

JOURNEY TO FEMINISM  
Understanding my Silenced Voice

by

ANDREA M YOUNG

B.S. Supply Chain & Information Systems, B.A. Integrative Arts concentration in Dance  
Pennsylvania State University, 2008

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Director of Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_ Director of MFA: \_\_\_\_\_  
Melinda Rawlinson Jeffery N. Bullock

Department: Dance



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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984). Ix.



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## JOURNEY TO FEMINISM *Understanding my Silence Voice*

### “What? Are you some kind of feminist or something?”

*"I am a feminist."* A proclamation many could easily make; however, I could not. Statements I could easily make and support before this journey include: *"I believe in equality for all. I believe in equal rights. I believe in equal pay. I believe that everybody has a right to choose who they are and what they believe in. I believe there should be an end to oppression of race and sexism."*

Emma Watson, in her speech during her launch for the *HeForShe* campaign, addresses the word feminism by bluntly stating: "Men think it's a woman's word. But what it means is that you believe in equality, and if you stand for equality, then you're a feminist. Sorry to tell you. You're a feminist. You're a feminist. That's it."<sup>2</sup> Emma Watson's words ring out to me, as if she is gesturing at me – *"You're a feminist!"* I do stand for equality. Then why did I not identify with the word *feminist*?

In my first graduate seminar class, I recognized my own beliefs and values in the writings of feminist theorists. I started to question myself: *Why does the word feminism have a negative connotation? Where did this stigma begin?* While unpacking my privileges and acknowledging systemic racism, I realized I grew up in a white-supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist nation. I can still hear the distaste lingering in their mouths as they asked, *"What? Are you some kind of feminist or something?"* anytime someone spoke up about gender stereotypes or injustices. Why would I want to be associated with a word that brought such negativity and friction? Perhaps I was

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<sup>2</sup> CNN, "(83) Emma Watson to United Nations: I'm a Feminist - YouTube," September 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9SUAcNIVQ4>.

unwilling to step outside the box of the norm, fearing I wouldn't be included, fearing I would be 'othered.' These "feminists" were seen as aggressive. They were seen as man-haters, angry lesbians, loud and anti-chivalry, anti-Catholic, anti-family. I did not believe that was what feminism was, but I also did not want to be associated with a movement that had that reputation. I did not hate men, I did believe in the value of family, I was (and am) loud, I could be angry when I heard about injustices in my community or world. And then the realization hit: I didn't know any open feminists in my life.

To state, "*I am a feminist*," could easily be equivalent to stating which political party you are registered with. The conversation comes to a halt or immediately turns defensive when individuals are in the opposing parties. In my experience, the immediate assumption is that there is no common ground, there are no shared views. This polarization, the unwillingness to communicate ideas, is the same as when you state you are a feminist. For me at the time, to be feminist would be like acknowledging you were against your community, you were against the norm. There would be no discussion: *I am right, you are wrong. I am conservative, you are liberal. If you are feminist, then you are anti-man. If you are feminist, you will never find a man. If you are feminist, you always have issues with everything..'*

*If you are feminist... What is the opposite of not being a feminist? Sexist? Anti-feminist? What is it to be anti-feminist? "I believe in equality for all. I believe in equal rights. I believe in equal pay. I believe that everybody has a right to choose who they are and what they believe in. I believe there should be an end of oppression of race and sexism."* If I am not sexist, then I am feminist. And yet, the stamp of FEMINIST on my forehead made me cringe.

## Feminism...Thirdhand Knowledge

When asked if she was a feminist, the comic Amy Schumer exclaims: “It's so crazy that people don't identify as feminists. I think it's only people that don't know the definition.”<sup>3</sup> Therein lies the issue. Why is the definition of feminism a mystery? Is it because it is taboo to be feminist? Is it the patriarchy’s way of keeping females oppressed? I cannot recall ever learning about feminist theory in my formative years, let alone its definition. In her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks questions those with a distaste for the word feminism. But when asked, these people admitted they had only learned about feminism by acquiring ideas from several sources. They had never learned from any authentic feminist theorists.<sup>4</sup> I am among those who learned third-hand.

### **Define it...**

In order to understand the word feminist and what it stands for, I needed to investigate the many definitions of feminism and if there were any definitions for anti-feminism. In 2017, Merriam-Webster announced the word-of-the-year was feminism and had two meanings to offer: “The theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” and “organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.”<sup>5</sup> The second definition does not speak to the equality of all and how this will affect both men

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<sup>3</sup> 10:16 Am, “Amy Schumer Explains Herself,” July 5, 2015, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/amy-schumer-explains-herself/>.

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. (Taylor and Francis, 2015). Vii.

<sup>5</sup> “Definition of FEMINISM,” accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>.

and women. It only speaks to women's rights. As the first wave of feminism was focused on women's rights, particularly the right to vote, I can understand how this definition may have today's generation thinking that the feminist movement has accomplished its goals. Women do have certain rights; the right to vote, the right to work, the right to own property. However, I find the word "activity" to sound recreational, leisurely, and not as urgent; an activity to partake in when one is not occupied. But the first definition echoes the feminism referred to by activist Kate Millet in the 1970s.

Millet, a writer, educator, artist, and activist, stated that feminists believe in the "social, political, and economic equality of the sexes." She states that, "We are in politics as the relationship between sexes is a political relationship."<sup>6</sup> This definition speaks to what I believe in: All sexes, regardless of race or class, should have equality. I also agree that the relationship between sexes is a political one due to the past harms and oppression of females that violate basic rights. These issues, including a lack of equal pay, the right to hold property, and the right to vote, violated and oppressed females. It took action within the government to correct these wrongs.

In her book *Living a Feminist Life*, Sarah Ahmed writes that "in this world *human* is still defined as *man*."<sup>7</sup> Males still write the laws: only 15% of elected officials in the world are female.<sup>8</sup> Not until 1971 in the *Reed v. Reed* case did the U.S. Supreme court declare women were "persons."<sup>9</sup> Even now, with reproduction laws changing in our

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<sup>6</sup> Johanna Demetrakas, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking?*, Documentary (Netflix, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Sara Ahmed author, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). 15.

<sup>8</sup> "War of the Sexes: Language - Video - Films On Demand," accessed March 2, 2020, [https://fod-infobase-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/p\\_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=35826#](https://fod-infobase-com.hollins.idm.oclc.org/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=35826#).

<sup>9</sup> "Detailed Timeline | National Women's History Alliance," accessed May 4, 2020, <https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/resources/womens-rights-movement/detailed-timeline/>.

country, we have limited female representation speaking out to preserve our rights. Without representation, we have a limited voice in our government and society. In order to create equal rights and change in our society, the relationship between the sexes needs to be political. In agreement with Millet; if it is not political, how will women become equal?

The third definition of feminism is stated by bell hooks, the American author, professor, feminist and social activist: “Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”<sup>10</sup> This definition exposes sexism as the opposition to feminism. It was only in 1994 that Congress adopted the Gender Equity in Education Act, allowing teachers to train “in gender equity, promote math and science learning by girls, counsel pregnant teens, and prevent sexual harassment.”<sup>11</sup> Feminism is necessary to continue making political strides. This definition also goes beyond the Merriam-Webster definition, stating that feminism stands for the end of all sexist oppression. Therefore, feminism will benefit everybody.

### **Attitude...**

In 1996, a study conducted by Joan Buschman and Silvo Lenart examined college-aged women’s attitudes towards feminism, work that revealed an example of what an Anti-Feminist could be. From their research, they concluded that Anti-Feminists support the idea that a woman’s place is in the home and believe in their traditional role

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<sup>10</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Viii.

<sup>11</sup> “Detailed Timeline | National Women’s History Alliance.”

of being “proper.”<sup>12</sup> These two ideas are important examples of performative gendered roles that have been instilled in females for generation after generation – not just by society, but by females. At the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Tracey Rose performed a puppet show where she questions the second wave feminist movement addressing race and classism. Below is a portion of the script she performed:

*A movement for white women. They said they were fighting men. But they gave birth to the white men. They marry them. They fuck them. They love them. They are their brothers, their fathers, their sons. They educate white men, so who's the oppressor?*<sup>13</sup>

Rose’s question, “Who is the oppressor?” speaks to the struggles within the feminist movement. Who is enforcing the patriarchal views of being ‘proper’ and implanting the idea that a woman’s place is in the kitchen? It is the white females. Females are continuing to pass down this canon of Anti-Feminist thoughts and gender stereotypes. What is needed is the decolonization of white females’ minds and a resistance of this canon that is feeding into the system of oppression. Without awareness of these passed-down traditions, there can be no change in the equality of all sexes. There needs to be a change.

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<sup>12</sup> Joan K. Buschman and Silvo Lenart, “I Am Not a Feminist, but...’: College Women, Feminism, and Negative Experiences,” *Political Psychology* 17, no. 1 (March 1996): 59–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791943>.

<sup>13</sup> Tracey Rose, “Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art,” Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, March 24, 2007, [//www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/video/videos/global-feminisms-tracey-rose](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/video/videos/global-feminisms-tracey-rose).

## Identify it...

In my research, I found that many sexes, including females, do not identify as feminists. Columnist Bob Greene wrote in *Sister-Under the Skin* that “many women who obviously believe in everything that proud feminists believe in dismiss the term ‘feminist’ as something unpleasant; something with which they do not wish to be associated.”<sup>14</sup> My negative associations with the term *feminist* mirrored Greene’s claim. Even pioneering feminist author Virginia Woolf declared that she was hostile to the label of feminism and that the word should be destroyed.<sup>15</sup> With these definitions in mind, it is clear that there is no set definition of feminism. It is then easy for one to hear the thirdhand knowledge and not fully grasp the concepts.

In a 1979 study by Marsha B. Jacobson, the word “feminism” came in third in terms of positivity, ranking behind “equal rights for women” and “women’s liberation.” When “feminism” was replaced by “women’s movement,” there was a significant difference in response, the latter label conjuring more support and belief that women would have more opportunities.<sup>16</sup> In the conclusion of their study, Jacobson states that research on the attitudes of young women shows that they willingly support both equality for women and the changing notion of appropriate gender roles. At the same time, they found that there was an unwillingness to identify with or support for the word *feminism*.

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<sup>14</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Naomi Black, “Feminism and the Women’s Movement,” in *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 23–50. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Marsha B. Jacobson, “You Say Potato and I Say Potahto: Attitudes toward Feminism as a Function of Its Subject-Selected Label,” *Sex Roles* 7, no. 4 (April 1981): 349–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00288063>.

## **Growing Disinterest...**

A study done in 1996 by Buschman and Lenart sought to determine the level of support for feminism and its growing alienation from the term by surveying college women aged 18-22 years old. Their study used three components to examine the support for feminism: group consciousness vs. individualism, gender roles between traditional and non-traditional views, and the attitude towards the label of feminism.<sup>17</sup> Based on the subjects' responses, they had anticipated dividing the groupings into three: Feminist, Post-feminist, and Anti-feminist. What I found most interesting about this study was the largest group of their sample fell between the categories of feminist and post-feminist. This group has a strong belief in individualism and in group identification. Buschman and Lenart offers two possible explanations for this result for this new grouping: The first explanation is that these particular participants believe they can achieve success on their own terms over the efforts of group action. The second explanation is that they recognize there is a need to advance women's rights and equality, but that there is "a negative framing of the women's movement in popular discourse."<sup>18</sup> The researchers labeled this group, "precarious feminists," with the biggest sample size of 42%.<sup>19</sup> What I believe is still relevant today is that there are still a group of females who are dissatisfied with the current status of women, but are otherwise confident that they could access opportunities on their own. At the beginning of this process, I would have belonged in this category. What is not acknowledged by this group of "precarious feminists" is that the privilege to feel this way is only due to the efforts of those in the feminist movement.

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<sup>17</sup> Buschman and Lenart, "I Am Not a Feminist, But...", 60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 67.



What also should be noted is that this sampling is taking from undergraduate students from within the School of Liberal Arts at Purdue University in 1992; therefore is a small sample size with limited demographics and does not reflect all females.

The absence of extreme regulations against females has led to ignoring of “areas in which [females] are exploited or discriminated against; it may even lead them to imagine that no women are oppressed.”<sup>20</sup> In Carmen Vazquez’s essay, “Towards a Revolutionary Ethics,” she speaks to the American citizen as only looking out for themselves: “In key with the American capitalist obsession for individualism and anything goes so long as it gets you what you want, feminism in America has come to mean anything you like, honey.”<sup>21</sup> Right now, many females do have choices and therefore are not seemingly oppressed as there is some equality and some representation in the workforce. This fits with the “precarious feminist” described in the earlier section; females do not have to subscribe to feminism as long as they can get ahead and advance their own success. Consequently, there is a growing disinterest in feminism as a radical political movement. However, I question without consciousness and awareness, what will our society resort back to? What will be compromised? Will females need to ask permission to work as they once did? Not having decisions over our own body, no discussion as to when to have children, and decisions about our bodies made by husbands?

These rights that the feminist movement fought for are slipping. As bell hooks states, “[b]eing oppressed means the *absence of choices*.”<sup>22</sup> Currently, we are seeing it in

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<sup>20</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5.

the reproductive rights, as there is a limitation of choices. That includes the ability to choose whether or not to have children and when abortion access, the Affordable Care Act, and contraceptive access and coverage are needed. There is a call within select scholarly circles for the revolution of feminism, however, there needs to be a louder call socially. There is a call to end sexism as well as liberate men and women who are bound by the structures of capitalistic patriarchy. There is a call for change. “The schism of reality itself must be overthrown before there can be a true cultural revolution.”<sup>23</sup>

### **White-Washing...**

I began my research learning about the feminist movement, diving into the second wave. There was an assumption in American society during the early stages of the movement that there was a singular issue.<sup>24</sup> But that was not the case, as bell hooks states, “There was a silent majority.”<sup>25</sup> In the film, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking?* and in bell hooks’ *Feminism is for Everybody*, it’s stated that there were pitfalls in the second wave of the feminist movement due to power struggles within, struggles due to classism as well as the power struggle and dismissal of men’s role in the campaign.<sup>26</sup>

The failures of the second wave were due to a lack of intersectionality, especially with women of color. There was a need to create solidarity among women, a sisterhood, but instead women of color were told to quiet their concerns "for the greater good."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hilary Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2010*, 2015. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory*. 8.

<sup>25</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Heather Kember and Marina Kalashnikova, “You Can Tell If Someone Is Attracted to You by Their Voice,” *The Conversation*, August 27, 2017, <http://theconversation.com/you-can-tell-if-someone-is-attracted-to-you-by-their-voice-81337>. And bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*.

<sup>27</sup> Johanna Demetrakas.

The patronizing of people of color in order to advance the feminist movement could have happened out of willful ignorance. Regardless, it led to the feminist movement being considered a white women's rights issue.<sup>28</sup> bell hooks speaks to this in her book,

*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center:*

White women who dominate feminist discourse, who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory, have little or no understanding of white supremacy as a racial politic, of the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexist, capitalistic nature.

Unable to support the hegemonic control of the middle-class white women, many people of color left the cause. Audre Lorde also speaks to the white-washing of the feminist movement in describing that when white women ignore “their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become ‘other,’ the outsider whose experience and tradition is too ‘alien’ to comprehend.”<sup>29</sup> In moving forward, there is a need to reshape the class politics in order for women and men to join from all classes and races. The movement must refute the notion that there is a singular feminist position, and embrace that there is intersectionality within this movement.<sup>30</sup>

In my thesis performance manifestation, I use white fabric that hangs between two ladders to represent the white-washing of the feminist movement. I am standing behind the fabric, as at the beginning of this journey, I was unaware of what the feminist

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<sup>28</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 1

<sup>29</sup> Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” *Dangerous Liaisons.*, 1997, 374–80. 856.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory*. 8.

movement truly represented. I was blocked by the white patriarchal society. Using light from behind, the shadows of my movement are projected.

## Landing on Pitch...

In the article, *The Reasons Why Women's Voices Are Deeper Today*, David Robinson states that “For both men and women, the people who had lowered their pitch ended up with a higher social rank.”<sup>31</sup> Higher social rank, especially in American society, is the White-supremacist patriarchal hierarchy, where white males are at the top of the ladder. I argue that how society views vocal pitch and tone is one of the many indicators in the oppression of females. Studies have found that deeper voice and pitch assert dominance or authority. However, I question: is this due to the many years/centuries of men being in charge, holding the position of power so that our society became more accustomed to that tone quality?

Female figureheads either are changing their tones. Margaret Thatcher dropped the pitch of her voice by 60hz<sup>32</sup> when she was Prime Minister. Hilary Clinton was criticized for having a shrill voice.<sup>33</sup> I argue that this is due to the oppression of females and the hierarchy that exists due to patriarchy. Lower tone male voices contribute to the hierarchy in society and the oppression of females as society trusts and follows the deeper tones connected to patriarchy. Those with higher vocal pitches are seen as having no power. Therefore, they do not have the same level of authority and are heard as secondary citizens. Using voice as a jumping off point to understanding feminism, there is research that deals with not only the definitions and background of feminism and the association

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<sup>31</sup> Robinson, David, “The Reasons Why Women's Voices Are Deeper Today - BBC Worklife,” June 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20180612-the-reasons-why-womens-voices-are-deeper-today>.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, David.

<sup>33</sup> Stephanie Watson, “The Unheard Female Voice: Women Are More Likely to Be Talked over and Unheeded. But SLPs Can Help Them Speak up and Be Heard.: The ASHA Leader: Vol 24, No 2,” *The ASHA Leader* 24, no. 2 (February 1, 2019): 44–53.

with voice, but also the difference between higher pitch and authority tone. In my performance, I will be manipulating voice as a tool of dismantling the systems of oppression and the hierarchies in our society. Understanding and claiming both the literal, audible voice, and the societal voice through feminism, those that are oppressed are able to rise above being a secondary citizen.

## The Unheard Female Voice

Growing up, I watched the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* multiple times. As the father in the movie tells his daughter that she cannot take community classes in a subject she desired, but was to stay working in the family restaurant as a hostess, her mother comforts her by saying she will talk to her father. The mother declares, “The man is the head, but the woman is the neck, and she can turn the head any way she wants.”<sup>34</sup> This quote has always stayed with me. It affirms that men are the ones in charge, the leaders, but also that women are able to control men. The mass-media production of heteronormative gender inequality can be found in countless television shows and movies. This represents my understanding during my formative years of how society views men and women, their roles, and their gendered performative behaviors. It teaches females that they have limited power but always will sit below the man. These ideas are represented throughout my creative manifestation by the image and gestures of a woman that is missing her head, her voice stopping at the neck. We are visible, but we do not speak. We are silent. Both our literal voice, the audible one, and our societal voice needs to be viewed and portrayed as equal.



Fig 1. Andrea Young, *Captured footage of the voiceless woman*. June 2020

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<sup>34</sup> *The Head and the Neck - MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING*, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJbC5AfxqPc>.

## **Breadwinner...**

There are cultural and social biases that embrace the silencing of the female voice. One societal belief is in the structure of the family, the man as breadwinner and having the power and money to determine the family dynamic. He controls the size of the family, decisions about their lifestyle and education, and is the spokesperson for the household in performing his gender. The female performs her role as the supportive wife in having a silent societal voice. I believe it has been instilled in females over generations and generations of passing down how to act and be female. There is also a rhetoric that maintains in our culture the capitalist notion that the “PhD knows best” that stems from “daddy knows best.”<sup>35</sup> This can also be found in Christian upbringings: “In the name of the Father...” The father knows best. Men know best. Growing up within the Catholic faith, we pray, “*In the name of the Father, the son and the holy ghost.*” Where is the Virgin Mary in this? Where are the other females? The heads of the church are men.

Patricia Hill Collins speaks to the construct of family as a “core idea central to social relations of power whose meaning and valance varies dramatically.”<sup>36</sup> In challenging this view, we are able to point out the gendered biases and challenges the family dynamic creates. It is not only a “building block of patriarchy” but also holds the structures of inequalities dealing with race, class, age.<sup>37</sup>

In the movie, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking*, Jane Fonda, addresses how females are instructed to be a good girl – quiet and respectful. “You have to stuff your

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<sup>35</sup> Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory*. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “The New Politics of Community,” *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 1 (February 2010): 7–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410363293>. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



anger - you have to be a good girl. All your life, people are saying, 'Be a good girl.' Well that implies that you're not naturally good."<sup>38</sup> We are taught through generations and generations that we are not good, we are not good enough, we are the second sex. This patriarchal system also keeps men imprisoned by gender stereotypes. In abandoning controlling, suppressive patriarchal values, everyone will benefit, and this is what I am embracing in feminism.

### **Interruption...**

Men interrupt women at a rate of 2.6 times per conversation within three minutes. Researchers state that men talk over women, interrupting them are often misheard is not only due to social and cultural biases, but also women's word choices, pitch, breathiness, and soft voices.<sup>39</sup> Recently, there have been changes in the female voice: female voices are lowered, the word choices and phrases have been explained as talking more like a man. Another reason for this could be the changing dynamics between men and women.<sup>40</sup> The roles and structure of a family have changed and women have more equality in the workplace and in government.

Countless studies are identifying that both men and women prefer low pitch voices, especially when it comes to authority.<sup>41</sup> Is that actually the case? Or has it been programmed after all these years of having men in charge? According to Jay Miller, a voice and speech coach, those who speak with a higher pitch sound more youthful and,

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<sup>38</sup> Johanna Demetrakas, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking?*

<sup>39</sup> Watson, "The Unheard Female Voice: Women Are More Likely to Be Talked over and Unheeded. But SLPs Can Help Them Speak up and Be Heard.: The ASHA Leader: Vol 24, No 2."

<sup>40</sup> Robinson, David, "The Reasons Why Women's Voices Are Deeper Today - BBC Worklife."

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, David.

therefore, not credible.<sup>42</sup> In a study done by Andrea Levitt and Margery Lucas, who studied the four-voice qualities in females, modal, girlish, breathy and creaky, they concluded that lower pitch, older voices rank more dominant.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, both men and women will lower their voice to assert dominance, authority, and to be more successful. A great example of authority and pitch is the case of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In a voice analysis of Steve Nallon, he states that a higher pitch can sound “patronizing.”<sup>44</sup> Thatcher was coached to bring her pitch lower and perhaps with a “husky” tone that could be more appealing as a politician in comparison to a “shrill” high pitch voice.

There are differences between countries: “Women in the Netherlands consistently talk in deeper voices than women in Japan [...] and this seems to be linked with the prevailing gender stereotypes – independence versus powerlessness.”<sup>45</sup> Again, this acknowledges that women, like those from the Netherlands, have lower pitch voices that are associated with power and independence. In contrast, those with higher pitch are seen without power and therefore are secondary citizens. How society views vocal pitch and tone is one of the many indicators of the oppression of females.

What is identified is that female language is often apologetic and soft which results in being interrupted, talked over. What is determined by these researchers, though not expanded on, is that speech-language pathologists (SLP) note that “there is nothing

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<sup>42</sup> Watson, “The Unheard Female Voice: Women Are More Likely to Be Talked over and Unheeded. But SLPs Can Help Them Speak up and Be Heard.: The ASHA Leader: Vol 24, No 2.”

<sup>43</sup> Andrea G Levitt and Margery Lucas, “The Effects of Four Voice Qualities on the Perception of a Female Voice,” 2016, 43.

<sup>44</sup> *THE THATCHER YEARS - Voice Analysis of Margaret Thatcher for US TV*, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRQwLrpX61M>.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, David, “The Reasons Why Women’s Voices Are Deeper Today - BBC Worklife.”

inherently ‘wrong’ with their voices.”<sup>46</sup> Instead, there needs to be an effort by all sexes to become aware of these interruptions. Instead, the majority of the articles present how women’s voices have to change or have changed in order to fit into the male-dominated world. They offer vocal resonant therapy to help “modulate them.”

There ends up being a negotiation between the adaptation of female voices that may be necessary for success in a patriarchal community versus the resistance of change in our voices and acknowledging the problematic issues with said community. This negotiation mirrors my concerns with the use of voice in this project - what can the manipulation of my voice do to make changes in a patriarchal community?

### **Embracing Voice...**

Not only is language a key to my research as I have been investigating the definition of feminism, but I have been investigating female language development and the tone of the female voice. The interest in this subject started as a personal one, as I was uncomfortable audibly vocalizing my voice. Growing up with a high pitch voice, I remember making the decision to adjust my voice pitch and tone. I did have speech therapists in my younger years, as I had issues with my r’s and w’s. Being an avid, competent reader, but not passing my spelling tests and having speaking problems, the therapists worked on how to get the correct sounds out of my mouth. However, I do not remember them trying to adjust my voice. That was something I kept to myself and adapted on my own. I did not want the annoying high pitch voice. Looking back, I adjusted to being understood better in order to be accepted.

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<sup>46</sup> Watson, “The Unheard Female Voice: Women Are More Likely to Be Talked over and Unheeded. But SLPs Can Help Them Speak up and Be Heard.: The ASHA Leader: Vol 24, No 2.”

“Phonetic convergence” is adapting to the way a person may talk in order to be more similar.<sup>47</sup> Vocal teacher Roger Love believes that people do not use the voice that they are born with. He speaks about how our voices are developed through our infant years as we duplicate who we want to be connected to. We adjust to the sounds of our environment.<sup>48</sup> He believes you can decide how you want to sound. In the process of studying his method, I use his vocal warmup as a way to train my new weapon/instrument: my voice. Love states that using your voice allows you to determine how you would like to sound and be acknowledged. In investing in your voice, Love believes that you are investing in yourself.<sup>49</sup> *The personal is political*. “As a speaker, you have to emotionally engage your listeners if you want them to choose you, remember you, or do what you say,” Love states in his podcast.<sup>50</sup> In believing that the voice is the window into the soul, that you cannot lie with your voice, there can be power when using an audible voice against the injustices of a society, a community, a nation, or the world.

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<sup>47</sup> Heather Kember and Marina Kalashnikova, “You Can Tell If Someone Is Attracted to You by Their Voice,” *The Conversation*, August 27, 2017, <http://theconversation.com/you-can-tell-if-someone-is-attracted-to-you-by-their-voice-81337>.

<sup>48</sup> Scott, “Yale Research on Voice and Emotion: 5 Experiments and What It Means for Speakers,” *Roger Love* (blog), November 9, 2017, <https://rogerlove.com/yale-research-on-voice-and-emotion/>.

<sup>49</sup> Vanessa Van Edwards, *How to Be Your Own Vocal Coach, with Roger Love*, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=150&v=zp4n9Gxh7MY&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=150&v=zp4n9Gxh7MY&feature=emb_logo).

<sup>50</sup> “Vocal Tips | Training on Public Speaking | Public Speaking Tips,” *Roger Love* (blog), accessed April 28, 2020, <https://rogerlove.com/speaking/speaking-vocal-tips/>.

## Manifestations Drawn from Inspiration

Laurie Anderson's work as a feminist artist influences my aesthetic for the piece and a source of inspiration for using voice and video, most notably in her music video for "O Superman."<sup>51</sup> In watching Anderson's music video, I draw on inspiration to create a music video/dance on film as a creative manifestation of my research instead of the initial concept of performing live in a black box surrounded by audience members. Her use of shadowing in her music video and creating her own soundscape motivates me to keep moving forward with my own creation of sound and shadows.



Fig 2. Laurie Anderson, *O Superman*, Screenshot of shadow #1, 2007.



Fig 3. Laurie Anderson, *O Superman*, Screenshot of shadow #2, 2007.

Anderson, as a cyborg, uses technology to experiment with voice pitch and uses her body as a prop in order to transgress the boundaries of gender. Anderson uses a vocal harmonizer to raise and lower the pitch of her voice and evaluates how the audience responds to the different female and male voices. In the video portion of this thesis, I use a voice changer to record my voice, adjusting different pitches and tones, which creates

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<sup>51</sup> Laurie Anderson, *O Superman [Official Music Video]* - YouTube (Nonesuch Records, 1982), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vkfpi2H8tOE>.

the soundscape of my piece -- Using the multiplicity of voice as a way of breaking the binary.

I will be using a 2016 study, “The Effects of Four Voice Qualities on the Perception of a Female Voice,” a guide to investigate the four different qualities. The study investigates the less examined voice, the female voice, and four of its qualities: modal voice, breathiness, creakiness, and girlishness. The article states that they created stimuli by recording females pronouncing vowels, words, sentences, and phrases in the four-voice qualities stated above. The participants, both female and male, would listen and rate the four qualities on a scale of dominance, attractiveness, sexiness, and youthfulness. I will also try vocal fry or creaky quality as there are reports that there is an increasing number of young American women that are using the creaky voice quality.<sup>52</sup> The change in voice quality leads to the question: If the reports show that in a case study that both men and women see creakiness or vocal fry as less attractive, then is the rise in creakiness in young female Americans a way to combat gender discrimination?

At the end of the video, I will not be using the voice filters, leaving just my voice to be heard. In a study done by Yale University researcher Michael W. Kraus, it was found that voice-only communication without visual cues enhances empathic accuracy.<sup>53</sup> With the fabric blocking my facial expressions for the work, I am eager to see how the phrases and gestures will land with the audience. In the article “*Bodies of Evidence: Feminist Performance Art*,” author Erin Striff suggests that “it is not the artist

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<sup>52</sup> Watson, “The Unheard Female Voice: Women Are More Likely to Be Talked over and Unheeded. But SLPs Can Help Them Speak up and Be Heard.: The ASHA Leader: Vol 24, No 2.”

<sup>53</sup> Michael W Kraus, “Voice-Only Communication Enhances Empathic Accuracy,” n.d., 11.

who decides the nature of the performance, but the spectators themselves.” The artist does not have the power to decide how the audience will feel or perceive the female body.<sup>54</sup>

The multiple voices, coming from the two sides of the speaker, are having a conversation, questioning, and dialoguing about women’s voices and feminism. In the performance mentioned earlier by Tracey Rose, the puppets rise questions about women’s oppression and the lack of intersectionality of the second-wave feminist movement.<sup>55</sup> Not only does this source provide thought-provoking insight into the issues with sexist and racial oppression, but this source is useful as an inspiration to use questioning in the thesis presentation portion. It demonstrated the power of questioning as a means to address taboo topics and drawing the audience into the conversation.

In my research about Carolee Schneemann, a multidisciplinary artist whose work speaks to the discourse of the body, sexuality, and gender, I found a video, “The Artist Project: Carolee Schneemann” presented by The Met. Schneemann speaks to how her obsession with early Cycladic figures made in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium B.C. and how they are still relevant to today’s world and inspire her work.



Fig 4. Early Cycladic II, *Marble female figure*.

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<sup>54</sup> Erin Striff, “Bodies of Evidence: Feminist Performance Art,” *Critical Survey* 9, no. 1 (1997): 1–18.

<sup>55</sup> Rose, “Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.”

In Schneemann's descriptions of the figurines, she speaks of the uneasiness of this position with the protectively wrapped arms. She also describes the figurines as "adorable" and "simplified" that they have an elegant simplification and gracefulness.<sup>56</sup> This sparked a different response, where I believe women are not simple. From the wrapped arms and the uneasiness of the position represents the current turmoil in myself, in this work. Instead of describing the female figurines' position as simple, I find it complex. I do not find women "adorable"; instead, I find us fiery, strong. In response to these figurines, my movement uses the break of these wrapped arms as a way to symbolize the break or snap that needs to happen for those who are oppressed.



Fig 5. Andrea Young, *Captured footage of breaking/snapping of figurine*, June 2020.

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<sup>56</sup> *The Artist Project: Carolee Schneemann*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fS7vhBc6Dbg>.



There are two ladders framing the shot of the video portion representing the patriarchal structure of our society. As discussed previously, the white fabric will be hanging from these ladders with my body shadowed as I move behind the hanging fabric.



Fig 6. Andrea Young, *Photo of front view of setup*, June 2020.



Fig 7. Andrea Young, *Photo of side view of setup*, June 2020.



Fig 8. Andrea Young, *Photo of back view of setup*, June 2020.

## Creative Process

“Start an argument that shuns the traditional hierarchies built on power and knowledge, the breeding ground of oppression.”<sup>57</sup> My argument as to how society views vocal pitch and tone is one of the many indicators in the oppression of females. My way to argue this point is not only in the research of this paper, but in the following creative manifestations.

The original idea of this project was to be in a black box at Hollins University, the audience being on all sides as a way to see different points of views. The speakers would be behind the audience members. In the center is a box of white fabric hanging with light hitting the fabric and projecting my movements/body as shadows.

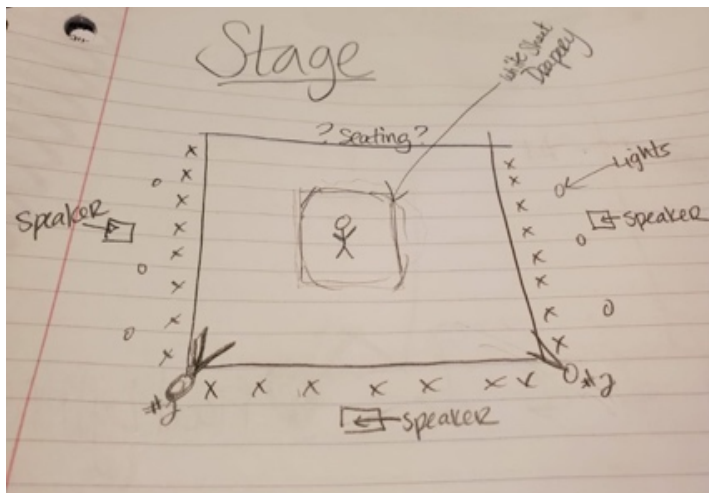


Fig 9. Andrea Young, *Sketch of bird's eye view of blackbox*, March 2020.

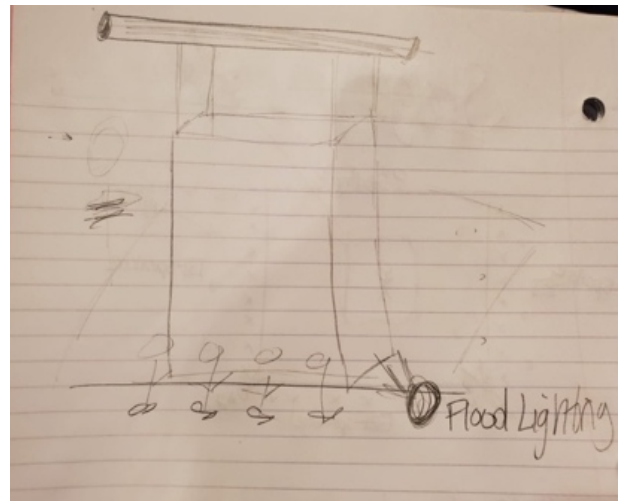


Fig 10. Andrea Young, *Sketch of audience view of blackbox*, March 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Jeanie Forte, “Women’s Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 2 (May 1988): 217–35, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207658>. 220.

This way the audience is surrounded by not only the different voices, but different perspectives/angles of the work. The white fabric would eventually drop from the poles. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this rendition had to be placed on hold and I had to manifest a new way of presenting these ideas.

The new manifestation ended up developing into two parts. The first part compiles the research of the female voices, both audible and societal, through a video; revealing the white-washing of feminism and gender stereotypes placed on society due to patriarchy. Using my voice as a jumping in point of understanding feminism, this creative manifestation explores the definitions of feminism and the differences between higher pitch and authoritative tone. In Jeanie Forte's article, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism, she speaks about the speaking female: "It is precisely this denial of women as 'speaking subjects' that women in performance art are both foreground and subvert."<sup>58</sup> This quote affirmed my idea to move forward with using my voice as the soundtrack in this presentation. By manipulating the voice as a tool of dismantling the patriarchal hierarchy, this video has layered voices of one female, using different vocal pitches, tone, and breathiness.

The second component of the creative manifestation is the website. This is a portal used for those to access the research, sources, my words, a dive into my process. In using the website, those who are questioning feminism, female voice, anti-feminist, dance as activism, they are able to dive, click, search, read, watch, interact with the research. Like in Jochen Roller's *The Source Code*, the website that they designed may have looked like a "hodgepodge of materials", but the "structure of the website mirrors

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<sup>58</sup> Forte. 221.

the structure of the process – it’s a complex web of references, comparisons, and links.”<sup>59</sup>

The interactive journey can be found on my website:

[aunjdance.com/journey-to-feminism/](http://aunjdance.com/journey-to-feminism/)



Fig 11. Creative Manifestation as an interactive website, through the use of Prezi, June 2020

<sup>59</sup> Mark Franko and Sabine Huschka, “Dance in Search of Its Own History: On the Contemporary Circulation of Past Knowledge,” 2018. 11.

## Land & Claim...

Currently, the world has changed slightly; it is still a man's world. My world is changing, where in my past there was a dichotomy of feminism, now through this research, I realize there can be many types of groupings: feminist, precarious feminist, post-feminist, and anti-feminist. When I started this journey, I realized that I had no feminist in my formative years; well, at least not any open feminists. Moving through this process exposed me to feminist artists and influenced my work so that I can now confidently state: "*I am a feminist.*" In comparison to Virginia Woolf, who always declared that the word feminist should be destroyed, in her evolution, she states, "A feminist is any woman who tells the truth about her life." I believe as artists, we must speak our lived experiences, our truths. Especially feminist artists, like the Trojan horse, entering the patriarchal system and making dramatic changes once inside.

As a feminist, I can state there needs to be a change in social institutions, in our education systems, and cultural assumptions. Both men and women need to be equally involved in coming up with a creative and transcendent new social order.<sup>60</sup> The focus of the past has been on men and male behavior, which has been a way to limit the development of women politically instead of allowing all to create a cultural shift towards a new social order.<sup>61</sup> Whether this stigmatizing of feminists being man-haters is done by the patriarchy or feminists actually focused on male behavior, there needs to be a change of narrative. This change is necessary for the continued work of feminism. A feminism that can affect all.

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<sup>60</sup> Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory*. 25.

<sup>61</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 161.

When bell hooks speak about the necessity of forming an oppositional worldview and a new social order, she says, "[p]erhaps it is the knowledge that everyone must change."<sup>62</sup> To me, that is everything. I have changed in this process. I can only hope that with knowledge and awareness, we, as a society, a community, are continually changing. Changing to be a global citizen; open to intersectionality and a feminist frame of mind... to end of sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. As stated in my (Wo)manifesto, growth can be painful, but we must embrace the friction, embrace our voices.

I am a small stone being cast along the river: I can cause ripples.<sup>63</sup>

As a collective voice, we can cause waves.

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<sup>62</sup> bell hooks. 166.

<sup>63</sup> This idea was paraphrased from Johanna Demetrakas, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking?:* "What difference does it make in the world – Its like throwing a rock into the water, it hits and radiates out"

## (WO)MANIFESTO

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, stemming from its Latin roots, a manifesto “is a statement in which someone makes his or her intentions or views easy for people to ascertain.”<sup>64</sup> Throughout my thesis process, I was able to locate my voice and my desire to expose systems that hold onto gender norms. My personal agency within this work exists in revealing and coming into my voice, while embracing all of my artistic response. As I worked through my relationship with feminism and alienation from this word, I developed a sense of urgency, realizing I needed to create a manifesto; a reminder to continuously recognize my cultural biases, the causes of sexism, and analyze gender norms. Here are my declarations and intentions:

- “Change means growth, and growth can be painful”<sup>65</sup>
- I will embrace friction
- It is okay to be the killjoy<sup>66</sup>
- I will use “sorry” when *it is* appropriate
- I am willing to support others
- I will not laugh at sexist jokes to be polite
- It is okay to be rude
- I am not willing to get over histories that are not over<sup>67</sup>
- I will embrace the tone and pitch in my voice
- I will continue to examine my role in the systems of oppression
- I will recognize my own cultural biases

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<sup>64</sup> “Definition of MANIFESTO,” accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifesto>.

<sup>65</sup> Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex.” 859.

<sup>66</sup> Sara Ahmed author, *Living a Feminist Life*.

<sup>67</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durnham: Duke University Press, n.d.).

- Flip it & Test it: <sup>68</sup> I will question my unconscious bias and stereotypes of gender
- My voice does/can/will make a difference
- I will not be a secondary citizen; I will strive be a global citizen
- If not *me*, Who? If not *now*, When?<sup>69</sup>
- I am a small stone being casted along the river, I can cause ripples<sup>70</sup>
- Embrace/live/remember: “The Personal is Political”
- “No Political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one’s notion of the possible and the real” <sup>71</sup>
- “The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but the piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactic, the oppressors’ relationship.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Kristen Pressner and Fabian Schaeublin, “(83) Are You Biased? I Am | Kristen Pressner | TEDxBasel - YouTube,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq\\_xYSOZrgU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq_xYSOZrgU).

<sup>69</sup> CNN, “(83) Emma Watson to United Nations: I’m a Feminist - YouTube.”

<sup>70</sup>This idea was paraphrased from Johanna Demetrakas, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking?*: “What difference does it make in the world – Its like throwing a rock into the water, it hits and radiates out”

<sup>71</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.*, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex.” 859.



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