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A Woman's Place in Jazz in the 21st Century

Valerie T. Simuro

University of South Florida, vtsimuro@aol.com

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A Woman's Place in Jazz in the 21st Century

by

Valerie T. Simuro

A thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Master of Arts, in Liberal Arts, in Humanities Concentration
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Major Professor: Andrew Berish, Ph.D.
Brook Sadler, Ph.D.
Maria Cizmic, Ph.D.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Today, a multitude of women in Western society face embedded subconscious attitudes, which restrain them from achieving the career success experienced by men. These deep-seated attitudes lead women to confine themselves to a self-defined space determined by “internalized patriarchal standards.”¹ Some women do achieve success in spite of the challenges they face. One such success story is Esperanza Spalding. She is a young, African-American jazz musician, who plays an instrument that is uncommon for a woman in a male-dominated musical field. She is enormously talented and has received numerous awards. She epitomizes the progressive twenty-first-century woman who is often caught in a Double Bind:² be nice and kind like the Western female stereotype requires, or tough and decisive, as the leadership stereotype requires. The first traits equate to weakness and the last to “bitchiness.” This thesis explores a female jazz bassist’s place in jazz today, and the difficult path she must negotiate between feminist ideals and commercial success. This paper will explore how the current norms of gender and race impact female jazz musicians and how these performative issues overlap and intertwine forming a co-constitutive relationship within each individual. Additionally, this paper will illustrate that a

¹ Bartky, Sandra L. 1990. “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power.” In *Femininity and Domination: studies in the phenomenology of oppression*, 66-78. New York: Routledge. “Woman’s space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined. . . Women have internalized patriarchal standards . . . it gets incorporated into the structure of self.”

² The Double Bind is a situation that women often find themselves in having to perform in two contradictory ways, to enact two contradictory set of values or expectations. If you perform and enact one you are bound to lose half your audience, or be rejected by half your audience for not performing the other, so if you switch and perform the other, the same thing happens.

female bassist's "performance" of gender includes not only visual aspects of her appearance, but are also shaped by the music industry, which determines which signifiers of femininity are marketable. This work will show that femininity is further complicated by age and genre.

Esperanza Spalding is perfect to talk about because she is a female, black, jazz musician who is young, beautiful, and an instrumentalist who plays the upright double bass, a seemingly "masculine" instrument.³ She is the perfect example to explore the ways that jazz musicians and the larger culture understand musical expression and the genre in terms of femininity. Outside of the jazz community, Esperanza was a relative unknown until, at the age of 27, she beat out Justin Bieber and Drake to win the 2011 Grammy for Best New Artist. This was the first time a jazz musician won this award. Although her music was virtually unknown to the general public at the time of her win, Spalding had already released three solo albums and was highly regarded by both critics and her jazz peers.

She grew up with her older brother and mother, in a single-parent household in a gang-infested neighborhood of Portland, Oregon. Her mother was White and her father African-American. Her parents separated when she was an infant. She never knew her father. She dropped out of high school at sixteen and was homeschooled by her mother. She was a musical prodigy - at the age of four, she taught herself to play the violin. She was inspired to play a musical instrument while watching Yo-Yo Ma perform on *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*.⁴ Her mother fostered her musical interest and enrolled her in two community-based music programs.⁵

³ Ables, Harold F, and Susan Yank Porter. 1978. "The Sex-Stereotyping of Musical Instruments." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 26, no. 2 (Summer): 65-75.

⁴ Years later when she viewed a rerun of the program, Esperanza remembered a scene she witnessed on the same program - two characters, one dressed as a bass, and the other playing it.

⁵ At an early age, Esperanza became involved with the Culture Recreation Band, a community organization of jazz musicians who helped inner-city children, and Hazel DeLorenzo and Dorothy McCormick who ran the Chamber Music Society of Oregon. This society provided Esperanza with a violin and free lessons. With this organization she played school concerts for over ten years, reaching a concertmaster position at the age of 15

As a young child, she spent two summers with the Mel Brown Jazz Camp.⁶The tireless dedication expended by so many members of the Portland music community gave Esperanza the support and opportunity to foster her love of music into a successful career. Her mother was her greatest influence. She provided support, created opportunities, and encouraged any random endeavor, helping Esperanza to find resources wherever possible. Spalding started playing the stand-up double bass in high school and began performing with a group called Noise for Pretend. She earned her GED degree and attended Portland State University before winning a scholarship to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. She graduated in less than three years and at the age of twenty became one of their youngest faculty instructors.

Although in today's society, Spalding has the freedom to develop academically and financially, she is still subjected to the norms and ideology of the patriarchal system. For the most part, women do not have to conform to the stereotypical submissive housewife,⁷ but are expected to maintain physical signifiers in accordance with an entrenched 'white' feminine ideal. Today that ideal is - young, light-skinned, slim, big-breasted, non-aggressive, well-groomed, and well-dressed.⁸ This male ideal of femininity is reinforced by the music industry, mass media, and in some cases, women themselves. To complicate matters, this feminine ideal changes over time, so women are always trying to attain an ideal that is elusive.

Frequently, a female instrumentalist who plays the upright bass, a seemingly masculine instrument, is perceived as a novelty, but Spalding transcends that patriarchal ideology. She successfully negotiates the chauvinistic world of jazz. This paper will explore Spalding's

⁶ Mel Brown Jazz Camp was on the Western Oregon University's campus. The faculty was made up of Oregon's finest Jazz Musicians who helped campers develop their skills as musicians.

⁷ Beauvoir, Simone de. 1953. *The Second Sex*, New York, Knopf.

⁸ Saltzberg, Elayne A., and Joan C. Chrisler. 1997. "Beauty Is the Beast: Psychological Effects of the Pursuit of the Perfect Female Body." In *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*, edited by Estelle Disch, 136. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

performance through the lens of feminine consciousness as described by Sandra Bartky, and discuss the social construction of a female jazz instrumentalist's identity based on Judith Butler's theory of performativity. It will include a discussion of race, age, and genre as it pertains to women's voices and bodies. Although this paper will discuss one individual and draw general conclusions regarding race and gender, it does not discount the diversity of every individual. Additionally, while this paper classifies a musician as female or male, which implies that they are each a separate and distinct category, it does not discount that each gender may possess qualities of the other. This paper will identify similar characteristics of female jazz musicians and their artistic embodiment, but the focus will be on Esperanza Spalding.

Feminist often speak of social change and equality but often focus on increasing rights for women. While this strategy is important, until women become more self-aware of the internalized attitudes and subliminal messages that they are subjected to daily, little will change. Although it seems self-evident, often it is not until reminded of how attitudes are influenced from birth does emotional recognition occur. Although one may ask why is jazz and a woman's place in jazz in the 21st century important to talk about, consider that jazz is historically an important part of Western culture and in particular an important part of African-American history. Jazz is a musical tradition where individuals construct and display a definitive identity based on stereotypical race and gender attitudes. The best way to deal with sexism and inequity is to shed light on the topic.

Through her media image, Spalding constructs a particular feminine space, an inspirational exemplar for young female musicians. She provides an individualized route into the world of femininity. What are the features of femininity she chooses to depict? In the climate of "feminism" today, what obstacles does she negotiate? What is the significance of her representations and negotiations? What does it teach us about what an African-American female performer has to do to be successful in the twenty-first century?

CHAPTER TWO

ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE THAT SIGNIFY SELF-IDENTITY AND MEANING

*... it's just the luck of the stars. It's crazy shit, and I think about it a lot, and it hurts my heart, because it's stupid. It's fucking stupid. If my face looked like this granite tabletop, I would still write and sing and play the same way, and it would be fucking hard to get people to pay attention to me⁹.....***Spalding talking about her appearance**

Women in the West live under a system of patriarchal domination. Yet, they find imaginative ways to create feminine space while seeming to adhere to social norms. Susan Bordo in her book *Unbearable Weight*¹⁰ describes how women create a cultural text with their bodies by struggling both to embrace feminine ideals and simultaneously fight against them. This chapter explores the complex negotiations that Esperanza Spalding mediates between femininity and her professional career. This chapter will discuss her compromises in areas that do not undermine her profound accomplishments in a male-dominated musical genre. Her physical appearance can be read as a cultural text shaped by the politics of gender and race, reflecting the ever-changing structure and meaning of femininity. Definitions of beauty vary over time, vary in different cultures, and vary even in different groups within the same culture.

⁹ Frank, Alex. 2016. "Esperanza Spalding: Insubordinate by Nature." Interview by Alex Frank. *Pitchfork*, March 8, 2016. <http://pitchfork.com/features/interview/9830-esperanza-spalding-insubordinate-by-nature/>.

¹⁰ Bordo, Susan. 2003. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

One of the first impressions upon viewing Esperanza Spalding is her signature “afro” hairstyle. [See hyperlink. Figure 1. Esperanza Spalding’s “afro” hairstyles.] By choosing to sport a natural afro she is practicing a kind of “black femininity” which draws upon a tradition of protest.¹¹ This is one way that culture and politics meet in the jazz world. Whether that is her intention or not, her hairstyle provides one of the tools that some African-Americans use as strategic resistance to white standards of beauty. Intentional or not her hair is making a political statement. Popular resistant strategies were most visible during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The “afro” became a political symbol to express pride in one’s African-American heritage.¹²

The white standards of beauty consider “kinky” or “nappy” hair unattractive. When African-Americans realized that the key to upward mobility was to adapt to the white standards of beauty, they began to straighten and color their hair.¹³ Bell Hooks posits, “once again the fate of black folks rested with white power. If a black person wanted a job and found it easier to get it if he or she did not wear a natural hairstyle ... this was perceived by many to be a legitimate reason to change ... Consequently, black folks could now feel that the way they wore their hair was not political but simply a matter of choice.”¹⁴

Esperanza Spalding’s afro hairstyle can be viewed as a political statement of resistance to the white standard of beauty, an expression of pride in her African-American heritage, or a marketing strategy to give her a unique signature recognizable to her audience. It is most likely a combination of all three. This is what Spalding says about her afro:

¹¹ Edwards, Chime. 2015. “The Impact of the ‘Fro in the Civil Rights Movement.” *Essence*, February 10, 2015. <https://www.essence.com/2015/02/11/impact-fro-civil-rights-movement>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Wallace, Michele. 1979. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 172. New York: The Dial Press.

¹⁴ Hooks, Bell. 1995. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, 122. New York: H. Holt and Co

I never really think about it. I mean, it certainly makes me 'identifiable' when I show up with my Afro, but, to me, that's the most obvious way to wear my hair. That's how it grows out of my scalp. Having big natural hair makes me stand out to people at first take. I think of myself as an artist, as a musician, and I'm happy that my hair is just one more way that I can express myself ... Embracing and freely wearing my natural hair is like a form of self- exploration. I'm not White, I'm not European, and my hair is not straight. So I don't have any desire to make it straight-- it doesn't speak to who I am as a person. I am very mixed and I like that my hair is a reflection of that. My hair is an extension of me, and that's how it should be.¹⁵

Spalding's hair expresses her mixed heritage.¹⁶ Years ago it was an Angela Davis-type¹⁷ political statement. [See hyperlink. Figure 2. Angela Davis.] Today it is an expression of who Spalding is. "I am mixed race and I am beautiful. Accept me as I am."¹⁸ It is an expression of a black standard of beauty. It is an expression of black femininity.

The next most notable characteristics of Spalding's appearance are her youth and beauty. Esperanza Spalding is perceived by the media and the general public as a beautiful young woman with light-colored black skin and even features, which she enhances with feminine makeup and lip gloss. [See hyperlink. Figure 3. Esperanza Spalding's make-up.] "How we dress, the daily rituals we perform to beautify the body – makeup, exercise, diet, are all regulated by the norms of the culture in which we live."¹⁹ Despite the strides of the feminist movement, women in today's Western society face intense pressure to conform to certain standards of beauty which are continually reified by the media.

¹⁵ Curlynikki. 2012. "Esperanza Talks Natural Hair!" *Curlynikki.com*, February 15, 2012. <http://www.curlynikki.com/2010/07/celebrity-natural-hair-esperanza.html>.

¹⁶ Her father was African-American and her mother was white.

¹⁷ Political activist, Angela Davis lecturing at Unisa.

¹⁸ Curlynikki, *supra*, footnote 15.

¹⁹ Bordo, *supra*, footnote 10.

Both women and men are judged by their outward appearance. They must look and act a certain way to be considered acceptable and employable. Beautifying oneself is then useful in the area of socialization and marketing. Judith Butler theorizes that gender is performative and is "produced as a ritualized repetition of convention."²⁰

Hair styling, applying makeup, skin care are all beauty regimens that become a performance of gender. According to Julia Wood, "Women are still judged by their looks. They must be light-skinned, pretty, slim, and well-dressed to be desirable."²¹ This implies racial inequality, i.e. that one race is better than another. In the West, the media perpetuates this white standard of beauty. We are bombarded with messages that we can look better, younger, and be more successful if we dress a certain way or buy a certain product. Consequently, we determine that beauty is the most significant aspect of a woman, not her intelligence or talent. Saltzberg and Chrisler note that "beauty cannot be quantified or objectively measured; it is the result of the judgments of others."²² This judgment is shaped by mediated images that dictate how we can tone and firm our skin to make us look younger or facial or body surgeries to correct perceived imperfections. We are socially constructed through these mediated images and judgment of others to believe that the standards of beauty presented are what a woman is expected to measure up to, not her intelligence or talent but the outward signs of a mediated ideal.

Spalding conforms to the beauty ideology in this aspect of grooming. She is a dedicated professional performer. As a performer, she must make herself more appealing to her audience, and this justifies her behavior as a conscious career decision. Spalding adheres to the norms of

²⁰ Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, 40, no. 4 (December): 519-531.

²¹ Wood, Julia T. 1994. *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, 83. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

²² Saltzberg and Chrisler, *supra*, footnote 8, at 135.

Western society today. Her beauty practices reflect the “rules” of that society.²³ Despite the advances of the feminist movement, women in today’s society face intense pressure to conform to certain beauty ideals. It is unlikely that a woman living in contemporary Western society, especially one who is on display, could ignore her physical appearance. It would be impractical and stigmatizing.

Spalding is a dedicated professional. Her appearance is important to her livelihood. Feeling good about oneself instills self-confidence to engage with the audience. As a performer, difference is important. As a performer, there is a double-sided mirror - her subjective identity and her identity as a performer. To market an artist, one must promote difference. It is not like selling a manufactured product where uniformity is appreciated. To sell a musical artist or a musical genre an audience wants something unique.

The one area where Spalding resists the beauty ideology is with her hands. [See hyperlink. Figure 4. Esperanza Spalding’s hands.] Her nails are short, blunted, and unpainted. Her hands are callused from hours of practicing and playing the bass. There is this tension between the pursuit of beauty and feminist ideals. Sandra Barky expressed it aptly: “What to do when ... desire is ... at variance with [one’s] feminist principles?”²⁴ It seems evident that females in Western society have been socially constructed to see themselves through the male gaze. Some theorists say beautifying one’s self is empowering. It is about creating your own space. Others argue that it is a form of gender oppression. Is it really freedom versus oppression or just trading one form of oppression for another? Relinquishing our internal desire for the social pressure of a

²³ Bordo, Susan. 1989. “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault.” In *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, edited by Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, 13. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. “The body ... is the surface on which prevailing rules of a culture are written.”

²⁴ Bartky, Sandra L. 1990. “Feminine Masochism and the Politics of Personal Transformation.” *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 56. New York: Routledge. Bartky is talking about sexuality but the principle can easily be applied to the desire to beautify one’s self.

feminist ideal can be considered another form of oppression which encourages women to become more like men. On the one hand, it may sound like empowerment to encourage women to abandon their female practices but it does not seem like liberation to mimic traditional male characteristics. It seems to reinforce the notion that man is better than woman, so woman should aspire to become more like man. In Spalding's case, beautifying oneself can be considered a marketing strategy.

Spalding's good looks and youth make her marketable. In the beginning years of jazz, Ella Fitzgerald was unable to find work as a singer, "not because she lacked talent as a musician, but because her appearance did not meet the societal standard of marketability."²⁵ Bandleaders, Fletcher Henderson and Chick Webb were reluctant to hire her because she did not fit the image of female singers at the time – slim and sexy.²⁶ In order to sing onstage, women were expected to look a particular way.²⁷ Because women are judged by their physical attractiveness, they must protect themselves from the appearance of aging.

Mass media bombards women with anti-aging products and procedures to reduce the 'imperfections' of aging. The implication is that aging is an undesirable state of being. Age is a category that can marginalize and oppress women, which in turn, can affect their economic and social opportunities. Calasanti and Slevin in their book *Age Matters* discuss how "age structures the opportunities and constraints that women face at different stages in their life, privileging the young at the expense of the old."²⁸ Spalding recognizes that this may be an issue in the future. "I know I'm invisible because I'm just a shell that's seen as a pretty person that does something.

²⁵ David, Norman. 2014. *The Ella Fitzgerald Companion*, 71. Westport: Praeger.

²⁶ But see, Norman, *id.*, at 71. Chick Webb later changed his mind and hired her for his band.

²⁷ Marcic, Dorothy. 2002. *Respect: Women and Popular Music*, 122. New York: Texere.

²⁸ Calasanti, Toni M., and Kathleen F. Slevin. 2006. *Age Matters: Realigning Feminist Thinking*. New York: Routledge. See also, *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press.

That will change in like 20 years, because I'm a woman, so I'm milking it while I'm still considered young and pretty."²⁹ Women pursue different strategies to deal with the stultifying norms of our patriarchal society. Women are said to be empowered if they have a choice between wearing makeup or not, having anti-aging surgery or not. Is expanding woman's choices in these instances really a meaningful empowerment?

Some feminists theorize that fashion is a tool of empowerment for women, that it allows a woman to express herself through her choice of clothing. This may be true, but is it significant when it is still based on a binary system of what is appropriate for each gender. Spalding uses fashion as a tool to exert control over her own narrative to conform to the stereotype of femininity in a way that is meaningful to her. She said, "Since I was never concerned with dressing up and looking fabulous, when I realized it was going to be part of my life, I wanted to find a way to make it interesting to me."³⁰ As a performer, it is necessary to dress and look professional. When performing at the White House before President Barack Obama,³¹ Spalding wore a glittery evening dress, with a cut-out, alluding to cleavage, and high heel shoes - symbols conforming to a normal mode of dress for a female in the West on such an occasion.³² [See hyperlink. Figure 5. Esperanza Spalding at White House, January 8, 2016.] Although conforming to what is expected for a female, Spalding uses fashion to espouse her socially-conscious views on the environment.³³ She dresses in second-hand finds from vintage shops.

²⁹ Frank, *supra*, footnote 9.

³⁰ Givhan, Robin. 2015. "How Esperanza Spalding Uses Fashion to Turn Up the Volume on Her Music." *The Washington Post*, June 12, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/06/12/how-esperanza-spalding-uses-fashion-to-turn-up-the-volume-on-her-music/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d585ff362086.

³¹ Performance at the White House, January 8, 2016.

³² Although this is a normal standard for females, some males do dress in this attire but are considered to deviate from the norm.

³³ In Bo Gehring video portrait, Esperanza Spalding wore jewelry from Red Earth Trading Co., clothing designed by Tara St. James of Study, a New York-based company that uses sustainable materials, Tamara Horton of Studio Samuel, a designer who teaches women in undeveloped countries to sew, and shoes from *What's More Alive Than You*, an Italian company that makes heels out of old tables. The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery May 2015.

She patronizes designers that use sustainable materials. Clothing can play an unexpected role in how we communicate our viewpoints to the world. It can become a political act, open to individual interpretation or a message of protest. Some feminists believe that the cause of feminism benefits when fashion embraces the imagery of a strong woman. In today's society, it is debatable whether a woman really is empowered by her ability to self-express. The patriarchal point of view is so ingrained in a woman's subconscious, reinforced in the media and in marketing that women often dress with the visualization of the gaze of the 'Other,' which reinforces gendered significations.

Signifiers of femininity are not only characterized by physical attributes, but also by elements of sound, body movements, occupied space, and appurtenant objects that historically represent a masculine or feminine frame of reference. The next chapter discusses how Esperanza Spalding's music tends to resist society's views of gender roles.

CHAPTER THREE

ESPERANZA SPALDING'S MUSIC PERFORMANCE CHALLENGES SOCIETY'S VIEW OF GENDER ROLES

When asked do you feel like you are representing jazz to the nation, her reply was: *I shouldn't be. With all the motherfuckers who are still alive today who are the essence of that music, it's bullshit if I am representing jazz. But that's what popular culture will do for you—it will fucking change the narrative and tell you something is that is not.*³⁴.....**Esperanza Spalding**

One aspect of identity is gender which is expressed by signifiers which categorize one as man or woman. Beauty routines, body movements, facial expressions, gestures, and voice are all indicators of the gender role one plays in society. Judith Butler theorizes that gender identity is produced by “a stylized repetition of acts ... miming ... the dominant conventions of gender which makes the performance of gender seem inherent.”³⁵ Theatrical performance differs from Butler’s theory in at least one aspect, the gendered self has already been constituted. Performance than is more a creation of a persona. Spalding comments “I love the role of being [a] bass player, both for the energetic relationship to my fellow band members and for being a bass player for myself.”³⁶ Jazz musicians, in particular, construct a distinctive role or persona based on the conventions of the genre, the marketing strategies of the music industry, and the individual talents of the artist.

³⁴ Frank, *supra*, footnote 9,

³⁵ Butler, *supra*, footnote 20.

³⁶ UNESCO. 2014. “Interview with Jazz Artist Esperanza Spalding.” *UNESCO – Gender Equality and Culture Section*, April 30, 2014. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/gender-and-culture/gender-equality-and-culture/the-report/interview-series/esperanza-spalding/>

David Churchill Somervell describes musical performance as the performer conveying a personality designed to create an aural and visual impression on the audience.³⁷ Philip Auslander paraphrasing Simon Frith tells us that “performers have three persona – the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (the performer as social being, and the character (Frith’s song personality) ... All three layers may be active simultaneously.”³⁸ Personas are shaped not only by the conventions of the musical genre but are also influenced by the dominant gender ideologies. Spalding’s persona is not only created by her music and her performance but also by her marketing team – publicists, managers, agents etc., who create the publicity materials, set up interviews and press releases, and create the packaging of music videos. Spalding uses all of these available means to define and perform a persona, including movement, dress, makeup, facial expressions and gestures, and manipulation of her musical instrument.³⁹ Persona is important because it is the signified which connects performer to audience whether it is through live performance, videos, or marketing strategies.⁴⁰ It gives the audience a perception of Spalding as a person.

This Chapter examines the gestural and auditory characteristics of Spalding’s performance at the White House on January 8, 2016,⁴¹ and discusses the relationship to the audience and meaning. In her performance at the White House,⁴² Spalding walks to center stage,

³⁷ Somervell, David C. 1943. “The Visual Element in Music.” *Music & Letters*, 24, no. 1: 42-47. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/stable/728610>.

³⁸ Auslander, Philip. 2006. “Musical Persona: The Physical Performance of Popular Music.” In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, edited by Derek B. Scott, 271-272. Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group.

³⁹ *Id.*, at 275. “Jazz musicians. . .have very distinctive persona as instrumentalists and bandleaders, expressed not only in the way they play, but also in their appearance, the way they move, the way they address the audience and the way they deal with their fellow musicians.”

⁴⁰ *Id.*, at 279.

⁴¹ President Barack Obama invited Spalding to perform for the 50th Anniversary of the National Endowment of the Arts entitled the “Celebration of American Creativity 2016.”

⁴² YouTube. 2016. *Esperanza Spalding On the Sunny Side of the Street*. Published January 10, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQtXo4tiZxs>. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Gi2kCRAEeQ>.

the spotlight focuses on her, and the lights mute the background players. It follows her as she picks up her huge bass and positions it center stage. She bends slightly to speak into the microphone and directly addresses the audience in a warm tone of voice. The microphone amplifies her voice above all other sounds making her the central focus. It creates a moment of intimacy between Spalding and the audience.⁴³

Spalding, as band leader, occupies center stage. Standing center stage in the spotlight leading the band on an upright bass is a seemingly aggressive, masculine position. The relative position of a woman on stage in relation to the other performers is usually an indicator of the norms in the industry. Norms which developed through a patriarchal society and in a cultural field mostly comprised of men. Spalding challenges gender appropriate norms and expectations and embodies a strong, confident band leader. In patriarchal ideology, “women are thought to beautify the stage not the music itself.”⁴⁴

Spalding resists the patriarchal ideology by playing what society perceives as a ‘masculine’ instrument, the double bass – a non-traditional musical instrument for a woman. How she holds her instrument on stage is a meta-communicative identifier of a professional jazz bassist. It is her own personal body language that communicates information to the audience beyond the music that she is playing.⁴⁵ Spalding’s ‘stance’ communicates her confidence and leadership to the audience. She stands feet apart with the bass at an angle nestled in the space

⁴³ Tagg, Simon.1991. *Fernando the Flute: Analysis of Musical Meaning in an Abba Mega-Hit*, 60. Liverpool, England: Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool. “... the singer is ... the central ‘reference point’ of the piece but also that she has had her mouth placed nearer the listener’s ear, not only by the proximity to the ...mike, but also by the relative volume accorded.” Tagg was referring to actually recording the song mix but the same reasoning can be applied to performing before a live audience.

⁴⁴ Tucker, Sherrie. 2000. *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940s*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁴⁵ Verheyen, Carl. 2013. “The Art of Communicating Music with Body Language.” *GuitarPlayer*, March 12, 2013. <https://www.guitarplayer.com/miscellaneous/stance>. The father of American jazz drumming, Max Roach, giving advice to a young jazz musician. “[T]hink about your stance, and what you can do to communicate to that part of the audience that doesn’t know a thing about chords, scales, frets, or strings.”

between her legs leaning on her pelvic bone with her left arm encircling the neck of the instrument and her right arm enfolding the body of the instrument. It almost seems like an intimacy between instrument and player. When she begins to play her left hand circles the neck of her upright bass and her right hand plucks up and down the strings, her head thrown back eyes closed. She seems lost in the music. Yet, her stance, gestures and facial expressions are not provocative or overly sexual. Her movements seem a natural progression of her artistic talent.

Stance is a much more complex theory than the relationship of musician to instrument. Harris Berger theorizes “that there is a stance relationship between composer and the piece, the listener and the piece, indeed between every person in every role in the production or reception of any form of expressive culture.”⁴⁶ Berger’s theory when applied to Spalding’s performance of a Louis Armstrong jazz standard, “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” has a *performative stance*, i.e the performative tools of the genre she uses to approach the performance, an *interpretative stance*, how she chooses to conceptualize the preexisting composition, and an *audience stance*, the audience’s relationship to her performance. It is not just the technique, or the instrument, or the form that transmits meaning to the spectators but the gestalt of it all. Whether you are the performer or the listener, the meaning conveyed by the music and performance is shaped by one’s culture. As Berger explains, “[M]uch of a ... performer’s work comes in crafting and enacting stances that she anticipates will be heard by the listener, and much of the listener’s experience is oriented toward finding those stances in perception.”⁴⁷

Stance does not only represent a physical manifestation of identity but also identifies a particular attitude toward the status quo.⁴⁸ Spalding’s original composition *Black Gold* is an

⁴⁶ Harris, Berger M. 2009. *Stance: Ideas about Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture*, 8. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

⁴⁷ *Id.*, at 15.

⁴⁸ *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/thesaurus/stance>.

excellent example of a political statement based on her African-American heritage. It is important to mention because it plays a role in identifying the persona she chooses to reveal to her audience, and relates a social inequality that she wishes to address. Music plays a role in inspiring social change.⁴⁹

Black Gold, is an excellent example of her political statement.

[See the complete lyrics in Appendix B.]

*Hold your head as high as you can
High enough to see who you are, little man
Life sometimes is cold and cruel
Baby no one else will tell you so remember that*

*You are black gold, black gold
You are black gold*

The song was released in 2012 to coincide with Black History Month. To emphasize the purpose of her lyrics, Spalding wrote a commentary for her press release:

This song is singing to our African American heritage before slavery. Over the decades, so much of the strength in the African American community has seeded from resistance and endurance. I wanted to address the part of our heritage spanning back to pre-colonial Africa and the elements of Black pride that draw from our connection to our ancestors in their own land. I particularly wanted to create something that spoke to young boys.⁵⁰

Stance and stage presence can make a difference to how one is perceived on stage.

Spalding creates her own feminine space within a conventional male domain where men occupy the leadership position center stage and presuppose entitlement to certain jazz instruments. This

⁴⁹ Fieser, James, and Bradley Dowden. 1995. "Music and Justice." In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by James Fieser and Bradley Dowden. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/music-sj/>. "... the tradition of the blues is widely recognized as a distinctively African-American contribution to music, but is not always recognized for its role helping to shape the political consciousness of African-American communities emerging from Reconstruction in the nineteenth century and migrating out of the American South in the twentieth century. The same is true of the interplay between free jazz of the 1960s and the black-nationalist movement it helped to nurture."

⁵⁰ Jarenwattananon, Patrick. 2012. "New Esperanza Spalding Song in Time for Black History Month." *NPR Jazz*, February 2, 2012. <https://www.npr.org/sections/ablogsupreme/2012/02/02/146287135/new-esperanza-spalding-song-in-time-for-black-history-month>.

could be just her performance of a “musical persona” but it is just as likely her love of the music and her natural ability. Standing and supporting the double bass for hours on stage requires physical and muscular endurance. Her smaller stature on so large an instrument could be awkward but she handles the instrument with an assuredness that belies any difficulty. Her stage presence is a graceful-looking integration of body/instrument coordination and playing style which engages the audience. She portrays coolness, strength, competence, and confidence without a display of arrogance. What does this tell us about Spalding’s embodiment of a jazz musician?

Spalding displays qualities of leadership, strength, and self-confidence without alienating the other musicians or audience members. The qualities associated with a successful career as a jazz musician are said to be masculine - aggressiveness, self-confidence, and competitiveness on the bandstand, i.e. “displaying one’s chops.” Fifty years ago a woman jazz musician was penalized for “displaying one’s chops” with the loss of respectability, ridicule, and oftentimes ostracism. Today women receive accolades for their spectacular performance on stage. They can make their own decisions about a career path but are still subject to the norms of the patriarchal system. Spalding has received numerous awards for her performance and her music.⁵¹ This is an indication of her acceptance and recognition as a jazz musician by her peers and society.

It was Spalding’s choice to perform a Louis Armstrong jazz standard “On the Sunny Side of the Street.” This seems appropriate because it portrays an optimistic personality to the audience. Her voice is soft and intimate as she narrates an introduction to the song which seems

⁵¹ Including, but not limited to: 2011 Grammy Award for Best New Artist, 2011 Boston Music Awards for Jazz Artist of the Year, 2012 Smithsonian Magazine’s American Ingenuity Award, 2012 Soul Train Music Award for Best Contemporary Jazz Artist, 2013 Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album, 2013 Grammy Awards for Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist, 2014 Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Accompanying Vocalist.

to mesmerize the audience. When she begins to sing in a melodic, higher-pitched tone, the timbre of her voice glides from note to note displaying her virtuosity and versatility. Spalding displays extraordinary poise and strength, as she confidently engages in stage banter with the audience, in the presence of the President of the United States. She creates her own feminine space within the perceived masculine realm without the negative effects of the ‘Double Bind.’

Two jazz legendary vocalists who performed the jazz standard “On the Sunny Side of the Street” were Ella Fitzgerald⁵² and Billie Holiday.⁵³ There is a noticeable difference between Esperanza Spalding’s rendition of this jazz classic and that of Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. This is not meant to denigrate either of these amazing performers. This is just to emphasize Spalding’s unique musical ability. Spalding’s performance has a more upbeat tempo and encourages a brighter outlook on life. She has this rare ability to transmit to the audience this energy and uplifting experience. It is a powerful motivator to attract and transfix an audience. This is her “X” factor. This adds another dimension to her performance which is unique in that she plays the double bass and sings at the same time – a musical feat that is very uncommon in a male or female.

Spalding’s voice is a performance of her gendered body.⁵⁴ Often the characteristics of the voice identifies the person as male or female.⁵⁵ Although rooted in biological differences, “gendered constructions of the human voice vary ... in ways that are consistent with the

⁵² YouTube. 2009. Ella Fitzgerald performing “On the Sunny Side of the Street.” *The JazzStreet*, November 17, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJW3fVpgAfw>.

⁵³ YouTube. 2011. Billie Holiday performing “On the Sunny Side of the Street.” *Mago IXI*, December 20, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjf20ntglMg>.

⁵⁴ Karpf, Anne. 2006. *The Human Voice: How this Extraordinary Instrument Reveals Essential Clues About Who We Are*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

⁵⁵ Green, Lucy. 1997. *Music, Gender, Education*. London: Cambridge University Press.

performative aspects of gender, and voice pitch is both highly variable and subject to cultural/historical framing and self-fashioning.”⁵⁶ Spalding’s embodiment of a jazz singer in display. She becomes an object of the audience’s gaze. Historically the public display of the female body has been associated with sexual availability. In this way, voice and sex construct inherent associations which have gendered meanings. “The sound of a singing voice, including the tessitura, the pronunciation of vowels and consonants, the technique of breathing, the use of the throat to affect tone-color, the use of diaphragmatic support, the level of vocal flexibility and control over dynamics, rhythm, intonation, phrasing: all these factors ... make up a vocal musical performance ... have meaning with reference to the norms [of society.] ... As such the voice carries and participates in the construction of inherent meanings. . The symbolic resonance of the singing woman is inescapably gendered, and this gendered quality is affirmative of patriarchal definitions of femininity: femininity as embodied and alluring, in control of and yet subject to the vicissitudes of the body.”⁵⁷ Spalding’s vocal performance is an affirmation of her femininity but challenges the norms of the jazz subculture. She occupies center stage, in a leadership role, exhibits physical strength, and endurance, and yet is sexually attractive. Her voice establishes her control over the audience and also represents a position of feminine strength. Karpf reasons that “singers cannot but help invoke some level of sexual display, which becomes a part of the delineated meaning of the music that they sing.”⁵⁸

There is a complicated relationship among gender, voice and body. Voice is produced by sound vibrations from the body. The body in turn responds to socially constructed norms.

“Gender and history impact how we read the tone, velocity and pitch of the voice, but they also

⁵⁶ Karpf, *supra*, footnote 54.

⁵⁷ Green, *supra*, footnote 55 at 30.

⁵⁸ Karpf, *supra*, footnote 54.

shape parameters of where and when particular voices are invited to speak or expected to remain silent. And here ... we encounter the ways gender hierarchy is expressed and constructed in the acoustic/vocal arena, as well as racial categorization.” The female voice “has been a site of woman’s silencing ... as well as an instrument of empowerment.”⁵⁹

Another aspect of Esperanza Spalding as a jazz musician is her ability to transition from a communal performance to improvisation which is perceived as a masculine skill in jazz culture.⁶⁰ Improvisation is often thought of as a competitive endeavor but Spalding in her performance at the White House displays an openness and a willingness to respond in a cooperative manner. Ingrid Monson describes how this rhythmic interaction can “be seen as negotiations or struggles for control of musical space. One player’s interjection ... might be experienced by another as an interruption or a challenge.”⁶¹ In a segment of the 2016 White House presentation, Crispin Cioe performs a solo on the saxophone and Spalding responds with a solo on the bass. It is not an aggressive and competitive exercise but one in which Spalding displays her individual creative talents to respond to the “musical conversation.”⁶² Spalding exhibits courage and a willingness to take a risk which are perceived historically as masculine traits. Spalding has stated that she is not fearless but she does not let fear of making a mistake prevent her from performing improvisation:

⁵⁹ Dunn, Leslie C., and Nancy A. Jones. 1994. *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁰ Rustin, Nichole T, and Sherrie Tucker. 2008. *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, 21. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. “Jazz origins are rooted in singing – blues, work songs, and spirituals – and yet singing has always been viewed in jazz historiography as subordinate to the ‘higher’ art of instrumental music, a predominately male domain.”

⁶¹ Monson, Ingrid T. 1996. *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, 80. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶² *Id.*, at 85. The use of language metaphors to discuss jazz improvisation is similar to Ferdinand de Saussure’s use of *langue* and *parole* to distinguish generally between language as a system and language as it is performed. “When musicians speak of the ‘jazz language,’ they are talking about a musical and aesthetic system that contrasts with others – a usage comparable to *langue*. When they refer to playing music as ‘talking,’ they emphasize communication through the act of performing music – a usage akin to *parole*.”

*When a woman musician can really play, people are, like, 'Man, she's a monster, she sounds like a dude!' Something is wrong in the mind right there. Because actually that quality of power and strength and quickness—and a wittiness that's necessary—that's not a masculine trait. It's just that it's such a boys' club that when a woman comes in and exhibits those qualities it's automatically associated with her having more testosterone.*⁶³

“When [women] participate in a jazz environment, they are expected to reproduce dominant styles of play. However, when they do embody these dominant styles they are then discursively positioned as ‘men’ and not women.”⁶⁴ If you think about it, that is not surprising when you consider that historically, jazz is a male-dominated cultural form which thrives on apprenticeship. Women participated in jazz but only within culturally imposed limitations. To understand Spalding’s experience as a woman in the jazz culture, we need to be mindful that her training as a jazz musician is more than formal training. Spalding’s jazz persona and everyday identity is shaped by her interaction with mentors and other jazz musicians. As a very young girl, Spalding credits Thara Memory, Ken Baldwin, Bruce Gertz, John Lockwood, Herman Hampton, and Pat Metheny, among others, as her mentors. She developed as a jazz musician through on-the-job training, learning from legendary jazz players, such as, Jack DeJohnette, Herbie Hancock, Papa Joe, Ron Steen, Gary Burton, Ken Baldwin, Prince, Joe Lovano, Terri Lynn Carrington, Patti Austin, and Wayne Shorter, to name a few. This had an effect on shaping her musical identity. Her on-the-job training was predominantly with male mentors and musicians. Since the jazz field has been dominated by males, men are predominately the role models to emulate.⁶⁵ Spalding suggests that her improvisation skills were gleaned from studying

⁶³ Colapinto, John. 2010. “Esperanza Spalding’s Music”. *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2010. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/03/15/new-note>.

⁶⁴ Caudwell, Jayne. 2012. “Jazzwomen: Music, Sound, Gender, and Sexuality.” *Annals of Leisure Research*, 15, no. 4: 401. <https://doi:10.1080/11745398.2012.744275>.

⁶⁵ Spalding has collaborated with female jazz greats, such as Patti Austin and Terri Lyne Carrington.

the jazz greats.⁶⁶ Her improvisation style is reminiscent of a renowned jazz musician that she admires, Ron Carter – the facial expressions, and the slight pauses between musical phrases, the walking bass line.⁶⁷ Spalding says that Wayne Shorter is an influence on her music performance.⁶⁸ “I’ve been spending a lot of time with Wayne Shorter over the past few years, and I see him as my mentor--my guru, so to speak, as a creator. He taught me a lot about the benefits of approaching communication, performance, composition, solos, melodies and lyrics without an agenda. You have to be willing to respond to completely unexpected stimulus. I’ve really taken this philosophy to heart.”⁶⁹

In jazz improvisation, musicians are spontaneously composing, and/or embellishing on composed melody and rhythms. In his book *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Paul Berliner describes the way musical phrases may be supported or even generated by physical motion.⁷⁰ According to this idea, the musical imagination of the jazz improviser becomes alive through the body’s interaction with the instrument and the interplay with other musicians. Spalding communicates, consciously and unconsciously, through body language. Her body movements are limited due to the size of the instrument she plays. When she improvises, she starts slowly, she closes her eyes and hunches over the instrument slightly, softly swaying to the

⁶⁶ Nadauld, Taylor, 2017. “Esperanza Spalding Discusses What It Means to be a Performer.” *Daily News*, February 27, 2017. http://dnews.com/local/esperanza-spalding-discusses-what-it-means-to-be-a-performer/article_73d3ca1d-f6d8-5270-a8da-2fe07dc721f5.html.

⁶⁷ See, *Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Billy Cobham – Walkin’* at stop 4:24-. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asJRAGUIZ1c>. Also, *Ron Carter Trio – Samba de Orpheus* at 1.41-. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFNHrzRzZE>.

⁶⁸ Bruner, Raisa. 2017. “Why Esperanza Spalding is the Most Audacious Innovator in Jazz.” *Time*. September 7, 2017. <http://time.com/4931070/esperanza-spalding-as-a-real-time-innovator/>.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ Berliner, Paul. 1994. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, 191. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

music. According to Philip Auslander, “[Facial] expressions are nonessential to the actual production of musical sound but serve as coded displays that provide the audience with external evidence of the musician’s ostensible internal state while playing.”⁷¹ Music is an embodied experience incorporating mind, body, and social environment to convey meaning. In improvisation, performers gesture in ways that respond to the music in the moment that it is being created. Michael Titlestad theorizes that viewing performing bodies can have specific kinds of meanings in jazz: “The audience will use every device to read the *becoming* work, including locating the music in the body (position, breath, gesture, expression, fingerings) of the musician. The body becomes, for the audience, a visual choreography of jazz.”⁷² Spalding’s improvisation style, body movement, gesture, facial expression, and interpretation is enlivening and original. She uses the rules of her craft but she creates her own unique musical interpretation in the moment. Some jazz musicians are technically competent but you can feel that they are performing the musical notes by rote. Spalding’s genius is in the way she uses the tools of the jazz genre to tell her own story every time she performs a solo, not regurgitating a memorized version of someone else’s thoughts. A ‘Female’ Genius!

In jazz, “genius” remains a description reserved for men. There are remarkable women who have gained recognition in jazz but never recognized as a creative genius. Farah Jasmine Griffin writes: “Billie Holiday was a musical genius... Since the earliest days of our nation, black women were thought to be incapable of possessing genius ... All persons of African

⁷¹ Godoy, Rolf, and Marc Leman. 2010. *Musical Gestures: Sound, Movement, and Meaning*. London: Routledge.

⁷² Titlestad, Michael. 2000. “Jazz Bodies: In Process, on Trial and Instrumental.” *Journal of Literary Studies/Tydskrif Vir Literatuurwetenskap* 16, no. 2, (June): 6-7. *MLA International Bibliography*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 22, 2018).

descent were thought to be unfit for advanced intellectual endeavor. Black women in particular were body, feeling, emotion and sexuality.”⁷³ And Judith Tick, writes, “Although women were encouraged to study and perform music, the language of creative musical achievement was patriarchal.”⁷⁴ This attitude insinuates that men are better than women and tends to influence a woman’s life path.”⁷⁵

Andrei Cimpian’s study of young children between the age of six and seven discovered that they are influenced by gender stereotypes that exist in society today, and that it has a deleterious effect on girls’ future plans. The author concluded, that “women are underrepresented in fields whose members cherish brilliance (such as physics and philosophy) ... because society’s gender stereotypes harbored from a young age are [likely to] discourage women’s pursuit of many prestigious careers ... [M]any children assimilate the idea that brilliance is a male quality ... This stereotype begins to shape children's interests as soon as it is acquired and is thus likely to narrow the range of careers they will one day contemplate.”⁷⁶ This attitude implants at a very young age, the negative mindset that a woman is not as intelligent as a man. It tends to erode self-confidence and mentally limit life choices.

Spalding’s project entitled *Exposure* dissipates the notion that a female cannot be a creative genius. *Exposure* was a 77-hour marathon recording session for the creation of her album also called “Exposure,” streaming live via Facebook. Spalding exposed her creative

⁷³ Griffin, Farah Jasmine. 2001. *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*, 14. New York: The Free Press.

⁷⁴ Tick, Judith. 1995. “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology.” In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, edited by Ruth Solie, 92. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

⁷⁵ Cimpian, Andrei, Lin Bian, and Sarah-Jane Leslie. 2017. “Gender Stereotypes about Intellectual Ability Emerge Early and Influence Children’s Interests.” *Science*, 355, no. 6323 (January 27, 2017): 389-391.

⁷⁶ *Id.*, at 388-389.

process and made visible to the world a young, black, woman genius at work. With this project, Spalding challenged the masculine connotation that only a man could be a genius. Although she worked with others to develop the album, Spalding was the sole creator of the musical and lyrical content. With this project, her musical accomplishments as a child prodigy, her work as an educator at the early age of twenty, her musical career as performer and composer, and the awards and accolades received from fellow jazz musicians, the media, her audiences, and the jazz community, establishes Spalding as a musical genius.

She also possesses a unique creative talent. She can sing and play the bass simultaneously. She sings in several languages and her music crosses genre boundaries. Spalding's music and performance style, her embodiment as a jazz musician, engages with the audience and encourages them to participate in various ways. The audience actively participates in Spalding's performance through bodily empathy with her movements. They may move their body or their head or their hands in time with the music, or mouth the words of the song along with the performer. In the video of Esperanza Spalding performing at the White House, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama can be seen moving their head to the rhythm of the music, and a female audience participant mouthing the words to the song along with Spalding.⁷⁷ "What appears to be behind audience involvement is a sense of empathy, a bond the viewer forms with performers ... This empathy relies on performers' use of gesture, embodied

⁷⁷ See, YouTube. 2016. *Esperanza Spalding On the Sunny Side of the Street*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQtXo4tiZxs>. At stop 1:36 can be seen female audience participant mouthing the words of the song along with Esperanza, and at stop 2:36-2:37 both President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama are moving their heads in rhythm to the music.

cognition, and motor resonance which allow viewers not only to empathize with musicians but also to feel “part of the music,” partaking of a shared experience.”⁷⁸ Recent theories of embodied cognition describe it as socially constructed interaction of body, mind, and social environment.⁷⁹ “We perceive others’ intentions and feelings through their bodily movement, and thus embodied interactions underpin our sense of self, our social relations and our capacity for inter-subjectivity and joint action.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Heile, Bjorn, Peter Elsdon, and Jenny Doctor. 2016. “Watching Jazz: Encounters with Jazz Performance on Screen.” *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 176. New York: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199347650.001.0001>.

⁷⁹ Johnson, Mark. 2007. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸⁰ Clayton, Martin, Byron Dueck, and Laura Leante. 2014. *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

As a child, Esperanza said she hated jazz. One day, she was given an album with Ella Fitzgerald and Louie Armstrong, performing *Porgy and Bess*. Nobody told her what it was, and she listened to it over and over again. So began her love affair with Jazz.⁸¹ The message is powerful: artistic success requires not only talent, dedication, and hard work but mentors, supporters, and opportunities. The fostering of Esperanza's talent will allow this young genius an opportunity to create a profound impact on the world.

People we write about do not develop in isolation. Throughout their lifetime they interact with innumerable people, places, and experiences, which help them form a self-identity. Spalding owes a lot to her supportive mother, her teachers, her mentors, and her marketing team. Years ago recognition was accomplished by having your songs played on the radio. Today it is television and social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. This is a different era. In today's technological age, finding a good management team is essential to achieving commercial success. Spalding states: "There aren't many female bassists with a unique look who lead their own bands. There are so many phenomenally creative musicians around the world that are capable of delivering cutting edge and high quality music, but nobody knows who they are because they aren't marketed properly. I've been very lucky to have met the right people who

⁸¹Audreality. 2011. "Esperanza Spalding: Wise Beyond Her Ears." February 25, 2011. <https://audreality.wordpress.com/2011/02/25/esperanza-spalding-wise-beyond-her-ears/>.

have helped propel my career in the right direction.”⁸² Dave Love, music producer, and former president of Heads Up International, Spalding’s label, was one of the people who discovered Spalding. Scott Southard, her booking agent, and Daniel Florestano, her manager convinced Love to help promote Spalding’s career. The music executives created a music video to publicize Spalding’s musical talent. In 2013, Spalding signed with WME, which is a merger of the William Morris Agency and Endeavor to become one of the biggest talent agency mergers in history of the leading entertainment and media companies. “In 2014, WME acquired IMG, the global leader in sports, events, media and fashion, forming WME/IMG.”⁸³ Spalding is managed and marketed by male agents. For the most part, the music industry itself is controlled by men⁸⁴ who in turn control the image that Spalding should portray. Spalding’s jazz identity and celebrity status is formed by her interaction with her marketing team, her agent, her manager, her record label, other jazz musicians, and influential people she has met along the way.

President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama took an interest in Esperanza Spalding. During his presidency, President Obama invited Spalding to perform at the White House three times. He selected her to perform a jazz number after his acceptance speech at the *Nobel Peace Prize* ceremony. This was the first time in history that jazz was played instead of classical music. The Obamas broadcast a concert on ABC for White House International Jazz Day 2016 and invited Esperanza Spalding among other jazz musicians. Spalding and Former President Barack Obama have similar upbringing. They both are talented, both come from the

⁸² Engel, Cliff. 2008. “Esperanza Spalding.” Interview by Cliff Engel. *Institute of Bass*, April 2008. http://www.cliffengel.com/interviews/esperanza_spalding/.

⁸³ Schneider, Marc. 2014. “Esperanza Spalding Signs with WME.” *Billboard*, August 14, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/business/6221421/esperanza-spalding-signs-with-wme>.

⁸⁴ McDonald, Heather. 2017. “The Big Three Record Labels.” *The Balance Careers*, October 23, 2017. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/big-three-record-labels-2460743>. Sony Music Entertainment – CEO Rob Stringer, Warner Music Group – CEO Stephen Forbes Cooper, and Universal Music Group – CEO Sir Lucian Grainge control over seventy-five percent of the music industry. Esperanza Spalding’s record label is Concord Records – CEO Glen Barros, Managing Director Scott Pascucci.

union of an interracial marriage, with a White mother, and African-American father, and both were raised by their mothers. It is possible that President Obama felt a kinship to Esperanza. Both President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama worked to improve the economic opportunities of African-American females during his presidency.⁸⁵ It is likely that the President helped Esperanza achieve celebrity status not only because she is phenomenal, but also because she is African-American. It is likely that the Presidential exposure and Esperanza's marketing team were instrumental in helping her attain celebrity status and win the Grammy for Best New Artist which launched her career. Spalding has commented, "I've never felt like [the record label] interfered with my mission. It's just, the motive of investing in a project is to earn a great return on your investment, so there are a lot of questions and conversations that revolve around, 'OK, how we are going to sell it? Like, what's the angle, what's the distribution?' Which are all fine questions if you're a business person, but if you're an artist and your mission is to tap into your voice and what it is that you've come here to share, I find that really debilitating."⁸⁶

It is true that women in today's Western society have the freedom to choose their own life path and have wedged the door open to what has been considered a man's domain in the jazz world. They have access to education and positive and supportive people to guide them. Sexism is lessening but not gone altogether. There still are pockets of unconscious bias by male jazz musicians, the music industry, and women themselves. Spalding, as part of the culture industry must adhere to certain standards of beauty, as part of the jazz community she must adhere to certain tools of the trade, yet try to sell herself as unique and special. As a woman in a man's

⁸⁵ President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama funded projects for the advancement of women of color. In 2014, the Council on Women and Girls (CWG) launched a program called "Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color." Provided funding for a \$100 million initiative by Prosperity Together to improve economic prosperity for women and girls of color, and \$75 million initiative by the Collaborative to Advance Equity through Research to support research efforts about women and girls of color.

⁸⁶ WBUR. "Esperanza Spalding Takes to Facebook Live to Record New Album Exposure." *WBUR 90.9*, September 11, 2017. <http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/09/11/esperanza-spalding-exposure>.

world, Spalding is doing some remarkable things in terms of a woman in a male-dominated field. Is she giving up too much? Are the compromises regressing the political goals of gender equality?

Our gender identities are so ingrained it is a challenge to change and redefine a woman's role in the White patriarchal culture. Caldwell has stated, "These stereotypes and the culture that sustains them exist to define the social position of black women as subordinate on the basis of gender to all men, regardless of color, and on the basis of race to all other women. These negative images also are indispensable to the maintenance of an interlocking system of oppression based on race and gender that operates to the detriment of all women and all blacks."⁸⁷

Female cultural role models evolve along with the development of a society and are the answer to many social and political changes. More and more women assume roles that were and still are perceived to be male-dominated. In carving out her career, Esperanza Spalding, has to deal not only with externally imposed conditions but also more subtle mindsets that she herself may have internalized. Although these unconscious attitudes may create a hindrance to success, Spalding hurdles this restrictive mentality seemingly effortlessly. She plays an instrument that is considered non-traditional for a female. Her musical expertise seems to transcend gender. She plays and vocalizes simultaneously which is a musical ability that not many jazz musicians, male or female possess. She conforms to the traditions of femininity in that she wears high heels, dresses, and uses makeup and this seems to reassure the audience that although she plays an

⁸⁷ Caldwell, Paulette M. 2000. "A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender." In *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 280. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

instrument that is associated with masculinity, she retains her femininity. As a performer she is not only judged on her talent but also on her appearance. She becomes an aural and visual attraction for the audience and the media.

“In a society that equates the body with self-worth, cultural meanings are attached to physical differences, so that the body provides a foundation for oppression based on gender, class, ethnicity, and age – all social characteristics that are deeply embodied ... Women learn to enact gender, social class, ethnicity, and age through the body ... They become aware of the rules governing such enactment as well as the consequences of defying them. While this process may not introduce the notion that such characteristics undermine social worth, it surely reinforces the idea ... Furthermore, women discover that the definition of physical perfection is ever-changing, so that they must be constantly vigilant in their self-examination, always searching for methods of correction.”⁸⁸ Women create pockets of resistance. Nevertheless, their actions do not undermine the oppressive power of beauty ideals. “The body might be a location of domination, but it is also a tool for resistance and agency in the construction and reconstruction of contemporary selfhood.”⁸⁹

Esperanza Spalding exhibits resistance to the White standard of beauty with her afro hairstyle. She portrays a Black beauty standard. As a performer with a public forum, her actions do re-position the marginalized feminine voice. As Spellers notes, "Silencing the stories of marginalized groups aids in the creation of a dominant discourse. This is quite a difficult position for all women and even more so for African-American women because African-American women have to challenge an entire race of people and system of thought ... No matter what a woman does or doesn't do with her hair-dyeing or not dyeing, curling or not curling, covering

⁸⁸ Gimlin, Debra L. 2002. *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture*. Berkley: University of California Press

⁸⁹ Id.

with a bandana or leaving uncovered - her hair will affect how others respond to her, and her power will increase or decrease accordingly."⁹⁰ As Hooks states, "Everyone must break through the wall of denial that would have us believe hatred of blackness emerges from troubled individual psyches and acknowledge that it is systematically taught through processes of socialization in white supremacist society."⁹¹ "The language, verbal and nonverbal, as well as the reification of white standards of beauty needs to be challenged and will continue to be challenged as women create their own standards of beauty."⁹²

Spalding resists the patriarchal ideology that woman should be seen but not heard. She occupies center stage, she takes a risk every time she improvises, and she does so gracefully and non-aggressively. She composes her own lyrics, some of which express her political views. Spalding, in a nuanced way, transcends the long-held assumption that jazz is a man's world and women should be seen but not heard. She has created her own feminine space which is recognized by her peers, the audience, and the media. She erodes the foundations of gender categories and shows that women can be creative geniuses. She portrays a strong, economically independent woman.

Today no one can ignore the contribution of jazz women. The once notoriously chauvinistic jazz world has admitted talented women musicians, but women still have not received full parity with men. Because of her talent, her mentors, and her management team, Spalding has attracted financial backers and earns her living by performing her music but that is not the case in most instances. It is true that in the West today opportunities have increased for

⁹⁰ Weitz, Rose. 2001. "Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation." *Gender & Society*, no. 5: 683. JSTOR Journals, EBSCOhost (accessed June 22, 2018),

⁹¹ Bell Hooks, *supra*, footnote 14, at 131.

⁹² Patton, Tracey Owens. 2006. "Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African-American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair." *NWSA Journal* 18, no. 2: 24-51.

women, but it is still a challenge to break into the man's club of jazz. In a recent television special, *Taking the Stage: African-American Music and Stories*,⁹³ which celebrated the opening of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History and Culture, there were numerous jazz performances by African-American female *singers*, but not one African- American female instrumentalist performed on stage or in the orchestra.

In today's society, women have a greater voice. Female jazz musicians from around the world founded the "We Have Voice" movement to publically focus on sexual violence and gender discrimination in music. Their platform states their commitment to creating a culture of equity in our professional world.⁹⁴ Esperanza Spalding subtle expressions of agency, her afro, appearance, clothes, hands, instrument, stance, leadership, music, voice, provides a role model. She makes concessions to femininity but offers resistance to gender roles, gender expectations, race roles, and race expectations. She presents a confident role model for young female instrumentalists who wish to challenge stereotypical norms of Western society. The term role model suggests an expectation of perfection. Esperanza Spalding is not perfect but she provides an individualized route to femininity and success. "Taboos tend to lose their authority and their seemingly magical powers when repeatedly and successfully defied."⁹⁵ It is specific women, like Ella Fitzgerald and Esperanza Spalding, who challenge socially constructed gender roles that serve as role models for future generations. Ella Fitzgerald was a pioneer during her generation.

⁹³ *Taking the Stage: African American Music and Stories That Changed America*. ABC Television Networks, January 12, 2017, 9 a.m. EST/ 8 p. m. CST.

⁹⁴ Leandre, Joelle. 2016. "Women Jazz Musicians are Using #MeToo and Taking a Stand against Sexism." *The Conversation*, January 12, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/women-jazz-musicians-are-using-metoo-and-taking-a-stand-against-sexism-89663>.

⁹⁵ Dahl, Linda. 1989. *Stormy Weather: the Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*, 44. New York, Limelight Editions.

Esperanza Spalding is carrying the torch during the twenty-first century. Just as Ella Fitzgerald before her, Esperanza is lighting the pathway for future generations of female jazz musicians.

The hope is that as more female jazz musicians challenge gender expectations and gain success, the gender norms will inevitably change. Spalding, by challenging gender norms is working to negate the perception that jazz is a man's world. Pierre Bourdieu posits that "gradual social change [occurs through] aggregate deviations individual agents produce as they learn, use, and bend the rules of a particular social universe."⁹⁶

It is true that jazz occupies a minor position in the music world. Yet incremental changes bring about a level of awareness. Awareness inspires real change. Spalding is creating little utopian spaces for women to unburden themselves of the pressure to be more like a man. Women jazz instrumentalists are aware that in the jazz world men question their competence. They are aware that they are perceived as a novelty. As Harro theorizes, "[O]ur socialization begins before we are born. We do not choose our gender, cultural group, sexual orientation, or ability. We are born into it. . . There is no reason for any of us to feel guilty or responsible for the world into which we are born. The characteristic of this system were built long before we existed, based upon history, habit, tradition, patterns of belief, prejudices, stereotypes, and myths."⁹⁷ To create social change one must become aware of the unconscious thought processes which reinforce the dominate norms that are already in place, then act to challenge them.⁹⁸ It takes courage to defy cultural norms and become a nonconformist. It takes courage to awaken from a complacent slumber and become aware. It takes even more courage to stay aware.

⁹⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Capital*. J. G. Richardson, 252. New York, Greenwood Press.

⁹⁷ Harro, *supra*, footnote 96 at 16-17

⁹⁸ *Id.*

As a jazz performer, Esperanza challenges patriarchy in the instrument she plays and in the leadership role she takes on stages, but is still constrained because her female appearance is still crucial to her identity as a performer. She is both reinforcing and challenging traditional representations of femininity. One gets to choose their own modes of self-expression. It seems that feminism is not that one has a choice but that one has the freedom to critically analyze choices before making a decision. Spalding appears polished and professional in a feminine way. She seems relatively unscathed by sexism and discrimination in comparison to many females of the past. She challenges socially constructed gender roles and presents a role model for potential female jazz musicians to follow.

Oftentimes women lack the self-confidence to defy societal norms and enter a field that is perceived to be male-dominated. The antidote is to have successful female role models to follow. Despite the challenges, Ella Fitzgerald and Esperanza Spalding serve as proper female role models, who breached the cultural stereotype in jazz and became successful jazz artists. They breached the male-dominated jazz world and established a female voice. Just as our feminist predecessors did in the past, Esperanza Spalding will influence the future. She illuminates the path for future female jazz musicians.

One particularly effective way to make changes in society is through the education process. At the age of twenty, Esperanza became one of the youngest instructors at Berklee College of Music. She is a four-time Grammy winner and recipient of many prestigious awards, such as the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Artist, and the Boston Music Award for Jazz Artist of the Year, to name only two. She created a music video entitled *We Are America* to protest the human rights violations at Guantanamo Bay prison. By invitation of then President Barack Obama she was the bassist at the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony and concert. She is a

vocalist, lyricist, humanitarian activist, and educator. In addition to her work as a performer, Esperanza Spalding has received an appointment as Professor of Practice at Harvard University, teaching courses in songwriting, arranging, improvisation, and performance. She is recognized nationally and internationally as an innovator in her field.⁹⁹ Her accomplishments as a vocalist, bassist, composer, band leader, and educator, work to dispel the myth that jazz is a man's world. Any system that identifies accomplishments based on gender, reinforces the idea that one gender is inferior to another. Esperanza is the harbinger of a brighter future where females will be considered jazz musicians instead of 'a female novelty.' Spalding as a role model is an agent of change, defining in her own way, a woman's place in jazz in the twenty-first century.

⁹⁹ Harvard University. 2017. "Esperanza Spalding Appointed to Harvard's Music Department Faculty." *Harvard University Department of Music*, July 24, 2017. <http://music.fas.harvard.edu/Esperanza%20Spalding.pdf>.

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APPENDIX A

HYPERLINKS TO PHOTOGRAPHS

- Photo 1. [Esperanza Spalding](#)
- Photo 2. [Esperanza Spalding and her mother](#)
- Photo 3. [Esperanza Spalding and Thara Memory](#)
- Photo 4. [Esperanza at the White House](#)
- Photo 5. [Esperanza Spalding, Jack DeJohnette, and Joe Lovano](#)
- Photo 6. [Esperanza Spalding and Dave Love](#)
- Photo 7. [Esperanza Spalding, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, and Milton Nascimento](#)
- Photo 8. [Esperanza Spalding and “Sweet Baby” Louis Pain \(King Louie\)](#)
- Photo 9. [Janice Scroggin](#)
- Photo 10. [Esperanza Spalding taking music lessons from Greg McKelvey in high school](#)

APPENDIX B

ORIGINAL SONG LYRICS TO *BLACK GOLD*

Hold your head as high as you can
High enough to see who you are, little man
Life sometimes is cold and cruel
Baby no one else will tell you so remember that

You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold

Now maybe no one else has told you so
But you're golden, baby
Black Gold with a diamond soul
Think of all the strength you have in you
From the blood you carry within you
Ancient men, powerful men
Built us a civilization

They'll be folks hell-bent on putting you down
Don't get burned
Not necessarily everyone will know your worth
Think of all the strength you have in you
From the blood you carry within you
Ancient men, powerful men
Built us a civilization
Think of all the strength you have in you
Powerful, powerful men
Built us a civilization

Hold your head as high as you can
High enough to see who you are, little man
Life sometimes is cold and cruel
Baby no one else will tell you so remember that

You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold

There'll be folks hell-bent on putting you down
Don't get burned
Not necessarily everyone will know your worth
Think of all the strength you have in you
From the blood you carry within you
Ancient men, powerful men
Built us a civilization
Think of all the strength you have in you
Powerful, powerful men
Built us a civilization

Hold your head as high as you can
High enough to see who you are, little man
Life sometimes is cold and cruel
Baby no one else will tell you so remember that

You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold

Think of all the strength you have in you
From the blood you carry within you
Ancient men, powerful men
Built us a civilization
All the strength
All the blood
That you carry
Ancient men
Powerful men
In you
Built us a civilization
Hold your head as high as you can
High enough to see who you are, little man
Life sometimes is cold and cruel
Baby no one else will tell you so remember that
You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold
You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold
You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold
You are Black Gold, Black Gold
You are Black Gold
Hold your head as high as you can
High enough to see who you are, little man
Life sometimes is cold and cruel
Baby no one else will tell you so remember that

You are Black Gold
You are Black Gold
You are
You are
You are
Hold your head up
Don't give up
You are Black Gold
You are
You are
Black Gold
Black Gold, Black Gold, Black Gold

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/black-gold-lyrics-esperanza-spalding.html>

APPENDIX C

CHRONOLOGY

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
1984	Esperanza Spalding was born in a gang-infested neighborhood of Portland, Oregon on October 18, 1984.
1988	At the age of 4, Spalding taught herself to play the violin. She was inspired to play a musical instrument while watching Yo-Yo Ma perform on <i>Mister Rogers Neighborhood</i> .
1989	Her mother enrolled her in two community organizations, the Culture Recreation Band and the Chamber Music Society of Oregon. The Culture Recreation Band was an organization of local jazz musicians who volunteered to help inner-city children. The Chamber Music Society provided Spalding a violin and free music lessons.
1998	Esperanza Spalding first discovered the bass in high school.
1999	At the age of 15, Spalding was concertmaster with the Chamber Music Society. Spalding played her first gig in a blues club.
2000	At the age of 16, Spalding received her GED. Soon thereafter, she entered the music program at Portland University on scholarship.
2002	Spalding won a scholarship to the prestigious Berklee College of Music. At the end of her first semester she toured with Patty Austin for the <i>Ella Fitzgerald Tribute</i> .
2005	Spalding won the Boston Jazz Society scholarship for outstanding musicianship. Spalding graduated from Berklee and became one of its youngest faculty instructors.
2006	Spalding released her first album, <i>Junjo</i> , under the Spanish label, Ayva Music.

- 2008 Spalding signed with Heads Up International. They released a press-kit DVD to introduce Esperanza Spalding to the world. Spalding released her album, *Esperanza*, under the Heads Up International label, which is part of the Concord Music Group. The album was on *Billboard's* Contemporary Jazz Chart for over a year. She appeared on the *Late Show with David Letterman* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live*.
- 2009 Spalding won the Jazz Journalists Association's *2009 Jazz Award for Up and Coming Artist of the Year* and the *2009 JazzWeek Award for Record of the Year*. Spalding performed at the White House twice in 2009. Spalding was invited by President Barack Obama to perform at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony and concert. It was the first time jazz was played instead of classical music.
- 2010 Spalding released her album, *Chamber Music Society*, which reached the top of the *Billboard* jazz chart. The *New Yorker* featured an extensive profile of Esperanza Spalding.
- 2011 Spalding won the 53rd Annual Grammy Award for Best New Artist. It was the first time a jazz musician won in that category. Spalding won the *Jazz Artist of the Year* award at the Boston Music Awards.
- 2012 Spalding performed at the 84th Academy Awards ceremony. Spalding released her album, *Radio Music Society*. Spalding won the *Smithsonian* magazine's American Ingenuity Award and the Soul Train Music Award for Best Contemporary Jazz Artist.
- 2013 Spalding won a Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal Album and Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist. Spalding released her song, *We Are America*, to protest the atrocities at Guantanamo Prison.
- 2014 Spalding signed with William Morris Endeavor. Spalding won Grammy for Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist.
- 2016 Spalding released her album, *Emily's D+Evolution*, under the Concord Records label. Spalding invited to perform at the White House. Spalding won Americans for the Arts' Young Artist award. Spalding won the Music of Black Origins (MOBO) award in Best Jazz category.
- 2017 Spalding released her album, *Exposure*. Spalding receives a faculty appointment to Harvard University's Music Department.
- 2018 Spalding named Occidental College's 2018 G. William Hume Fellow in the Performing Arts.