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Quiet Riot

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By

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Abstract

Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham have long been revered as leaders in propelling modern dance forward. Because their techniques were both built out of their need to express their struggles with their current social norms, their versions of modern dance can be seen as embodied feminism. Modern dance was born as a rebellion against ballet, and the restrictive elements of that technique. Well known for freeing the torso, Isadora Duncan based her technique off of naturalistic movement. Martha Graham's technique comes from a focus on breath that evolved into contraction and release, which is the contraction of the spine that releases into a flat back. The theater piece that I created was a connection between the work of those two women and feminism. The piece was also an expansion of the exploration of using the physicality of modern dance to embody elements of feminism.

This study focuses on the intersection between feminism and early modern dance, and how modern dance can be used to express aspects of feminism. When one thinks of feminism, often what comes to mind are women protesting in the streets, burning bras, and other acts of radicalism. I was interested in exploring and discovering through what other ways the feminist movement can be seen and expressed. I first became aware when I was coming of age that there are many “rules” to being a woman. There are these expectations, both spoken and unspoken, about women’s place in society. As someone who constantly feels the impulse to challenge these rules and norms, I have often found myself exhausted and unable to fully articulate and express the frustrations I was feeling. As a theater artist, I have always wanted to create a piece of theater that encompasses and further explores the root of this feeling. I often use dance to make sense of the world and found myself using dance as a way to navigate my understanding of the environment around me. This is what led me to this idea of using dance to explore elements of feminism. Although subtler than taking to the streets, I believe that early modern dance, specifically the work and techniques of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham, sowed the seeds of embodied feminism.

My adventure with this project was sparked by my fascination with dance history. I started dancing seriously in high school, where dance history was a huge component in the dance education curriculum. My high school dance teacher believed that it was important for us to understand where the styles of movement we were learning came from, and what dance meant beyond creating beautiful shapes and a pleasing aesthetic. This engendered my life long curiosity about the history of dance, and how entire genres and styles were created, and the need artists felt to create them. What struck me in particular, was how dance, and specifically modern dance, has evolved in terms of gender politics, and gender roles. When I began to study this, I realized

that there were recognizable aspects of feminism that were embedded in the early days of the modern dance, that were being expressed in the work of the women who were at the forefront of its creation, long before feminism had that name. I decided to create a piece which would explore these elements and use the techniques of women choreographers and innovators in modern dance as a tool to tell this story and present this idea. In this paper I will detail my research on the birth of modern dance and its relationship to ballet. I will also describe my findings on Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham and how their work relates to feminism. I will also discuss how the piece I created evolved from the original concept to the actual production, the process of creating the piece, how I developed the specific topics, and my goals for the future of the work.

Chapter 1: Research

The main focus of my research was on the work of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham and the way in which different aspects of their technique could be used to explore themes of feminism, and the gender issues that women face on a daily basis. In order to structure my research, and the process of creating my theater piece, I needed to establish the definition of feminism that I would work with throughout this process. For the purpose of this work I defined feminism as the movement which recognizes and works toward ending inequality based on gender in a patriarchal society. (McCann 2016 1)

It is important to note that this iteration of the project is only the beginning of a bigger conversation and would require a longer piece of theater that delves into the themes and components of intersectionality. Intersectional feminism recognizes that there are multiple layers of oppression that intertwine with gender, and that all of those layers must be acknowledged in order to be considered truly feminist. (McCann 2016 6) My piece begins this conversation about

the different components of being a woman, and how modern dance can be used as a way to explore and express feminism.

The history of dance can be explored in the context of patriarchal power, both in terms of who is watching and who is dancing. For example, ballet began in the French and Italian Renaissance courts, where royals and courtiers would dance in order to create a lavish spectacle for the nobility. It became the main event centered around the court and was funded and produced by royals such as Catherine de Medici, the wife of King Henry II of France and a great supporter of ballet and the arts (*A Brief History of Ballet* www.pbt.org).

King Louis XIV of France was a passionate ballet dancer and patron of the arts. He was the principal dancer during the first part of his reign; when Louis danced, ballet was still dominated by male dancers. He created the Academy of Dance in 1661 where ballet technique was codified. His contributions helped bring ballet to the stage from the courts and contributed to the rise of ballet as an art form. When Louis retired from performing the focus shifted from men as the central performers, to women who would dance to please the king.

The 18th century saw the rise of female dancers such as Marie Carmargo who daringly shortened her skirts and removed the heels from her slippers in order to emphasize her technique when dancing. She was also a choreographer and producer and was instrumental in moving ballet technique forward (*A Brief History of Ballet* www.pbt.org). When the romantic era of ballet emerged in the early 19th century, women had been dancing alongside men for 100 years. However, these new ballets focused on themes of fantasy and exoticism. Female characters were often portrayed as weak, passive, and fragile (*A Brief History of Ballet* www.pbt.org). It is possible to see the embodiment of women's oppression under a patriarchal system built into the very technique of classical ballet. Ballet technique demands straight backs and spines, pristine

lines in the body, and an inherent lightness in the quality of movement, for both men and women. This physicality traces back to the time of the French courts where presentation of one's self was of deep social importance, and dance was a way to separate nobility from the common people.

Modern dance was born out of a need not only to rebel against the restrictions of ballet, but to democratize dance both physically and socially. It also sought to extend the understanding of women's bodies past the objectified aesthetic beauty, and toward an equalization of female sexual agency. Where there were notable men in the modern dance movement, my thesis is focused on the women who pioneered the movement and the connection between modern dance as an art form, and feminism as a social movement. Where ballet had women en pointe, often giving the illusion that they were floating and gliding in space, modern dance embraced natural gravity and emphasized being grounded and connecting to the earth. Women were the ones to defy tradition and use dance to express and use human emotion in their work. There are many important women who were involved with the creation and/or the evolution of modern dance, whose artistic contributions can be viewed through a feminist lens.

Isadora Duncan was one of the first women pioneers, innovators, and creator/choreographers in modern dance. Isadora Duncan's social impact was seen and felt both onstage and off. She was known not only for her influence on modern dance, but also for her radical ideas. As Diana Mills says in *Dance and Politics: Moving Beyond Boundaries*, "Her understanding of class politics was inseparable from her interpretation of other forms of oppression, and those different categories become intermingled in her interpretation of dance." (43) Duncan's was fascination with politics and classism influenced her choreography. Duncan's artistic actions and social statements were not well received in her lifetime. Many people consider Duncan's work ahead of her time (Mills 29). However, upon further reflection, I have

concluded that this is something that people say when anyone does anything that is unknown, that disrupts the social norm, and promotes change in any artistic medium. When people say that women such as Duncan were “ahead of their time” what they are really saying is that there were people who inevitably opposed their work and progressive ideas. Isadora Duncan was not ahead of her time by any means, she was right on time in leading the way for other women and women artists of her time to come forward with their work. Duncan’s work is now interpreted through the lens of radical feminism in its comprehension of women’s oppression in a different medium other than legal and political structure, through using dance as a platform to express her social and political stances. (Mills 40).

Duncan’s dancing can be broken up into three different eras, as detailed by Ann Daly. From 1908-1911 Duncan’s early dancing focused on creating an image of her as a young nymph; this period of her creative career was focused on fluid movement, exploring the meaning of catharsis through movement. Her second period, which ranged from 1914-1918, was filled with choreography with major themes of heroism and mythology. In her third period that ranges from 1922-1923 Mills suggests there was a major change in usual style, where Duncan was immersed in stillness. This is a contrast to her earlier work on continuous movement of the body. (Mills 28) Throughout all these periods of Duncan’s life we see how both political issues affected her work. (Mills 29 qted: Daly 1995)

Duncan was not intimidated by of any kind of limitations or restrictions placed on her by society and the outside world. Duncan’s defiance and determination made her a key player within the feminist movement of modern dance and important to my investigation into the connection between the two. Her defiance was built into her work and her unique technique.

Duncan's use of her torso in an isolated and free quality gained her accusations of promiscuity and indecency. Rather than listen to these complaints, Duncan only further explored the meaning of freedom in her dancing, finding new ways for women to use and explore their bodies in a way that expressed individuality, and emancipation from men and patriarchal structures.

Though Duncan did much in regard to changing the limited idea of women's role in dance, one of the most impactful things she did was remove her corset and dance onstage barefoot. This was considered atrocious and indecent at the time, but Duncan saw it as a way to liberate women's bodies and spirits (Lockyer 2012). In 1903 Isadora Duncan delivered a speech in Berlin, Germany about the need for dance to progress and how she believed in the importance of looking back to learn from the past in order to move forward into the future. Duncan argued that we can learn and grow dance by mirroring the natural, free, and uninhibited way that the ancient Greeks moved and danced. It was around this period in her life that Duncan began to solidify her theory and form of "natural" dance, which is focused around movement derived from the solar plexus (www.isadoraslegacy.com).

An example of Duncan's work capturing her ideologies, is a performance she did in Boston on October 7th, 1922. At the end of her performance, Duncan is said to have taken a red scarf and waved it above her head proclaiming "this is red! So am I! It is the color of life and vigor. You were once wild here. Don't let them tame you" (Mills 34). Some accounts claim she revealed her breasts, others stated that she removed her loose dress and gave the entire speech in the nude, others mentioned nothing about nudity and only referenced the words she spoke and her use of the scarf. In *Dance and Politics- Moving Beyond Boundaries*, Diana Mills states that no matter the exact details of the events the most important impact that this performance had,

was that it allowed for Duncan to “claim her space as a legitimate speaking subject by showing the intertwining of her political and choreographic goals” (Mills 44). Duncan responded to the backlash from this particular performance with the statement “if my Art is symbolic of any one thing it is symbolic of the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hidebound conventions that are the warp and woof of New England puritanism” (Kurth 2002: 521). In order to create a piece about feminism using Duncan’s technique, it was very important to me to research and understand both women’s relationship with feminism and with activism, because these two elements influenced how they built their techniques inspired their choreography.

In order to create my piece, I had to investigate the main components of Duncan’s technique. This was so that I could be knowledgeable enough with the technique to be able to collect a physical vocabulary of movements to build a movement phrase to teach my actors. Because Isadora Duncan’s technique came from a direct rebellion against ballet, there is sometimes a misconception that the technique itself isn’t as difficult. However, it is equally as demanding and requires just the same amount of work and diligence to achieve mastery. It simply demands different things from the body.

Julia Levien, who is a trained Duncan dancer, stated that the technique often requires turned out knees, hips thrust forward, and a specific cadence in the breath. She also stated that nothing is left to chance. Every movement is meaningful and intentional. This is something that was new to dance at the time: ballet technique focused less on intention and more on aesthetic beauty. (www.isadoraslegacy.com) Some important aspects of Duncan technique are strong and flexible ankles, mobility and freeness of the pelvis, and an ever-present quality of fluidity in arms and upper body. The Duncan technique puts an emphasis on free-flowing movement and

the illusion of spontaneity. When executed correctly, the Duncan technique appears naturalistic, and organic. It might appear to an audience that it is completely spontaneous, when in fact a rigorous technique supports the natural movement (www.isadoraslegacy.com).

When talking about modern dance, and especially in relation to women in dance and choreography, one must mention Martha Graham. Graham changed what people thought could be possible in dance and paved the way for many who came after her. In my research, I found that Graham's connection to feminism can be broken down in terms of her choreography, and how she conducted her career and personal life.

After she trained at the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts, Graham started the Martha Graham Studio 1926, where she began work on many of her early dance and movement experiments (Mills 48). Graham created dances from the female perspective at a time in which women were not often portrayed as heroes in their own stories. Many of Graham's most famous pieces of choreography come from well-known myths and legends that offer a new insight into the stories by portraying the mythological women as interesting and complex human beings in a way that men had typically been portrayed.

According to Lewis Segal, a New York Times Dance writer "Starting from this core of meaning, Graham created a repertory that overturned male views of myth and history. In 'Night Journey,' her reworking of 'Oedipus Rex,' Graham emphasized the predicament of Queen Jocasta, with Oedipus seen merely as the fatally seductive instrument of her doom. In 'Clytemnestra,' her reworking of 'The Oresteia,' the title character prowled the underworld demanding justice, needing to know why she, alone, was dishonored among the dead when male brutality and betrayal drove her to her crimes" (Segal). Graham not only made space for the

creation of strong female narratives in art, she broke barriers and challenged stigmas against women and what was acceptable for the female body to do in dance. Graham was so unapologetic in her portrayal and depiction of sex and sensuality onstage that her piece “Phaedra” was declared as obscene by the United States Congress. Graham’s willingness to defy standards and societal expectations of how she should dance greatly influenced my interest in this project and is one of the reasons I think people were and still are so drawn to her work.

Graham was more than an extraordinary performer, dancer, and choreographer. She also created a unique dance technique, into which she inserted aspects of her own brand of feminism. She crafted a technique based on her own body, and the way she moved. The backbone of Graham’s technique is the contraction and release. This curving of the spine and release to a straight back comes from observing breath in the human body. Graham movements are known to have contrasting qualities of movement. While many Graham movements can be sharp, direct, and angular, her work also puts an emphasis on the spiraling of the torso and curving of the spine. (marthagraham.org) Martha Graham’s focus on the evocation of the human soul was revolutionary. Her emphasis on the importance of making movement significant and full of deeper meaning is one of the things that sets her apart. Dorothy Bird, a member of the Graham Company in its first years, wrote: “Martha said, ‘dance has nothing to do with what you can tell in words. It has to do with actions, coloured by deep inarticulate feelings that can only be expressed in movement’. She did not permit a single sentence, neither a subject nor an object, to be considered as a basis for a movement, only verbs and adverbs” (Mills qtd. Horosko 2002:48).

This was an important element of my research, because this is how I approached the physical aspects of my piece. I was attempting to encapsulate the use of dance as a vehicle to

express a deeper meaning and a strong need to communicate struggle and resilience. Where ballet had always prioritized the beauty and the idealization of the human form, Graham's interest was beyond beauty, and towards meaning and deep connection to one's emotional and spiritual self. She used emotionality and spirituality in dance in a way that no one before her had. Graham taught that the body holds secrets and stories, and the right movements can unlock the body and the soul. Her technique demands dancers to be grounded and connected to their pelvis, which allows these emotional connections to happen as a response. Graham's revolutionary contributions to modern dance opened up possibilities for women to have more agency over their bodies and their own creative pursuits in dance.

Chapter 2: Developing the Performance

When I first began working on this project, long before I started rehearsals or even began my tutorial, I had a specific concept in mind of the piece I wanted to create. In my original concept, I wanted every actor to have a shadow "dancer" that would each use different techniques created by modern dance pioneers Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, and Katherine Dunham. The characters were going to be developed from feminist elements found in the work of the different dancers. For example, Isadora Duncan is well known for using dance to express personal and sexual liberation; I was going to have one of the actors embody this quality, with her shadow dancer dancing in the style of the Duncan technique. I originally planned on creating the script from different interviews and written material by these women and others that reflected the experience of womanhood not only within their work and in the dance world, but also in society during their respective time periods. I was planning on then fashioning them into a series

of monologues which would eventually tie back to and relate to the modern-day struggles women still experience. Along the way the piece evolved and changed in ways I couldn't have anticipated. Part of the life of a creative artist involves reflection on how ideas and concepts shift throughout the process and learning from that.

After I cast my piece, I decided not to include Dunham in this rendition, because I didn't have any black women. I didn't feel that it would be right to include her, because Katherine Dunham's feminism is intricately intertwined with her identity as a black woman. I didn't want to perpetuate the white feminism narrative of white women's problems being more important than those of women of color, or the of white women's voices drowning out those of women of color. Because my cast consisted of straight, white, cis-gendered women, I was extremely intentional about every piece of text I used and made sure that at no point would there ever be a moment in my piece where we discounted another woman's experience. We married facts from research and the casts' personal experiences. My strategy in approaching the piece was to focus on the specificity of each woman's experience. I thought that if each of my cast members spoke of her individual experiences of womanhood, that this would resonate more deeply, and wouldn't be perceived as a group of white women complaining.

After I had gathered all my academic research on Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham I then had to look at the reality of devising a piece of theater with this information. I realized that I was going to need to specify what I wanted to talk about, because I had found that there are boundless conversations about feminism, women's oppression and empowerment, and that I had a limited amount of time. I decided that five of my six cast members would each have individual topics or specific issues that pertained to the greater topic of feminism. I had a list of several

topics that I thought would be solid options. I also decided to do a different kind of research with my cast, through survey questions.

Before we started rehearsals, I sent each of the women a set of questions that pertained to their relationship with feminism, and questions that were meant to prompt them into thinking deeper about the feminist movement: how they see themselves fitting or not fitting in to that movement, and prompts guiding them to a specific topic of interest. I ended up with five topics that were specific and personal to the cast members, and that I hoped would turn out to be relatable to a lot of women who would watch the piece. However, I didn't anticipate a common aspect in every one of their responses. Every single one of them felt disconnected from the feminist movement, and felt they were not "good feminists" because they weren't engaging in protests.

This posed the question, what does it mean to be an active feminist? Are there requirements that you must fulfill to claim this label? These are questions that I didn't think about previously and yet they ended up influencing the tone of the piece. The responses that I received helped open my mind and provided the bulk of the text for this piece, which was divided into five sections. The structure consisted of monologues based on the topics of interest that each woman had emphasized.

Part 1: Women and Body Image

The first topic centered around women's body images. One of the questions that I asked was, "What aspect of feminism speaks to you the most?" One cast member responded to this question by detailing her deep feelings about society's hyper focus on and commercialization of the female body:

Female bodies and body image certainly speak to me the most. As someone who is in recovery from an eating disorder I've seen first-hand just how extremely insane female diet culture is driving the world. An unrealistic expectation has been set on all of us to achieve a body that is simply not possible for most, and furthermore, we've been taught to think that our bodies somehow define our worth and our value as females and humans. We're being taught that our bodies get to define our femininity and that some of us are less than others because our thighs are different shapes.

Her response about the diet industry; how it effects women and their relationship with their bodies, and how society tells us how one's body looks defines your femininity was both simple and profound. According to Tabitha Farrar who writes extensively on body image and eating disorders, the marketing of beauty as thinness contributes to poor body image in women, which can lead to unnecessary dieting and unhealthy relationships with food. Over 50% of girls from the age of 9 and 10 feel better about themselves when they are on a diet. (Farrar) The standards that we as women are told to live up to in order to be desirable, and how we are taught that being desirable is what gives us value, became the key point of this actor's topic. I wanted this to be a component of the piece, because it is both a universally public and painfully private experience.

The first line of this cast member's monologue "Why is there such thing as a Dad bod, but not a mom bod?" came from a discussion we had in a rehearsal one day in which we were discussing different standards that men and women's bodies are expected to meet. Hearing her say this in a rehearsal inspired me to use it in the text of her monologue. This cast member's piece evolved from being about body image, to the factors that influence body image, such as diet culture and societal pressures to look a certain way.

Part 2: Women and The Mental Health Stigma

The second topic that I settled on was women's unique experience of mental health. I got this topic from another cast member's response to the associations she held with the word feminism. She said:

When I hear the word feminism, I think of the words equality and acceptance. To me, feminism is a feeling of inclusion and support. In my town at home, people who consider themselves feminists are often looked down upon or criticized because of a general assumption that feminists are extremists and think they're better than men. For a while, this made me scared to speak up, out of fear that I also might be criticized. Now, I view this as more of an opportunity to show my friends and people from home and educate them on what it actually means to me a feminist.

After reading this, I asked her what the biggest barrier was that kept her from being vocal about the struggles she was experiencing. She told me that she was constantly afraid of judgement from society, from her family, and from the people closest to her. Upon further discussion, we came to the agreement that there is a common societal expectation that women must bear the burden of always needing to be composed and be the one to take care of everything. My second cast member stated that while men are often allowed to deal with conflict with bursts of anger, women are often labeled as crazy, unstable, unreliable, and overemotional.

According to the World Health Organization, gender is an important and under-researched factor in mental illness and how it is treated. "Depression, anxiety, somatic symptoms and high rates of comorbidity are significantly related to interconnected and co-occurrent risk factors such as gender-based roles..." (www.who.int 2013). The fact that the adversity and oppression that woman face on a daily basis can lead to mental health problems is something that is often left unsaid, and this was what we addressed in this section of the piece. At the beginning of the process developing this monologue I originally wrote a lot more about different specific mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. When I worked with this particular cast member she felt that this was too much to fit into one piece, and suggested we take a step back

and focus on the effects of social media, and expectations that women face in ways that men do not. From there, this monologue evolved into being more specific to the personal experiences of the actor who was speaking it.

Part 3: Women in the Church

The topic of women's role in the church was one that I did not think of including at all originally. It wasn't until the third cast member sent me her responses that I began to open my mind to the idea of addressing this topic in my piece. This is what she said concerning what the word feminism makes her think of:

I think of equality, empowerment, peace, and change. Feminism to me is a movement that recognizes women's rights in an attempt to fight towards the equality of everyone, no matter the gender. I think of strong and brave females finally standing up for themselves and trying to change the way they are viewed in the world. My job in this life is not to become a housewife and do everything for my husband, or to clean and cook every day. If I want to do that, I will. But I want to be able to live my own life and choose my own path, no matter what doubts other people have because I'm "just a girl". I grew up in a very conservative household (my father is a pastor and missionary) where feminism is seen as evil and intense when it should be a positive and beautiful thing to progress conversations around certain issues. My parents and even my sisters believe that the man should be the center of the household and that in the end, the husband has rule over the wife and gets the final decision, which has caused many arguments between us. I don't think that the wife has say over everything, but I believe that there should be a unity in marriage and that both the partner's in the relationship, no matter the gender, should work together to make decisions and raise their family.

When I dissected this, I found that her description of her family's structure, and the expectation of how she should structure her own life, are an extension of the patriarchal values that are perpetuated and upheld through the institution of the church.

It was important to both her and me that in the piece it didn't come off as a monologue that was bashing religion and Christianity. The process of writing this monologue began with working with this cast member on narrowing down what we wanted to focus on. We found that it most interesting to hear about this cast member's love for the church, where she finds herself in

terms of her role as a woman in it, and the need she has to make it better. The focus of her monologue became how the anti-woman and anti-feminist narratives that are seen in the church do not come from God or the faith itself but come from humans and their own prejudices and a particular process of socialization. The text detailed this cast member's journey as she navigates these obstacles in this institution that has always been an important part of her identity.

Part 4: Shame Surrounding Sexuality

The fourth topic a cast member brought up in my piece was women and sexuality; more specifically how women are taught to associate their sexual feelings with shame, while men are celebrated for the same thing. This didn't come up in depth in her original answers to the survey, but instead came up in a discussion in rehearsal, and she realized that this was what she connected with the most. In her answer to my question about her relationship to women, she wrote:

I love the idea of women supporting women. I know women and sexuality is something I'm sensitive about and something I'm still discovering for myself- I feel like I'm not allowed to be sexy, even though I know I can be.

This led me to ask questions about the different ways in which shame surrounding sex and our bodies influences not only our relationships with ourselves, but how we look at and perceive other women. I find this topic to be very important, because I think that the lack of discussion around sex and specifically female sexuality, is what leads to problems such as unplanned pregnancy, painful and unsafe sex, and even sexual assault (Lancer 2018). Men are socialized to objectify and degrade women. It is considered as acceptable masculinity to speak of women as if they were sexual challenges to be conquered. This is also related to the popularity of pornography, specifically violent pornography where men are dominating women (Lancer qtd. Elder, 2010).

The text that this cast member ended up speaking began with a personal story about an experience she had with her mother, who commented on her body and how she was dressed, and deeply influenced the way that this cast member thinks of her body, herself, and her control over her own body. I wrote and organized the monologue in the cadence of how this cast member naturally speaks, which was my goal with all of them. Following this personal account, I then incorporated text about wanting and needing power and ownership over one's own body as a woman and independent being. This was intertwined with facts and research that this cast member brought in.

Part 5: Femininity

The fifth main issue that we ended up focusing on was femininity and one's personal definition of what it means to be feminine versus society's. This cast member expressed her desire to explore a topic that had to do with the expectations of how women are supposed to look and act. Her response to what aspect of feminism speaks to her the most was:

I think that equal opportunity and equal pay are the aspects of feminism that speak to me the most. I think the idea that women are not as capable as men in any capacity, other than maybe brute strength, is an outdated, misogynistic view and it baffles me that there are many people in America that continue to hold that view, including women.

She also noted that she felt strongly about the need to end gendered societal pressures, for both men and women. This was important when it came to the development of the text in this piece.

I structured this cast member's monologue by establishing her identity as someone who doesn't identify with traditional gendered femininity. In our improvisations and discussions, a lot of what this cast member was being drawn to was the experience of a child learning the societal rules of gender. The text of her monologue reflects this, and also expresses that women should be able to take on leadership roles such as CEO's and not be seen in negatively when in positions of power. From here it was easy to find the trajectory of her monologue, following her personal

experience with her own personal expression of a femininity that does not conform to the societal norm.

What I believe to be important is how I made the parallels between feminism and modern dance in the development and execution of the piece. The main physical idea that I began working with was the contrast between physical repression and full embodiment and expressiveness of the body. I wanted to explore the metaphor of fully embodying oneself as a woman in expressing our struggles and personal challenges. One day after a rehearsal, I was reading an article on Isadora Duncan and the controversy that ensued when she removed her corset to dance. I decided that I would use corsets in my piece. Each cast member would have one on at the beginning of the piece, where we see them attempting to complete the full range of their movement phrases but being unable to move fully due to the physical restrictions the corsets provided. During the piece, when each cast member delivered her monologue, she would take off her corset in order to execute the unrestricted versions of the movement phrases associated with her topic. The corsets offered several things to the piece. They functioned as a visual metaphor for the restrictive powers and effects of a patriarchal society, but also a physical obstacle for the actors, and an aid to help the audience to understand the correlation between the movement and freedom from oppressive structures.

Each woman had a movement phrase that I called her “mantra” that was incorporated into her individual section to support and connect her words to her movements and help the audience understand the meaning behind the movement. Given the short amount of rehearsal time we had, it didn’t make sense for me to try and teach a technique that was new to my actors and expect them to be able to incorporate it. I gave each of my cast members a specific prompt and

guidelines to create a personal movement phrase from their own movement vocabulary. These prompts came from the qualities of movement, and other physical traits and ideas that I had associated with their individual topics. This was my interpretation of what it literally looked like to physically express feminist tendencies. For example, I gave my actor who had the topic of body image the prompt to create her movement phrase focusing on connecting each body part together in a fluid movement and to focus on creating negative space (the open space or air between parts of the body that allow clear shapes to surface), between her body parts. This was my way to help her initiate exploration in the relationship with her body, which would be the core of her topic. I gave her fluid movement, as an embodiment of the way that women often flow into new ideas of beauty as it is continually changing. The use of the negative space came from the idea that there was something she was looking to fill. These things also can be connected to the Graham and Duncan techniques as Duncan famously was fluid with her movement in her torso and upper body, and Graham's affinity for negative space within her own dancing and choreography.

I decided I would choose a different main movement from the Graham technique that each actor would execute. This is so that I could make specific connections between the vocabulary of the Graham movement and what each cast member was speaking about. This supported the core of my thesis: modern dance can be embodied feminism. A clear example of this was the Graham movement I chose for the cast member whose topic was women and mental health. The seed of her topic was the emotional burden placed on women to always be the caretakers and problem solvers. For her signature movement, from the Graham technique, I chose the contraction and release. This is not only the foundation of Graham's technique, it also holds great meaning. "The contraction, or strong pulling back and curving of the torso, and the

release of this movement by returning to a straight torso are symbolic of the dichotomies in life. It is the contrast between desire and duty, between fear and courage, between weakness and strength” (Giguere 2014). The use of the contraction was meant to portray the way women absorb the grief and the pain we experience in daily life, and the release portrayed the toll this has on women. The two components of the contract and release sequence together act as an expression of that cast member’s experiences as woman navigating mental health. This general movement structure of a Graham movement being assigned to each cast member aligning with their specific topics existed throughout the piece.

The sixth member of the cast, who I will call RF, played an important role that evolved into something other than I’d originally expected. As I mentioned before, each of the other five women had a monologue based on their individual topic. RF provided the connection of modern dance as an expression of feminist struggle and ideals, and she functioned as the medium that united all of the other cast members. Though my original intention for this sixth cast member was to be the physical manifestation and personification of the Graham and Duncan techniques, she ended up signifying more. She became the what brought all the other actors together, as well as an additional outside perspective on each person’s pieces. I tasked RF to ‘build’ the Graham movement that would correlate to the other cast member’s text. In rehearsals we worked extensively on the relationship between this character and the others, and the relationship between the movement and the text. While the featured actor was performing her piece, RF would enact the Graham movement for the respective person, as if she was offering it to them in response to their words. The witnessing of the Graham movement is what acted as a motivator for each actor to take off her corset. As each actor removed their corset, they joined RF in encouraging the next person to make the decision to take off her corset. This is what drove the

narrative of women supporting women. Since the corsets were representative of the restraints placed on us as women by a patriarchal society, removing the corsets spoke of removing judgement of other women. RF, who acted as the conductor between the issues, experiences of the women, and the use of the body through the modern dance techniques became the through-line of the piece.

In retrospect I had the most difficulty creating the opening and closing of the piece. Both the opening and the closing elements evolved significantly from the beginning of the process to the end. At the beginning of the process I played with different ways to create a dystopian world. I knew that in order to address these issues within the piece, I would have to establish a need for each of the women to speak their truths in order to prepare for the release that came with the removal of the corsets so that they could fully inhabit the movements. I started with exercises in which I had them section out the trajectory of their respective pieces and assign a word or a label to the different beats. I then had them create individual tableaus in which they inhabited those beats. I led them in an exercise where they all walked around the room, and when I called their name they would go into their tableau series. This was in order to experiment with establishing a chaotic world and exploring what would happen with moments of stillness. We built on this and explored different variations, playing with the distance of the other bodies in the space, stillness versus movement, and even the idea of them speaking factual text about their topics from different newspapers and headlines. Within these explorations I found that I could create an environment of unrest and need for change, simply by having them be in their separate world, performing a reduced and restrained version of their mantras. The corsets created a clear understanding of each actor's need to fully express herself physically, but her inability to do so. I

cut the informational and factual text as I felt that their bodies were expressive enough on their own, and that the simplicity of this action was sufficient.

Overall, another challenge that I faced in the creation of this piece, was how to establish the sixth cast member as a key part of this world: someone who is taking her own journey and not just a figure who comes in and fixes all of the other actors' issues. I found that by having the audience witness the sixth cast member remove her corset as the lights come up, we relate her to the other women and see that she is connected to the other actors. I directed the sixth cast member to take in the impression of each woman living in her own struggle, in their respective reduced movements. I then asked her to have a moment with each woman where she replicates the movement they are doing, but she does the full out version while they do the reduced version. This was a way of showing that she recognizes the oppression that is keeping them from fully moving, because she had just gone through it herself, because we've seen her remove her corset. After she has a moment with each one of the other actors, the sixth cast member performed a physical phrase that was a compilation of the movement from each of the women's personal phrases. The first woman was brought to the moment of speaking her text by seeing the sixth cast member fully inhabit her body as a form of expression. This was to create the idea that seeing other women dealing with their struggles by fully expressing it can inspire and help other women to do the same. This is how I addressed the theme of women supporting each other.

The closing segment was born out of my realization of the need to give RF an arc in her journey. As the last woman removed her corset, all of the women were freed from their physical restraints. As they all found their way to this point of realization, I had them direct their energy toward RF. I had them each start speaking their text as a canon in order to create a cacophony of sound. As a response to this, RF danced her own mantra, which is the first time we perform

movement unique to her, rather than a version of one of the other woman's phrases. It is also the first time she is seen, fully expressing something for herself rather than for others. I didn't think of this at the time, but as I reflect I realize that this was a way to say that there is still so much more work to be done, and that a woman fighting for herself is inherently feminist.

At the end of the piece, the actors performed the movement phrase that the sixth cast member did at the beginning that included a movement from everyone's phrases. However, this time it was done in unison, and some of the movement included picking up and using the corsets. This was meant to portray them as a group taking back power from what had previously restrained them. As the lights went down, they continued to slowly finish their movement as all of their heads turned towards the door. This small detail was extremely important for me, as it was a way of saying that we are not done, we have not solved all of the problems we face as women and that other women face, but we are still moving.

Chapter 3: The Next Step

I would like to continue working on this piece post-graduation and to apply what I've learned from this process to help it grow and mature, and to address new issues. One thing that I would like add to the piece is diversity, both in casting and in the issues addressed. Building on what we created in relation to the importance of women supporting each other. I would like to expand this idea to explore what it means to have different layers of oppression, and how not every woman's experience is the same. In today's political climate, our differences are being used to tear us apart, divide us, and distract us from what is important. I would like my piece to

display all of our differences unapologetically and explore ways to show how fully inclusive feminism makes us stronger.

I would like to put the technique and work of Katherine Dunham back in, which would require black women in the cast. Initiating more conversations surrounding intersectionality is a goal that I have for the future of this work. In order to do this, I would like to eventually expand this piece to include a variety of different people who have different identities and different life experiences but share the experience of identifying as a woman. I would want to include people such as women of color, queer women, trans women, women with disabilities, older women, and women of all body types. I am also interested in further developing the sixth cast member's track and playing with the idea of that track splitting into multiple characters/topics in order to accommodate the different needs and people.

Another element that I am interested in exploring is relationships between generations of women. Early on in my research, I wasn't sure which women in modern dance I wanted to focus on. I settled on Graham and Duncan as they are both considered mothers of modern dance and decided that I wanted to focus on the revolutionary aspects of this form and its correlation to feminism in that way. However, now I'm interested in investigating how the mothers of modern dance paved the way for women who came after them, such as Pina Bausch and Trisha Brown, and how those women either followed in their footsteps or rebelled against them and their teachings. I would like to use this information as both historical analyses, as well as a metaphor for generational relationships between women. Since I have a lot of different ideas about how I want to develop this concept and add to it, I am also playing with the idea of creating a series of short devised pieces that all incorporate modern dance in a similar way that deal with different

feminist themes. I look forward to working on this, taking with me the knowledge that this process has given me, both artistically and personally.

Taking all my research on Duncan and Graham to devise an original piece using modern dance was a challenge and a privilege. It challenged me to take what I know how to do and apply it in a new way. Through the process of creating and working on this piece, one thing that I stressed to my cast was that we were not attempting to present simple solutions to years and years of complex and interwoven oppression and trauma. Our job as artists while working on this specific piece was to simply embody the questions that we have, and to use our stories to bring attention to issues that are often ignored. While building the piece I found that what helped me the most wasn't finding the answers to my questions, but rather the new questions that we would find through each exploration.

The concept of this piece was born out of my need to answer my own questions about issues surrounding being a woman, and my need to do it with more than just words. Similar to how the modern dance techniques of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham were born from a need to rebel against ballet. The structure of my piece encompassed individual women's' expression of her experiences with gender-based oppression. This in conjunction with specific physical vocabulary from Graham technique, supported my thesis that modern dance, in particular Isadora Duncan's and Martha Graham's work and techniques, can be seen as embodied feminism. The use of dance and movement enhanced the elements of repression, freedom, discovery, and the deep desire to be heard and understood in a way that I don't think any other medium can. Martha Graham said it best when she famously said, "The body says what words cannot." (The New York Times "Martha Graham Reflects on Her Art and a Life in Dance" 1985)

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Quiet Riot

A Thesis by Griffin Lockette

(Opening. Lights up. The song “The Violet Hour” by The Civil Wars plays. In a horseshoe shape, from stage right to stage left, stands Izzy, Sariah, Emmy, Cassie, and Jaclyn. Facing different directions, each person is doing the reduced version of their individual mantra. Rachel stands center stage. She removes her corset, and throws it down stage right.)

Rachel: I think we go through enough as women without having to worry about judgement from other women. *(To Sariah, as she does Sariah’s mantra movement)* the body says what words cannot. *(To Cassie, while doing her mantra movement)* Dance is the hidden language of the soul. *(To Izzy, while doing her mantra movement)* And it’s often the language that we don’t want to speak. *(To Emmy, while doing her movement mantra)* We have so much to say-- *(To Jaclyn, while doing her mantra movement)* words are secondary.

Rachel moves center stage a does a mantra made up of movements from each woman’s individual mantra. Izzy, Sariah, Emmy, Cassie, and Jaclyn, turn their heads to watch her. At the end of the mantra, everyone looks away except for Emmy. Music stops. Emmy move’s downstage.)

Emmy: Why is there such thing as a dad bod, but not a mom bod? Why are men’s bodies allowed to age and change, but women must keep their bodies in “perfect” condition? I hate that. *(to Izzy)* When I was little, I thought dieting was just a part of being a girl *(Izzy crosses DSL, Emmy moves to Sariah)*, and I never questioned the things I did to myself because *(Sariah crosses USL, Emmy goes to Cassie)* I thought all girls did it. It became equal to femininity. *(Jaclyn crosses USR)* That kind of mindset starts so young *(Cassie crosses DSR, Emmy moves to Jaclyn)*. When I was in

treatment, there was an 8-year-old girl there. *(Emmy goes CS, everyone begins doing reduced mantra, Rachel begins to “build” Emmy’s Martha Graham movement)* Diet culture is 90% women and marketed to women. These businesses are literally profiting *(wave)* off of our low self-esteem *(wave)*. They are creating the problem and then offering the “solution”. Selling us this idea that being *(small wave, heave)* smaller is beautiful and beautiful is everything. I know I bought it for a long time. We need to talk about body image because women are losing *(step back)* themselves in search of something that doesn’t exist. The “ideal female body type” *(revolution)* is always changing and I can’t keep up. Men aren’t the only ones attracted to women but they’re often in control *(clutch forward)* of industries surrounding and profiting off women’s bodies. As women, our entire value is placed on our bodies. *(Individual mantras halt, each girl turns to look at Emmy, Emmy turns to look at Rachel. Rachel shows Emmy the Martha Graham movement)* Nothing ever said about my personality has stuck with me the way it has when people comment on my body.

(Emmy attempts the Martha Graham movement, but her corset is prohibiting her. She removes the corset, Cassie, Jaclyn, Sariah, and Izzy touch their own corsets as she does this. Emmy drops the corset, the 4 corsetted women turn away, crossing USC and forming a line. Emmy and Rachel do the Martha Graham movement together. Emmy crosses to the line of women in the back, pushes Cassie forward as Rachel clears Emmy’s corset. Cassie crosses DSC, Rachel crosses USL, Emmy goes USR. As Cassie speaks, Jaclyn, Sariah, and Izzy turn to look at her. Throughout this monologue, Jaclyn crosses DSL, Izzy crosses DSR, Sariah stays USC, Rachel begins to build the Martha Graham movement, Emmy follows her movements.)

Cassie: I'm always expected to be happy or peppy when I'm upset, or disappointed, or just not doing well. I scroll on Instagram and twitter and sometimes I think it makes things worse. I have to remind myself that my messiness I experience every day doesn't make me less than those girls who have seemingly perfect lives, because they are just as messy as me, I just don't see it (*Jaclyn, Sariah, and Izzy touch their corsets, Cassie back US*). I've always thought to myself that I have to be strong all the time and I can never show weakness, because I have to take care of everyone else. I feel like if there's something that is worrying me then I'll keep it to myself, because that's what I was taught. (*Cassie starts her reduced mantra, Jaclyn and Izzy begin to move towards Cassie*) A big part of why I don't speak up about things is because I never wanted to be a burden. It's this fear that if I express myself honestly, I'll be written off as crazy. (*Rachel and Emmy cross to Cassie*) There's such a stigma surrounding women's mental health. Sometimes it feels like being a woman comes with an obligation to be okay (*Cassie steps through Jaclyn and Izzy*). That being poised is the only option. Women are always fixing things. What they don't tell you is that in order to fix things you have to absorb the brokenness into yourself. (*Rachel and Emmy show Cassie the Martha Graham movement*) That's the unspoken expectation of being a woman. Once someone told me, that I was the glue that held everyone and everything together. But what if I don't want to exist just to put you back together? (*Cassie takes off corset, Jaclyn, Sariah and Izzy touch their own corsets*) (*Cassie drops her corset. Izzy, Jaclyn, and Sariah run to the back wall, Jaclyn remains looking at Cassie, the other two face the wall. Cassie joins Rachel and Emmy, they do*

the Martha Graham movement. Cassie begins her full out mantra, using it to invite Jaclyn to speak. As this happens, Rachel clears the corset DSL. Emmy crosses DSL, Rachel and Cassie join her.)

(As Jaclyn speaks, she begins to "Pinball" off of Izzy and Sariah. Rachel trails USL, turning when she hits the back wall and walking SR.)

Jaclyn: Growing up in the church, I have noticed biased definitions of both Christianity and feminism. Christians should be loving and accepting, *(Jaclyn crosses DSL, Sariah crosses DSC, Izzy crosses USR)* that's kind of the whole point, but a lot aren't *(Sariah stops Jaclyn. Jaclyn watches Sariah as she walks backwards USR. Jaclyn turns, is stopped by Izzy. Sariah crosses DSR)* In many places, women can't be leaders in the church. *(Jaclyn backs DSR, facing Izzy. Izzy crosses SL)* If you grow up as a young woman in the church and you're taught *(Jaclyn is stopped by Sariah)* to follow the rules, you are taught to follow men. *(Jaclyn crosses USL, is stopped by Izzy. Izzy crosses DS. Sariah crosses SL)* There are things I struggle with that are a part of the church, and as a woman who has always seen Christianity *(Jaclyn is stopped by Sariah)* as a part of her identity *(Emmy crosses SR, standing to the right of Sariah, facing away from her. Cassie stands to the left of Izzy, facing away from her. Jaclyn is stopped by Izzy)*, I don't know where that puts me *(Jaclyn stands between Izzy and Sariah, begins her reduced mantra. Rachel begins building the Martha Graham movement. For the next set of lines, Cassie and Emmy lean around Sariah and Izzy, attempting to reach Jaclyn but always being blocked)*. I remember my pastor teaching that the best way to save your marriage is to give into your husband's sexual desires, even when you don't want to. I also remember learning in church that feminism was equal to promiscuity- and that if you call

yourself a feminist, you're a whore and you hate men. I struggle with this, because my faith is important to me. *(Jaclyn turns, watches as Rachel shows her the Martha Graham movement)* A lot of these issues of how women are treated in the church, come from us as people, not from God. People use God as an excuse to build walls against people different than them. *(Jaclyn begins taking off her corset. Cassie and Emmy stop reaching, Izzy and Sariah watch Jaclyn, touching their corsets)* The only walls that exist are the walls that we put up to keep each other out, out of fear.

(Corset drops, Izzy and Sariah turn and run US, Sariah faces US, Izzy faces DS. Jaclyn, Cassie, Emmy, and Rachel do the Martha Graham movement together. As Rachel clears Jaclyn's corset DSR, Jaclyn does her mantra to Izzy. Cassie moves USL, Jaclyn moves DSL, Emmy moves DSR, and Rachel moves USR. Each person faces away from center. Izzy crosses DS.)

(As Izzy speaks, Sariah slowly turns around)

Izzy: My first memory of someone commenting in how I was dressed was when I was 5. *(To Jaclyn)* My mom said to me- those shorts are too short; do you want a man to pick you up? Good girls don't wear things that bring attention to their bodies *(Cross to Rachel, Jaclyn turns around)*. As a society we value the idea of "becoming a man" more than becoming a woman. When a man has sex for the first time, he gets a high five *(Cross to Emmy, Rachel turns around)*. When a woman starts to develop, she is armed with mace and pepper spray and told not to walk alone at night, or dress too revealing *(Cross to Cassie)*. This stems from the idea that we don't own our bodies. All I ever wanted was to own my body. *(Izzy walks center, beings her reduced mantra. Cassie,*

Jaclyn, and Emmy move to make a horseshoe shape around Izzy. Rachel begins building the Martha Graham movement. Sariah slowly crosses DSR) We are still in a world where a woman has no sexual agency inside her own society, where women are still making sexual choices based on the desires of their partners outside of their own needs. We encourage men to be sexual beings and to sexualize women, but shame women when they own their sexuality. Isn't that a little fucked? (Izzy stops mantra, Rachel crosses DSL, She, Cassie, Jaclyn, and Emmy show the Martha Graham movement) For a society that talks sex a lot we don't talk about sex enough. (Izzy tries the MG movement, can't do it because of her corset) I'm not a disposable object, I'm a human being with feelings and desires. (Starts to remove corset) I wish that society knew that, I wish my mother told me that, and I wish I had always believed that. (Corset drops. Sariah runs back USR. The 5 other women do the Martha Graham movement together. They swipe the scene, Rachel clearing the corset DSL.) (On stage right, Izzy braids Jaclyn's hair. On stage left, Cassie and Emmy play ninja. Rachel crosses USL, silently encouraging Sariah to speak, and begins to build the Martha Graham movement. Sariah slowly crosses DSL)

Sariah: I was really young when I first understood that there was a right and wrong way to be a girl. Little girls get dolls, dresses, and pink toys. I always wanted to play sports with the boys at recess, but that was considered weird. *(Sariah joins Emmy and Cassie in playing ninja)* I'm always being told that I'm too aggressive or too much *(She stops, begins to cross DSR)* which I find funny because nobody tells boys that! Being loud, asking questions, and having opinions is cool when boys do it, but in girls it's

considered annoying and bossy. Why is it that I'm bossy and my guy friend is "leadership material?" (*Crosses center*) There's also this idea that girls are either "girly" or a tomboy. What about those of us that are somewhere in the middle? (*Begin reduced mantra, Cassie and Emmy cross SR, Izzy and Jaclyn cross SL, they begin doing their mantras*) I always wanted to be one of the dudes, because the girls didn't accept me. While there's nothing wrong with being traditionally feminine, nobody should ever feel that they have to be. Women are always expected to put in more effort with our appearances. Makeup, shaving, clothing. At the same time even when I do all those things "right" I'm still not taken seriously, (*Everyone stops moving*) because I'm still just a woman. (*Sariah turns, crosses to Rachel. Rachel shows her the Martha Graham movement*) No matter how I present myself, traditionally feminine or not, society never approves. I would hope we are past the stage where a woman has to be a man to be successful and I wonder if I would've enjoyed being a woman more when I was younger (*Cassie, Emmy, Jaclyn, and Izzy do their own Martha Graham movements*) if I didn't think that there was only one way to be a woman.

(Sariah removes her corset, everyone does the Martha Graham movement. Cassie, Jaclyn, Emmy, and Izzy turn their heads to look at Rachel. Sariah presents her mantra to Rachel. Rachel slowly crosses center. At this time Emmy begins to say her monologue to Rachel as she passed by. Cassie starts her monologue layering over Emmy's. Jaclyn, Izzy, and Sariah follow suit. As they grow louder Rachel does her own mantra. When she reaches the end, everyone stops talking. Silence.)

Rachel: (*Emmy does mantra*) Isadora Duncan changed the way women existed in dance. The curved movement of her upper body came from watching the waves lapping

the Pacific coast. And, dancing barefoot in loose tunics, (*Jaclyn mantra*) she rebelled against the unnatural strictures of ballet and the physical constraints of the clothing of her day. Shedding her corset in order to dance unrestrained, she caused a riot. Duncan, like many who followed her, danced to express herself personally, her choreography infused with her passionate feelings about political events, and the anguish (*Izzy mantra*) derived from her personal tragedies.

Taking women from just demonstrating aesthetic beauty to dancing with real human emotion, Martha Graham redefined what it means to dance and explored womanhood unapologetically. (*Cassie mantra*) Graham believed movement is generated from three places: the action of contraction and release, the pelvis, and the emotional inner self. The contraction, or strong pulling back and (*Sariah mantra*) curving of the torso, and the release of this movement by returning to a straight torso are symbolic of the dichotomies in life. It is the contrast between desire and duty, (*Go get corsets, Izzy gets Rachel's*) between fear and courage, between weakness and strength.

(The six women stand in a line at the front of the stage, holding their corsets as Rachel finishes her last line. Patience by The Lumineers begins playing. The women exchange looks as they move into their formation. They do the mantra made up of movements from each individual mantra, as seen in the opening, dropping the corsets when they go to the ground. Black out. The lights come back up on the corsets. Bows. Blackout. End.)

