

2019

The Way It Should Be: Towards Healthy Masculinity

Jenna Gadille

The Way It Should Be: Towards Healthy Masculinity

an Honors College Thesis

by

Jenna Gadille

Spring 2019

Theatre

(Faculty Advisor, Lauren Reinhard)

(Reader, Maria Porter)

(date)

ABSTRACT

My thesis paper explains how my research on the pervasiveness of gendered violence provided the material we used to devise a show. I analyze what causes the issue of specifically *gendered* violence, instead of just “violence”. I focus on the gender binary and how it creates an unhealthy practice of masculinity, which is a major contributing factor to gendered violence. My ensemble used that research to create devised pieces during the process, which we molded into an original show we titled *Beyond Us*. To start, we identified why the topic mattered to us and why we were all in a room together to make a theatre piece. We identified our big questions regarding the topic and followed them. This guided our devising process. We were all so passionate about the topic that we ended up making pieces that went in several different directions. Within the last week of rehearsals, we had to pare down our show and focus on what we really wanted to say with the time allotted. We stuck with the pieces that were more personal for us rather than those based in the initial research. *Beyond Us* served as a platform for us to speak on why gendered violence matters to us and how we want to make change.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: TOXIC MASCULINITY

Toxic Masculinity in our *Beyond Us* Process

CHAPTER TWO: THE GENDER BINARY

The Gender Binary in our *Beyond Us* Process

CHAPTER THREE: RAPE CULTURE

Rape Culture in our *Beyond Us* Process

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BEYOND US SCRIPT

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a pervasive problem in our society. “The Center for Disease Control says violence against women is the number one health concern for women in this country and abroad” (Porter, Tony). In this paper, I will delve heavily into gender inequality, investigating how the gender binary supports toxic masculinity, and how that serves as the foundation is for violence against women, thus creating rape culture.

My thesis included a devising process where seven women in a room synthesized research regarding gendered violence and picked out key questions from which to create an original performance. Two of these women were my fellow Lead Artists who had also spent a semester in Tutorial with me researching this topic. On our first day, we introduced the research we had done prior to meeting in the rehearsal room. We laid out numerous materials on gendered violence, including statistics, articles, testimonies, quotes that stuck with us, and visual art, and allowed the ensemble to take in the research on their own. I came to see the research as the *why* behind our desire to make a piece of theatre. We laid out our research in the rehearsal room, and, as if we were in a museum, the team quietly walked around the room and took in this research. This created a focused energy that was nearly palpable. When a piece of research particularly struck one of the ensemble, they vocalized it. Sometimes they added why it struck them -- usually a statistic that made them angry-- but most of the time, they did not know. All they knew was that something inside them was stirred by receiving that information and they wanted to learn more about it. This is where we started our devising journey. We

started throwing key facts, words, and phrases onto a whiteboard to tease out what initially stuck out to us. A conversation started when we came across things upon which we agreed and things that angered us. This initial conversation ignited a spark in the room, bringing up questions about our topic: perhaps the biggest one being “*Why* is it the way that it is?” or “What can we *do* about it?” The research fueled the desire to take action. Thus, *Beyond Us* was created.

The final product was presented as a part of the Thesis Festival through Post Theatre Company in March, that was comprised of devised pieces. Devising is a form of theatre that does not start with words on a page of a script. Devising results in something that is one-of-a-kind, combining all types of sources and art forms (Garcia, Vanessa). In a sense, it is created through improvisation, since the script gets created during the process. The script reflects the work being made in the room instead of coming in already planned or written. In devising, all of the possibilities are in front of us instead of the only possibilities being on the page. I chose the devising process because I believe that, for research, other people are often the best asset. This process allowed me to expand my understanding of how gendered violence personally affects other people, specifically, my collaborators. I also felt that, through devising, I was able to culminate my past four years of physical theatre training into one rehearsal process: most of what we created was based in physical storytelling rather than text-based. Although we all had varying degrees of the same unique training, we were able to utilize our ensemble to create physical theatre that was rich and abstract. Through this, *Beyond Us* empowered our audience to take action in their own lives by opening conversations about the issues

that women face. We welcomed our audience to believe that “the way it is” is *not* the way it has to be. Change *is* possible, contrary to popular belief. “I believe people can change, which is, unfortunately, an unpopular opinion” - Megan Sickels. It is my hope that *Beyond Us* inspired the audience to not accept the status quo: to take action in their own lives to create change in eradicating gender inequality.

Gendered violence is a major public health problem as well as a violation of women’s rights. In order to understand how this problem exists, we must investigate the root of the it, for then we can educate ourselves to make change. Rape culture is a multifaceted issue that we have been conditioned to and therefore, accepted. “Without a doubt, there are some wonderful, wonderful, absolutely wonderful things about being a man. But at the same time, there’s some stuff that’s straight up twisted and we really need to begin to challenge, to look at it, and really get in the process of deconstructing, redefining, what we come to know as manhood” (Porter, Tony). By challenging rape culture and what makes masculinity toxic, the systemic normalization of violence against women can end.

CHAPTER ONE: TOXIC MASCULINITY

“Toxic masculinity refers to stereotypically masculine gender roles that restrict the kinds of emotions allowable for boys and men to express, including social expectations that men seek to be dominant (the "alpha male") and limit their emotional range primarily to expressions of anger” (“Toxic Masculinity”). Empowering men to exhibit healthy masculinity will help solve the issue of gendered violence. Gender-based violence is rooted in sexism and how our culture often teaches masculinity (Fox Valley). “Toxic masculinity is at the root of all of our gender-related problems” (Marya Markovich). Masculinity, however, is not what needs to be abolished. People who identify as masculine must examine how healthy their expression of it is and identify places in which unlearning is in order. “The traits espoused by media as valuable and appropriate for men are strength, valor, independence, and the ability to protect and provide. Consequently, men are often dissuaded from displaying vulnerability, sensitivity, compassion, humility, and seeking help from other people” (Redigan, Patrick). “Being a man” does not teach men to develop healthy ways of dealing with negative emotions. Strength, in a man, is valued most highly of the masculine traits: it is seen as “strong” to not display negative emotions. Women, on the other hand, are not dissuaded from such “negative” emotions, therefore, they are seen as weak. The expression of masculinity is shown by suppressing (rather than expressing) traits that are considered to be feminine in nature. One’s manhood can be taken away by having these “feminine” traits (Redigan, Patrick). In order to keep their manhood and subvert

harassment, ostracization, and bullying, men manifest this notion of masculinity that is toxic.

The Man Box is the prime example of toxic masculinity. The Man Box describes the idea of the false, unhealthy masculinity that men are taught and believe they must abide by.

“Growing up as a boy, we were taught that men had to be tough, had to be strong, had to be courageous, dominating. No pain, no emotions -- with the exception of anger, and definitely no fear. That men are in charge, which means women are not. That men lead, and you should just follow and do what we say. That men are superior and women are inferior; that men are strong, women are weak; that women are of less value, property of men, and objects, particularly sexual objects. I’ve later come to know that to be the collective socialization of men: otherwise known as the Man Box.” - Tony Porter

The Man Box preaches that women are of lesser value and that their value is tied to physical appearance. It teaches men to see women as property: an object that can be earned. It is easier to inflict violence on someone or something seen as different or lesser than. While sexual violence is certainly perpetrated on men, statistically, the instances of this occurring are much lower due to perceived differences between men and women. Only one out of every ten rape victims are male (Victims of Sexual Violence). The Man Box is the definition of the constraints of toxic masculinity. Understanding what it is is

the first step in eradicating toxic masculinity. “What would life be like for you if you didn’t have to adhere to this Man Box? ...I would be free” (Porter, Tony).

Men are encouraged to be hyper-violent, hyper-sexual beings, especially apparent in black men. Toxic masculinity is portrayed more in men of color because of their need to be tougher than their white counterparts (Sargent, Antwaun). Blackness often rejects any traits that could be seen as feminine and homosexual. When black men are open with their emotions, they are shunned due to the policing of masculinity within the black community. “To protect your spirit, desire, and body, you feel you have to mimic the masculinity of black men on TV and in the streets... you slip up, the critiques come back” (Sargent).

Fox Valley Voices of Men is an organization that was founded in 2007 (one year after the Me Too Movement was founded). Their vision is “a community where boys are taught Healthy Manhood and men treat all people with dignity.” Their mission statement says, “Fox Valley Men helping end sexual assault and domestic violence by dismantling Man Box culture and building a culture of Healthy Manhood”. They aim to change the misconception that sexual assault and domestic violence is a “woman’s issue”, seeing as 90% of its perpetrators are men. They encourage men to be up-standers, rather than bystanders. (Fox Valley)

Fox Valley Voices of Men, in their community outreach, presents on topics related to their mission statement. During a presentation on toxic masculinity, they often get the same answers from their subjects, regardless of demographics. They posed the

question on what it means to “act like a man / man up”. They noted how the responses differ when they ask the same respective groups what it means to exhibit “healthy manhood”. Their responses are as follows:

“Man up / act like a man: Don’t cry, no emotions except anger, fight, be tough, be into sports & guns, don’t ask for help, don’t wear pink, eat meat, don’t be “whipped”, no fear, drink beer, dominate, be straight, head-of-household, in charge, drive trucks, no long hair, good with tools, be a lady’s man.

Healthy manhood: Be able to cry and show emotions, loving, not afraid to fail, music and theatre and not just sports, don’t treat women like property, drive a minivan, care about others, honorable, good listener, selfless, loyal, stay-at-home dad, listen to women, gentle, able to show anger in a positive way, humble, not all about money, willing to show a feminine side, helping those in need.”

- Fox Valley Voices of Men

It is apparent that “acting like a man” and having a “healthy manhood” are two separate ideas. Toxic masculinity, in part, is not understanding that a separation exists. “How we teach [our sons] to be men: that it is okay to not be dominating, that it is okay to have feelings and emotions, that it is okay to promote equality, that it is okay to have women who are just friends and that’s it, that it is okay to be whole; that my liberation as a man is tied to your liberation as a woman” (Porter, Tony). I believe that, if more men knew how a healthy manhood really feels, we would not have such a large gender inequality problem.

Toxic Masculinity in our *Beyond Us* Process

Serving as a co-director for *Beyond Us*, I encouraged the ensemble to follow their own personal questions about gendered violence that arose from our initial research discussion on the first day. Many of them had questions when it came to toxic masculinity: why is anger considered not feminine? What makes boys grow up to be predators? Why are men of color (specifically Black and Latino men) much more likely to be imprisoned than any other group? Why is male affection not normalized? Why are people more concerned with why women stay in abusive relationships rather than why men abuse women? In the United States, why are 96% of perpetrators of rape white but 80% of those imprisoned for it are black? Why do some people see being a girl as the “dead end”? Why is it easier to have power and success if you are a man? Our questions were what drove us during the devising process. We focused on gender issues in terms of what the conditioning of toxic masculinity does to our society and where it comes from. Thus one of our main pieces for *Beyond Us* was born: an original poem titled “To Be A Man”, written by a member of the ensemble. This poem is in response to another of our big questions: why is simultaneously being a male and being sensitive unheard of? This poem deals with the topic of unhealthy masculinity and gives suggestions for healthy manhood. Megan, the author, brought in this poem early on in the process, unprovoked. We had been discussing the issues the poem refers to but we never asked her to write anything. We were astounded by her work and immediately agreed it would be in our show. I worked with Megan only slightly in making minor word choice edits throughout the process to clear up the imagery. I said that I would rather the piece be about her and

her beautiful words. I did not want her worries about being off book to muddle her artistic voice, therefore, I staged it as if she was at a poetry slam. It was an empty stage, except for Megan, a music stand, and her poem. I believe that the words were powerful, simplistic, and did not require any further staging.

I want the pink delicate parts

Underneath,
So sensitive from being
Hidden
From the sun for such a long
Time.

The Vermeer painting you think
So plain, so poor,
Has richness you can't comprehend,
Wealth you can't see.

You don't need to be
Anything that you're not,
Or to feel anything
That you don't.

You aren't quite a lie
But the truth is underneath.
You are pages lost
To water and time and coffee stains.

Your sincerity will not
Defeat you,
Your vulnerability will set you
Free.

To be a man is not
To be big or small,
Hot or cold,
Tall or short,

To be a man
Is not in opposition to
Being a woman;
They float together through an indigo sky.

Baby to be a man, any man,
Is to walk every day in your own
Truth.
If you want to show strength
Show me that.

- *To Be A Man*, Megan Sickels

CHAPTER TWO: THE GENDER BINARY

The gender binary is harmful because in its essence, it separates boys from girls. It gives an excuse for people to treat girls differently than boys, specifically when it comes to raising children. The gender binary is the classification of gender into two opposite, disconnected forms of masculine and feminine, held by societal or cultural beliefs. Boys are encouraged to do sports, learn to fix things, and build careers, while girls are encouraged to learn how to be a good homemaker and mother. The binary itself is not necessarily harmful: we still need people who can fix cars and people who can fix dinner, however, they do not need to be done exclusively by men and women, respectively (Markovich, Marya). What *is* harmful about the binary is the cultural belief that people may not exist outside of it. The gender binary tells a boy how to be a man, therefore, it supports the culture that suggests that the only way for a boy to be a man is to emulate the behavior that men in the past have exhibited (bad, criminal, and toxic behaviors) (Levkoff, Logan).

When one is assigned a sex at birth based on their physical genitals, gender binarism assumes that person will be congruent to how the gender binary deems them to be (Newman, Tim). It includes expectations of how they dress, how they behave, who they will develop romantic attractions to, and what pronouns they use. This is called cisnormativity (Newman, Tim). The gender binary includes expectations of cisnormativity. The expectations of cisnormativity reinforces negative attitudes, discrimination, and bias towards people who do not conform to gender norms.

GLAAD describes gender as “one's internal, personal sense of being a man or woman” (Newman, Tim). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices. They describe the expression of gender as “external manifestations of gender, expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine and feminine changes over time and varies by culture” (Newman, Tim). People often do not understand sex and gender to be different entities. “Sex” comes down to biological characteristics, such as genitals and genetic differences, whereas “gender” is much more difficult to define. Gender, and their way of expressing it, is different for every human, so it is difficult to pinpoint. Gender can be the physical expression of a person, related to the mental and emotional reactions of their environment, such as family interactions, the media, their peers, and education. Gender can be how one views their role in society, which can be very different between societies. It is an individual's identity. It is how one chooses to express themselves through traditional norms of masculine, feminine, a bit of both, or neither. “Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed” (Newman, Tim). If a person identifies their sex as male and expresses their gender with normally feminine attributes, they would not fit into society's idea of the gender binary. “For many men who subvert gender stereotypes, a sort of internal battle often rages between expressing their feelings as they occur naturally and of carefully monitoring and restricting those emotions that are liable to be labelled weak,

effeminate or altogether unacceptable” (Patrick Redigan). “While gender identity is a deeply held feeling of being male, female or another gender, people of different genders often act differently, not because of biological characteristics but because of rigid societal norms created around femininity and masculinity” (Clemens, Colleen). Sex and gender are two separate entities that, when used interchangeably, discredit the independent notion of gender and perpetuate the toxicity of the gender binary.

Gender roles are the central aspect of the gender binary which shape and constrain people’s life experiences and self-expression. The media, religion, mainstream education, political beliefs, and cultural and social systems all play a part in reinforcing negative gender roles. The gender binary creates a structure of power. Individuals who identify outside of the traditional binaries often experience harassment and discrimination, and therefore, do not have power. This is present even within the queer community. As inclusive as the LGBT community’s efforts can be, it has its own problems of exclusion. For example, a white gay man who presents as traditionally masculine has more power/privilege than someone of color who does not identify with a male or female gender. Those who do not identify within the binary system fall at the bottom of the power hierarchy within the queer community and therefore, can still receive harassment and discrimination. Society needs to understand that someone’s genitalia does not need to enforce how they lead their life. These issues can be prevented with the cultural acceptance of loosening the constraints of the gender binary.

The Gender Binary in our *Beyond Us* Process

While I was co-directing, I was also a collaborator and devised with the people who were in our cast. I created a piece during our first day of “making”. We prompted the group to make a piece about “Space”. We used this as an introductory exercise to devising, since the cast had never had any experience with devising before. There was no structure or rules -- they simply had to create a piece about “space”, however they interpreted that idea. In the beginning of the devising process, I created my own pieces alongside my ensemble in order to teach by example. I also believed that helped dissolve the hierarchy that is often present in rehearsal rooms. I did not want my cast to feel below me, even though I was technically directing them. I wanted them to share responsibility as well by establishing an equal distribution of power.

Feeling empowered by our recent conversations over our research, my “Space” piece related to the space that women take up: how we are told to take up *less* of it as opposed to *owning* the space that we are in. Since my childhood, my mother has told me to close my legs when I am sitting -- even when I am wearing pants. While she may see this as politeness or “being a lady” (which I have no interest in), she is subconsciously telling me that my body does not deserve to be comfortable and does not deserve to take up the amount of space it desires -- let alone creating room for girls to be more susceptible to body image issues. Generations of women have been taught to minimize their bodies in order to be polite while, simultaneously, men are told no such thing. This is one way in which boys and girls are raised differently, supporting the gender binary. Girls are taught to create more space for men to inhabit because men are ultimately of

more importance than women are and therefore, more deserving of space. I was reminded of this frustration I have experienced throughout my life during our research discussion. We discussed how boys and girls are raised differently and how it is stifling to be on the receiving end of a system that holds boys on a pedestal for achieving less than girls. I was reminded how infuriated it makes me to receive comments like that from my mother, who is not aware of the harmful messages she is sending to me when she does so. That prompted me to create this piece that ended up being our opening to *Beyond Us*. In order to do this, we physicalized the idea of minimizing space by the actors receiving audible cue as a “reprimand” which informed them to make themselves smaller and more presentable and ladylike. This involved crossing the ankles, shifting to sit at the edge of the chair, rolling the shoulders back, sticking the breasts out, crossing the legs, and arching the back. This escalated until they finally broke out of those confines and owned their space. It stood well as the opening piece to *Beyond Us* because it introduced how we, as the ensemble, will not put up with what we have been taught about gender norms -- *this* is how we will tell our story. It introduced what women endure and how *we* as an ensemble are acknowledging that and breaking out of it. We will take up the space that we deserve -- whether that space be physically in a chair or metaphorically in life. The piece said that we will not accept any further the things that are taught to us that we do not agree with. We will not blindly accept anymore: we are writing our own history.

CHAPTER THREE: RAPE CULTURE

Rape culture allows for rape to be normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality. It is the systematically rooted judgement towards rape victims as well as society's acceptance of sexual assault (Thomas, Brynne). One in three women will experience sexual assault in their lifetime (*Statistics*). While this number is startling, I believe that more women than one in three experience sexual assault, but the numbers are not higher due to the lack of education or acceptance for what assault actually is. Sexual assault is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim (Sexual Assault). Force, which may contain emotional coercion, psychological or physical pressure, or manipulation, is a behavior that often is not viewed as sexual assault (Sexual Assault). Rape culture serves as a basis for the completely different attitudes towards male and female sexualities (Thomas, Brynne). This double standard is harmful because it treats men and women differently. It shames females for having a successful sexuality, when men are celebrated for having theirs. Gendered violence is a huge problem plaguing our community that often goes ignored, due to rape culture. This does not, however, necessarily mean that it *is* accepted, but rather, we have become desensitized due to the numerous occurrences of it and therefore, we do not treat it as the large problem that it actually is. One quarter of college-aged women will be raped during their four years on their campus (Williams, Reagan). Rape is about power and control rather than acting out on suppressed sexual urges. Therefore, by treating rape as a normal occurrence that happens due to men's high sex drives, or when men and women are put together, it diminishes what the problem actually is (Williams, Reagan).

Working towards gender equality will change the attitudes regarding gender and sexuality and therefore, dismantle rape culture.

The Me Too Movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence (particularly black women and girls and other young women of color from low wealth communities) find pathways to healing. The movement, due to the viral #metoo hashtag, has recently become a part of a national dialogue. Now reaching a global community, the movement illustrated the pervasive nature of sexual assault. One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn eighteen years old (*Statistics*). The Me Too Movement found that one in five black women have been raped in their lifetime and for every one that reports her rape, at least fifteen other do not report theirs. (*Statistics*) Some are enraged by this movement, claiming that men are suddenly under attack (Fink, Jennifer L. W.). Some will say that there are too many pressures on boys because they are told they are innately predatory, dangerous, and harmful (Fink). In actuality, the status quo is no longer being accepted and men are being held accountable to their actions. “Boys will be boys” is no longer an excuse that brushes aside what grows into harmful behavior. While males are also victims of sexual violence and females can also perform assaults, male on women violence is a much more pervasive problem. The Me Too Movement states only sixteen percent of men with documented histories of sexual abuse considered themselves to have been sexually abused, compared to sixty-four percent of women with documented histories in the same study (*Statistics*).

Not every man is a predator, but the percentage of predators that are exclusively men is too high to not take this problem seriously. Men are naturally, inherently, not

violent but in a culture that equates masculinity with physical power and aggression, it is no wonder that there is a vacuum of violence created for men and boys (Clemens, Colleen). Compare this to airport security. As Americans, we understand the drastic precautions set in place after the devastation from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. We understand that most of the people who go through airport security are not dangerous and have not meditated how to bring down a plane. However, all of these rules and procedures are deemed necessary and taken seriously. The topic of gendered violence can be handled in the same way. Not all men are predators the same way that not all plane travelers are terrorists. However, too many people have been hurt by it to not take action.

No one teaches men to explicitly become predators (Levkoff, Logan). This then begs the question, *how* does it occur? It is in the subtle ways in which raising a boy has been accepted within our society that promotes destructive behavior. It is because we, as a society, are raising boys and girls *differently*, rather than raising children as children. That is the root of our gendered violence problem. There are ways to interact with boys that will help them not develop predatory behavior as they age, such as encouraging expression of emotions other than anger, telling them it is cool to be wanted to be cared for, and what consent is and looks like (especially what to do when that permission is not granted) (Levkoff, Logan). “Realizing that the simplicity of these messages are unimportant enough to notate can be detrimental to the health of our children” (Levkoff). This means that it is something within our control, therefore we are the only ones who are

responsible for it in the past and for making sure it does not happen in the future. Boys are not innately predatory, it is our job to make sure they stay that way (Levkoff).

Due to the prevalence of rape culture, men are viewed with fear that suggests they are potential rapists. This makes them exude harmful behaviors that is seen as predatory (Thomas, Brynne). Women are then defensive because they are taught how to protect themselves -- they learn to hold their keys in their fists when walking alone at night. They are told to not show as much skin when going out -- as if the amount of skin showing makes one more worthy of being assaulted. The flaw in this notion is that if a woman is told to watch what she is wearing so that she does not get raped, she is actually being told "make sure he rapes the other girl". With this logic, we are victim-blaming instead of focusing our attention on its foundation. "There is a level of humanity that is sorely lacking from the way we treat victims of rape and sexual assault" (Janae, Dani). We should be looking at how to change the system in order to abolish people from raping, instead of stopping people from becoming victims. "Collectively, we as men are taught to have less value in women, to view them as property and the objects of men. We see that as an equation that equals violence against women. We as men, good men, the large majority of men, we operate on the foundation of this whole collective socialization. We kind of see ourselves as separate, but we're very much a part of it... We have come to understand that less value, property, and objectification is the foundation -- and the violence can't happen without it. So we're very much a part of the solution as well as the problem" (Porter, Tony).

Some people feel that focusing on making boys not grow up to be predators puts too much pressure on them. Jennifer Fink wrote about an assembly her sons attended at their school. At the assembly, they pledged never to hurt women and to end male violence against women. “Most males do not hurt females or other males, or even dogs and cats. Yet they’re all treated as potential perpetrators, and our boys feel the weight of this prejudice” (Fink, Jennifer L.W.). She thought that it was rude to ignore the girls that were sitting in the audience and to not ask them to do anything as well. Fink felt that the assembly, who’s overall idea was to teach men how to fight the violent, felonistic ways inside of them, unfairly placed blame on her sons and the other boys in the assembly. “The presentation unfairly and inaccurately implied that every male sitting in the audience is a potential perpetrator of violence” (Fink). The material sent home before the assembly said that the presentation was to “raise awareness, examine our culture, and ultimately end male violence against women.” Fink was unhappy at the specific phrasing of male violence against women, instead of simply ending violence. Fink’s attitudes, along with many other conservatives’, are misdirected. “Three percent of American men have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime” (What Is Gender Violence?). Less than eight percent of men in college commit more than ninety percent of sexual assaults and repeat offenders commit an average of six or more acts of sexual assault (The Hunting Ground). These statistics illustrate the need for a call to action in our schools for all young boys. While men are also rape victims, men are almost always the perpetrator. Ignoring this fact discredits the patterned violence and diminishes the

call to action.

Rape Culture in our *Beyond Us* Process:

During our devising process, we were shocked to hear how much of a problem domestic violence is in the LGBTQ community. 43.8% of lesbian women and 61.1% of bisexual women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime, as opposed to 35% of heterosexual women (NCADV). 26% of gay men and 37.3% of bisexual men have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime, in comparison to 29% of heterosexual men (NCADV). The CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 46% of bisexual women have been raped, compared to 17% of heterosexual women and 13% of lesbians (Human Rights Campaign). The 2015 U.S Transgender Survey found that 47% of transgender people are sexual assaulted during their lifetime (Human Rights Campaign). These statistics angered us for a multitude of reasons, but the top one is why we had never heard of it before. The Human Rights Campaign suggests that, as a community, LGBTQ people face higher rates of poverty, stigma, and marginalization, which therefore puts the community at greater risk for sexual assault (Human Rights Campaign). They also face higher rates of hate-motivated violence, which can often take the form of sexual assault. Moreover, the ways in which

society both hypersexualizes LGBTQ people and stigmatizes their relationships can lead to intimate partner violence that stems from internalized homophobia and shame (Human Rights Campaign).

We wanted to create a piece about this information because we wanted to highlight marginalized voices. A goal of ours was for our piece to speak to multiple marginalized communities instead of only white feminism. When gender issues are discussed, the emphasis tends to fall on the more privileged: white, heterosexual, cisgendered women.

“The benefactors of white supremacy and rape culture are of the same bloodline, and the narratives they create are similarly destructive. Rape culture posits that men (especially white men) have the right to anyone’s body. And often, that body, that person, is left feeling their voice has no weight. Rape culture is a collection of ideologies and circumstances that lead to the revictimization of women, an almost acrobatic bending of truth to justify the actions of rapists.” -- Dani Janae

We were able to speak against this in our show, which was done through our third piece, dubbed “P.O.C.”. One of our actors, Christine (a queer artist of color), spoke about her desire to create spaces where historically silenced voices could be heard. Christine says, “I think it’s important to tell people that people like me exist and live in constant fear. It makes me feel like an easy target toward bigotry.” We utilized our other two actors, who were white, to act as the “subtext” during this piece, since they were silent. Christine lit matches (which ended up being a motif throughout the show) and the other actors blew

them out, highlighting how this topic tends to emphasize the plights of white women rather than *all* women. The simple action of the white actors continuously blowing out the flame that the woman of color ignited was very succinct and powerful.

In the end, we did not create much regarding rape culture. It was important for us to create a creative environment that was safe when it came to hot-button issues like ours. On the first day of rehearsal, we opened up a dialogue about safety. While in a creative space, we do not want to stay “comfortable” because I believe that the best art is made when the limits of what you “thought” you could do are broken. However, it was important to value our artists’ safety when it came to mental health, especially when generating material from topics that could potentially bring up past trauma. We constantly checked in to make sure that everyone felt valued and did not feel as if they were dealing with any subject matter that would be unsafe for them. If they felt that way, we dropped it immediately. Due to this, rape was a topic that was off the table for us from the first day. This limited the amount of research that we brought in for discussion and creation.

CONCLUSION

Through challenging rape culture and what makes masculinity toxic, the systemic normalization of violence against women can end. Rape culture is a multifaceted issue that we have been conditioned to and therefore, accepted. The gender binary leads to raising children differently depending on their gender, which holds men to a higher status than women in society. Rape is about power and therefore, rape culture empowers men while silencing the voices of women. Gender-based violence is rooted in sexism and how our culture often teaches masculinity. The gender binary supports the culture that suggests that the only way for a boy to be a man is to emulate the behavior that men in the past have inhibited, which leads to gendered violence.

I had no idea what my devising project would end up looking like. Creating devised theatre relies on the energies of the specific people in the room, therefore, we focused on the collective goals of the group. One goal was to stay away from anything that could be trauma-inducing. The topic of gendered violence was a sore spot for a few of us, so we felt it necessary to not create from topics that could be too close to personal trauma. With the freedom to create anything we wanted, we felt the responsibility to do it safely. Therefore, we did not end up pulling a lot of ideas from my research. It was good to have the research because it got us all on the same “hivemind”, learning why the topic was important to all of us. Instead, we focused on what each person wanted to create -- not on a surface level, but more as an intrinsic deep wish. I encouraged them: “we only have fifteen minutes with the audience -- what do you *need* to say?”

I am pleased with the product we presented. My personal goal for this experience was to learn how to become a better collaborator, specifically, one in a leadership role -- one who is caring and kind towards her castmates, while still relentlessly following the “big” questions. I got a lot of feedback from friends and classmates afterwards: a lot of them simply thanked me. They felt as if each member of my cast had an opportunity to say what they needed to say. One audience member told me that *Beyond Us* was a progressive piece that moved past how feminism is usually portrayed in the media and that it went more towards the *true* definition of feminism. They saw and heard something about the topic that they had not seen or heard before. It made me happy to receive this feedback, for the audience experiencing something new that surprises them is the kind of art I want to create. I was also told that my piece encouraged someone how they could be a better man and father. Being told that someone left the theatre a *changed* person was all I wanted.

If we wish to end systemic gendered violence, we must unlearn what we have been taught about gender norms. In order to prompt this change, we must recognize the social biases within ourselves we were conditioned to exhibit, and make conscious efforts on how to combat them. Injustices in the world are often written off as “the way things are”, as in, they cannot change and we must deal with it. My thesis performance project was made to show people that, instead, we can meet injustices by saying “it does not have to be this way!”, or “we can do better!”, or even “how can we change this?”, and “how can we make it the way it *should* be?”. A healthier future begins with us, but change is not possible until it is *beyond us*.

I came upon this text while searching for text to use for our callback process. I searched through many works of Charles Mee and came across this. It is from a piece called “You Might Say I’d Never Do Such A Thing”. We used other sections of it for the callbacks, but this particular section stuck with me throughout the remainder of the process.

you look at history

not to know how things are going to be

but to tell you that

the way things are is not the way they have always been

or the only way they can be

and now

looking back

whatever there has been

it’s all available to us now

to pick and choose

have one of these and one of those

and make a life of that

- Charles Mee

Bibliography

Brisbane Domestic Violence Service, *The cycle of violence*. Micah Projects, Brisbane.

“Charles Mee.” *Charles Mee | the (Re)Making Project | Agamemnon 2.0*,
www.charlesmee.org/things-women-say.shtml.

Cherry, Kendra. “How the Fight-or-Flight Response Prepares Your Body to Take Action.”

Verywell Mind, 21 Sept. 2018,
www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-fight-or-flight-response-2795194.

Clemens, Colleen. “What We Mean When We Say ‘Toxic Masculinity’”. *Teaching Tolerance*, 11 December 2017,
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/what-we-mean-when-we-say-toxic-masculinity>.

Garcia, Vanessa. “The Paradox of Devised Theater on the Twenty-First Century Stage.” *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 21 July 2013,
howlround.com/paradox-devised-theater-twenty-first-century-stage.

Generational Differences Chart.

Greene, Tristan. “Counterpoint: 'All Men Are Trash' Is Hate Speech.” *The Next Web*, 7 Sept. 2018,
thenextweb.com/facebook/2018/09/06/counterpoint-all-men-are-trash-is-hate-speech/.

Fox Valley Voices of Men. "Some Thoughts on Toxic Masculinity." *Fox Valley Voices of*

Men Some Thoughts on Toxic Masculinity Comments, 20 Feb. 2018,
voicesofmen.com/2018/02/some-thoughts-on-toxic-masculinity/.

Fink, Jennifer L.W. "Men Are Not Monsters." *Fox News*, FOX News Network, 19 Nov. 2015, www.foxnews.com/opinion/men-are-not-monsters.

Fisher, Corey. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Ensemble Theatre".
HowIRound Theatre Commons, 16 Dec. 2015,
<https://howlround.com/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-ensemble-theatre>.

"Frequently Asked Questions." *Rape Crisis Center of Central New Mexico*,
rapecrisiscnm.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions.

Human Rights Campaign. "Sexual Assault and the LGBTQ Community." *Human Rights Campaign*, 2019, www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community.

Janae, Dani. "Let's Talk about RACE: How White Supremacy Shapes Our Treatment of Rape Victims." PublicSource, 22 Jan. 2018,
projects.publicsource.org/pittsburgh-race/dani-janae.html.

Kamenstein, Chris. "Process and Product and Product and Process." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 19 Dec. 2014,
howlround.com/process-and-product-and-product-and-process.

Koestler Ruben , Marina. "How (Not) to Talk to Someone Else's Daughter." *Motherwell-Telling All Sides of the Parenting Story*, 11 Dec. 2017,
motherwellmag.com/2016/11/07/how-not-to-talk-to-someone-elses-daughter/.

- Kremer, Kate Dakota. "Devising the New Avant-Garde-Part 1." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 28 Aug. 2014, howlround.com/devising-new-avant-garde-part-1.
- Kremer, Kate Dakota. "Devising the New Avant-Garde-Part 2." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 18 Oct. 2014, howlround.com/devising-new-avant-garde-part-2.
- Levkoff, Logan. "How to Raise Boys Not Predators." *Motherwell-Telling All Sides of the Parenting Story*, 8 Dec. 2017, motherwellmag.com/2017/12/07/how-to-raise-boys-not-predators/.
- Markovich, Marya. "There Is More than One Way to Be a Boy." *Motherwell-Telling All Sides of the Parenting Story*, 17 Jan. 2018, motherwellmag.com/2017/12/19/there-is-more-than-one-way-to-be-a-boy/.
- McCarthy, Joe. "Toxic Masculinity Is Killing the Planet, Study Finds." *Global Citizen*, 23 May 2018, www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/toxic-masculinity-is-killing-the-planet-study-fi-2/.
- Mignogna, Matt. "Why Do We Associate Blue with Boys and Pink with Girls?" *Penn State Presidential Leadership Academy PLA*, 23 Mar. 2015, sites.psu.edu/academy/2015/03/23/why-are-boys-blue-and-girls-pink/.
- Mitchell, Karen S, and Jennifer L Freitag. "Forum Theatre for Bystanders." *SAGE Journals*, 25 Aug. 2011, ojs.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1077801211417152.

“NCADV | National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.” *Domestic Violence and the LGBTQ Community*, 6 June 2018,
ncadv.org/blog/posts/domestic-violence-and-the-lgbtq-community.

Newman, Tim. “Sex and Gender: Meanings, Definition, Identity, and Expression.”
Medical

News Today, MediLexicon International, 7 Feb. 2018,
www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232363.php.

Nutchanart, Napat, and Chayanit Pitakwongroj . “Origins of High Heels.” *History of High*

Heels, 2012, history-of-heels.weebly.com/origins-of-high-heels.html.

Norgren, Lisa. “Fighting the Patriarchy One Grandpa at a Time.” *Motherwell-Telling All Sides of the Parenting Story*, 21 Nov. 2018,

motherwellmag.com/2018/11/21/fighting-the-patriarchy-one-grandpa-at-a-time/.

Redigan, Patrick.

Sargent, Antwaun. “Tender Photos of Black Men That Redefine Masculinity.” *Vice*,
Vice, 22 Aug. 2017,

www.vice.com/en_us/article/gyyjp4/tender-photos-of-black-men-that-redefine-masculinity

“Sexual Assault” *RAINN*, www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault.

Sickels, Megan. “Home.” *A Mild Spectacular*, 11 Mar. 2019,

megansickels.wixsite.com/amildspectacular/home/to-be-a-man

Spotswood, Stephen. "Devising the Environment - Experimenting Inside the Black Box." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 10 Mar. 2015, howlround.com/devising-environment-1

Spotswood, Stephen. "Devising the Environment - Finding a Narrative in the Noise." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 8 Jan. 2015, howlround.com/devising-environment-0

"Statistics." *Me Too Movement*, 2018, metoomvmt.org/statistics/.

Stein, Deborah. "What I Mean When I Talk About Collaboration." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 14 Aug 2011. howlround.com/what-i-mean-when-i-talk-about-collaboration.

Swift, Laura. "How Far Should We Go When Depicting Violence?" *The Conversation*, 12 Mar. 2016, theconversation.com/how-far-should-we-go-when-depicting-violence-55560.

Tasker, Amy Claire. "Opening Space for Collaboration and Change". *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 05 March 2018, <https://howlround.com/opening-space-collaboration-and-change>.

TEDtalksDirector. "A Call to Men | Tony Porter." *YouTube*, YouTube, 10 Dec. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=td1PbsV6B80.

TEDtalksDirector. "Why I'm Done Trying to Be 'Man Enough' | Justin Baldoni." *YouTube*, YouTube, 3 Jan. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cetg4gu0oQQ.

TEDxTalks. "A Life Of Rape Culture | Brynne Thomas | TEDxYouth@TCS."

YouTube, YouTube, 31 May 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYppe9kyUxY.

TEDxTalks. "Rape Culture | Reagan Williams | TEDxArkansasStateUniversity."

YouTube, YouTube, 3 Apr. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_2DU7VTOMk.

Thawley, John. "Cycle Of Violence - Domestic Violence." *Domesticviolence.org*, domesticviolence.org/cycle-of-violence/.

The Hunting Ground.

"Toxic Masculinity." *YouTube*, YouTube, 8 Aug. 2018,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=afeog8O-dPc.

"Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics." *RAINN*,

www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence.

"What Is Gender Violence?" *Student Affairs*, 2019,

studentaffairs.duke.edu/wc/gender-violence/what-gender-violence.

Beyond Us Script

Piece 1: Subway

(Actors walk onstage moving through the space, weaving in and out of chairs. They make their way to their seats and sit. There is a hit and they sit up straight. There's another hit and they sit at the edge of their chairs crossing their ankles, there is another hit and they cross their legs. There is one more hit and they stand, walk around their chairs in a circle and sit. They relax into their "manspread" pose.)

Piece 2: Interviews

(Actors begin twitching in their seats and mumbling their answers to their questions. Eventually they stand and walk around the space gradually increasing their answers and speed. They make their way downstage)

Megan: What does feminism mean? It means fighting for your worth.

Lee: How does being controlled by a man make me feel? I feel as though my voice is being taken away.

Christine: What's the hardest part about being a woman? What isn't? *(Megan and Lee remove their chairs and go offstage SL)*

Piece 3: P.O.C piece

(At some point during Piece 3 Megan and Lee return to the stage and sit opposite each other downstage)

Christine: As a queer artist of color myself, I know how important it is to create spaces that allow for historically silenced stories to be heard. *

But, sometimes, being #woke and using one's art to wake others up can be emotionally and spiritually draining. So, it's important to take time to make art that is cathartic, art that is about letting go and getting free.

I use my art to get free by using it to create space for myself and others like me.

Queer as fuck. Woman as fuck

Piece 4: Christine's Wall

("Eight" by Sleeping At Last beings to play and Christine moves around architecture. She finds a mirror covered in red paint and tries to wipe it away with her hand. She can't wipe it and begins trying to inclose the mirror with other pieces of architecture. Megan and Lee try to bring Christine out of the architecture and fight her until it is open. Christine brings the mirror DSC and tries to wipe at the paint again. Lee and Megan bring a bucket of water and towels to help Christine clean the mirror. She looks at herself in the mirror while Megan and Lee carry it circling her. Christine grabs the mirror and goes off through the audience. Megan and Lee grab the bucket and towels and bring them offstage. Megan and Lee set the scene for Piece 5.)

Piece 5: To Be a Man

(Crew and Lee set the stage for suffering contest, Lee remains hidden behind the structure. Megan is USC with a music stand. "Hearing" by Sleeping at Last starts playing)

Megan: Baby I have some good news for you:

You are not a mountain

You are not an anchor

Or an Oak with roots running deep in the ground

You are not immovable.

You are not a force of nature
Or something to be
Reckoned with
You do not need to change the world
Or prove yourself,

You are simply human.

To be a man, is not
To make shifts in the atmosphere
Or to slam your cold fists on the
Table and rattle the
World.

It is not to withstand
Hurricanes and tornadoes and
Death and demise and not shed a
Single tear for the person
You leave behind.

I have no interest in this
Armor you've built to
Defend yourself from everything
That makes you so real.

Or this false idea that weakness
Is something measurable
By how happily you can
Destroy yourself.

I want the pink delicate parts
Underneath,
So sensitive from being
Hidden
From the sun for such a long
Time.

The Vermeer painting you think
So plain, so poor,

Has richness you can't comprehend,
Wealth you can't see.

You don't need to be
Anything that you're not,
Or to feel anything
That you don't.

Your sincerity will not
Defeat you,
Your vulnerability will set you
Free.

To be a man is not
To be big or small,
Hot or cold,
Tall or short,

Baby to be a man
Is not in opposition to
Being a woman;
They float through an indigo sky.

Baby to be a man, any man,
Is to walk every day in your own
Truth.
If you want to show strength
Show me that.

Piece 6: Suffering Contest

("Lovely" by Billie Eilish begins playing. Lee pops up behind the structure, she tries to break through an invisible wall. She circles it slightly and tries to break in by punching and kicking. She gets injured by this and falls. She crawls over to front stairs and lays. She forces herself up and struggles. She tries to punch at the stairs and finds an "opening". She starts to step up the stairs and kicks off a shoe on the first step. She gets "hit" in

the face and goes up to the next step kicking off that shoe. She gets "hit" again in the shoulder. She goes up another step, kicks off another shoe and gets "hit" in the stomach, falling down. She gets to the top of the structure and discovers the match box. Christine and Megan enter from opposite sides of the screens. Lee lights a match and blows it out.)

Megan: Life is not a suffering contest.

Christine: It is a contest for compassion.

(Christine and Megan offer Lee their upstage hands to help her down off the structure. Lee walks forward)

Lee: Your trauma is valid. Period. *(Drops Match)*

Piece 7: She Is

Lee: The conscious woman
is one with all the textures
that make her who she is.

She doesn't conceal
any aspect of herself.
She fully embraces and embodies
all that is held within her.

a sharpness that could cut,
blazing hot and burning
from the inside out,

She is all of it.
Unapologetically,
all of it.

Christine: She channels her inner sage,
ancient and wise,
alive inside.

She celebrates the wild seductress

that boils beneath her skin. An untamed flame ignited,
burning, hot, on the cusp of explosion.

She is all of it.
Unapologetically
All of it.

Megan: She needs no boundaries,
She is open, trusting and free.

She bows to her temple
that walks this earth,

She is present in every moment,
She is here –
grounded, solid,
while ever changing and in flow.

She is all of it.
Unapologetically.
All of it.

Megan: She doesn't need approval or validation.

Lee: She doesn't yearn to be seen.

Christine: She has no attachments.

ALL: She is whole within herself.

Megan: And she leaves her trail
of impact everywhere she goes –

Lee: changing her surroundings,
transforming realities,

Christine: bringing all into alignment.

All: She is the truth.

Megan: And you cannot help
but become exposed in her presence.

Lee: A force so potent,
you can feel her coming.

Christine: A being so fearless,
nothing can stop her.

Megan: A heart so tender,

Lee and Christine: A soul so true,
committed to her mission.

All: You cannot hide from her.
For she will always see you.

Megan: Even when you can't see yourself.

(Christine and crew move architecture to the side of the stage. Christine moves DSL and sits with the box of matches. Lee goes behind screens to set up for Peter Pan)

Piece 8: Peter Pan

(I Can Change by Lake Street Drive begins to play. Megan walks DSC)

Megan: I believe people can change; which is,
unfortunately, an unpopular opinion.

(Megan walks back to screen and begins dancing with her shadow. Her shadow follows her but shifts to dance with her. They fight, Shadow [Lee] leaves. Megan struggles

looking for her shadow again. Christine offers Megan a match. Lee comes onstage and the three of them have lit matches in their hands.)

Piece 9: Finale

Megan: I believe people can change.

Lee: I believe we cannot force change upon the world -- it has to decide for itself.

Christine: I believe in my friends.

Lee: And the friends I haven't met yet.

Christine: I believe in the power of us.

Megan: But I believe more in the power of people beyond us.

(Lee places matches down)

(blackout)