

THE GAZE

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INDEPENDENT PROJECT
VIVA VOCE PRESENTATION



RESEARCH QUESTION

HOW DO FEMALE HEELS DANCERS
NEGOTIATE THE TENSION BETWEEN
SEXUALISATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND
THEIR OWN EMBODIED EXPERIENCES OF
EMPOWERMENT?



WHAT IS THE GAZE?

THE GAZE REFERS TO THE WAY VISUAL MEDIA POSITIONS SUBJECTS TO BE LOOKED AT AND INTERPRETED.

- **INTRODUCED BY LAURA MULVEY (1975)**
- **OFTEN LINKED TO POWER AND CONTROL**
- **TRADITIONALLY POSITIONS WOMEN AS OBJECTS OF VISUAL PLEASURE**
- **SHAPES HOW AUDIENCES UNDERSTAND IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION**
- **EXTENDS BEYOND CINEMA INTO DIGITAL CULTURE**

WHY I CHOSE THIS TOPIC

I CHOSE THIS TOPIC BECAUSE OF MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN HEELS DANCE, AND I WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN HOW WOMEN WHO PERFORM IN HEELS ARE VIEWED. I WANTED TO EXPLORE HOW THE GAZE AFFECTS PERFORMERS AND HOW HEELS DANCE CAN BE SEEN AS EMPOWERING RATHER THAN PURELY SEXUALISED. AS ME MYSELF HAVE BEEN SEXUALISED THE WHOLE 9 YEARS OF DANCING IN HEELS, SO IT MADE ME FEEL LIKE I WANTED TO HEAR OTHER HEELS DANCERS STORIES.

- PERSONAL CONNECTION TO DANCE AND PERFORMANCE
- INTEREST IN FEMALE REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT
- CURIOUS ABOUT HOW THE GAZE AFFECTS PERFORMERS
- HEELS DANCE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD OR SEXUALISED
- OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE THIS THROUGH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

KEY THEORY: THE MALE GAZE

LAURA MULVEY (1975)

- WOMEN ARE POSITIONED AS OBJECTS TO BE VIEWED
 - THE VIEWER IS PLACED IN A POSITION OF POWER
- THE CAMERA CAN REINFORCE OR CHALLENGE OBJECTIFICATION
 - FRAMING AND EDITING INFLUENCE PERCEPTION
- RELEVANT TO HOW HEELS DANCERS ARE VIEWED IN MEDIA

THE GAZE IS NOT SINGULAR AND
CAN EXIST IN MULTIPLE FORMS
IT OPERATES THROUGH MULTIPLE
PERSPECTIVES:

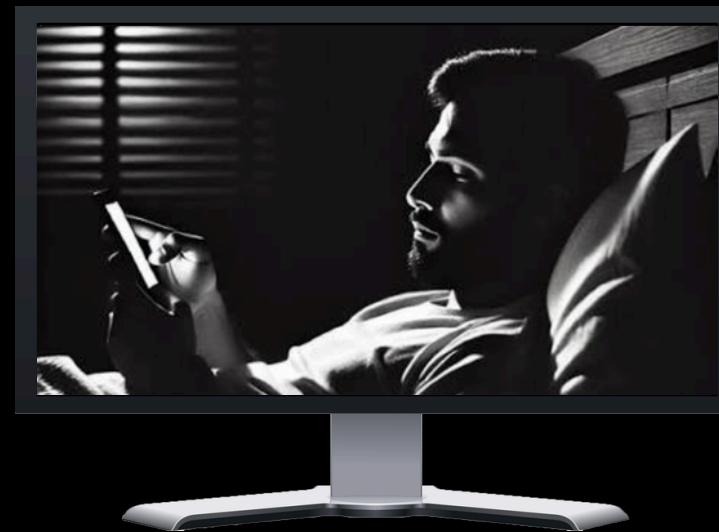
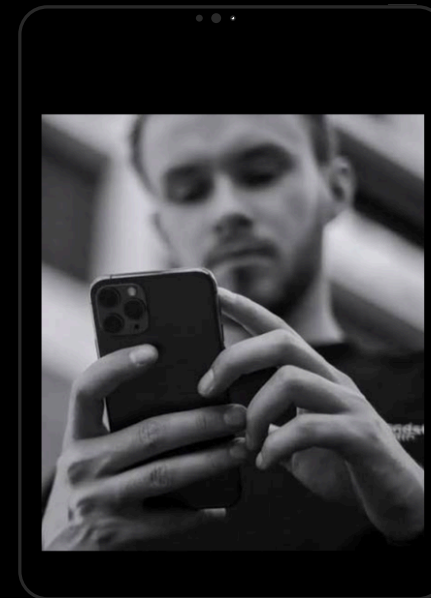
- THE FEMALE GAZE — FOCUSES ON FEMALE PERSPECTIVE AND RECLAIMING AGENCY AND SUBJECTIVITY
- THE SELF-GAZE — AWARENESS OF BEING SEEN AND SELF-PRESENTATION/AWARENESS OF ONE'S OWN VISIBILITY
- THE CAMERA GAZE — HOW FRAMING INFLUENCES PERCEPTION/FILMMAKER'S CONTROL OF REPRESENTATION
- THE AUDIENCE GAZE — HOW VIEWERS INTERPRET AND SHAPE THE SUBJECT
- DIGITAL GAZE — SURVEILLANCE AND VISIBILITY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS,

OTHER TYPES
OF GAZES

ONLINE RESOURCES

THIS PROJECT ENGAGED WITH CONTEMPORARY ONLINE MATERIALS TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE GAZE OPERATES IN DIGITAL CULTURE.

- ONLINE ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLES (GOOGLE SCHOLAR, RESEARCHGATE)
- MEDIA INDUSTRY WEBSITES AND FILM ANALYSIS PLATFORMS
 - RECENT NEWS ARTICLES DISCUSSING REPRESENTATION AND GENDER
- SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS (INSTAGRAM, TIKTOK) AS CASE STUDIES
- ONLINE DISCUSSIONS AROUND VISIBILITY AND EMPOWERMENT



RESEARCH SOURCES

THESE SOURCES STRENGTHENED
THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING AND
PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

THIS PROJECT WAS FURTHER
INFORMED BY:

- DOCUMENTARY THEORY (BILL NICHOLS)
- VISUAL METHODOLOGY (GILLIAN ROSE)
 - FEMINIST THEORY TEXTS
- PRIMARY RESEARCH DATA (29 SURVEY PARTICIPANTS)
 - REFLEXIVE PRACTICE AND PRODUCTION JOURNALS

HOW RESEARCH INFLUENCED MY WORK

MY RESEARCH SHAPED BOTH THE CREATIVE
AND TECHNICAL DECISIONS WITHIN MY
DOCUMENTARY.

MY PRIMARY RESEARCH, INCLUDING
INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY RESPONSES,
DIRECTLY INFLUENCED THE THEMES EXPLORED,
ENSURING THE DOCUMENTARY REFLECTED
REAL EXPERIENCES RATHER THAN
ASSUMPTIONS.

RESEARCH ON EMBODIMENT INFLUENCED MY
USE OF SOUND, BREATH AND PREPARATION
SHOTS TO SHOW HEELS DANCE AS LIVED
EXPERIENCE.



MULVEY'S (1975) THEORY OF THE
MALE GAZE MADE ME MORE
AWARE OF HOW CAMERA
FRAMING CAN OBJECTIFY THE
FEMALE BODY. BECAUSE OF
THIS, I INTENTIONALLY USED
EYE-LEVEL SHOTS AND FULL-
BODY FRAMING TO SHOW
DANCERS AS POWERFUL AND IN
CONTROL.



POSTFEMINIST MEDIA THEORY
(GILL, 2007; MCROBBIE, 2009)
HELPED ME UNDERSTAND
HOW EMPOWERMENT AND
SEXUALISATION CAN EXIST AT
THE SAME TIME. THIS
INFLUENCED THE NARRATIVE
STRUCTURE, WHICH
EXPLORES BOTH CONFIDENCE
AND VULNERABILITY.

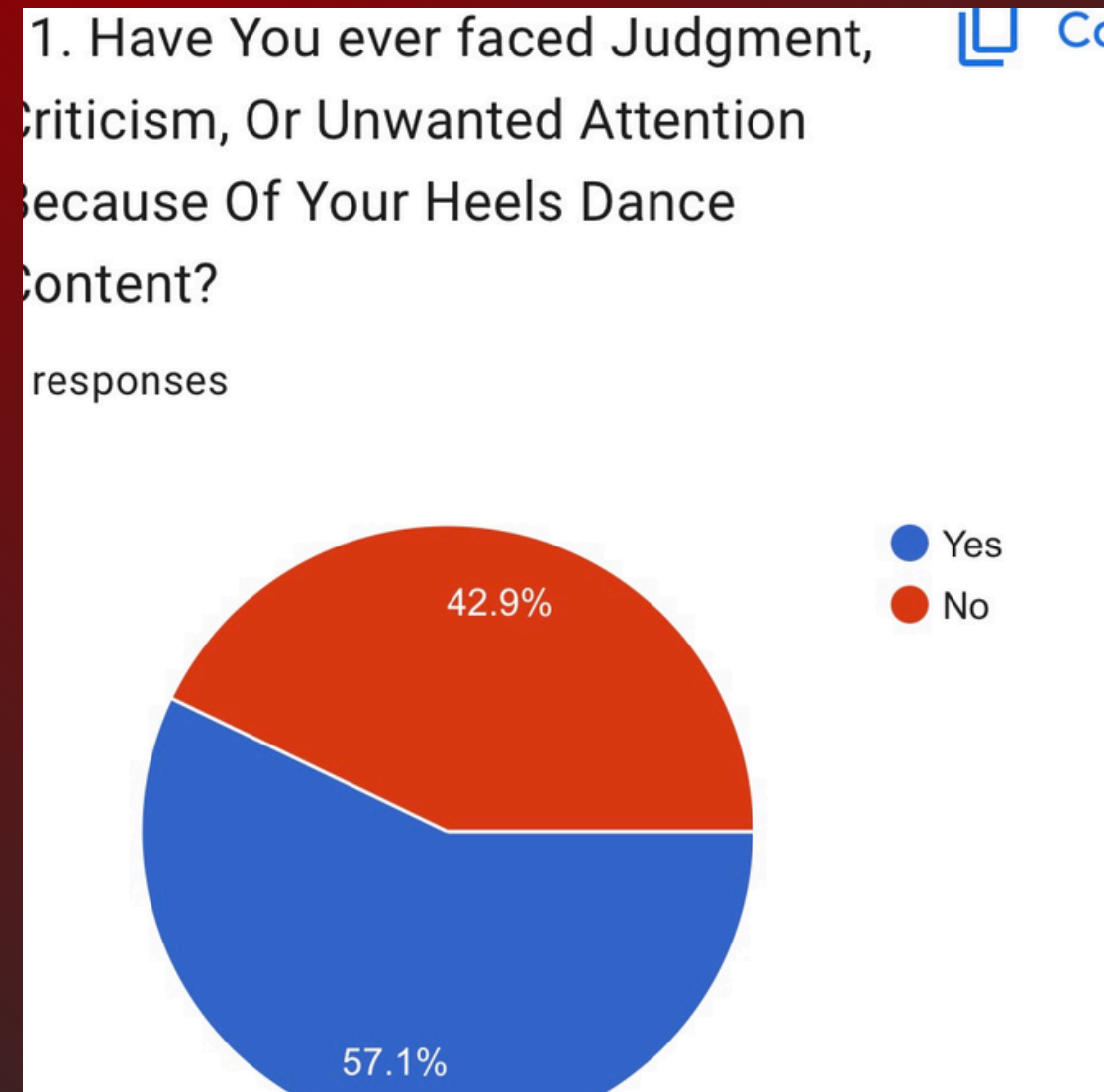
SURVEY FINDINGS

SURVEY CONDUCTED WITH 29
PARTICIPANTS

KEY FINDINGS:

- OVER 50% HAVE EXPERIENCED
SEXUALISATION ONLINE
- STRONG FEELINGS OF EMPOWERMENT AND CONFIDENCE
- WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT HEELS DANCE IS SEXUALISED
 - EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE OBJECTIFICATION
- AWARENESS OF AUDIENCE PERCEPTION AND VISIBILITY
 - LIMITED FORMAL KNOWLEDGE OF GAZE THEORY

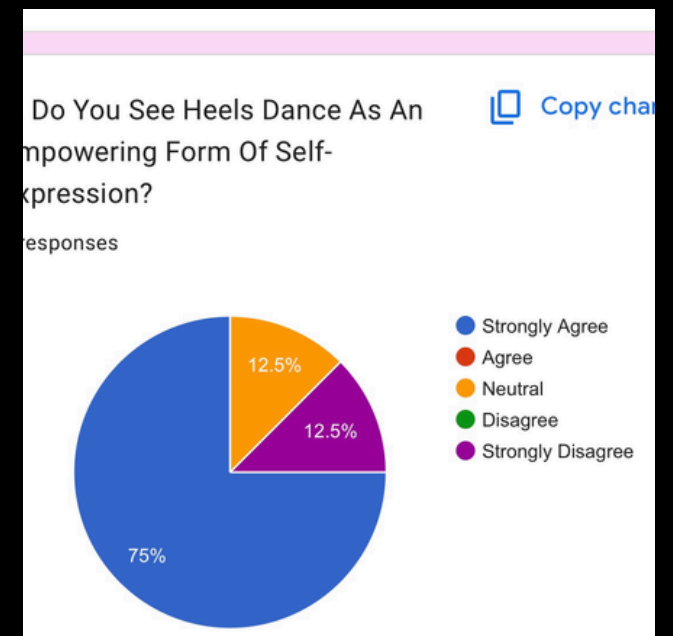
THESE FINDINGS DEMONSTRATE THE COEXISTENCE OF
EMPOWERMENT AND SEXUALISATION.



SURVEY FINDINGS

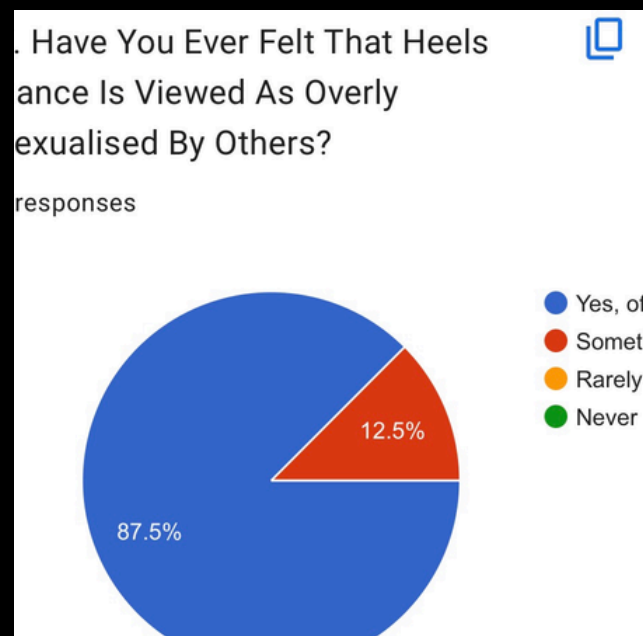
75%

REPORTED FEELING EMPOWERED THROUGH HEELS DANCE



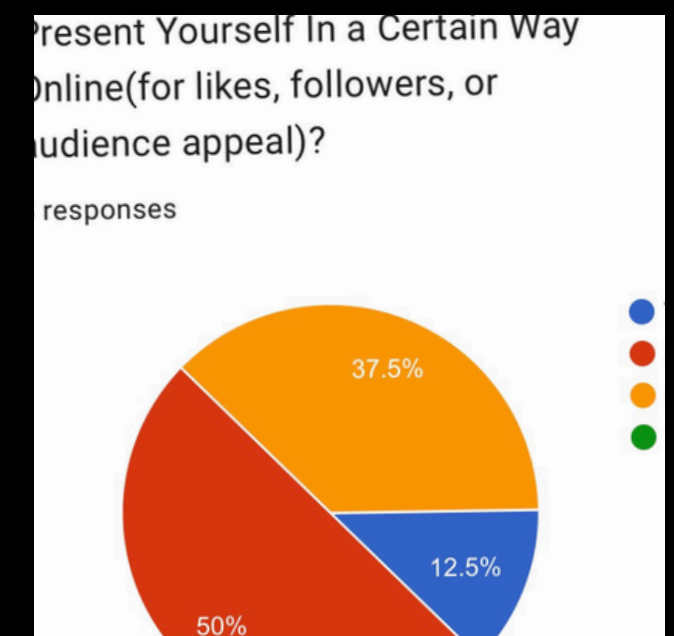
87.7%

BELIEVE HEELS DANCE IS OFTEN SEXUALISED



50%

FEEL PRESSURE TO PRESENT THEMSELVES IN A PARTICULAR WAY
FOR AUDIENCE APPEAL.



HOW THE SURVEY INFLUENCE MY DOCUMENTARY

SURVEY FINDINGS INFORMED BOTH THE NARRATIVE AND VISUAL DIRECTION OF THE GAZE.

- VALIDATED MY RESEARCH QUESTION AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES
- HIGHLIGHTED THE TENSION BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT AND SEXUALISATION
 - SHAPED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND THEMATIC FOCUS
- INFLUENCED THE REFLEXIVE APPROACH AND INCLUSION OF MY OWN PERSPECTIVE
 - REINFORCED THE FOCUS ON DIGITAL SPECTATORSHIP AND VISIBILITY
- STRENGTHENED THE DOCUMENTARY'S GROUNDING IN REAL LIVED EXPERIENCES

THE SURVEY ENSURED THE DOCUMENTARY WAS RESEARCH-INFORMED RATHER THAN PURELY PERSONAL.

WHAT YOU SAY VERBALLY WHEN PRESENTING THIS SLIDE CAN BE:

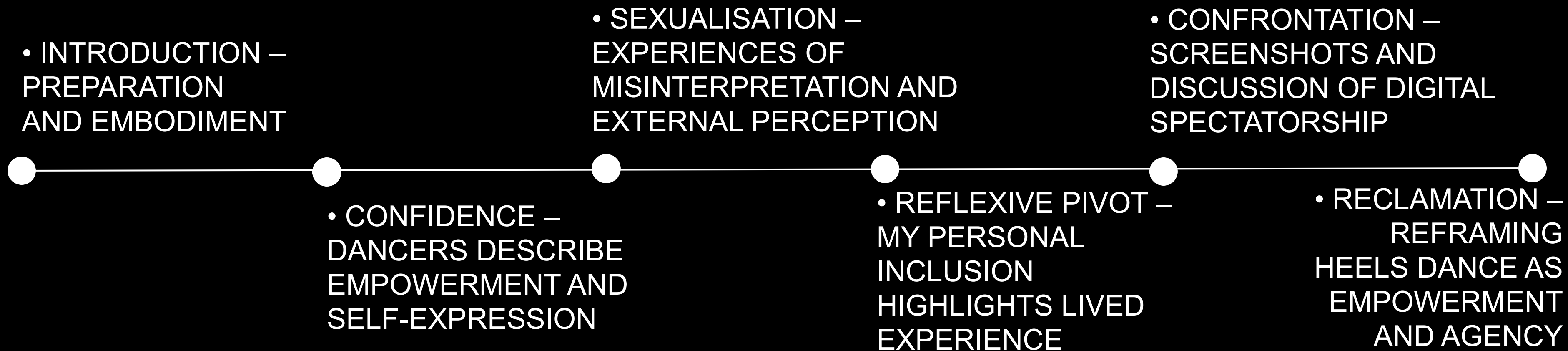
THE SURVEY WAS REALLY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT CONFIRMED THAT MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WASN'T ISOLATED. SEEING THAT MANY DANCERS FELT BOTH EMPOWERED AND SEXUALISED VALIDATED MY RESEARCH QUESTION. IT DIRECTLY INFLUENCED MY DECISION TO CENTRE REAL VOICES IN THE DOCUMENTARY AND INCLUDE THEMES OF VISIBILITY, SPECTATORSHIP, AND REFLEXIVITY.

INTERVIEWERS

NAME	KATIE MORRISSEY	CASPIAN RAI	HOLLY TUNE	LEWYS BROCK	ONYX UWANDULU	ELINOR MORGAN	ISOBEL MARTIN	ROBYN WELDON
AGE	21	24	25	20	25	22	23	21
Date Date of interview	06/02/26	06/02/26	05/01/26	04/02/26	05/02/26	05/02/26	04/02/26	05/02/26
How How long the interview took?	1 HOUR AND 30 MINS	1 HOUR AND 30 MINS	1 HOUR AND 17 MINS	44 MINS	1 HOUR AND 23 MINS	22 MINS	37 MINS	42 MINS
How long they've danced in heels for	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	5 YEARS+	3 YEARS+	16 YEARS	10 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS
Have Have they been sexualised while dancing in heels	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES

STORY OF THE DOCUMENTARY

THE GAZE FOLLOWS A STRUCTURED EMOTIONAL AND CONCEPTUAL PROGRESSION:



THE DOCUMENTARY MIRRORS THE NEGOTIATION BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT AND THE GAZE.

EDITING DECISIONS, MUSIC MEANING

- EDITING WAS USED TO REFLECT EMOTIONAL PROGRESSION AND NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT
- SLOWER PACING WAS USED DURING DISCUSSIONS OF SEXUALISATION TO ENCOURAGE REFLECTION
- FASTER PACING WAS USED DURING EMPOWERMENT SEQUENCES TO CONVEY CONFIDENCE AND ENERGY
 - REFLEXIVE EDITING INCLUDED MY OWN PRESENCE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AUTHORSHIP AND POSITIONALITY
- MUSIC WAS CAREFULLY SELECTED TO REPRESENT EMOTIONAL SHIFTS AND THEMATIC MEANING
 - SOUND DESIGN, INCLUDING AMPLIFIED HEEL SOUNDS AND BREATH, EMPHASISED EMBODIMENT

EDITING AND SOUND WERE USED TO REINFORCE THE THEMES OF EMPOWERMENT, SPECTATORSHIP AND AGENCY.

• MUSIC EXAMPLES:

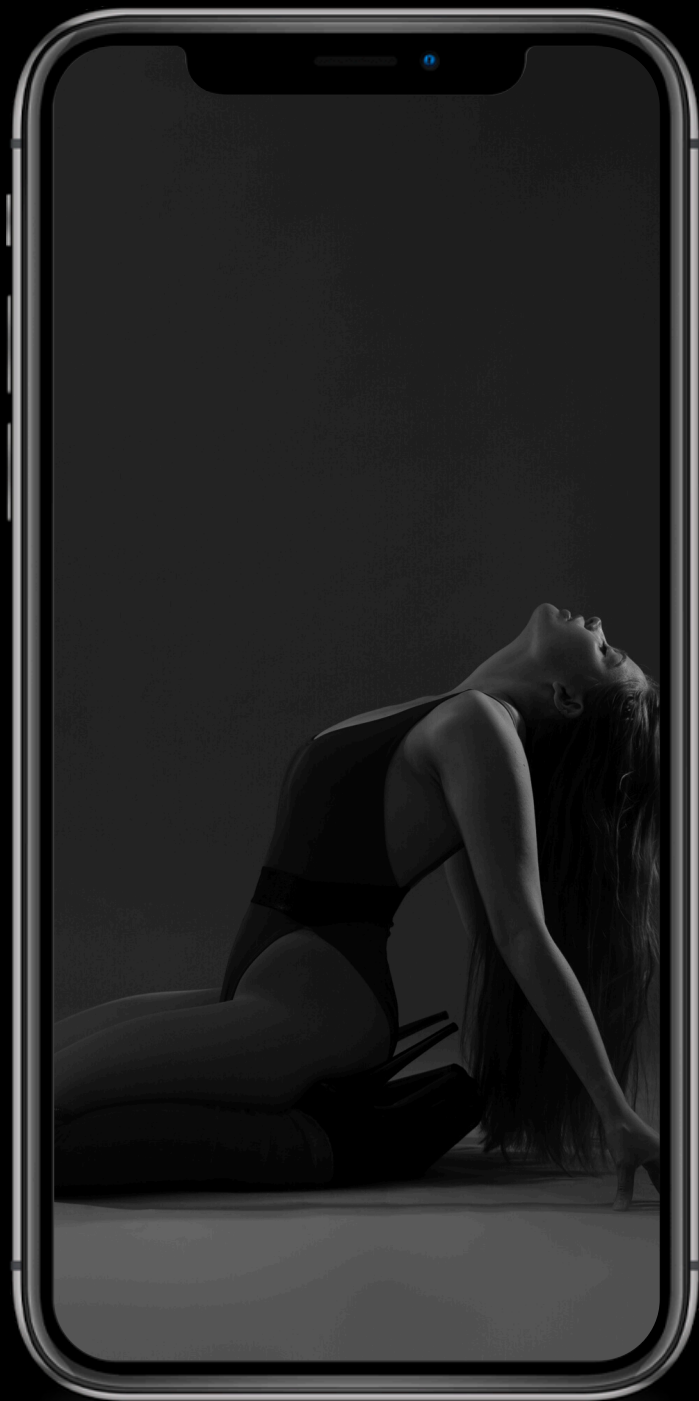
- DIRTY DIANA — REFLECTS EXTERNAL SEXUALISATION
- WHAT WAS I MADE FOR? — REPRESENTS VULNERABILITY
- HIGH HEELS — REINFORCES EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY

PRODUCTION DECISIONS

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS WAS SHAPED BY RESEARCH, ETHICS AND CREATIVE INTENTION.

- USED EYE-LEVEL CAMERA ANGLES TO AVOID OBJECTIFYING FRAMING
 - AVOIDED FRAGMENTED BODY SHOTS TO CHALLENGE THE MALE GAZE
- FILMED IN A STUDIO SETTING TO EMPHASISE AUTHENTICITY AND REALISM
 - USED NATURAL LIGHTING TO MAINTAIN A DOCUMENTARY AESTHETIC
- INCLUDED INTERVIEWS TO CENTRE DANCERS' VOICES
- ADOPTED A REFLEXIVE APPROACH BY INCLUDING MYSELF IN THE FILM

ALL PRODUCTION DECISIONS WERE GUIDED BY FEMINIST THEORY AND PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS.



HOW MY DOCUMENTARY CHALLENGES THE GAZE

MY DOCUMENTARY CHALLENGES THE GAZE BY REPOSITIONING HEELS DANCE AS EMPOWERMENT RATHER THAN OBJECTIFICATION.

- AVOIDED FRAGMENTED BODY SHOTS COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE MALE GAZE
- USED EYE-LEVEL CAMERA ANGLES TO CREATE EQUALITY BETWEEN SUBJECT AND VIEWER
- FOCUSED ON DANCERS' VOICES THROUGH INTERVIEWS TO PRIORITISE LIVED EXPERIENCE
- INCLUDED REFLEXIVE FOOTAGE OF MYSELF TO ACKNOWLEDGE AUTHORSHIP AND POSITIONALITY
 - USED SOUND, BREATH AND PREPARATION TO EMPHASISE EMBODIMENT OVER SPECTACLE
 - EXPOSED SEXUALISATION THROUGH REAL MESSAGES TO REVEAL THE REALITY OF DIGITAL SPECTATORSHIP

THIS SHIFTS HEELS DANCE FROM PASSIVE OBJECT TO ACTIVE, SELF-DEFINED SUBJECT.
THIS CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL SPECTATORSHIP BY PRESENTING DANCERS AS AGENTS RATHER THAN
OBJECTS OF VISUAL CONSUMPTION.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

CHALLENGE 1: BALANCING MY ROLE AS BOTH FILMMAKER AND HEELS DANCER

- IT WAS DIFFICULT TO REMAIN OBJECTIVE WHILE DOCUMENTING A COMMUNITY I AM PART OF
- SOLUTION: I USED REFLEXIVE PRACTICE AND INCLUDED MYSELF IN THE DOCUMENTARY TO BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT MY POSITION

CHALLENGE 2: REPRESENTING DANCERS ETHICALLY WITHOUT REINFORCING SEXUALISATION

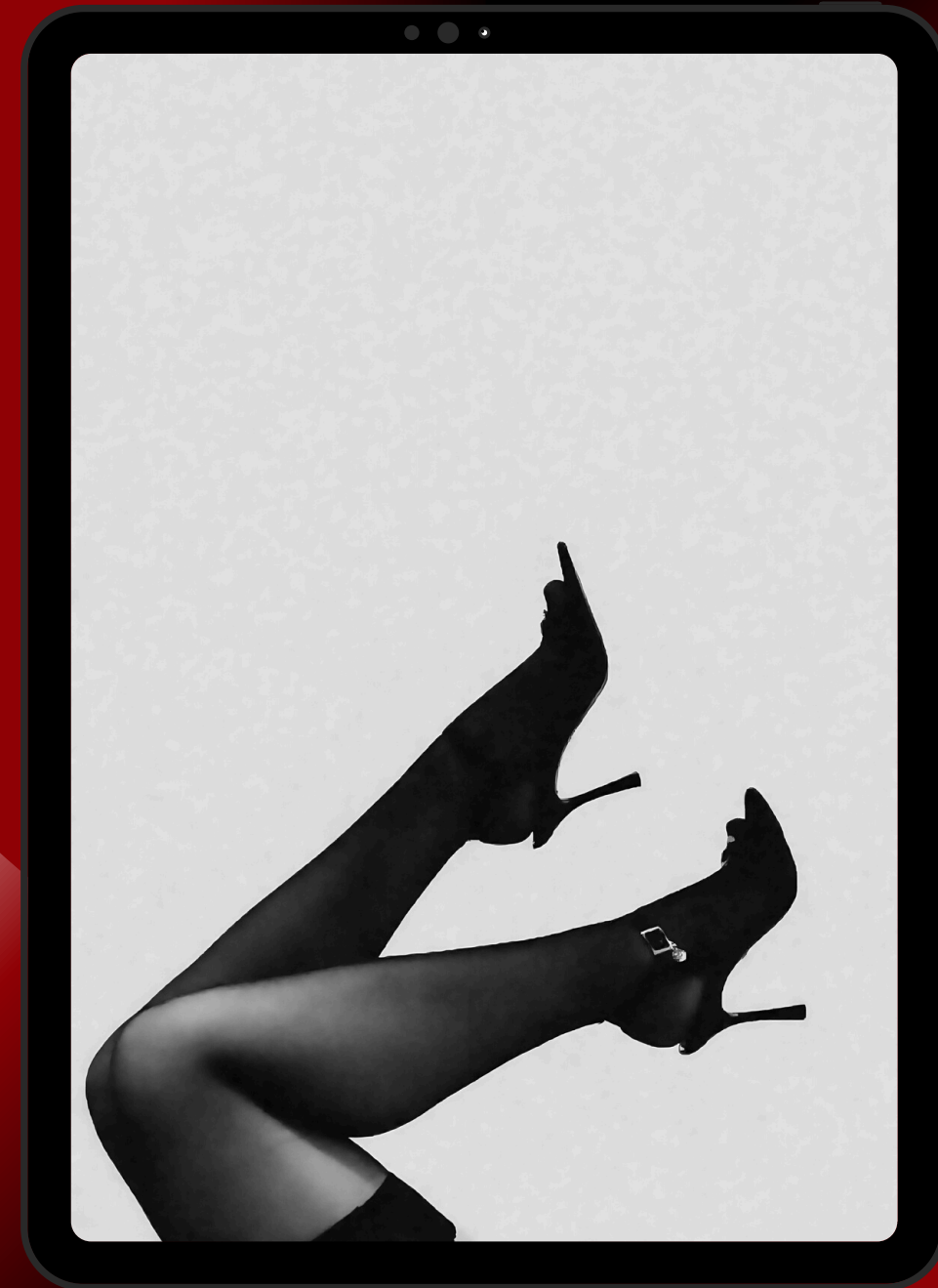
- RISK OF ACCIDENTALLY REPRODUCING THE GAZE THROUGH FILMING CHOICES
- SOLUTION: USED EYE-LEVEL FRAMING, FULL-BODY SHOTS AND PRIORITISED DANCERS' VOICES

CHALLENGE 3: TIME CONSTRAINTS DURING FILMING AND EDITING

- LIMITED TIME TO FILM, REVIEW AND REFINE FOOTAGE
- SOLUTION: FOCUSED ON NARRATIVE CLARITY AND PRIORITISED MEANINGFUL SCENES

CHALLENGE 4: SHARING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF SEXUALISATION

- INCLUDING REAL MESSAGES FELT VULNERABLE
- SOLUTION: INCLUDED THEM INTENTIONALLY TO EXPOSE AND CHALLENGE DIGITAL SPECTATORSHIP



WHAT I LEARNED

- EMPOWERMENT AND SEXUALISATION CAN EXIST AT THE SAME TIME

- THE GAZE IS COMPLEX AND EXISTS IN BOTH MEDIA AND DIGITAL CULTURE

- FILMMAKING IS NOT NEUTRAL — EVERY DECISION INFLUENCES MEANING

- REFLEXIVITY IS ESSENTIAL WHEN RESEARCHING SOMETHING PERSONAL

- SOUND, FRAMING AND EDITING CAN CHALLENGE OR REINFORCE THE GAZE

- MY OWN PERSPECTIVE IS PART OF THE RESEARCH, NOT SEPARATE FROM IT

- MY EXPERIENCE IS VALID AS BOTH RESEARCH AND CREATIVE PRACTICE

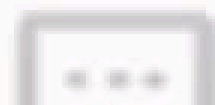
- EMPOWERMENT IS SOMETHING NEGOTIATED, NOT FIXED

- THE GAZE AFFECTS HOW DANCERS ARE SEEN AND HOW THEY SEE THEMSELVES

- VISUAL AND SOUND CHOICES CAN SHAPE AUDIENCE PERCEPTION

- REFLEXIVE FILMMAKING CREATES MORE HONEST AND MEANINGFUL WORK

- I DEVELOPED CONFIDENCE AS BOTH A FILMMAKER AND RESEARCHER



CONCLUSION

- THE GAZE EXPLORES THE TENSION BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT AND SEXUALISATION IN HEELS DANCE

- REFLEXIVITY AND INTENTIONAL VISUAL/SOUND CHOICES SHAPED THE NARRATIVE

- THE DOCUMENTARY CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL SPECTATORSHIP BY PRIORITISING DANCERS' VOICES AND EMBODIMENT

- RESEARCH, INCLUDING SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS, DIRECTLY INFORMED CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION DECISIONS

- THE PROJECT DEMONSTRATES THAT EMPOWERMENT EXISTS WITHIN VISIBILITY, NOT OUTSIDE IT

- THIS PROJECT STRENGTHENED MY UNDERSTANDING OF FILMMAKING, REFLEXIVITY, AND THE POLITICS OF LOOKING



THANK YOU!
ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

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