Women on the Floor: A Study of Feminism in Modern Dance History

Hannah McCarthy
Western Kentucky University, hannah.mccarthy760@topper.wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses
Part of the Dance Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/734

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
WOMEN ON THE FLOOR:
A STUDY OF FEMINISM IN MODERN DANCE HISTORY

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Honors College Graduate Distinction at
Western Kentucky University

By
Hannah K. McCarthy
May 2018

*****

CE/T Committee:
Associate Professor Amanda Clark, Chair
Assistant Professor Meghen McKinley
Assistant Professor Yufen Chang
Copyright by
Hannah K. McCarthy
2018
I dedicate this written thesis to my parents, Kathryn and Robert McCarthy, who took me to 14 years of dance classes, encouraged me to read and write, and continued to inspire me throughout this process.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the help of the Western Kentucky University Honors College, the Faculty-Undergraduate Student Engagement Grant, and the WKU Theatre & Dance Department. I would specifically like to thank my faculty mentor, Professor Amanda Clark for the hours and effort she poured into helping me with this thesis. Thank you also to Professors Meghen McKinley and Anna Patsfall for instilling a love for dance history in me and for choreographic and written feedback on this project and others.

I am eternally grateful to the beautiful and thoughtful dancers who participated in the choreographic facet of my research, Jena Thompson, Bernadette Turnage, Elise Wilham, and Mimi Burrow. I also thank all of my friends and fellow dance majors for helping me along this journey.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for the continuous love and inspiration. Thank you, Mimi and PawPaw for the constant grammar corrections and for all of your gracious wisdom. Thank you, Molly for introducing me to Naomi Wolf’s *Promiscuities* and for being the little sister I can look up to. Thank you to Franklin for always reminding me to relax. And to my husband Daniel, thank you for helping me through the countless joys, tears, complaints, and hours spent staring at my computer screen. I am grateful also to those who I have not named but who offered their support, feedback, and/or participation throughout the culmination of my undergraduate research.
ABSTRACT

Modern dance evolves everyday with new movement ideas, styles, and teachings. Not only can modern dance be new and innovative, but it can also be a mirror reflection of the current time period. It is an art form often used to make a social statement. It can become a discussion of the past, present, or future. Modern dance informs its audience through an intent chosen by the choreographer or dancers. The intent varies depending on time, space, emotion, and myriad other conditions.

My studies will examine how the different periods of modern dance aligned with the waves of the feminist movement throughout time. Feminism, like dance, is an ever-changing movement. Over time, its ideals have meshed, obstacles have been confronted, and struggles have been overcome. Yet, there are still many inequalities that have not been addressed. Art, being one of the most powerful forms of social commentary, has had a large effect on feminism over time. Modern dance choreographers helped to shape modern dance, feminism, and American art into what they are today. In short, I have studied how modern dance has preserved, promoted, and advocated the story of feminism throughout its short history. By looking at modern dance choreographers’ works through different time periods as well as how my own work aligns with the current movement, I have studied the close connection between the art form and feminism.
VITA

EDUCATION
Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY May 2018
B.A. in Dance and B.A. in Journalism
Mahurin Honors College Graduate
Honors Capstone: Women on the Floor: A Study of Feminism in Modern Dance History

Hume-Fogg High School, Nashville, TN May 2014

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
WKU Talisman- Magazine Co-editor Spring 2018
Numinous Flux Dance Company- Dancer Spring 2018
College Heights Herald- Features Editor Fall 2017

AWARDS & HONORS
Magna Cum Laude, WKU May 2018
Faculty Undergraduate Student Engagement Grant, WKU Fall 2016
Beverley Veenker Dance Scholarship, WKU 2016-2018
Doris L Owens Dance Scholarship, WKU 2015-2016

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS
National Honor Society for Dance Arts- WKU Student Chapter

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE
Dance in Italy- Study Abroad program May 2015
La Caldera Barcelona- Internship abroad May-June 2017

PRESENTATIONS
Women on the Floor: A Study of Feminism in Modern Dance History. Performance presentation at the WKU Student Research Conference. Bowling Green, KY.
## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.................................................................iv  
Abstract...................................................................................v  
Vita.........................................................................................vi  
Introduction. .................................................................2  
Chapter One.................................................................5  
Chapter Two...............................................................20  
Chapter Three..............................................................34  
References.................................................................47  
Appendix 1:  
Interview with Jacqulyn Buglisi...........................................51  
Appendix 2:  
Interview with Terese Capucilli..........................................57  
Appendix 3:  
Photos of 19th Century Women.........................................65  
Appendix 4:  
Photos of 1920s Women.....................................................66  
Appendix 5:  
Photos of 1950s Women.....................................................67
Appendix 6:

Compiled Inspiration for Trio of Dancers.........................................................68

Appendix 7:

Personal Essay- Flesh Memories................................................................. 72

Appendix 8:

Spoken Word..................................................................................................76
INTRODUCTION

Art and the dance have been impetuses for change since the beginning of their existence. For hundreds of years, dance has questioned, changed, and broken down barriers which society gradually constructed. Many of these barriers had been placed upon the global female population, as women throughout history sought to break free from the limitations which were set on their abilities. Today, it is important to recognize the historical and artistic movements that continue to bridge the gap between genders. As each subsequent wave of feminism rolled through society, prominent female pioneers of modern dance were entering the spotlight, creating new dance techniques, and catalyzing change in public opinion. These dancers’ choreographic works had a lasting effect on the feminist movements of their time and have greatly influenced the subsequent Third and Fourth waves as well.

The waves of feminism are often separated by landmark victories, policy change, and different time periods. The First Wave began in the late 1800s and ended around 1920. The Second Wave occurred in the 1960s through the early 80s. Currently, the complete characterizations of Third and Fourth Wave feminism are unfinished, as we have just moved from the Third Wave of the 90s and early 2000s into the current Fourth Wave. Although the details are different, the fundamental goals are the same as they have been throughout history. Gender divisions still exist in the work place and in society as a whole. Reproductive rights are being challenged yet again by those in power. The
rhetoric surrounding females remains belittling, as “hysteria”\(^1\) and PMS\(^2\) are still seen as key reasons why some females are unfit to hold high political offices.

Modern dance has created a platform, transcending time and space, for choreographers to comment on and combat these aspects of society. By creating movement languages and choreographic commentaries that can be carried on by dancers throughout generations, modern dance choreographers have a responsibility in awakening the minds of their audiences to the injustices which surround them. These choreographers, often female, worked alongside the waves of the feminist movement helping to shape a future of equality for women through rebellion, intelligence, and innovation. One major modern choreographer, Martha Graham, had such a lasting stamp on modern dance history that her company is still sharing her legacy today. Although Graham herself did not identify as a feminist, her works alluded to historical female characters and brought them to the forefront of the narrative. The females in her dance company who played these roles also got to take the stage as principal dancers. Graham’s often-female choruses as well as her principal dancers and soloists displayed strength and power that challenged the female image of the time.\(^3\)

Like the modern dancers who have come before me, I believe in the power of dance to change public opinion. I have decided to follow my role models and create

\[^2\] Eric Bradner, “Business woman stands by her man-only view of presidency,” CNN.com, April 18, 2015.
choreography that empowers and tells the stories of women today and throughout time. This thesis paper and choreographic project will take a deeper look at how dance influenced and shaped public opinion alongside the waves of feminism by closely examining the works of Martha Graham and other female modern dance choreographers, as well as public response and policy change. Chapter one outlines the major aspects of each wave of feminism and how they correspond with the periods of modern dance. It details important figures who changed both fields, adding historical context for each example. Chapter two gives insight into the life and works of Martha Graham, whose period of choreographic fruitfulness closely preceded the second wave of feminism. The chapter argues Graham’s position as an important feminist artist, although she and many others do not consider her a feminist. Through movement analysis and personal artistic description, Chapter Three provides a window into the current feminist movement and the choreography that I have created as a result of it.

Modern dance has had a great impact on my life and chosen career path. The feminist movement provides an outline for my values in life and in art. Both movements stress the importance of freedom and self-expression, aspects I strive to incorporate into my choreography and my own dancing. I have been strengthened by feminism and modern dance and the rich histories that surround both of these long-standing movements.
CHAPTER ONE- UNDERSTANDING THE MOVEMENTS

Feminism and modern dance share many common factors. They began as fledgling movements around the same time periods and in the same areas of the world. They were born out of rebellion. They challenged authority and the current state of being, and they were nurtured and raised to fruition in the hands and hearts of women. In 1895, The Oxford Dictionary defined feminism as “the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.” However, the term first appeared in writings by the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier in 1837. Féminisme encompassed many of Fourier’s progressive ideas regarding the stature of civilizations based on women’s liberation. He wrote that more developed civilizations should have more freedom and equality, for he believed both sexes were the same. Similar sentiments arose in America in 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton made her first speech in Seneca Falls, New York. Stanton expressed the need for women to take control of their own lives and roles in society. She believed that it would have to be women who changed the nature of their stations in the world, “for woman alone can understand the height, the length, and the breadth of her own degradation.” Although it would be another half-century before the

---


5 New World Encyclopedia contributors, “Charles Fourier,” New World Encyclopedia.

6 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, (public address, Women’s Convention, Seneca Falls, New York, September 1848).
The feminist movement picked up major traction, the initial sparks would soon ignite a flame of political action, protest, and art.

Around this very time, the world of dance was drastically changing. During the dawning of the Progressive Era (1890-1920), the concept of recreational movement swept across the country. This was a time when urbanization, gender separation due to labor specifications, and national consumerism reached new heights. As Linda J. Tomko writes in her book *Dancing Class*, these were the common “Progressive-era themes that worked themselves out through and upon human bodies.”

As a new middle class emerged, so did the ability to consume new forms of physical activity such as community center fitness classes and social dances. The dawn of the 20th century brought about innovative choreography and a refreshed appreciation for dance that the working and upper classes could now share. Out of this new form of physical recreation, American citizens, particularly women, found a way to express themselves as they never had before. The Progressive Era fostered important opportunities for women in both political and recreational spheres, and this led to two of the longest-standing movements in American history: feminism and modern dance.

The feminist movement is divided into time periods known as “waves,” which extend throughout the 20th century and into present day. Each wave is characterized by the time in which it occurred, the methods that were used to catalyze change, and the desired and achieved outcomes it contained. First Wave feminism in America occurred from the late 19th century until the early 1920s. Many of the movement’s efforts revolved

---

8 Ibid. 21
around women’s suffrage, but they also dealt with female reproductive rights, economic independence, and property ownership. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, two primary leaders, created the American Equal Rights Association in an effort to unite people regardless of race or gender on the front of female and African American suffrage.

Although First Wave feminism is not known for having a large impact on African American female rights, many of the first known feminists also identified as abolitionists. Sojourner Truth, who made her famed speech “Ain’t I a woman?” in 1851, spoke fervently of the natural inequality placed on both women and black people at birth. At a women’s convention in Akron, Ohio, she delivered the following words:

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [Intellect, somebody whispers] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negro's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure-full? Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.9

Eventually, the Equal Rights Association would channel less effort into the African American right as they felt the focus being drawn away from women’s suffrage. In fact, after siding with a notably racist Democratic politician, Anthony initiated a splitting of the two suffrage movements within the association.10 Both Stanton and Anthony would go on to lead the female suffragist movement separately from the African American movement. After many marches, organized conventions, and political

---

9 Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman” (public address, Women’s Convention, Akron, Ohio, 1851).

engagement, the female suffragists finally stood victorious. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified; women were allowed the right to vote.

It was also during the First Wave feminist movement that Margaret Sanger published a pamphlet called *Family Limitation*, outlining different options for birth control that she had studied abroad. The 1914 publication caused uproar in conservative circles, yet Sanger was able to open her own birth control clinic in the year 1916. She was soon arrested, but her legacy would inspire other women to fight for rights to control their own bodies, an issue which would thrive throughout the later waves and still remains unresolved today.11

In this same time period, dance changed in America. Before this period, recreational dance was limited to social ballroom dance or dance for physical fitness. In the early 1900s, the Ballet Russes, a French-born company of Russian dancers compiled by impresario Sergei Diaghilev, visited America and brought the art form across the sea with them.12 Ballet gradually gained popularity, yet another form of dance was also in the making. Soon, one woman would set out to change the world of dance forever. Isadora Duncan became known as the “mother of modern dance.” The First Wave of feminism correlates almost directly with the nativity of American modern dance and Duncan’s life.

Isadora Duncan, born in San Francisco, California in 1877, spent her life travelling between the West and East Coasts from California to New York then later expanded her horizons across the world. Much of her career began in Chicago, where she


began to share things she had learned in California with other artists across the country. Once after moving from California to Chicago, Duncan proclaimed that she had “discovered the true movement of man. This movement, drawing its inspiration from nature and going up through the evolution of the psychology of modern thought, [was] the true revelation of the Dance.”

Duncan’s movement style originated from this “true movement”; she danced with bent knees and bare feet. Her pieces incorporated running and large flowing arm movements, which indicated Duncan’s want for freedom in dance. Her style was considered new and daring because the way she danced was “all in opposition to the idea of ballet,” and the way she lived was mostly in opposition to societal norms of her time.

In 1903, Isadora Duncan visited Greece and other European countries to tour her work and to gain influence from the artists there. Many of her pieces displayed themes or plotlines from Greek mythology, and she developed a deep connection to the goddesses, especially Isis. She was known for exploring themes untouched or glossed over by many artists of the time. While her work was often perceived as distasteful in America, she was well accepted as an artistic intellectual in Europe. Still, she managed to push boundaries even in Europe as she showed off her body and had “a reputation for nudity.”

Duncan was unperturbed by the criticism, often countering attacks with even more provocative movement, concepts, and costumes. She wanted to show the world that all women should be allowed to express their sensuality in whichever way they chose. In fact, she spoke

---


14 Charmaine Patricia Warren with Suzanne Youngerman, “‘I see America Dancing’: The History of Modern Dance,” dancemotionusa.org, 2.

15 Kurth, 119.
openly of her opinions on issues regarding women, namely free sensual expression, female social and relational dominance, and the right to decide against bearing a child.

After giving birth to her first child in 1906, she wrote this in her journal:

> It is unheard-of, uncivilized barbarism that any woman should be forced to bear such monstrous torture. It should be remedied. It should be stopped… Don’t let me hear of any Woman’s Movement or Suffraget Movement until women have put an end to this, I believe, wholly useless agony, and insist the operation of childbirth, like other operations, shall be made painless and endurable.\(^\text{16}\)

Duncan’s life was dedicated to the dance, but her ideals shined through everything she did and through everyone with whom she came into contact. She changed the ideals of dance, but she also shaped the public opinion of the “modern” woman. She shared the want for political and physical freedom that the suffragists also fought for within the same era, while also creating a new movement vocabulary that would live on for centuries.

After the major victories of the First Wave movement were won, feminism became a more social than political movement. Women cut their hair and began wearing shorter skirts to show their ankles. They could be seen smoking and drinking alcohol in public, a taboo before the Golden Age.\(^\text{17}\) However, once this time of prosperity and scandal died down into a dismal economic depression, families, especially women, were forced into the home, thus reinstating the female archetypal role of domestic housewife. This lasted as the norm, although some women did go to work during the Second World

\(^{16}\) Kurth, 125.

War, throughout much of the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Feminism lied mostly dormant and was even frowned upon by the societal majority.

The period of dormancy lasted until the early 1960s, when authors such as Betty Freidan and Gloria Steinem used research and personal experience to shed light on the rampant gender inequality in America, starting with the working class and moving up through top tier socialites and popular culture. Freidan was one of the first writers to compile such extensive research on the psyche of the American housewife; it was a study that launched the Second Wave of feminism in America. The Second Wave began in the early 1960s and lasted until the early 1980s. It is characterized by issues of female inferiority and gender inequality in the home and workplace, further inclusion of African American women’s rights, and major policy change regarding reproductive rights. Also within this movement, Friedan’s successors would coin the term “patriarchy” to describe the “systemic subordination of women at the level of culture itself.”

Freidan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), provides a detailed analysis of what she calls “The Problem That Has No Name,” which was a psychological, relational, physical and even fatal problem for many housewives during the 50s and 60s. In concluding the book, she urges women to rethink their positions in society and to shatter preexisting boundaries placed upon them:

Then the split in the image will be healed, and daughters will not face that jumping off point at twenty-one or forty-one. When their mothers’ fulfillment makes girls sure they want to be women, they will not have to “beat themselves down” to be feminine; they can stretch and stretch until their own efforts will tell them who they are. They will not need the regard of boy or man to feel alive. And when women do not need to live through their husbands and children, men will not fear the love and strength of

---

women, nor need another’s weakness to prove their own masculinity. They can finally see each other as they are. And this may be the next step in human evolution.  

Friedan also played a large role in the formation of activist groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), which lobbied for the Equal Rights Act (ERA). Other female authors such as Kate Millet, a NOW committee member, and Susan Brownmiller would produce works branching off from the pioneers and deepening arguments against patriarchal structures of the mid-20th Century. While Millet worked to further define the patriarchy in her PhD dissertation Sexual Politics, Brownmiller would discuss the stigma surrounding female sexuality and promiscuity. These women and many more gave the Second Wave feminist movement its power but also gained harsh criticism for being “over the top”, even to some women. In the face of much adversity from powerful political factions, including President Ronald Regan, the Second Wave had some of the largest impacts on the feminist movement as a whole.

Some of those impacts came with actual policy changes. The Supreme Court of the United States reached a decision on Roe v. Wade in 1973. The case legalized abortion and gave women the right to choose whether or not they wanted to reproduce. However, a host of other legislation passed in state and federal courts, which helped to expunge the discrimination of women based on sex. The Women’s Educational Equity Act (1974) and Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978) passed to ensure that women were

---

20 Buchanan, "Second Wave feminism."
21 Ibid.
allowed equal opportunities in education and job markets. The Fair Housing Act (1974) illegalized housing discrimination based on gender.\footnote{Buchanan.} However, as America saw an increasingly conservative governmental shift, the Second Wave’s tactics became decreasingly popular. It died out in the surrounding years of Ronald Reagan’s rise to power.

The Second Wave of feminism most closely corresponds with one of the most important eras in modern dance history. Throughout the period of dormancy just before the Second Wave, monumental female dancers and choreographers emerged to give voice to the silenced. Beginning in the early 1930s, modern dancers Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham branched off from Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and the earliest pioneers to create their own techniques for movement as well as new narratives in performance. Doris Humphrey blended the concepts of “fall” and “recovery” in her works to create a constant struggle against gravity.\footnote{Anderson, 175.} This often translated into a fight for balance within the narratives of the pieces as well. Her dances, though not directly focused on social justice, often had themes exploring the human condition. Her 1947 work, \textit{Day on Earth}, focused on a woman’s navigation through love, coming-of-age, marriage, and heartache. The piece questioned the fairytale nature that surrounded love and marriage, especially in ballet, and created a dialogue about the veracity of marriage as the only option long before Friedan published her books.

Martha Graham, who also separated from the well-known modern dance company Denishawn, was perhaps the most important modern dance choreographer,
teacher, and storyteller of all time. Her name is almost synonymous with the modern dance field itself. Her prolific library of works and wisdoms fit so closely with the feminist movement that I have devoted the next chapter solely to the discussion of Graham and whether or not she is perceived as a contributor to the Second Wave. It is important to simply note her here in order to maintain an organized timeline, as she began her career as a director and choreographer in 1926 and worked almost until her death in 1992.24 Her most fruitful choreographic works were created right before and during the Second Wave of feminism.

The early 1960s brought a period of unrest in the dance sphere as well as the political. It was a time of great experimentation and rebellion from the “technical” modern dance to which Graham, Humphrey, and many others had contributed. This is the movement now referred to as “post-modern dance.” In 1962, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and other fledgling choreographers put on a show featuring innovative choreographic styles at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, New York.25 From that moment on, the church became a breeding ground for dances that were “deliberately plotless as choreographers reacted against the dramatic, allegorical, or literary dances that were prevalent at the time.”26

One such dance was Lucinda Childs’ “Carnation” (1964), a piece in which the dancer/choreographer uses household items to portray the mundaneness of a housewife’s daily tasks. Childs interacts with kitchen sponges, hair-rollers, a bag, and a sheet as props

24 Ibid. 176.
25 Ibid. 187
26 Ibid. 190
and eventually adorns herself with them. Throughout the performance, her face is unchanged until the end when she almost flashes a smile. Then as New York Times reviewer Jennifer Dunning puts it, her face “crumples, to chilling effect. A whole history of buried or lost aspirations is within that final quick thrust upward.”27 Like many products of the post-modern era, the work was not generally accepted until years later when public opinion finally changed. Still many works from the post-modern era can be seen as a catalyst for that change just like the political movements that occurred at that time.

The Third Wave of feminism began rather shortly after the Second Wave ended. From the early 1990s to the mid-2000s, feminists reinvented themselves and their movement by declaring themselves “anti-racist feminists who thoroughly deconstructed white mainstream feminism's maintenance of racist and classist oppression.”28 In fact, the Third Wave was not referred to as such in its earliest years. It was known as “post-feminism” until writer Rebecca Walker published an article in Ms. Magazine entitled “Becoming the Third Wave.” In the article she proclaimed, “I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave.”29 Walker also co-founded the Third Wave Fund, which would later become the Third Wave Foundation, an organization that seeks to provide opportunity and advocacy for different gender, racial, and social groups.

The inclusion of homosexual and transgender equality first appeared on a large scale in the Third Wave movement. Feminists of this era also dealt with the questions of

---


hypocrisy surrounding the “lesbian sex wars” of the 1970s and 1980s, where Second Wave feminists were beginning to normalize certain sexually expressive choices (lesbianism) while devaluing others (pornography, S&M, and sex trade work).\(^{30}\) The Third Wave produced movements that encouraged rights for sex workers and a safer pornographic industry as well as new movements in art and music. More females broke into the “Third Wave Punk” scene through the Riot Grrrl movement, and all-female bands like Bikini Kill, Sleater-Kinney, and The Breeders used their music as an artful protest against the patriarchy, sexual assault, and discrimination.\(^{31}\) The Third Wave is often characterized by its infiltration into popular culture through music and also through Hollywood. Celebrities such as Madonna, Beyoncé, and Leonardo DiCaprio used their prominent place in the media as a platform for advocacy, and they still do today. The Third Wave of feminism was one of outspoken calls to action and rebellion, which led almost directly into the Fourth Wave.

Many different aspects can characterize modern dance in the Third Wave. The post-modern era, which was so prevalent in the 60s and 70s, began to lose its traction in the 80s. There was, in some circles, a slight rejuvenation of appreciation for technique, yet innovation was still key to continuing the modern dance movement.\(^{32}\) In fact, innovation became a key factor for Canadian choreographer Marie Chouinard; she is one of the most popular and radical voices of feminist dance during the Third Wave. Although many critics may not characterize her performances as dance, but perhaps

\(^{30}\) Pinterics, 15.

\(^{31}\) Pinterics, 15

“body art” or “performance art,” she still holds an influential space in modern dance and feminist history. Her works have been performed throughout North America and across the globe. Chouinard’s solos are created to draw attention to issues surrounding women’s sexuality and gender, such as *Petite danse sans nom* (1980), a piece where she pees on stage into a bucket, and *Marie Chien Noir* (1982), where she masturbates on stage after gagging herself with her own hand. While her pieces can be seen as shocking, even offensive, Chouinard’s works aim to give the dancer’s body and inner impulses an outlet for expression, whether those impulses are female, male, fluid, or non-binary. Chouinard not only helped change the definition of what modern dance can be, but she also worked and continues to work on redefining the feminist movement, a typical characteristic of Third Wave voices.

The Fourth and current wave of feminism is still being defined as it plays out in society. Beginning where the Third Wave left off in the mid-2000s, Fourth Wave feminism is characterized by its involvement with social media and the internet. As feminist theorists, advocates, writers, and artists are able to disseminate their ideals more swiftly than ever before, a global audience can track Fourth Wave undulations as they occur and weigh in accordingly. In fact, the first major sub-movement of the Fourth Wave began on Twitter in October of 2017, when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted urging women to reply with “me too” if they’d ever been sexually harassed or assaulted. The tweet went viral and received millions of replies and prompted responses on Facebook,

---

33 Ibid.

Instagram, and other social networks as well. It is important to note that while the movement was popularized by Milano, it started as a movement founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 “to help survivors of sexual violence” 35

Since the tweet went viral, the #MeToo movement has sparked a public outpouring of stories and a push for legislative changes and power shifts. The subsequent movement to expose sexual misconduct in the political sphere as well as other work environments is called #Time’sUp. This is another sub-movement of the Fourth Wave, which can be closely watched through social media trends. Both the #MeToo and #Time’sUp movements seek to share women’s true stories of gender discrimination so that Americans and other global citizens can see the gravity and scope of the issue. 36 Although America is currently engaged in these movements, changes can already be seen as, across the country, men in powerful positions are losing their jobs and their good reputations due to their dark pasts. Movie mogul Harvey Weinstein was the first in a long line of Hollywood predators to be accused of multiple alleged sexual assaults. He is still awaiting criminal charges for his wrongdoings, as he denied many of the accusations. 37 Well-known broadcast journalist Matt Lauer was fired from the Today show amid sexual harassment allegations in November of 2017. 38 Politicians are being removed from office, stepping down, or simply losing elections due to sexual assault allegations and

scandals. People are beginning to say “Time’s up,” but there is an unsure ending to this Fourth Wave of feminism. Yet there is still hope that it may end in something near equality.

As we move into a more globally connected era, modern dance is also globalizing. Ideas are being shared across oceans, and cultural understanding is becoming a major facet of the modern dance world. There is also a meshing between genres of dance that has never been seen on this level before. Cross-genre choreographers are becoming more common as ballet moves to Broadway and contemporary is performed in pointe shoes. Modern dance is no longer defined by certain techniques or lack thereof. Among the amalgamation of versatile choreographers and teachers, Elizabeth Streb, Sonya Tayeh, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar are just a few of the women making names for themselves as powerful female voices in the modern dance world but also in the rest of society. Male choreographers like Bill T. Jones, Ohad Naharin, and Matthew Bourne are also joining the crusade for equality by challenging gender norms and working to rid sexual inequality. Together, dancers, painters, videographers, performance artists, and everyday citizens are joining the feminist movement to fight for women’s rights and equality for all.

The American feminist movement has always shared commonalities with other sociopolitical movements in history. Over the course of almost two centuries, it has shifted in purpose, practice, and participants, but its core goal remained the same: to advocate for women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. Similarly, modern dance has shifted shape since its earliest beginnings. While choreographers, techniques, and dancers change, the main objective stays the same: creating innovative forms of
expression through movement. Feminism and modern dance have much in common, and both are extremely important, often overlooked parts of the fabric of American history. As both the modern dance and feminist movements continue to strengthen alongside each other, it is my hope that the two will remain driving forces for social, political, and economic change now and well into the future.

CHAPTER 2 - A GREAT DEBATE: GRAHAM AS A FEMINIST THEN AND NOW

Martha Graham danced, choreographed, and taught almost until her death in 1991 at the age of 96. Living through several wars, various artistic movements, and three waves of feminism, Graham saw many changes in her life that affected her work. Throughout the many generations of dancers who have worked with her, there is unity in the knowledge of Martha Graham’s history and the relationships that grew between dancer and choreographer in her rehearsals. However, as the company begins to drift further away from those who actually danced with Martha, perceptions over the meanings behind her works have changed. It is important to note that although Graham offered few detailed descriptions of her work, she remained mostly ambiguous. As many artists do, she left much of her work up for interpretation. Through discussions with her dancers from the past and present, it is apparent that a debate exists. Is Graham a feminist or isn’t she? Through a series of interviews with dancers from the Martha Graham Dance
Company, I have discovered that the answer varies depending on the generation and its definition of feminism in general.

There are many generations of Graham dancers living and teaching the Graham technique today. During my research, I have found that different generations lie on different sides of the debate. Terese Capucilli and Jacqulyn Buglisi are two former principle dancers of the Martha Graham Dance Company. Both women danced with Graham in the 1970s and 80s. They have similar views on Graham as an individualist rather than a feminist. Capucilli said Graham had a deeper handle on the human soul than most artists, saying “I never thought about Martha as a feminist. Martha, I don’t think, thought of herself as a feminist. Martha just talks about gut level truths about human beings. Basically what you said. She had something to say as a woman. Speaking as a woman from the woman’s point of view…”

Buglisi echoed Capucilli’s sentiments, saying that Graham’s choreography came from an “inner landscape,” and though she studied the female character more in depth than others, she was not politically involved as a feminist. The two dancers, who both now identify as feminists themselves, said there was a negative light on feminism during much of Graham’s creative period. For this reason, she did not feel the need to participate in feminist advocacy. She simply wanted to speak about equality and humanity, according to Buglisi. Capucilli and Buglisi are two of the dancers from the last few generations to work with Graham personally. Dancers who are now in the company feel differently about Graham’s legacy.

---

39 Terese Capucilli (Former Graham dancer) in discussion with the author, February 14, 2017.
40 Jacqulyn Buglisi (Former Graham dancer) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.
41 Jacqulyn Buglisi (Former Graham dancer) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.
As the feminist movement is beginning to broaden in size and scope due to social media, more people are questioning our history in order to create a more progressive future. The question of whether or not Graham was a feminist is still a debate in dance-related academia. In fact, dance historian Sally Banes argues that Graham never identified as a feminist yet has an immense sense of empathy that helps her see the humanity in all people. In her book *Dancing Women* (2013), Banes analyzes the feminist nature of historical dance works. In analyzing Graham’s *Night Journey* she writes,

> Although she lived her life as if she possessed every right that men enjoyed, and although she made women the subject of her dances, certainly Graham never identified herself as a feminist. An individualist to the last, she writes that she never could understand the need for women’s liberation as a political movement…She may never have experienced those feelings, but she emphasized well, and she created characters who did.\(^{42}\)

However, others are beginning to define Graham as a feminist even if she didn’t consider herself as such. Current company dancer, Jacob Larsen, and former apprentice Ricardo Barrett, never got to work with Graham personally, but they believe that her ideas and creations align directly with the feminist movement. Barrett said in examining Graham’s repertoire, one learns that, “she was empowering women before it was the ‘thing to do.’”\(^{43}\) She made women the focal point not only of her stories but also of the spatial patterns on stage. Still, the male also plays an equally important role on stage. Larsen identifies as a homosexual male, yet he says that Graham’s work has “brought out [his] individual

---

\(^{42}\) Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies Onstage* (Routledge, 2013) 165.

\(^{43}\) Ricardo Barrett (former Graham apprentice) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.
masculinity that [he] ha[s]n’t found in other forms of dance.” Although the male often serves a supporting role, both men and women were equal in Graham’s eyes. This vision of equality is what the newer generation of Graham dancers considers a major feminist quality of Graham’s pieces.

As the definition of feminism in the public eye aligns more closely with equality, more people may define Graham as a feminist. Although she did not define herself that way, her work is very important to feminist history. It elevated the female dancer to a new position, and her pieces empowered women to use their bodies to voice their opinions. In order to better describe how Graham’s work aligns with feminism, one must understand her history and her choreographic works. In this chapter, I will describe her life before dance and analyze one of her most feministic artistic works.

**Martha Graham: A brief history**

Martha Graham was born in the neighborhood Allegheny in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on May 11, 1894. She was raised in a relatively affluent household by her psychiatrist father, Dr. George Graham, and devout Presbyterian mother, Jane Beers. The oldest of three girls and a brother who died at age 1, Martha Graham was the first to learn and play with the Graham’s self-proclaimed nanny Elizabeth Prendergast. Elizabeth, known as Lizzie by the Graham family, was a former patient of Dr. Graham.\(^{45}\) Lizzie would often put on performances for Graham, which were an amalgamation of singing, dancing and make believe stories resembling the religious rituals of her Roman Catholic

---

\(^{44}\) Jacob Larsen (current Graham company dancer) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.

Her experiences with Lizzie as a young child are perhaps the earliest exposure Graham received to the imaginative realm of the arts. Whether through performance or the written word, Martha Graham learned the importance of storytelling from the youngest years of childhood development. She would go on to retell some of the best-known stories in recorded history through the art she loved most: dance. Yet, she was able to recount these ancient tales in a much different way than her predecessors by creating her own dance technique and incorporating her own progressive point of view.

In 1908, Graham and her family relocated to Santa Barbara, California, when her sister began having complications from asthma. Graham was fourteen at the time. Three years later, as Martha Graham walked down the streets of her town, she happened to see a poster announcing the Los Angeles tour of a woman named Ruth St. Denis. A small photo was attached. Graham was so enchanted by the photo of the dancer that she asked her father if he would take her to see the woman perform. To her surprise, George Graham agreed, and the two attended the show together. At age seventeen in the seats of the Mason Opera House, Martha Graham found her calling: to be a dancer and perform onstage.47

Five years after watching “Miss Ruth” dance, Graham walked into her studio for the first time. She signed herself up for dance classes and was taken into a room for her “diagnosis lessons.” She was accepted into the school with hesitation, but St. Denis decided to pass the pupil on to her husband and partner Ted Shawn. However, Graham would go on to prove herself as one of the star pupils of the Denishawn school as she

---

46 Stodelle, Deep song, 3,4.
47 Stodelle, Deep Song, 11.
completed her training. She was known for her “projection” and her great passion for the “dramatic dance.” As Graham grew in the Denishawn school, she greatly respected the teachings and principles of her superiors. She learned from them about the art, music, and philosophy of the time. However, by 1923 Graham began to feel herself being pulled away from the Denishawn company. She was different, and others began to notice that her way of moving, though trained in the Denishawn school, was something new and special. Graham was also known for her artistic spirit and a willingness to create her own movement combinations when teaching for the Denishawn school. After a stint with John Murray Anderson’s *Greenwich Village Follies*, Graham relocated to Rochester, New York. There she taught dance for one year at Eastman School of Music. By 1926, she was ready to start her own company. What started as a small group of women in a little room in New York City would grow to become one of the most famous companies in modern dance history. With this company Graham would create her own technique for movement as well as artistic works that transcended time and put the female character on a pedestal upon which she was never previously allowed.

In the early years, Graham choreographed many solos and trios for herself and her few female dancers. As her school began to grow, people started to recognize her teachings and performances as innovations in the dance field. Still, Graham felt her earliest solo performances were still “influenced by Denishawn.” However, she continued to find a unique sense of individualism by studying the body, music, art, and philosophy. Her most famous solo, *Lamentation*, premiered in 1930, just four years after

---

she began her solo career. The dance depicted a single dancer as the personification of grief. It became well-known for its subject matter and also for the long tube of fabric that enclosed the dancer as she sat on a simple bench. Graham wrote about the fabric in her autobiography saying, “I wear a long tube of material to indicate the tragedy that obsesses the body, the ability to stretch inside your own skin, to witness and test the perimeters and boundaries of grief.” The piece won Graham acclaim and attention from major arts publications and connoisseurs of the time.

Just ten years later, by the early 1940s, Graham was producing her most important group works on a now fully staffed dance company. Out of this fruitful period came many of Graham’s female-centered ballets, including one that I will discuss in further detail. *Clytemnestra* is one of Graham’s most feminist works. It focuses symbolically on the outer flesh of the female as well as the inner psyche of a generally overlooked woman from Greek mythology. By relating these well-known tales to her own personal life, Graham effectively used the past to communicate progressive ideals to diverse audiences across the world.

*Clytemnestra: Shifting the focus*

Martha Graham’s *Clytemnestra* reached an important artistic climax in the time that it was created. Full houses and rave reviews show that many loved the 1958 work, including Graham and her dancers. In fact, in a 1961 review in the *New York Times*,


John Martin called *Clytemnestra* “her apotheosis.” It is also believed that set designer Isamu Noguchi reached his artistic peak with the stage design for *Clytemnestra*.

However, other dance experts believe that the full evening-length piece, known as a ballet, was actually the first step on the road to Graham’s decline. Nonetheless, Graham’s choreography was effective in conveying the nature of the female psyche through its historical context, the overall aesthetic of the work, and two important characters from evening-length ballet.

*Clytemnestra* premiered April 1, 1958 at the Adelphi Theatre in New York City, and it quickly became an enormous success. The piece consisted of a variation of solos, duets, and group dances. Although it did not end up staying on Broadway, *Clytemnestra* was enjoyed by many at the time for its intriguing storyline, dramatic style, and the relation between Graham and her character, Clytemnestra.

In order to understand the piece in context of contemporary history, it is important to note Clytemnestra’s role in Aeschylus’s ancient trilogy. She was Helen’s sister, “low-stature, fierce-lipped…craftier than queenly.” Clytemnestra was manipulative and calculating. She, unlike many of *The Oresteia*’s characters, was unable to see the wrongs she had committed. This contrast in ideals made her intriguing yet relatable to audiences and surely to Martha Graham as well. In fact, one *New York Times* article questions,

---


“...was it the ancient matriarch, or Graham, who needed to be justified?” Some believed that Graham choreographed Clytemnestra based on her current state of rage during that period.

In the spring of 1956, the Martha Graham Dance Company had just finished their Asian tour, and Graham was on a vacation in Greece. When the company returned home, there was a period of no dancing and no rehearsal. However, the company understood the contemplative nature of this period in Graham’s process. As one dancer, Helen McGehee writes, “...it was not a sterile time. Martha Graham’s mind was churning.” Soon, rehearsals began for Graham’s latest work. It was after this rich learning experience in Greece that Graham began to craft the detailed account of Clytemnestra’s character as she battled her own conscience both on earth and in the underworld.

At the time of its premiere in 1958, the U.S. was still in the middle of the long stale mate that was the Cold War. Tensions were high between eastern and western powers and between Communists and Anticommunists. The push toward nuclear innovation and space travel became an arms race with very high stakes. The aforementioned Asian tour of the Graham Company was seen as a U.S. “weapon” to portray “artistic modernism, threaded with American nationalism” to the enemy countries. Graham was then considered an ambassador of the U.S. with the role of


57 McGehee, Choreography and Dance, 72.


aiding cultural exchange and reparations after the Korean War. Comparatively, *Clytemnestra* was a piece set in the aftermath of one war only to be thrust into another. It is riddled with themes of tension, destruction, and death. Although Graham did not write the plotline of Clytemnestra’s story, she created this ballet at a time when the entire world was choosing sides and committing wrongdoings.

Graham was recognized for her natural artistic ability but also for her deep knowledge of the history, which surrounded each of her works. It is probable that she was fully aware that history was repeating itself at the time she created *Clytemnestra*; in performing the piece so centered on war, deception, and ruthlessness, she was holding a mirror up to the audience so that they could see that nothing had changed. The ballet won acclaim from art enthusiasts, doctors, and sailors alike, but Graham seemed to never take the credit for the success. Perhaps this was because she knew that she was foreshadowing the truth about what happens when a woman, or a nation, gets too arrogant and falls from grace.

Not only did this piece reflect the political and militaristic state of society at the time, but it did so through a female perspective. The choreography of *Clytemnestra* gave the focus to the title female character in a previously male-centered story. Where her husband Agamemnon was once the focus, he is but a small supporting character in Graham’s ballet. This choice was bold, as 1958 was shortly prior to the publishing of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The first wave of feminism had gradually

---

60 Stodelle, *Deep Song*, 185.

61 McGehee, *Choreography and Dance*, 72.
died out after women won the right to vote and began to shift their focus back to heteronormativity and domestic life, and the second wave had not yet begun. Graham herself faced deep struggles moving fluidly in and out of her presumed role based on her gender. She was originally very independent, focusing on her art more than her various lovers. However, as she moved through relationships with lovers, like Hawkins, her rough reflections shone through her choreography and dancing. Many people attribute the great success of her strongest female characters to the personal connection Graham had with them, which came out in her dancing.

By 1954, Hawkins and Graham were divorced, and in 1958 Graham created a character for herself who she described as an “angry, wild, wicked woman.” In Clytemnestra, the audience peers into the psychological battle of a woman who is unrelentingly unashamed. Whether or not Graham wanted to express her own rage through the role, Clytemnestra’s character is unique in her ability to bring society’s focus onto the complexities of the female psyche, as that was an unexplored topic at the time.

Similarly original was the overall aesthetic Graham achieved with this piece. The sets and costumes are minimalistic and simple while the movement is powerful, athletic, and dramatic. With a commissioned score written by Halim El-Dahb, the work is driven by marked percussive and intense choreographic and musical moments. In line with the modernist philosophy, the set includes a white chair-shaped object on stage right, a raised white platform on stage left, and streaming ribbons hanging from center stage. Simple black, red, and gold costumes create a more raw, realistic version of the Greek story. The

---

62 Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 1.

63 Stodelle, Deep Song, 184.
stark scene helps to create the illusion of the psychological rather than physical
landscape. Graham chooses to delve deeply into the mental and time-bending story of
Clytemnestra after she has killed her husband.

The choreography for this ballet in two acts tells the complex and convoluted
story of Clytemnestra by punctuating group dance scenes with solos or smaller group
pieces to introduce characters. These are perhaps the more important scenes of the ballet,
as Graham is known for the psychological depth in her dances rather than the linear story.
Initially, Clytemnestra is introduced as a strong character. In her movements she carries
herself with the definite poise of a noblewoman, but she also shows that she is capable of
contorting and twisting herself into new forms through the deep core contraction and
quick floor-to-standing transitions. This is not only Graham’s way of showing that
Clytemnestra is of royal stature, but it also alludes to the stealthy and sometimes
manipulative side of her character. In fact, Clytemnestra’s name was originally thought to
mean “famed for her suitors,” but ironically, another discovered meaning is “scheme or
contrive.”

It is obvious that Graham related and choreographed for the latter, as
Clytemnestra’s character is devious and conniving from the start. However, Graham
shows that there is dignity behind the character, and it is the external pressure of her
position which causes her to act wrongly. When Clytemnestra moves across the stage in
the first act, she seems to glide from pose to pose. These poses represent her dignity,
while each battement à la seconde represents her power and ability to get her way. Both
of these aspects were expected of the character due to her role in society, and this is

---

64 Stodelle, *Deep Song*, 185.
perhaps what Graham was beginning to feel with her fame: the pressure to always act dignified, strong, and poised.

In the Epilogue, Clytemnestra faces Hades and the underworld. After having an affair with another man, killing her husband, and eventually being killed by her son, the queen seems to have been stripped of her regal qualities and gives the audience a more human authenticity through her movements and her facial expressions. She trades a stern upward tilt of the chin for a restless look, seeking forgiveness. Graham has shown the vulnerabilities of the human psyche through this change in the once-strong character. Now, she becomes strong in a new and relatable sense. As an audience, our empathy is heightened by Clytemnestra’s sense of defeat which makes us even more proud when she redeems herself at the end of the ballet, even if only slightly.

Another group whose movement quality is highly discernable from the rest of the ballet is the furies, the group of six dancers who are a figment of Orestes’ imagination and longing for acknowledgement. In Graham’s story, they are a projection of the psyche of Clytemnestra. When she is enraged, the furies dance with strong, harsh movements. When she is at peace, the furies become light and almost ethereal. The furies are a common archetypal group used in literature to evoke a fearful respect for women. The main chorus of furies consisted of six women cloaked in dark dresses, a common theme throughout this and many other Graham pieces. The original costumes for this piece were partially designed by one of the dancers, Helen McGehee and Graham herself, which gave Graham even more control over the specific aesthetic and allowed it to be sealed with the Graham staple.

---

65 Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies Onstage*, 30.
In Act II, the furies swarm the stage in a series of bison jumps and percussive steps after Clytemnestra has been killed. They actually hit their legs with their hands as a way to announce their arrival. As Clytemnestra’s ghost has summoned the furies, this percussiveness is the physical manifestation of her anger being released as she has been sent back to the underworld. In lines of unanimous movement, the six furies begin to come together in a circle. Using ritualistic hand and arm gestures, the furies again seem to be foreshadowing an imminent demise while simultaneously drawing upon remembrances of other fury-like groups throughout ballet and modern dance history.66 Although Clytemnestra has been sent to Hell, the Furies return later in the ballet as Eumenides, or Well-Wishers.67 This symbolizes Clytemnestra’s coming to peace with all she has done. Just as the furies represented her in a time of rage and disappointment, the Eumenides return as Hades hands her the branches of peace. As the other characters unite as one and the curtain closes on Clytemnestra, it seems she has come to closure with the demons (or furies) once inside her and she slips out from under the curtain yelling “Rebirth!”

Graham’s use of an untraditional storyline partnered with, at the time, still revolutionary movement technique made Clytemnestra visually and emotionally appealing. More importantly, Graham used her aesthetic knowledge to create choreography that advanced a female character into the spotlight, while leaving the male heroes on a lesser platform in the story. An audience can learn from this ballet to look at


67 Stodelle, Deep Song, 193.
two sides of one age-old story. Because of Graham’s unique ability to understand the human condition, she was able to switch the scope onto the female and tell a truthful story of passion, guilt, rage, and ultimate female empowerment by taking a look at the heroine’s journey.

CHAPTER 3- HISTORY MEETS CURRENCY

When I came to Western Kentucky University to study dance and journalism, I never believed that my two majors would mesh with harmony and that I’d be able to explore each subject in such depth. However, both degree programs have provided me with opportunities external of the university that have broadened my viewpoints and expanded my curiosity. As I began my involvement with the WKU Student Publications, I consequently paid much more attention to current events than ever before. Similarly,
when I began dancing for the WKU Dance Company, I was able to experience new forms of dance that I had never tried. Whether at school or travelling to multiple cities and countries for performances, conferences, classes, workshops, and internships, my knowledge of the possibilities in the world around me was rapidly expanding.

Soon, I grew interested in a concept that is very common in my favorite genre, modern dance: social and political commentary through movement. I wanted to create work that expressed my feelings or helped people understand what was happening in the world. This was the impetus for my research and the corresponding choreographic project that premiered at WKU Dance Program’s *The Dance Project* in February 2018. I combined the processes and philosophies of modern dance pioneers Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham as well as many aspects of the feminist movement and my own life to create a movement-based sociopolitical commentary of feminism throughout history and now. This chapter details my artistic process through a look at the history behind my work, my points of inspiration, and my choreographic pitfalls and triumphs.

Going back to the beginning, I was born in 1996 into a relatively conservative middle class white family in Nashville, Tennessee. I lived in the same red brick house on the corner of our street for my entire life until moving away for college in the fall of 2014. My preconceptions of feminism prior to moving away were not negative, although my father had mentioned the “bra-burners” and extremists, but they were not radiantly positive either. Christianity had taught me submission, southern ideals had taught me the female’s “place,” dance had taught me unachievable perfectionism, and daily life had taught me about the stereotypical male. Feminism seemed like a lofty ideal, a utopian
concept that could be worked toward but never fully achieved. I was fine where I was in life. I was complacent.

In spring 2015, my sophomore year, I read the book *Promiscuities* by Naomi Wolf. It is an autobiographical retelling of the author’s developmental years in the 1970s through a feminist lens. In chapter two, Wolf details the significance of the Barbie in young girls’ lives.

Barbie was the first toy that taught us what was expected of us sexually…Barbie taught us a lot- sometimes more than we wanted to know. Her posture showed us that being sexual meant being immobile. It meant: walk on your toes, bust out, limbs rigid…We learned from Barbie’s feet that the most important activities for us would be those we would perform à pointe.68

In reading these words, I laughed in spite of myself. How could I have missed the glaring disparities in what I thought Barbie taught me and what I actually learned from her? As I read on, it was like I had seen it all before, yet everything was so new. It was as if I was reading about my own childhood but in a parallel universe where everything blissful was turned on its head to point out my own ignorance. I began reflecting on the rest of my early life, the parts Wolf had missed in her book, like the points when I was forced to wear dark makeup and fishnet tights as an 8-year-old on the dance competition stage or when I was reprimanded by my grandmother to cross my legs and “sit like a lady” in the church pews. These thoughts made me restless. They made me question the very foundation of my existence. Most importantly, they made me want to dance about it.

While my fascination with feminist literature grew in my free time, I was also beginning to do more research in class on the history of modern dance. Always a fan of

---

the modern dance genre, I was excited to know more about the rich history that made the
dance form what it is today. I had gone through life hearing the names of the techniques:
Duncan, Graham, Horton, Limón, and a host of other pioneers. Yet, the more I read, the
more connections I recognized throughout the thread of dance history. For example,
Isadora Duncan’s ideas inspired Ruth St. Denis, and St. Denis accelerated Martha
Graham’s career. Martha Graham has evident influence on the Horton technique, and
Lester Horton inspired choreographer Alvin Ailey. These connections, while intimidating
at times, also comforted me. They made me feel that as a modern dance student, I was
connected to something greater than myself or even my university. Combining my
interest in dance history with my newfound fascination for feminism, I finally felt I had a
direction in which to channel my choreographic impulses.

**Sitting Like a Lady**

In the spring semester of 2017, I found a note in the back of my phone case. It
read, “how women sit through history.” I couldn’t remember exactly when I had written
down the idea, but I immediately felt excitement in seeing the note again. I knew that this
time, I would have to get down to work if I was going to bring this small, simple phrase
from pen on paper to life through movement.

Although I don’t know exactly when, the idea came to me while I was reflecting
on a piece of my childhood through the feminist lens, a practice that I began after reading
Wolf’s book years before. Thinking about the many times I sat in Donelson Presbyterian
Church, surrounded by white walls and squished between my mother and grandmother, I
realized how much of an impact those Sundays had on me. On those days, my hair was
brushed and pulled and curled until tears welled up, while the words “pain is beauty”
floated through the air. Tissues were often thrust in my face prompting me to spit out my gum. And each time my restless, tingly legs drifted into a relatively open position, they were quickly pushed back together. Knees knocking and ankles crossing, I resumed a “ladylike” posture. These memories prompted me to think about what my mother experienced on her Sundays as a preacher’s daughter, and then I wondered what my grandmother endured as a young girl in the 1950s. I began to look at photographs of American women through time and all the way back into the 19th century, and I noted trends within the poses.

The oldest photographs (1840-1900) showed women with straight faces, as it was uncommon to smile in the beginning years of photography. Their hands, often placed in their laps, were a sign of modesty or a display of a married woman’s wedding ring. Legs were not visible due to large bustle skirts, but occasionally feet would be crossed at the ankles under the skirts. Corsets cinched women’s waists to obtain the ideal silhouette. The next group of photographs I focused on were products of the 1920s. Common photos of women in their daily lives showed legs crossed at the knees, and smiles were more common though not always present in the photos. More portable cameras gave opportunity for more creatively posed photos as well. Women often posed with soft hands upon their faces or even covering their body parts. Finally, I looked at photos of women in the 1950s. Women plastered smiles across their faces. Again, the

---


70 See Appendix 3

71 See Appendix 4

cinched waist was at the pinnacle of fashion. Many women crossed their legs and sat up as straight as possible in proud showing of their busts. In beginning rehearsals, I knew I wanted this piece to be a solo. I wanted the dancer to have a deep connection to the audience members that I felt could only be achieved if attention focused on one person. Casting for this piece did not require a dance audition, as I knew it would consist of minimal movement. I cast a dancer who I knew to be graceful and poised as well as theatrically expressive. I had always admired the theatricality in Martha Graham’s choreography through her use of “contraction” and “release,” so the expressiveness and living breath became important facets of the piece as well. During the creative process, the dancer, Jena Thompson, attended one to two rehearsals per week. The time frame of those rehearsals varied from 30 minutes to 2 hours, often depending on whether the rehearsal would be choreography or intent-based. In choreography based rehearsals, I would teach Thompson the general sequences using a chair that we found in the building where our dance classes are held. I often had a general outline of the movements I wanted to see, then the rest came from either Thompson’s choreography or experimenting with the chair. I truly believe that the dance studio is a laboratory, and much of what we did to create this piece was an experiment.

Meanwhile, in the intent-based rehearsals, I wanted to use what I had learned about the successes of Martha Graham’s process to bring out the proper character in Thompson’s performance. According to former Graham dancer, Jacqulyn Buglisi, Martha

---

73 See Appendix 5
Graham facilitated a research-based approach to movement in order to achieve the overall vision of her work.

> You would become supplicant to the character that you were playing. There was always an extreme layering like scaffolding. A lot of scaffolding that I did would go underneath the underpinning the character that you were working on or whatever the ballet was that Martha was working on that supported the work, the vision of the work.\(^74\)

With this in mind, I showed Thompson the photos I had found and spoke to her in many rehearsals about the history of the women in each picture. Together we searched for the proper gestures to emulate those women. These gestures would become the entire first section of the piece. From there, I incorporated other poses and light gestures from certain pictures into the later, less pedestrian parts of the choreography. Through this research, both the dancer and I found a deeper meaning within the piece: the discomfort of conformity to gender expectations.

“\textit{Sit.}”

Set to Claude Debussy’s \textit{Rêverie}, the piece is 4 minutes and 23 seconds long. The dancer begins seated in the chair (the same chair we began with in rehearsals; it became integral to the piece). She is posed with her ankles crossed, hands in her lap, and a pleasant look on her face. As the music begins, the dancer seems at ease, acknowledging audience members as if they were sitting in a room with her. Then there is a slight shift in her face and body language. The dancer seems to be uncomfortable. She shifts to the same position on the opposite side of the chair. This slight shifting continues as she finds new ways to sit. She crosses her knees and unclasps her hands as the intensity in her shifting gradually increases. The dancer begins to lose control of her body as she cannot

\(^{74}\) Jacqulyn Buglisi (Former Graham dancer) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.
handle the discomfort of her forced poses any longer. In an exasperated gasp, a movement combining Graham’s contraction, release, and audible exhale, the dancer throws her hands to the bottom of the chair and slowly rises back up. This noted shift in the piece shows that the dancer is yearning for change and trying her hardest to create a new place, a new role for herself. Although still connected to the chair, she writhes now standing until, in another sigh of discomfort, she steps down from the chair. Connected now by only a hand, she falls behind the chair.

After a few seconds, the dancer reemerges having traded her green dress for nude undergarments. The dancer now seems to be in control of herself and of the chair. She caresses it to stand and then proceeds to do a series of twists and jumps with intermittent poses on top of the chair. In one of the slower posing moments, she begins bent over with her back to the audience and slowly traces her hands up her legs. This represents her newfound sense of almost-freedom, yet she still feels ashamed, hence her back still toward her onlookers. She continues with more jumps until she is facing the front again. Slowly she stands back on the arms of the chair. Slower still, she traces her legs and makes her way to a fully upright position, arms outstretched in a victorious pose. As her arms fall, she looks at the audience, smiles, and giggles to signify the silliness of her previous desire to conform. Thus, she has made a full journey from imprisonment to freedom from societal pressures.

In creating this piece, I gleaned useful information on how to sharpen choreographic intent. I learned when to ask for specifics and when to let the dancer have interpretive freedom. “Sit.” took almost a year to create and perfect. Although it will
never reach perfection, it is one of my proudest works. I will continue to work with and perhaps expand it in my future choreographic endeavors.

A Challenge in Numbers

When I decided to make a lengthier series of dances as my culminating project, I knew I would have to choreograph on a group. I generally love choreographing solos because of the one-on-one discovery in rehearsals, and frankly, I just don’t like raising my voice. However, I knew group choreography was a challenge I needed to overcome. At first, I chose a large group of around ten dancers. I was excited to have so many bodies to work with and mold into a choreographic landscape. However, this quickly became unmanageable. The ten bodies plus the millions of ideas swirling in my brain kept me up at night with uncertainty. After multiple rehearsals with no real progress, I was advised to take a step back and make a big change. My finished product became a trio, and although it was set on a smaller group, it still challenged my choreographic skill.

The final trio that I produced featured dancers Bernadette Turnage, Mimi Burrow, and Elise Wilham. Turnage studied ballet throughout her childhood, and she has a considerably taller frame than the other two dancers. She embodies ease through her movement quality and flexibility. Mimi started her technical training at a later age than most. She has a background in competition dance and hip-hop and is one of the few African American women in WKU’s Dance Program. Her ability to analyze a character and portray it through all of her body language drew my attention from the first moment I saw her dance. Wilham has a concert dance background and is extremely rhythmical. She is able to identify important musical details, which makes her dancing very visually satisfying, in my opinion. They are three very different dancers, but they complemented
each other through their variance. The trio loosely focused on three different female archetypes: the mother, the lover or sexual being, and the thinker or intellectual. There was no real plotline to this piece, but rather a general mood of togetherness and unity that I wanted the audience to glean. For this piece, I again used a Graham-inspired method of research to help my dancers understand their characters. For the movement style, I was inspired by Isadora Duncan’s use of running and breath to create airiness and a sense of freedom in movement. Together, those two principles combined and became the work “Together//Whole,” the second piece in my complete series.

“Together//Whole”

“Together//Whole” is a 5-minute 40-second trio about how women can come together to be their most effective selves. In the beginning, different gestures show the different traits of each archetypal role. The sacrificial mother takes a dagger to herself in honor of her child. The intellectual shields her body in order to be recognized for her mind. The sexual being closes her eyes in submission. As I told my dancers in the beginning of the process, “we do not have to agree with the archetypes in order to study them in our bodies.” Each dancer was given a folder containing quotes and excerpts from literature in order to better understand their characters.75 I also took entries from Patricia Monaghan’s *Encyclopedia of Goddesses and Heroines* to help the dancers relate to an entire story if that was what they needed to deepen the intent of the piece.76 As the dance continues, the dancers each have a solo where they explore their characters alone while

75 See Appendix 6

76 Patricia Monaghan, *Encyclopedia of Goddesses and Heroines* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2014)
the other two are in the background. In each solo there is still a desire for community.

Eventually, all the dancers join together in unison to play out the climax of the piece. As they run and dance together, the music builds and there is a general happiness across the whole stage. The dancers are notably stronger together, and they realize that they all have a part of each other within. The end returns to the gestural phrasing, but this time each dancer does each gesture together. Just before the lights fade, they audibly blow out air, symbolizing the release of negative energy and the growth of positivity through community.

Although this was the toughest piece to create, it became an uplifting and positive experience as the dancers began to discover their characters in a deeper sense. I believe they let this dance impact their lives as women. I hope that they carry the lesson learned from the process, even grueling, tedious lessons, with them for the rest of their careers. I am so grateful to have learned how to overcome choreographic struggles and produce something which gives me such pride.

**The Story of My Flesh**

When I was thinking of a concept for this solo, I knew what I wanted to say, I just wasn’t sure how to say it through movement. In the heat of the 2017 #MeToo movement, I knew I owed it to myself to share my Me Too story, or a story about how sexual harassment or assault affected me, with others. I went into the process with a story and with a song, two things I don’t normally have to start, and still I didn’t know where to begin. This story would be the most personal thing I had ever shared through writing or through dance, and I wasn’t sure it was even worth the effort in telling. In fact, I genuinely questioned whether or not I should share my story for fear that the incidents I
experienced were “too small” or “insignificant.” Luckily, I realized that these thoughts would render me a hypocrite if I supported the movement without sharing my own story.

Once I got into the studio, I began to improvise with the song I had chosen. It was my favorite song at the time, called *Si Tú Supieras Compañero* by flamenco artist Rosalía. I had discovered the artist in a time of great happiness, while I was studying abroad in Spain. Because it reminded me of such a carefree time, the improvisation came easily. Out of the improvisation, I pulled small bits of movement that would eventually end up in the finished product. Once I started piecing the movements together, I found ways to connect them by reverting back to the story in my mind. I combined newfound contemporary modern techniques that I had learned in Spain with modern vocabulary I have studied since the eighth grade to produce choreography that tells my history through dance. The main intent of the choreography is a continuation and movement exploration of a personal essay I wrote in early 2018. The solo became my personal #MeToo statement as well as a recognition of my own struggle to grow from haunting past events. By combining elements of my technical background with my personal history, I was able to share my story with intimate audiences who seemed receptive to the message I tried to convey.

“Mild Devotion”

My solo began in the downstage left corner of the small black box stage. I placed a washbasin full of water in the corner, where the dance begins and ends. Unable to fully cleanse myself of my past, I start moving up the strong diagonal as if to rewind myself back through my life. Throughout the beginning of the piece, I am slow and reflective,

---

77 See Appendix 7
moving through the events of my life always contemplating my next movement. As the middle point of the dance approaches, it is obvious that I am fixated on the basin, and I cannot continue life without thinking about it. I gradually get closer to the basin until I do a large pass of jumps and turns down the diagonal straight back to the corner. I get close enough to touch the basin, yet I pull myself away trying to tell myself not to focus on how badly I want to cleanse myself of my past. After a bursting explosive floor pattern, I walk slowly again straight downstage center. This is where I beg the audience to pull me away from myself. I look into their eyes, pleading for them to take me out of my introspection. Finally, I give into the pull of the water. I begin to scrub my hands, hair, back, chest, and hands of the filth that is felt and not seen. I am giving in to the mild devotion I feel for myself but also for insanity; I enter the place of reckless abandon. It is a place I never want to go. But once there, it feels free. I enter a place of self-honesty and ultimately let the water take me. The piece ends with a spoken word section I wrote in order to signify that I am not yet through with my journey to self-recognition. My past still has an ability to overcome me, and that is okay. It is a symbol that I will continue on until I can defeat the demons that haunt me because millions of women are doing just that every day.

I have always wanted to speak in front of crowds and lead groups with my voice. Yet, I am not an extrovert. Dance gives me the ability to express myself in a different way. Through movement, I have discovered a way to say what I want and need to say. Even if members of the audience did not understand my words, I hope that they felt some emotion as a result of watching my choreography. Even if it made them question my

78 See Appendix 8
dancers or me as a person, that is still a form of success for me. Although I saw many ups and downs during this process, I learned so much about choreography, history, and myself through this project. I am so thankful to have the freedom to express myself through dance; it is a gift I will cherish and use for the rest of my life.

REFERENCES


Buglisi, Jacqulyn. (Former Graham dancer) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2017.


Capucilli, Terese. (Former Graham dancer) in discussion with the author, February 14, 2017.


Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. Public address, Women’s Convention, Seneca Falls, New York, September 1848.


Truth, Sojourner. “Ain’t I a Woman.” Public address, Women’s Convention, Akron, Ohio, 1851.


Wardell, D. “Margaret Sanger: birth control’s successful revolutionary.” American Journal of Public Health 70, no. 7 (July 1, 1980).


APPENDIX #1- Interview with Jacqulyn Buglisi

**Interviewer:** Student

**Interviewee:** Jacqulyn Buglisi (Former Martha Graham Dance Company member)
**Interview Setting:** Interview conducted in Hanami Sushi restaurant in New York City, New York on February 15, 2017.

**Affiliation with interviewee:** I had no previous affiliation to Buglisi. Terese Capucilli recommended that I speak with her, as they were friends and colleagues.

(Start of Interview)

**Interviewer:** So are you originally from Italy?

**Interviewee:** No. My grandparents are of Italian descent from Italy and Sicily. So I’m Italian descent, and I went to the high school of performing arts and that’s where I first learned Graham technique. The first modern technique I studied though was Mary Wigman technique when I was like 11 years old with Jan Veen at the Boston Conservatory of Music. And then I met Martha Graham in 1964, and I studied the Graham technique at the high school of performing arts, and my first teacher was Gertrude Shurr which was one of I believe Martha’s first company or very near. And May O’Donnell and Ethel Winter was my teacher and Mary Hinkson and Helen McGehee and other various teachers.

**Interviewer:** How did you discover your love for the technique…

**Interviewee:** And Martha was also my teacher. Martha Graham was my teacher at the Martha Graham school where all these teachers taught. David Wood also. Bertram Ross was my teacher. I was very fortunate to be there at a time when Pearl Lang, I also danced in Pearl Lang’s dance company 1973-76. And then I got in the Graham company in 1977, and I pretty much stayed until I had my son in 1988. I was pretty much associated with the company through Martha’s death of course. But until this day, I teach at the school intensives and also during the year if they need me they call me. And I also taught at Juilliard for more than 10 years the Graham technique. And I guess the thing that’s kind of different for me is in working for Martha, when I first met her in the Martha Graham studio, she was teaching in the evening, and she was very compelling and magnetic and inspiring at the same time that she was very terrifying. I was compelled by her omnipotent kind of presence. She had an incredible indomitable spirit. And an individual who stands in front of you and they seem to be an illumination, and she had that kind of aura about her that kind of deep, deep conviction to what she was doing that was so powerful that it kind of enveloped you. It was kind of like the first recognition of when you step on this ground in this studio, it is sacred ground and that you were part of something that was going to be really so deep that it would consume your life. So, there was so much life force there and so much richness and nurturing that I never wanted to leave. I was completely awed by Martha and by the work. It was that there seemed to be an endless exploration and investigation into the archetypal female, for sure. And the myths that Martha spoke about in her work. There was lots of research and reading and exploration that surrounded all of the works and the stories. The mystery of life itself could unfold in that way of looking at many of the works, like *Cave of the Heart*. *Cave of the Heart* is the story of Medea, but in a sense it is a story of today that we see over and
over again. And so it was learning about man about humanity. It was learning about the human condition.

**Interviewer:** So did you do a lot of research for your specific roles when you were doing them?

**Interviewee:** Absolutely. I wrote everything down. When we learned a ballet, we learned usually first from seeing performances. I got to see more performances probably than many dancers before coming into the company. I was able to see the company, to see rehearsals and generally once you were chosen to be in a ballet…

*Interruption: Food comes to table.*

**Interviewee:** So every ballet that you learn, you had to go late after class in between when no one was using the projector and you had to learn your ballet. Write it all down. And then when we used film projectors, you couldn’t go backwards. You only could go forward so we did it very carefully. And these were old films. You were responsible to take very good care of them.

**Interviewer:** So how did she gather her stories mostly when you were in rehearsal? Did you notice her taking different analogies and metaphors from things that were around her? What did she pull from most often?

**Interviewee:** Well, Martha was a genius. No doubt. She was extremely well-read. When she embarked upon a work, she had a very clear vision of what she was doing when I worked with her. There was no frivolous exploration. Everything always had a meaning, and if it didn’t she could justify it. If she couldn’t justify it, it was out. But anything she did, she could justify. She worked from a deep place of knowing, from what she called the inner landscape. She always moved from the depths of being, from the magma of the earth out into the infinite cosmos. Limitless, boundless abandon. And you would become supplicant to the character that you were playing. There was always an extreme layering like scaffolding. A lot of scaffolding that I did would go underneath the underpinning the character that you were working on or whatever the ballet was that Martha was working on that supported the work, the vision of the work.

**Interviewer:** So did you ever feel like you were under a lot of pressure to be a certain role, to be the same or better than people who were in the company before you doing the same role or Martha herself?

**Interviewee:** I always believe like what Martha said: ‘you’re always in competition with one person and that was yourself.’ And I always thought that way. I didn’t ever approach the role like I can do it better than so-and-so. That never entered my sphere of thought. Martha inspired me to be the best that I could be and to never stop and to never give up to never stop and to keep striving for the beauty. The kind of beauty that Rilke talks about. You know I did a ballet called *Threshold* and in that ballet there’s a quote from Rilke: [loose quote of Rilke’s First Elegy of *The Duino Elegies*] ‘Who if I cry out loud will hear
me among the angel hierarchy and even if one of them suddenly pressed me to his breast, to his heart, I would be consumed in that overwhelming beauty for beauty is only the beginning or terror for which disdains to annihilate us.’ We are afraid of our own beauty. And that is the First Elegy of Rilke. R-I-L-K-E. You should look it up. And I used that quote for my ballet Threshold where the women comes out from underneath the claws. And that also is for me the archetypal woman. It kind of has a mystery to it. It’s a kind of work that has something that either moves with the viewer. You see it. You understand it. And it has a lot of symbolism in it. Or it’s not for you. But it is a work I did in ‘91. Around ‘90-’91. My mother had died just a month before my son was born. And then shortly after, Martha died. That moment in my life was very close to what is life and death. You know seeing those two, the miracle of life and then the vulnerability and fragility of life. So you see man’s strengths and man’s weaknesses. Also how fleeting life is. When you live through that kind of experience so close, life and death right on top of one another. I feel that Martha really, like in the ballets like Medea. I was creusa in Cave of the Heart for about ten years, and then I never tired to be a part of the work. Any part was of the work for me was the most important part, which made up the ballet. So, I felt like I knew every part. Certainly after 10 years, I knew every part. And I loved it. I thought it was one of the most incredible works I’ve ever been a part of. To work with Martha and to be in the studio with her, I was privately coached with her, and at one point, my ex-husband and I we were partners together in that ballet. And we were rehearsing with Martha and she was coaching us. And at one point she said “Ms. Ruth’s tongue was on me and my tongue is on you.” And that for me was very strong. The responsibility. I took it deep into my heart. You know I felt very honored that she would say something like that. And so it’s like you are given this kind of message to go on, to keep going, to go further. Ms. Ruth was Ruth St. Denis, and that was of course the first company Martha danced with, learned how to dance. I was...I love a part that I did which was Andromache in Cortege of Eagles. And that is like a mini Clytemnestra where Martha was working with all the different characters and we were reviving that work. It was always very intriguing to explore these different women and the different women of the Trojan War, the different women of Greece, of that time, the women of Egypt, the queens, Cleopatra. We did Frescoes, it was Cleopatra and Anthony. Also, when we did Acts of Light and I was there when Martha choreographed the Lament in the Acts of Light and then I got to dance that role. It was very beautiful. Anything I got to do, I felt very inspired like to go deep. I would have my notes and images. There was always a tremendous depth. Whether it was literature, visual art, music, the music that Martha chose, always really excellent, was the underpinning to the work. So you always felt that what you were saying was really important and everything else there was supporting that within the ballet. And then the characters supporting each other to tell the story. I think Martha was a great storyteller. And I could never understand when we would go and play in places like in the Midwest or whatever, and they didn’t get the ballet. But because they didn’t know the myth and they didn’t care to explore it

Interviewer: Even if you don’t know the myth, though, I feel like there’s still a story you can tell yourself.

Interviewee: Oh my god, I know. But they just miss it you know.
Interviewer: When I first watched *Errand Into the Maze*, I didn’t know the story, and I had to look it up afterward, but I still made my own kind of story and it pretty well aligned with the myth. I love that one.

Interviewee: Yeah. Ariadne and the Minotaur, but it’s a story about fear. Did Terese tell you the thing behind it when Martha was in the airplane?

Interviewer: No.

Interviewee: She was flying over Asia. The plane was crashing...

Interviewer: No. She didn’t.

Interviewee: And she had to face her fear. It’s knowing that kind of terror when you’re looking at yourself or death right in the face.

Interviewer: So, the ultimate question. Would you consider Martha Graham a feminist?

Interviewee: Well...I don’t know. I have to think of Gloria Steinem. Well my hesitation in saying it is that by putting Martha...well if you look at Jocasta. When I studied that role, I think it was a deeper recognition that Martha took from most of the ballets of course but very into how she looked through the perspective of Jocasta, the woman who...and like Lucretia too and other women before her and like her how she hangs herself. That archetype, that woman...how women...well I go all the way back to Sargon and so in 2285 BC, you have the first female writer. And she wrote 42 hymns in the Cuneiform, the first language of man. And she signed in her prose, “I, Enheduanna”, and that is where we see that first kind of recognition, for me...I go there. Now, Martha inspired me to go there in my work. That’s where I go, all the way back there. 3,000 BC. And what happened? Sargon was the one who took away, up until that time archaeologically we now know, we have evidence that men and women lived together that there was no division between the man and the woman. But then Sargon, as they became more and more wealthy and more and more prosperous and they became warring and there was wealth and money, then they took the power from the women saying the women couldn’t have wealth and property. And then with the Egyptians we see that also, taking away wealth and property. And you know where they came from is Sumeria, Mesopotamia, Suma. And that’s where Sargon came from. From Suma, and you know where Suma is? Iraq. I guess I’m getting off. When I think of a feminist, I think of Gloria. Or you know many people who spoke out in the sixties. I think Martha spoke out early on. She became a strong, incredible...her works from that period are iconic. One like *Primitive Mysteries*. Just now the Graham tried to revive *Ekstasis*, and of course the well-known work *Lamentation* but *Heretic*. Look at *Heretic*. *Deep Song*. Did you read Ernestine Stodelle’s book *Deep Song* by the way? You have to read it, it’s going to tell you a lot. Ernestine Stodelle is an amazing writer… The only thing I wanna say about Martha in terms of feminists was I don’t think she approached things from saying, “I’m a
feminist.” I don’t feel that way about her work. I think she was standing up for humanity, for the human condition. But I do think, then again, she wanted all her works in the beginning her dancing them and her being at the center of them, you should see Heretic. There’s also a Martha Graham app you could look at. In my ballets that I did like Suspended Women, I end very much speaking about the woman being supplicant to the man in a sense that I dedicate it to Sor Juana Ines. Just now...all these years later...in 1989 I did that work, if I mentioned the anthology of Sor Juana...and so I dedicated Suspended Women to her and to my mother because women, I feel, just like her have come two steps forward one back. Women have been throughout time suspended in this moving forward because who we are. We are the givers, the goddesses of fertility. We give life. Without us there is no human race. And you know we have been honored in many societies, the Greek, you know the giver of life, the goddess of life and fertility. But then the men kind of...so Suspended Women is inspired by Sor Juana because again here's a woman with extraordinary intelligence and in order for her to really achieve anything she becomes a nun. Then once she becomes a nun, she is again persecuted for her intelligence But she does manage to get her works, only by the grace of God does she manage to get her works...or the Viceroy that was in Mexico from Spain, these works are published that she wrote. Yeah I guess Martha could be called a feminist, but that’s not something I think she was thinking about or was her total motivation. I think her motivation came deep from within, from the inner landscape.

**Interviewer: Would you consider yourself a feminist?**

**Interviewee:** Would I consider myself a feminist. In a way, I do deeply because I during the time, from the time I was very young, I was always fighting for rights. It was a time when we were fighting for Civil Rights and you know social justice and equality and equanimity, and I have felt very very strong toward Women’s rights and you know supporting Roe v. Wade and against human trafficking. I did a work against human trafficking. You know, Butterflies and Demons. And I am still inspired by things. Right now I’m doing a piece called Moss. Well, I’m just calling it Moss for right now. It’s inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer’s book Gathering Moss. To me gathering moss is a metaphor again for human existence during the time that we are living now. I guess I just have a hard time putting certain labels on Martha. Am I wrong? Has everybody else said she’s a feminist?

**Interviewer:** No.

**Interviewee:** [Laughs] Oh good, so we all agree.

**Interviewer:** Well it’s funny, generationally I think it’s actually changed. I talked to a couple of the dancers, and I think because our definition of feminism has kind of evolved over the years, the dancers now say she is a feminist.

**Interviewee:** Oh so a lot of the dancers now say that she is? But a lot of them never knew her. But they see the work and they see the focus of a lot of the work and they see it that way.
Interviewer: Yes, so it’s interesting because my immediate first thought just watching some of her works was “oh she’s definitely all for the cause,” but then after researching more and more, I’ve found the opposite.

Taking out the book Gathering Moss from her bag.

Interviewee: This is not my book that has the notes. There's a beautiful quote in here. So, this is one of her books but the other one is Braiding Sweetgrass. Sweetgrass was the first grass on the Earth. Moss is 350 million years old. There’s 22,000 types of moss. It’s been here a long time, and I think that it has something to say. As a metaphor for what we are doing to the natural world around us and our need to honor that and to look at it, I would like for human beings to be here for 50 million years, but we need to learn something from the moss. In order to stay here for that long, we have to learn a better way of cooperating. A better way of...it is kind of slowing down too. Moss moves very slowly. It doesn't need a lot. It attaches itself to bark, to logs, to the rock. And of course it has stayed there, and it takes so long before the rock can become sand. But it can wear it down to sand. This is a nice quote, she says... she is part of the Potawatomi Indians is her heritage and she wanted to study botany. But she wanted to look at it through its beauty almost like they were sentient beings, like us. So this is a nice quote: [reading] “The rocks are beyond slow, beyond strong, and yet yielding to a soft green breath as powerful as a glacier, the mosses wearing away their surfaces, grain by grain bringing them slowly back to sand. There is an ancient conversation going on between moss and rocks. Poetry to be sure. Above light and shadow, the drift of continents. This is what has been called, the dialectic awe of moss on stone, an interface of immensity and minutnesses, past and present, softness and hardness, stillness and vibrancy, yin and yang, the material and the spiritual live here together.” So I like when she says the material and the spiritual live here together. Anyway, she’s a very beautiful writer. So again, reading the book of a women I also like the author of Eat Pray Love, Elizabeth Gilbert. She wrote the next book all about botany...

Conversation drifts to other topics.

I think also, I read a lot of female biographies. I always seemed to be interested in Cleopatra, who she was, what she did. Queen Hatshepsut, and then they had an exhibit. Who were these women? Like Judith, you know Martha’s ballet. You’ll have to read the Apocrypha. That’s the story of Judith. But then again Artemisia Gentileschi. That was a part of the inspiration for my work Requiem. I had started to do a work inspired by her. Artemisia Gentileschi is an artist in the 1400s who lived in Italy during the period and Caravaggio, that was her father. And she was raped by her father’s close colleague who was then tutoring her in painting and then he raped her and there was a big trial. And I read the trial and then I start on this ballet Requiem and Artemisia Gentileschi again is a woman who because of her genius, her art who was persecuted when she spoke out, up for herself. She went before a tribunal of men. And she’s also become very well-known. Her paintings were exhibited in the Met. So you know I’ve thought of some pretty esoteric people but then all of the sudden they’re like blooming. It’s kind of in the air. So,
in some way, i feel like coming out of Martha’s house, I came out of Martha’s house but then I was inspired. You know, I took my own path in terms of my inspiration and study of women’s lives throughout history, all the way back to 2,285 BC. I didn’t ever think I would go there. I didn’t think I’d know about that. But I am. Even going further, not many dance...I don’t know if I could say for sure. I think Martha’s approaching Clytemnestra, that myth, that character, that work, that full-length opera is the only one I’ve seen or known that we’ve done. We did it here at the Metropolitan Opera here which I felt like that was the best...being able to do it in the opera house with live music was incredible. But it shows you there too the depth and the range of Martha’s ability to conceive of the characters and to have conversation within the work and to tell the story through such a highly stylized and human way. The seduction. Martha was great at being able to show us love in its extreme, in it’s seduction, you know love turned to hate, murder. She goes...she really goes and delves into telling us about the human condition. It’s bigger. It’s broader than I can say one thing. But you know, I can see looking now from the outside back how she would be an inspiration for feminists. I don’t know, I just don’t call her a feminist. Maybe it’s my generation. Maybe it’s knowing her. Maybe it’s seeing my son sitting in her lap. Her humanity. Martha had tremendous compassion as a woman. These things came out of her expression as a woman and from her life experience, her life journey. She was in love with Erick Hawkins and it didn’t really work out, and then the other man she was in love with, she could never live with. I think she understood a lot about the things that drive us. I don’t think she was very practical though. I feel very fortunate, blessed, and grateful to have known Martha and to have been able to have worked in her theatre. Definitely wish I could go back there sometimes. Sometimes were just amazing, being able to travel to Egypt and do the works there and then the Middle East and to travel around the world and to share our work with other people. I felt also that in those years when we performed in Italy, the Italian public, because they are so educated from an early age in the myths, they really loved Martha’s work. We performed at festivals in the summer and the palace in Florence. The audience would just go wild. They really, really loved it. They understood the works they appreciated them. Anyway...I could go on and on, but I think you’ve got some good things there.

APPENDIX #2: Interview with Terese Capucilli

**Interviewer:** Student

**Interviewee:** Terese Capucilli (Former Martha Graham Dance Company member)
Interview Setting: Interview conducted at interviewee’s residence in New York City, New York on February 14, 2017.

Affiliation with interviewee: I had no previous affiliation to Capucilli. My former professor Eric Rivera recommended that I speak with her, as they were friends and colleagues.

(Start of Interview)

Interviewer: First I was just going to ask for you to give a little bit of your background. I kind of already know the basics just from reading your biographies online, but I guess more of why you started dancing, why you kept dancing, and then how you got into the Graham Company and what really interested you about that.

Interviewee: Well it’s a long story, but I’ll make it short. You know, I grew up in Syracuse, New York. I had a large family and we were all involved in musical theatre. I did not have any exposure to modern dance at all until my senior year in high school. And I met this woman, her name was Joni Constro (Sp?), and she was teaching sort of this what I guess later figured out it was this watered down Graham Technique, and she was the one that inspired me to audition at SUNY Purchase. She wrote my letter of recommendation and my audition solo, and that really didn’t happen until my senior year. Before then, I was really involved in theatre. I had two production groups that I would work with. My family was not wealthy. We couldn’t go to the theatre all the time, and so mainly I had exposure to theatre which was with this company called Salt Lake City Players or was it Salt City Players...It just ran through my head. I haven’t said those words in so long. But anyway I would go and usher, and I really learned a lot about theatre there...and about developing a character and watching over and over again the same actors doing these roles. But I had a teacher...my dance teacher who was actually the local teacher of Salve, which was a little section of Syracuse where all the Italians lived. She taught my mother. She taught my aunts and uncles, ya know. So it was kind of a thing where you meet people you know who encourage this love of something, and she was the one. Her name was Augustine Scapura(SP?), and she brought me to New York [City] a couple of times. I also came to New York with my theatre groups. But other than that and seeing things in dance magazines. I really didn’t have any exposure to dance. I was learning ballet and jazz and tap, right? So when I met Joni that senior year it just kind of changed my life, because she encouraged me to audition at SUNY Purchase and I ended up getting in. That was 1974 and I was there until 1978 when I graduated. So you know, you’re talking about being immediately immersed in a really really wonderfully new and ya know just...I felt like a sponge soaking in all of this information with really exceptional teachers. I had people like Kazuko Hirabayashi and Carol Fried who were both Graham. And I had Aaron Osborne who was Limon based, and I had Mel Wong who was Cunningham. And ballet teachers Anne Parsons and Royez Fernandez and Rossana Seravalli. So I had really great all-rounded...I felt like I could’ve gone in any direction when I left senior year. I don’t think I could’ve been a ballet dancer. I didn’t
have the feel for ballet. And the way that I actually got kind of geared into the Graham school was that my teacher Carol Fried had arranged for me to have a scholarship for me the summer after graduation. So that was the summer of ‘78, and I had to, as soon as she told me give a yes or no answer and call the rehearsal director who was Linda Hodes at the time and accept or not accept. So the door opened. I walked in, I said “Yes, of course” and everyone thought I was going to be a Limon dancer actually. One of my closest friends at Purchase was Doug Varone. Are you familiar with his work?

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Interviewee:** So Doug and I were very close, in fact we just did a memorial for Kazuko Hirabayashi recently and did a duet of his on that program. We hadn’t danced together since Purchase and we used to do a lot of solo and duet work together when he was first developing stuff at Purchase. So, we ended up doing our senior project together and we did Limon’s *Exiles* as our repertory piece, this beautiful duet. So everyone thought I was going to be a Limon dancer but I walked into the door at Graham. I met Martha Graham immediately. That summer Linda Hodes, as I said, was the rehearsal director, and she suggested that I actually take the scholarship audition even though I was already on scholarship just so that Martha could see me. And I did. I was in all white, and I had my hair like pulled tight over on the side with this big ponytail. It was funny. But Martha saw me, and it was kinda one of those things where you walk into a room and there’s this very powerful lioness in front of you. And your hair stands up on the back of your neck. So you recognize the magnitude of this person in front of you that will one day be very important to your life. I studied at the Graham School for that entire summer and through the fall of ‘78. I would also be demonstrating for classes, when you’re starting on scholarship. So Martha saw me quite a bit. Basically, I was waiting for an opening in the company. In March of ‘79 there was an opening and so that’s when I joined the company. The first thing we did was to go to Nashville and film the WNET production of *Clytemnestra*. That’s Martha’s only full-length ballet. And I’ll tell you. You asked about why I danced and all of that. And I can’t you answer that. I just know that I’ve always danced. And Martha always said, “You don’t choose to be a dancer. It chooses you.” And you know really I immersed myself in such a way that it was a natural progression from musical theatre to concert dance. I immediately started working in the core, and very, very early on I started doing featured roles and by 1983, I was a principal dancer. In 1999, I became associate artistic director. Then in 2000, I was artistic director. From 2000 and...oh no it’s all mixed up because we had all those legal battles in there. I was artistic director from 2003 to 2005. And associate artistic director before that. Then I left in 2005. Yeah, so that’s basically how I ended up there. I do think that once I started experiencing the Graham technique in my body along with other techniques, I physically became interested or immersed in the visceral and dramatic quality of the work. It just felt right on my body, the expressiveness of it. And the fact that it has such an incredible language of its own. I’m not sure where I would’ve gone if the door didn’t open for me at Graham. I try to live my life in the moment. At least I did when I was younger. To just be present and alive in that moment and I think that’s sort of something that carries me... through my teaching as well. And I try to inspire my students to have that belief that you
could lose that moment at any time so it’s best to just stay in that moment and experience it to its fullest.

**Interviewer: What was your favorite role?**

**Interviewee:** You know I danced so many of Martha’s roles and every one of them has some little piece of the others in it. There are some works that I did longer than others. And there are some that I did a little bit later in my career. But they’re all so different and they’re all so... The development of these types of archetypal characters are in themselves so phenomenal so incredible to research and to live through time and time again on the stage. I danced for many many years doing these works over and over again, which for my generation was one of the real plusses that I had the opportunity to, when I got a role, I really worked on performing those roles over and over and over for 26 years. You’re finding so many incredible things as you ensure through your life... those life experiences inform what you’re doing on the stage. So, given that Martha was 35 years old when she really started to choreograph and to find herself as a choreographer and to develop these roles, the older I became the more I understood about what was happening on the stage in these roles. So I know that some of my favorites are things like *Cave of the Heart*, which is Medea. Doing Medea which I did a little bit later in my career. But a piece that is very dear to my heart is *Errand Into the Maze*.

**Phone Interruption...**

Where was I... so *Errand* was the first big role that I did...that I was honored to perform of Martha’s. I had done a lot of featured work before that like the Yellow Girl in *Diversion of Angels*. I did the Princess in *Cave of the Heart*. I did a lot of really great featured roles but in terms of a principal role... Martha’s role...that was my first. And I danced that role for almost 20 years, and it is an incredible journey from beginning to end. Through my life’s ups and down, as an example my father’s passing, which this was his favorite piece. You know, he would always say, “are you gonna do that Maze piece?”

**Interviewer: Yes, it’s one of my favorites too.**

**Interviewee:** Yeah. It’s a great work. And anything you may be going through in your life you know when you’re on stage from beginning to end in a work it’s so wonderful to go through that journey time and time again. The time we spent on the stage is again just of that moment. It lives in the hearts of those who are watching and nowhere else. Even if it’s something that happens to be filmed, it is not the same as that exchange between audience and performer and for the performer, it is that spontaneous moment onstage that is the most exhilarating. But it’s fleeting. It’s gone. It only lives in the hearts of those who see it and your own. So it has this beauty and this tragedy all at the same time, right? And some of my best performances have been in the studio. My best performances... in the studio... rehearsing. You know, nowadays students just kind of mark through everything. I see dance companies, they’re markin through everything. We never marked anything! Never. You know, in a rehearsal room you are doing 100 percent. Yeah so if I had to put a label, I’d say *Errand Into the Maze* but you know also Martha had some very funny
works and some very poetic works like *Letter to the World* and *Deaths and Entrances*. *Deaths and Entrances* is Brontë. *Letter to the World* is Emily Dickinson quotes with a speaker in it. And you have works like *Every Soul is a Circus* which is very funny and endearing. So you know, each of those experiences is so different from one another. People always ask me ‘do you have a favorite work?’ Well, I can’t give you an answer to that cause there’s just so many incredible pieces. The repertoire is just phenomenal, and the fact that I had that inspiration of Martha being there is a gift that you cannot replace. And it’s only mine. Every person that stands in front of her has their own experience. Each legitimate, but only I can own that. That’s my gift from Martha. Nobody can take that away, and that’s all I have.

**Interviewer:** So...How did you feel being the next one, I guess not to fill her shoes, but trying to interpret what she told you throughout all those years? How did you take on that role?

**Interviewee:** Well the beauty of Martha’s teachings, if you would call them that. Teachings in the doing of it. Martha wasn’t gonna relinquish anything to you that she did not expect you to find yourself. So by allowing us and by demanding that we ask the questions, that is really where the teaching comes in. She struggled so immensely in her life to develop a language that spoke for her and that delved very deeply into the heart of man. And she wasn’t going to relinquish her ideas. She expected you to find your own reasons...and there was only one time in my whole career where I actually thought, and I remember it like it was yesterday, where I actually thought ‘oh my god, how am I going to stand up against all of the others who have done that role and Martha who has done that role?’ That was when I got my first principal role in *Errand Into the Maze*. That was the only time I ever thought consciously ‘how can I possibly stand up and do these roles?’ From then on in, once you understand what that process is, the responsibility of that is larger than you. And I don’t know if you can understand that, but I came to realize that the responsibility was far beyond just me. And so that actually was a protective mechanism. It was a way of looking at Martha’s work and going into these roles that she created for herself and looking at an archetype like an actor would go in and study a character. You’re going into an archetype that is larger than you but in knowing that it was actually a comfort because it became more selfless and less about me. So I never thought about that again...about the idea of how I’m going to stand up against someone else that has done this role. And then that way as an artist you grow and you move forward truthfully through the work that you’re doing. And I don’t know that I could’ve told you that while I was doing it, but I certainly understand now what I had done and how I was able to do that because once you’re on the top, once you’re recognized as doing Martha’s roles and doing them well or more than well, people compare you to Martha, because of my coloring you know whatever, because of the dynamic of it...I just don’t go there because that’s such a responsibility to uphold as an artist. The main thing that I felt was most important is to keep the faith in my process and learn to work as an artist developing through a language because the language of Martha’s technique was the language in my body. It’s what I did. It’s what I do. It’s very deeply in my skin, and knowing how to delve into those roles from one role to the next, you’re actually going back to the role previous and saying ‘okay’ you know finding your thread.
through the work. And there's a lot of security in that, a lot of responsibility in that. And thinking beyond yourself into the responsibility of getting that character on the stage to speak to an audience. It’s very different than thinking ‘oh goodness, are they gonna compare me to Martha?’ That to me is way too selfish. Do you understand?

**Interviewer:** Definitely.

So, switching over to her as a feminist. So the way I see it, she wasn’t this outright speaker on the times. She kind of took her work and put her voice in everything she did. Whatever she said, it didn’t have to say “feminism is the right thing” she said, “this is a woman. She can be powerful.” So, I’m just making sure that my view is on the right track.

**Interviewee:** Your view is your view. I mean I don’t know much work you’ve seen…I don’t want to get off on too much of a tangent from what you’re saying because you took words out of my mouth in your own paraphrased way. So let’s just start with, I never thought about Martha as a feminist. Martha, I don’t think, thought of herself as a feminist. Martha just talks about gut level truths about human beings. Basically what you said. She had something to say as a woman. Speaking as a woman from the woman’s point of view, that’s something you really need to look at. Martha wanted to dance things that were important to her so what did she do. You answer that question.

**Interviewer:** She danced what she thought, what she felt.

**Interviewee:** She put the female in the forefront. Let’s look at one work. Let’s look at *Night Journey*, do you know *Night Journey*? Oedipus and Jocasta? The thing you always have to look at when you’re looking at Martha’s work is where’s the focus? Martha was choreographing for Martha, her roles, so the focus is generally from the female point of view. Have you ever read *Oedipus*? Who’s the focus in that work? Oedipus. So this is from Jocasta’s point of view. So from the beginning of the ballet...so the ballet starts with Jocasta looking back in time. She’s holding the noose up in the air ready to kill herself and the ballet begins. And we’re taken back in time to where she first meets Oedipus and the whole story unfolds for you and then she realizes, this is my son. And then the devastation of that… she kills herself, Oedipus blinds himself. But it’s all from Jocasta, the female POV because, frankly, Martha wanted to do the big role. She has every right to put herself in the forefront. So you have this, and not that other roles were not strong, but you have a choreographer looking to express herself in a time in history where there was nothing called a contraction or a release. You know she was challenging what 400 years of ballet, and the dances that she created required a great amount of investigating, physicality, and that physicality began on the female. Because she was female. Her first concert was in 1926. Why was her company all female? Just because she wanted to have a female company?

**Interviewer:** Because females were reinventing themselves? Becoming something new?
Interviewee: Maybe. But because we had war. Men were at war. And were there many men dancers? Probably a lot in the ballet world, and ultimately Erick Hawkins came from the ballet world didn’t he. I mean ultimately when you think about feminism and you think about Martha Graham starting out, you need to think about what’s happening in the world. What’s happening in art? What’s Picasso doing? I think that you could in your research...just don’t limit it. What’s happening in the world? Spanish Civil War, Martha’s Deep Song. That was reconstructed on me in 1987 by Martha, but it was choreographed in 1937 as her response to the Spanish Civil War. The Conte jondo by Lorca. If you read Lorca, you’re going to find out what was happening immediately.

Searches for book in her library

You’ve got to look to see what was happening in the world. This was Martha’s response. To discovering what the body can do and of course at the beginning it was the female body, and of course there were more females willing to come in to, I don’t want to say a cult, but it was like the ritual. It was like a religion for them. These were women that were working all day long and then would come to the studio at night and work with Martha. Chronicle also...that piece was done in 1936, also a response to war. What about Martha’s Lamentation (1930)? Grief, you know that was a huge breakthrough in her moving away from Denishawn, but it didn’t have anything to do with feminism, it had to do with human. Human beings. Martha wasn’t thinking about being a feminist or any of this. People can label her as a feminist because of the extent she brought the feminine figure into a very strong, powerful place through dance. But that was far from Martha’s mind. She wanted...she needed out of a necessity...she needed to investigate to discover what the human body could do expressively. I just there are a lot of little threads you can look at, but particularly when she first started. You know, why? And Martha’s why was not “I’m a feminist and I’ve gotta go do this” it’s exactly what you were saying. But the voice was female because Martha was female, but it had nothing to do with being a feminist. It was having to find something very important, something beautiful, something sensual, something sensitive, something visceral and a way of touching space with eyes, with ears, with devouring the emotional state of the human being with all the ugliness, the beauty, the joys, the terrors of what that could become in the body. And it was often not considered pretty. That wasn’t her goal.

Interviewer: And I would argue that that is what feminism is innately about being a human, not labeled as a woman or man but just being a human and I think that’s a really important.

Interviewee: I mean there are some things. That’s ultimately the first thing that should be spoken about. Obviously women have been repressed through history and they’re still being repressed throughout the world. These little children marrying these old Yemenites. You know it’s pretty sick a lot of the things that have happened to women and are still happening to women. The oppositions that help to bring those things to a halt, to me can be labeled as feminism. Which ultimately bring us back to, women just want to be considered to be human beings and to have those rights as human beings. So yeah, that’s
the start and the finish of it, isn’t it? And then there’s the different threads that go through it. Through art there is also, through a lot of dance and choreographers, there are many who may consider themselves and their work to be leaning toward that feminist of black feminist or whatever that may be work too. But ultimately it comes back to that place of wanting to be considered human beings and to see what the human beings are all capable of being and becoming.

**Interviewer:** Are there any specific values that you try to instill in your students now, either coming from Martha or coming from what you discovered during your time with her?

**Interviewee:** If I would point to something that I continually stress with my students, it is the ability to listen with every pore of your body. I do not feel that I can teach the Graham technique as just a technique. It has to…

*Phone rings...telemarketer.*

I use a lot of sensory work when I teach because I feel like it enlivens the student to the space around them and to the innate being that’s inside of them. I work with the idea that we can see and hear and taste and touch to space with every pore in our bodies. And I work with this first. I bring them to an understanding of this, so that when we work into the difficulty of the technique itself and learning the language, it does not become a mechanical process but one that is truly coming from a very central place in their being. It requires them to immediately become expressive in the work as they’re learning because it’s a very difficult technique to learn. I work a lot with the sensory as well as the energetic lines of the body. Using the sensory to move energetically through the body. Okay what does that mean to me? [Demonstrating] That has to do with let’s say that we can learn to create volume in our muscles or in our bodies by creating space between the joints. I call it my magic joint opener where I have the students a couple of inches away from each other and here’s my arm in the space. There’s no energy besides what it takes to hold it there, but by using sensory and energetic lines of (this would be a horizontal line of energy), I can create space in the joints. And actually without moving my arm or my body, I can actually just make a space in the joint and just create volume and touch the cabinet so that I can create volume in my muscles. So that requires sensory energetic work, and that can be explored in every direction the body can take. Horizontal, diagonal, vertical. It also creates a sense of focus. A lot of times we’re so frontal focused that we have a three dimensional focus by thinking about working with sensory work. One of the first things I do when I work with students right from the get-go. From day one, I have freshmen and sophomore students at Juilliard. Freshman year, I bring in all of my book. For instance Rodin, Michelangelo, and I say, “this is marble. Look at the expressiveness in those bodies.” You have Michelangelo’s Pietà. You have Rodin’s The Crouching Woman. This is created through marble so don’t you think you could do this in your own body. So I put that task in front of them from the beginning of the year. And they have to find a way to make that happen.

*Phone rings again.*
That’s really where I start. I start with the understanding of the capability that they can be expressive artists and that that is as important as learning the technique. And I also demand that they remain as curious as a child because the technique is very difficult to learn. And if they are not curious and hungry for the information, it becomes even more difficult for them. I think that’s pretty much where I go.

**Interviewer:** If you could give any advice to young dancers today, what would that be?

**Interviewee:** I think the one thing that’s difficult and lacking in society right now because of technology...technology is great in so many ways but it is desensitizing out young and we need more sensitivity in the world. And I think in terms of the way I speak to my students that to me is everything. Sensitivity, giving, being truthful to yourself.
APPENDIX #4: Photos of 1920s Women
From the 1928 Guide to God Posture with Julia Faye

APPENDIX #5: Photos of 1950s Women
APPENDIX #6: Compiled Inspiration for Trio of Dancers
The following quotes were included in folders I made for the trio of dancers in “Together// Whole.” Each page of quotes provided the dancer with different options of ways to portray her character. The quotes I chose displayed both antiquated and modern views on each female archetype in hopes that the dancer would develop a greater sense of the historical background of her archetype as well as a progressive outlook. The folders also included excerpts of text from Patricia Monaghan’s *Encyclopedia of Goddesses and Heroines*. As I read through the text, I found it interesting that many global cultures share similar female archetypal characters in their religions and folklore. I believe wholeheartedly that these examples helped my dancers dive much deeper into their roles than anything else I gave them throughout the process.
“MOTHER’S LOVE IS THE FUEL THAT ENABLES A NORMAL HUMAN BEING TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE.”

Marion C. Garretty

Of all the rights of women, the greatest is to be a mother.

Lin Yutang

“I believe a strong woman may be stronger than a man, particularly if she happens to have love in her heart. I guess a loving woman is indestructible.”

— John Steinbeck

At some point in life, the world’s beauty becomes enough.

Toni Morrison

With what price we pay for the glory of motherhood.

— Isadora Duncan

Ain’t no hood like Motherhood.

THE MOTHER...
“Though she be but little, she is fierce!”

— William Shakespeare

“He was like a song I’d heard once in fragments but had been singing in my mind ever since.”

Memoirs of a Geisha

**If He Says**

If he says your body is ruined because it has been touched by another man’s hands before his, ask him how many woman’s bodies have his hands ruined and what is wrong, in his mind, with a man’s hands that they only know how to ruin a woman’s body rather than love it?

— Nikita Gill

“Girls are not machines that you put kindness coins into until sex falls out.”

— Sylvia Plath

stay soft. it looks beautiful on you.

THE LOVER...
And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good.

- John Steinbeck

You were once wild here. Don't let them tame you.

Memories are less tangible than dreams.

If you want something you never had
You have to do something you've never done

Reality is wrong. Dreams are for real.

I dream of painting and then I paint my dream.

Vincent Van Gogh
APPENDIX #7: Personal Essay- Flesh Memories

Once — I must have been 7 or 8 years old — I dreamt that my toes were being run over by a lawn mower. I remember lying flat in the cool green grass on a spring day. I wore my dress with the tiny purple flowers. My toes wriggled freely with the breeze. Then, suddenly, there was a terrible pain, a shredding and ripping of flesh and bone, beginning at my toes and moving up my legs. I watched with panic as pieces of me cycled through the mower and sprayed onto the rest of the lawn. But as is true of most dreams, there was a veil of subconscious censorship, which made this scene bloodless and turned me into a mixture of grass and soil. It was as if my flesh was being recycled back onto the green lawn as I was begging for the pain to end. I woke with a fright to the sun through my blinds. Looking down at my toes to make sure they were still there, I realized I had fallen asleep with my little pink dance tights and leotard still on from the day before. My physical pain had manifested itself into a dream.

At times, I still remember that dream when I slip on the pink nylon encasements which will tightly contain my body for the majority of the day. Twisting my hair into a cinnamon bun on top of my head, I laugh at my 7-year-old self— the young child who had only so far endured three hair-pinning, mirror-staring, tight-wearing years, yet she already longed for freedom from the constriction of her world. Freedom from her flesh.

**

A dichotomy exists between flesh and body, which has been noted for thousands of years in literature, theology and dance theory. The body is often seen in each of these contexts as the vessel through which human life occurs. In literature, the body carries out the plot points. In some religions, the body is a temple where worship can be performed daily. In dance, the body moves through each choreographed step. The body is the container for the flesh. The flesh holds the blood even after Lady Macbeth has washed her hands. The flesh of the Bible is equal to sin. The flesh is what has made the art of dance resonate with viewers for centuries. While our bodies are cleansed with each new day, our flesh is scarred with the brands of our past. Our flesh reveals what the made-up, tattooed, clothed body hides. Our flesh tells our story. My flesh is unable to contain its speech.

**

Age 5
A taped X with our names marked the spot for each of us to sit “crisscross applesauce.” I sat next to Andrew M. and in front of Zachary R. I didn’t know it at the time, but it was going to be a long year. Every time we got on the carpet, Andrew and Zachary would
begin their games. Always poking or playing with my hair. They would tease me through the entirety of story time, but I knew what to do. I had already been briefed on how to deal with annoying boys: “ignore them; they probably just think you’re cute.”

Age 6
Andrew M. was in my class again. It was book fair week. Paper chains with the names of students and the books they had read that week lined the ceilings. Standing in line outside the bathrooms, we were having contests to see who could jump high enough to reach the chains. Ms. Spence decided to put an end to the madness, yelling, “The next person who touches the chains will get a tally.” Andrew dared me to jump when she wasn’t looking. I did it. I went home with a sad face in my agenda that day.

Age 9
We sat in a sunny restaurant on a Sunday. It was an all-you-can-eat buffet. My best friend, Alys, came with us after church. We sat with my grandparents, parents, siblings and the one-third of my aunts, uncles and cousins who went to my church. There were probably 15 of us. There were always at least 15 of us. Alys, my cousins and I were filling our plates to the brim with mashed potatoes and fried okra. Parents sat at one end, the kids sat at the other, and I bridged the gap as the eldest cousin. I was wearing my favorite dress — the one with the pink, black and blue stripes and a little ruffle of tulle at the bottom. Shoveling a fork of fried chicken into my mouth, I locked eyes with my grandmother. “Pretty soon you’re going to have to hand that dress over to Alys if you keep up those eating habits. You’ll bust right out if it.” I saved my tears for after dessert.

Age 15
At Governor’s School for the Arts, I was the only girl who had to take ballet class from a teacher from my home studio. I quietly warned everyone how evil he was but also tried to remain optimistic for the sake of maintaining peace. The day approached when it was his turn to teach. I cried in my room alone in anticipation of the moment when we would be in the studio together again. The day finally came, and Mr. Christopher walked into the room. I made it through the first exercise unscathed. He asked me to demonstrate the next one but told me to stop halfway through. My legs weren’t straight enough. “It’s because you have such a fat ass,” he exclaimed. Like I’d watched many of the older girls do, I laughed and nodded as if I agreed. I took a deep breath and continued on with his class … for the next three years.

Also age 15
I was kind of a bro in show choir, meaning I hated most of the girls and joked about them with the guys. One day I must have shown weakness because the guys turned on me. They started making fun of my gangly limbs and lack of curves in my hip region. They called me “Flapjack” for the rest of the semester. I called myself that as well.

Age 17
We were asleep on the floor. Everyone was next to everyone, but also next to no one. I think there was a carpet. I think there were curtains. I know there was the sun. It woke me. And so did a hand. It was an unwanted, earth-shattering hand. I played dead as it caressed me, as it slipped into my sweater… or was it a shirt? I don’t remember; I was asleep. But I wasn’t asleep. The hand continued slithering down through fabric and skin. One thousand slow seconds later, I uttered a sleep-like groan and slowly turned myself toward the ground. I searched the manual in my mind for my next move. I skimmed over the chapters that had been written there through time.
Chapter 1: Ignore It.
Chapter 2: Give Into It.
Chapter 3: Don’t Cry About It.
Chapter 4: Laugh It Off.
Chapter 5: Let It Happen.
There were some faint lines that read, “say no,” “be strong,” “speak up,” but they seemed to blur to invisibility as I read them. Those lines weren’t in my flesh. Frantically, I searched for the instruction on how to get myself out before the hand returned. I lie face down on the carpet … or hardwood … or whatever it was, hating myself for what had just occurred. As tears came to my eyes, I referred to Chapter 3, fearing that the hand might hear me cry and discover my awakeness. I lie there until the early morning hush resumed. No one else stirred.

I ran to my car, saying nothing to anyone — for years. I thought of the lawnmower again that night. I’m not sure it was a dream, more of a wish. A wish that I would be completely consumed by its powers to recycle my flesh back into the earth where it began, pure and free.

**
My body has been poked and prodded from its earliest days. It has been bruised and scraped and broken. I have put it on display in front of mirrors and audiences and harsh critics or abusers almost every single day for the last 17 years. My body has been molded and shaped into an inconceivable number of patterns and positions. Now, at 21, my body is already beginning to fail me. As I stiffly rise out of bed each morning with the crackling sounds following each hunched step, I look in the mirror and realize that one
day all I’ll have is the flesh I so despised when I did not know how to appreciate its worth.

One day, when my legs don’t kick as high and my back doesn’t bend like it used to, all I’ll have are the memories stored in my flesh. The flesh will remind me why I teach young girls to wear what they want and create what they want. The flesh will tell me to keep loving who I want because he respects both my body and my scars. The flesh will say “me too” as it rises in solidarity with survivors and “time’s up” as it fights for equality for all. My flesh will speak when my body no longer does the talking. My flesh will sing. My flesh will dance.
**APPENDIX #8: Spoken Word**

**Jena:** She wished I was there.

**Bernadette:** She wished I was there.

**Mimi:** She wished I was there.

**Elise:** She wished I was there.

**J:** When she was running those races in her brain,

**B:** When she searched for someone to hold her hand,

**M:** Someone to repair her heart,

**E:** To acknowledge her dreams.

**J:** But history seemed to outrun her to the finish line,

**B:** And she felt alone at the start.

**M:** So she ran alone.

**E:** She wept alone.

**J:** She healed alone.

**All:** But she wasn’t alone.

**J:** History circled back around,

**B:** Watching over her,

**M:** Caring for her,

**E:** Inspiring her to continue on,

**Hannah:** And so I kept running.
J: With all of those who came before.

B: With the mothers,

M: The lovers,

E: With the dreamers of forgotten dreams.

Jena: I was there.

Bernadette: I was there.

Mimi: I was there.

Elise: I was there.

Hannah: They were there.

Jena: I was there.

   All: Me too.

Bern: I was there.

   All: Me too.

Mimi: I was there.

   All: Me too.

Elise: I was there.

   All: Me too.

Hannah: I am here.

   All: Me too.