These are all integral parts of the characters they are portraying and the story they are telling. In my story, I felt a deep essentiality that our characters be in their underwear. I could not validate any other option. Nothing else seemed like it would make sense. This piece was developing as a journey through the waxing and waning of empowerment and objectification. Our costumes needed to reflect that. Dancing in your underwear might be many women's worst nightmare. I used to have a reoccurring dream that I would accidentally go onstage without remembering to put my costume on over my nude undergarments. But for others, the idea of dancing on stage, showing off her body, could be liberating and exciting. I was curious to know how this costume choice might influence a viewer's perception of the work, and how we, as dancers, were affected. Would our lack of clothing reflect the male gaze? Is this how men see women even when they are wearing clothes? Would the costume choice alone necessitate an unavoidable sexual connotation? Would it have

been different had this been a heterosexual male choreographer making his dancers perform in underwear? How about a gay man; or a lesbian woman? What is it about the context in which we are performing in underwear delineates whether we will feel empowered or objectified? Though there is still a great deal of societal pressure placed on women to be sexy, but not too sexy, I also find myself in an environment that boasts sex positive feminism. We are encouraged to love our bodies and take ownership of ourselves as sexual entities. The costume choice served as a nuanced layer to pose questions about the very themes explored in the work.

Performance Reflection

When I informed the dance faculty of my decision to perform in the entirety of my work, I was encouraged to reconsider. I was told that while honors candidates who create group work may also make a solo for themselves, it's unprecedented for the choreographer to appear in much of the group work. Faculty who had created group work in which they also danced attested to the difficulty of such an endeavor. Logistically, this made sense to me. I could see the potential for struggling to capture the development of the piece in its entirety if I had to constantly take myself out to watch and direct. I certainly experienced this at times throughout the process. But I felt my participation in the piece was an integral part of my vision. I was researching my own history, my story, my struggles, my questions. When you are a Rockette, or an ensemble member of a Broadway cast, you are part of a team. Translating the ideas I was exploring to a canvas that intentionally excluded me felt incomplete. I needed to be a part of the journey that would take place on stage; and be one of the dancers taking the audience on this deeply personal passage.

Wearing the hats of choreographer, movement director, and dancer did pose its challenges. It was hard for me to envision where I would fit in each section spatially without

physically being there. Other complications came in the form of my own comfort with the choreography. Despite having the role of creating and shaping the entire piece, at times it was amazing how little I felt like I really knew the choreography. In performance we tend to rely on our muscle memory to keep the body moving when the mind is elsewhere. I did not have that luxury. When show week rolled around, I became keenly aware of how fresh the choreography felt on my body. Having practiced the piece many times fewer than the rest of my cast, I feared my performance might be lacking. In the face of that, I indulged in the novelty of the movement. Allowing space for impulsive decisions on stage was risky, but exciting.

On opening night in particular, I was nervous. While I wanted to be fully present in my work and deeply focused on my performance, I found myself distracted by my own insecurities. About to perform on a very intimate stage, in my underwear, in front of my friends, acquaintances, professors, grandparents, and strangers, I was on edge. Because the choreography still felt so fresh to me, I did not quite trust myself with it. Messing up was my big fear, especially with the added anxiety of spectators and bright lights. My background in competitive dance still has a way of seeping into every performance. I want to dance well and show off my hard work and my talents. I get panicked that I will falter or embarrass myself on stage. This performance brought an added layer of self-doubt because it was both my work and my body on stage, my intellect and my physical being. It was all of me. It felt like there was so much at stake and I had a deep sense of obligation to myself to get everything just right. Composure and the air of easiness are tenets that some forms of dance, such as ballet, were founded upon. As part of the female experience, we are encouraged to make it all look effortless, to veil our insecurities and vulnerabilities with poise. The irony of these fears and insecurities is their centrality to the themes of my thesis.

What I experienced, though, the first time I performed the piece, was a personal transformation. I have never danced anything that felt as profoundly personal as did this piece. I am a relatively shy person. While I come out of my shell to perform, I am not typically sharing my private thoughts on stage. And although I have had to show vulnerability in pieces I have danced in before, I felt a sense of detachment in those other circumstances. It did not really matter if I was actually being vulnerable, or just acting vulnerable, the message would still read. I was putting on a character, a façade, for the audience. In this instance, however, there was no acting. I had to be the most authentic and vulnerable version of myself, in all aspects of this work. In many ways, this was liberating. How often do we get to stand before a large group of people who are actually interested in what you have to say? Was it also terrifying? Yes. But as I journeyed through the piece, building in vigor and potency, I felt that fear and insecurity melt away. I was gaining the very empowerment this piece sought to summon. Whether I was comfortable with it or not, there I was, on stage, in my underwear, making my statement apparent, my dancing seen, and my thoughts heard.

Dancer Reflections

I invited my dancers to reflect on their experiences during the process of making this piece and performing it. One dancer said that she felt strong dancing this piece. Even though the piece called for vulnerability, she felt command of the space, and never felt like a spectacle or object. For her, the movement both asked and answered new questions each time we danced it. She felt that by dancing in our underwear we baited the audience, taking their preconceived notions about female sexuality and making them confront those expectations. It was a power

move on our part. She further offered that had it been a man who had choreographed this, asking us to strip down to our underwear, it would have been an entirely different story.

Another dancer reflected on the cyclical nature of this piece. A constant restatement of previous choreography and ideas, were we caught in a vicious cycle, unable to get out? Or were we perpetuating it ourselves? In one of our final rehearsals before the performance I asked my dancers, with regard to the final moments of the piece, "Has anything changed, or are we back where we started?" My reason for asking was because I, myself, was not sure. This dancer recently told me that yes, we had changed. Our positions on the stage were similar to how we had begun, but we were not slowly walking forward in defeat, we were charging forward with conviction and ownership. So yes, perhaps something has changed and some progress has been made, though we find ourselves still in this cycle of incessant repetition.

Performance itself is a phenomenon. After months spent conceptualizing, agonizing, preparing, discovering, and rehearsing, the performance is fleeting and evanescent. To quantify the effectiveness of a performance seems almost iniquitous. How do we evaluate our success in chasing our curiosity and developing personally? Despite these concerns, and the fact that this project comes from an acutely personal place, I was eager to know how it was received.

Feedback

Preceding both performances, I invited audience members to fill out a brief survey. The form posed three questions:

1. What questions and issues did this piece bring up for you?

2. Did the dancers in this piece seem empowered or objectified? Explain.
3. How would you describe the movement vocabulary of the entire piece?

Between the two performances a total of 54 completed surveys were collected. 26% of respondents identified as male and 74% identified as female. While there was a range of responses to the first question, 100% of responders identified questions and issues surrounding femininity and sexuality. Only approximately 6% of responders also noted the pieces commentary about the nature of movement style, and questions about why and how we differentiate modern and jazz from one another. Though tampering with movement style was my initial point of entry into this project, the results indicate that was a less salient takeaway of the piece for audience members.

In response to the second question, 68% of females and 79% of males reported observing a combination of empowerment and objectification in the piece. Many spoke of a transition from objectification in the first sections, to empowerment in the latter ones. There was a common thread among responses that the women were thought to be reclaiming their bodies as the piece progressed, or stepping out of their traditional gender stereotype. About 14% of females and 7% of males reported that they felt the dancers were more objectified than empowered, while approximately 18% of females and 14% of males felt the dancers were more empowered than objectified. Those who felt the dancers were more empowered attributed it to the dancers breaking out of tradition and finding power in their freedom. Some felt it was the act of dancing in their underwear that made them seem more empowered. Those who felt the dancers were more objectified attributed that to a sense of powerlessness evident in the arch of the work, but

also commented on the influence of the costumes. All of the respondents indicated that they saw at least one of the themes, either objectification or empowerment, in the piece.

In response to the third question I received more than 50 different adjectives used to describe the movement. The descriptors ranged, describing the dancers' body attitudes, movement style, performance quality, energy, sexuality, and more. Words that were used the most frequently included powerful, strong, jazz, sensual, modern, and released. Many people's responses included pairs of paradoxical words, such as strong but vulnerable, structured but released, and percussive but smooth.

Though informal, the results from this survey yielded helpful information. While no concrete conclusions can necessarily be drawn from this feedback, it illuminated patterns of curiosity among my audience. As a choreographer telling a story, it was extremely gratifying to receive so much feedback reflecting the themes and patterns I had hoped to communicate. I would have enjoyed more comment directly on the opposing movement styles in the piece. I posit that adding an additional question inviting the audience to define the styles of dance present in the piece may have provided additional insights. Regardless, I am interested that the most salient themes of the work were those regarding femininity, sexuality, female oppression, and empowerment. Overall, I am moved by the thoughtfulness and sincerity of my audiences and am sincerely grateful for their feedback.

V. CONCLUSION

I was overwhelmed by the feedback I received on this piece. From the surveys to discussion with my peers and dance colleagues, I was touched and amazed by how people connected to my work. I realized that the questions sparking the development and evolution of this piece only scratched the surface of potential avenues of exploration. The thoughtfulness with which people observed and reflected on my work was poignant. I was moved to accept that my audience not only valued my commentary but was eager to participate in this important dialogue with me.

One of my greatest qualms about embarking on this project was concern that my results would leave me disenchanted by the very dance form with which I am hoping to pursue a career. Exposing Fosse and the Rockettes for their contribution to, and perpetuation of, an idealistic female experience was not what I originally set out to do. There were times where I feared my results, foreseeing an undeniable critique of these dance forms that effectively empower me, but are based in a history that marginalizes my gender. However with the performances now behind me, and nothing left but my thoughts and memories of the forty minutes on stage and the hundreds of hours spent reflecting on this entire saga, I do not find myself disheartened or bitter. The project has charged me with examining my relationship with movement and my connection to my own feminine experience. It has channeled me to be introspective through exploration, deconstruction, and reconstruction of movement. I have observed and examined contrasting movement styles and their conveyance of objectification and power on the female body. This endeavor has enabled me to come to terms with the conflicting movement styles that reside within me as well as with the confusing, and often contradictory, messages embedded in each. I

have indulged in my quest to discover whether or not a dancer can live in both worlds at once, and I submit that she can. I have faced, head on, the uncomfortable reality of a dance history deeply embedded in sexism and prejudice, and allowed myself to find acceptance in that discomfort and dissatisfaction. Before undertaking this process, I never understood how interconnected my identities as woman and dancer are to one another. And while bringing this project to an end has clearly left me with more questions unanswered than resolved, I feel powerful and prepared to tackle the next phase of my inquiry. Standing at the precipice of the next chapter of my life, this work is a catalyst for me to begin an ongoing journey of self-discovery, both as a woman and a dancer.

Appendix A: Promotional Flyer

The Emory Dance Program Presents

HONORS THESIS CONCERTS

March 23-25, 2017

Dance Studio, Schwartz Center for Performing Arts

PROGRAM A March 23 & 25, 7:30pm

Clara Guyton
an investigation of the boundaries between dance and poetry

Julianna Joss
analyzing the body's means for communication & identity expression

PROGRAM B March 24, 7:30pm & March 25, 2:00pm

Rosie Ditre
translating a modern dance work from the stage to the screen

Cherry Fung
an exploration of personal identity in the context of a divided political relationship

Eliza Krakower
an exploration of the intersections of musical theater, jazz, and modern dance

404-727-7266
dance@emory.edu
www.dance.emory.edu

EMORY arts

no admission charge and no tickets required

Appendix B: Concert Program

The Emory Dance Program Presents

HONORS THESIS CONCERT

Program B: March 24, 2017, 7:30pm & March 25, 2017, 2:00pm

Dance Studio, Schwartz Center for Performing Arts

Title of Work

Film Director and Editor: Rosie Ditre
Choreographer: Cherry Fung
Sound: "Erupting Light" by Hildur Guanadottir
Performers: Diana Bender-Bier, Laura Briggs, Cherry Fung, Lauren Lym, Alfredo Takori
Costumes: Rosie Ditre and the dancers
Camera Operators: Elizabeth Littlefield, Conor Makowski, Katrina Peed, Toby Teitel, Evan Welch

INTERMISSION

Between a Rock and Jazz Hand: A Personal Journey of Movement Style and the Female Experience

Choreographer: Eliza Krakower
Performers: Jessica Bertram, Katie DeWolf, Alice Halter, Eliza Krakower, Breylan Martin, Serena Schmitt, Kelly Vogel
Sound Editing: Eliza Krakower with Kendall Simpson
Costumes: Eliza Krakower with Cynthia Church

Hey, Big Spender
Music: "Big Spender" by Fosse Ensemble & Valarie Pettiford

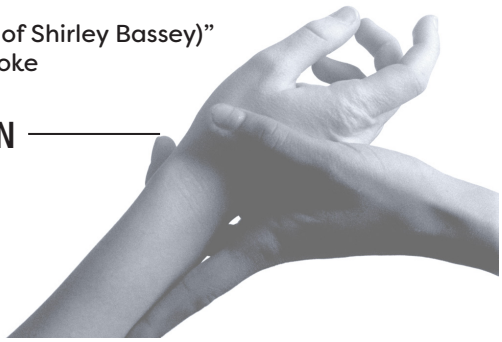
Breakdown *(noun)*: A failure to progress or have effect
Music: "Big Spender" by DJ Crazy J Rodriguez

Self-Talk
Music: "Logic Moon" and "Moon" by Alva Noto + Ryuichi Sakamoto

Hey, Self-Talk
Music: "Quadrate Fur Max-Ernst" by CoH

Begin Again
Music: "Big Spender (In the Style of Shirley Bassey)" by Ameritz – Karaoke

INTERMISSION



众 | 从 | 人 Trilogy

Choreographer: Cherry Fung
Costume Design: Cynthia Church, Cherry Fung

众
Who you see is not who we are

Performers: Paloma Bloch, Laura Briggs, Sasha Dymant, Patrick Otsuki, Jacob Robbins, Hannah Schwartz, Alfredo Takori, Maggie Vail
Music: "Varoeldur" by Sigur Ros, "Wave to Beat" by CoH
Sound: Compilation of lectures and news recordings by Cherry Fung and Kendall Simpson

从
Two in one encounter

Performers: Jessica Bertram, Cherry Fung

人
Missing pieces

Performer: Cherry Fung

Lighting Design: Gregory Catellier

Emory Production Staff

Technical Director: Gregory Catellier
Light and Sound Technician: Luke Reid-Grassia
Stagehand: Sharon Carelock
Costume Coordinator: Cynthia Church
Dance Program Interim Director: Sally Radell
Dance Program Coordinator: Anne Walker
Music Coordinator: Kendall Simpson
Promotional Assistance: Nick Surbey and Emma Yarborough
House Management: Nina Vestal
Videographer: Hal Jacobs

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Appendix C: Post-Concert Audience Feedback Survey

Between a Rock and a Jazz Hand: A Personal Journey of Movement Style and the Female Experience

1. Which performance did you attend?

   Friday Night Saturday Matinee

2. What is your gender?

   Male Female Other

3. What questions and issues did this piece bring up for you?

4. Did the dancers in this piece seem empowered or objectified? Explain.

5. How would you describe the movement vocabulary of the entire piece?

Appendix D: Survey Results

Survey Responses: Female

Performance	1. Questions / Issues	1. Empowered / Objectified	3. Movement Vocabulary
Friday Night	How did the women feel at the end?	Both	Jazz, modern
Friday Night	As a woman, is it wrong to want to feel sexy?	Both	Strong, confident, vulnerable
Friday Night	Agency of exposing the female body	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Conflict of being attracted to women and perpetuating objectification of a demographic I am a part of	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Relatable as a woman	Both	Jazz, musical theatre, modern, contemporary
Friday Night	Women's perceived roles	Both	Enticing, provoking
Friday Night	Sexualization of women and their bodies	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Things media tells us about gender stereotyping	Both	fluid, sharp
Friday Night	Feminism in the performing arts	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Female ideals imposed by society and the difficulty of breaking free of them	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Choosing to display one's body vs. being expected to; consent, comfort	Both	Jazz
Friday Night	n/a	Both	Fosse

Friday Night	How society views women; sexualization	Both	Structured, released, performative
Friday Night	Continued sexualization of female bodies	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Objectifying the female body	Both	n/a
Friday Night	How did the choreographer get into dance?	Both	Feminine, flirtatious
Friday Night	n/a	Mostly Objectified	Jazz, fluid
Friday Night	Role of women in society	Mostly Objectified	Powerful, expansive
Friday Night	Conflict between self and society	Mostly Objectified	n/a
Friday Night	Perceptions of ideal female body	Mostly Objectified	n/a
Friday Night	Making women sexual objects	Mostly Objectified	Interesting, sad
Friday Night	Ownership of one's body; sexuality/sensuality	Mostly Empowered	Sensual, strong
Friday Night	Exhausting demand of being a performing woman	Mostly Empowered	Vulnerable, performative
Friday Night	Behind the scenes of Broadway	Mostly Empowered	Bold, strong
Friday Night	What are they/am I covering up?	Mostly Empowered	Sensual, powerful, self-conscious
Saturday Matinee	n/a	Both	Exquisite, bold, fearless, powerful, precious
Saturday Matinee	Identity as a woman vs. identity as a human	Both	Accurate
Saturday Matinee	Femininity on Broadway	Both	Sharp, sexualized
Saturday Matinee	Comparing my body to the dancers'	Both	Lines, poses, sexual

Saturday Matinee	What is sexuality/sensuality? How is it expressed? Who can and cannot express it?	Both	Percussive, smooth, sensual, powerful
Saturday Matinee	Loving vs. hating our bodies	Both	Indescribable
Saturday Matinee	Why is sexuality frowned upon? Why are modern and jazz so isolated?	Both	Brilliant
Saturday Matinee	Sexualization of women	Both	n/a
Saturday Matinee	Objectification of women and their respective reactions	Both	Mysterious
Saturday Matinee	Coexistence of objectification and empowerment	Both	Juxtaposed
Saturday Matinee	What is jazz, what is modern? Is dance empowering or objectifying?	Both	Varied, exploratory, exquisite
Saturday Matinee	Female voice vs. sexualization of female body	Mostly Objectified	Jazzy, sassy, sexy, powerful
Saturday Matinee	Vulnerability	Mostly Empowered	Released, integrated, compartmentalized, relaxed, gestural, direct, postural
Saturday Matinee	Who is female sexuality for?	Mostly Empowered	Released, swinging, particular, sassy
Saturday Matinee	Feminism	Mostly Empowered	Powerful, strong, endearing

Survey Responses: Male

Performance	**1. Questions / Issues**	**1. Empowered / Objectified**	**3. Movement Vocabulary**
Friday Night	Femininity; sexualization of women's bodies	Both	Beautiful, complex, individualistic, showy, performative, real

Friday Night	Respect of female body and mind	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Female sexuality; power	Both	Jazz, vaudville
Friday Night	Evolution of/issues with gender	Both	n/a
Friday Night	Why do we subject women to painful expectations?	Both	Piercing, pushing, combative
Friday Night	n/a	Both	Playful, intense
Friday Night	Commodifying female sexuality	Both	Sexual, provacative
Friday Night	Questions about manhood, motherhood, women's sexuality, gender empowerment	Both	Fluid, sharp, vivacious, sassy, piercing
Friday Night	Objectification; sexualizing women	Mostly Objectified	Righteous
Saturday matinee	How do different types of music influence how dance is perceived?	Both	Indescribable
Saturday matinee	Patriarchy; the expectations I place on women as a (gay) man	Both	n/a
Saturday matinee	How are women portrayed?	Both	Powerful, suggestive, sexy, jazzy
Saturday matinee	n/a	Mostly Empowered	Seductive, timid
Saturday matinee	How one views themselves in relation to society's standards	Mostly Empowered	n/a

Question 3 Response Word Cloud

Appendix E: Performance Photographs (Credit Lauren Lindeen)

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