

Transgressively tWERQing:
Using Dance Fitness as a Tool for Empowerment
[artists statement]

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This performance is the tale of a female feminist fitness instructor helping participants to feel empowered by reclaiming their right to pop, twerk and shake away from the patriarchal gaze of society. As a self-identified feminist and educator, I continue to be interested in how the battles surrounding feminisms are happening in our private spaces, specifically in our own bodies. How I, as an informed white woman, can know how my female body is commodified, marginalized, reduced and silenced and yet still feel the very real struggle of weight and self-esteem in my own body. How fitness is pushed as a solution to slim down and shape up and while I know that isn't true, I find very real comfort and release in the exercising of my body. How the misogyny of hip hop and pop music is stressed in the media, and yet how these same beats can provide motivation for people to express and move. For me, my experiences with WERQ have been about finding a space where these paradoxes find balance and I'm allowed to both express myself, find comfort in my female body and celebrate a safe space of movement and music.

WERQ classes bring people together for various reasons; some come to achieve a fitness goal, others come to dance away stress, still others come for the sense of community and friendship. The beauty of this class is that it offers a space in which everyone can achieve their own personal goals, and so much more. While the individual pieces—this type of music, white bodies moving in traditional African movements, women exercising to fill a need—could be problematic, the intertextuality of these pieces within the space of a WERQ class create a unique safe space for bodies of multiple shapes, sizes, races and ages to move and be moved. Audre Lorde questioned whether we could dismantle the master's house using the master's tools (1984). I argue that dance and movement cannot belong to the master, but have been used against women as a means of visual policing of gender and race. By offering a supportive environment that encourages fun freedom of

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Megan Orcholski is a second year PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She specializes in performance, public speaking, rhetoric and gender communication, while being particularly interested in exploring critical and queer theories to interrogate existing systems and boundaries. Megan discusses some of her many passions in her TEDx Talk: <https://youtu.be/NchKTTN-Hg8> She is so grateful to Terra for this opportunity to collaborate.

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Terra Rasmussen Lenox & Megan Orcholski

expression under the guise of fitness, every week I lead my classes through a series of chart-topping pop, rock, and hip hop songs with uplifting messages and powerful moves with the intent to not only provide a fun workout, but also to empower them to feel confident in their abilities. This auto-ethnographic performance invites the audience in to experience the ways in which dance fitness, specifically a format called WERQ, can be used to push through normative barriers.

The reader instructions are to help the reader feel like they are experience a WERQ class. In a collaborative effort, we have crafted the sections to flow like a typical class would through Terra's personal narrative and Megan's artistry to make words dance across the page. Listening to the music with help the reader intertextually experience the performative qualities of being in a class. This will be different for every reader and change each time they read it, similarly to taking a class. The formatting is meant to help the words dance and rock across the page. The use of text boxes and different sized font is to help communicate the multiple thoughts and feelings that may be experienced during a class. The weaving of multiple texts--quotations, music, photos, testimonies--adds to the multiplicity of the performance.

Sweating is an excellent way to purify the body from toxins. For me, I continually WERQ out the toxicity of patriarchal society and empower the people in my space to dance toward a more inclusive future. This has been one way I have found to enact empowerment through space and body. We hope the reader feels this as they read and that this performance potentially inspires people to find their own groove on their feminist journeys.

References

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