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### Bodies That Matter: Black Girlhood In "The Fits"

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# BODIES THAT MATTER: BLACK GIRLHOOD IN *THE FITS*

Patricia White

**Director Anna Rose** Holmer's debut feature, *The Fits* (2015), starts with the barely audible sound of a young girl's voice counting quietly between breaths. Then the film's first image appears: a widescreen frontal medium shot of the film's cagey eleven-year-old tomboy protagonist moving into and out of the bottom of the frame as she does sit-ups. At the outset, the viewer is as close as s/he can get to Toni, played by the riveting newcomer Royalty Hightower (whose name suits despite her diminutive size). Later it becomes clear that the film's first shot is taken from the mirror on the wall of the boxing gym where Toni trains with her elder brother Jermaine (Da'Sean Minor); the viewer becomes her reflection. The image onscreen, the sounds in the cinema, allow the viewer to look and feel with Toni, but without getting inside her head. *The Fits* depicts black girlhood through the rhythms of cinematic form and bodies in motion, maintaining a close attention that at the same time keeps its distance, a dynamic that characterizes both the film's themes of belonging and the approach of its young white director and her collaborators.

Practicing down the hall of the community center is the Lionesses drill team. Toni regards the older dancers' hip hop moves through the door to the gym with an appraising gaze—there's a pang of longing, a tinge of envy, and a note of hauteur grounded in her own differently disciplined athleticism and comportment. Conveying Toni's watchful, anxious perception through careful compositions, minimal dialogue, and an inventive, eerie soundscape, the film quietly signals that the internal conflicts of one girl on the threshold of adolescence matter as much anything else in the world.

The cataclysmic nature of the transition from childhood to adolescent femininity is signaled by the "fits" of the title—the sudden onset of mysterious spells of fainting, twitching, and choking. The fits befall first the co-captains of the Lionesses, then the team's lesser members, and eventually the "Crabs," the new recruits among whom Toni finds her tentative place.



**Toni (Royalty Hightower) in the opening shot of *The Fits*.**

Courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories

The cause of the symptoms and the route of their contagion are never explained.

The mystery in *The Fits* is framed by Toni's point of view, and wise and grave as she appears, she's too young to interpret what she sees. Access to Hightower's character's interiority is also limited since—unlike Junee Smollett-Bell's ten-year-old heroine, Eve Batiste, in *Eve's Bayou* (Kasi Lemmons, 1997), or six-year-old Hushpuppy (Quvenzhané Wallis) in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Benh Zeitlin, 2011), her kin in a much-too-small celluloid sisterhood of black girl protagonists—she has no voice-over or subjective fantasy sequences to clue the viewer in to her desires, fears, and worldview. Instead, she is observed: fixed in shallow-focus widescreen images by cinematographer Paul Yee and plunged into pockets of intimate and ominous sound as confusing visions and feelings accumulate. (The score is by composer duo Stenfert Charles and the sound design by Chris Foster.)

*The Fits* is at once formally assured and modest, lyrical and realist in style. The Lionesses dance team is played with grit and charm by the actual members of the Q-Kidz from Cincinnati's West End, with whom Hightower has been performing since age six. Marquicia Jones-Woods (known by her team as Ms. Quicy), the Q-Kidz founder, has an associate producer credit. Choreography is by her twin daughters, head coaches Mariah and Chariah Jones (who guided the team to first place in the *Battle of the Beyoncé*s competition in 2015 in Memphis). The film was shot immersively on location at the recreation center where the Q-Kidz practice.

All of these documentary-style elements are channeled with deliberate pacing and palette choices into an efficient seventy minutes of elliptical narrative. There is no more exposition of the girls' lives or the world of drill team competition than there is of the mysterious fits.

The seed of *The Fits* lay in Holmer's fascination with cases of mass hysteria, or mass psychogenic illness (MPI). Such outbreaks frequently afflict close-knit groups of girls like cheerleaders that are structured by intimacy, imitation, and internal hierarchies. Attesting to the strength of both the bonds forged in girlhood and the institutions that regulate them, hysterical symptoms condense conflicting attitudes about adulthood, sexuality, and gender identity. Both real and imagined, cause and symptom, "fits" do not communicate unequivocally. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, recently revived on Broadway, spectacularizes female mass hysteria in an ideological drama of national proportions. *The Fits* attempts something more modest.

Holmer's film was made through the Venice Biennale's prestigious College-Cinema competition, which selects, finances, and supports the production of three low-cost films each cycle to be ready for the Venice Film Festival in September.<sup>1</sup> In the rarefied world of film festivals, being thus anointed launches a young director's career and elevates her cultural capital. Given this production and reception context, much of the film's coverage has been auteurist, hailing Holmer as an emerging talent and Hightower as a promising discovery.

Yet Holmer would be the first to insist on the collaborative nature of her art. Not only did Jones-Woods and the performers participate integrally in the production, but Holmer too is part of a team that includes creative producer Lisa Kjerulff and editor Saela Davis, both of whom share co-writer credits with her.<sup>2</sup> The three met through the New York documentary world and conceived of *The Fits* as a dance film that would tell its story visually through movement-driven performances. Holmer watched Q-Kidz videos on YouTube and found the dance form to fit the concept. Her director's statement notes: "*The Fits* juxtaposes the precise, powerful, and intentional movements of drill with [the] subconscious, spontaneous, and uncontrolled movements of collective hysterics."<sup>3</sup>

Yet the line between the fits and the routines is not so clearly drawn, and indeed both are elements of the girls' performances. Drill is a realm of discipline, roles, and rules, where collectivity and individual creativity interact. So is a film set. While the Q-Kidz choreographers created the dance routines, the fits themselves were devised in collaboration with choreographer and filmmaker Celia Rowleson-Hall,

who served as the on-set "movement consultant." Stills photographer Tayarisha Poe captured the process and, in the image used on the poster, conveyed a distinct quality of magic realism.<sup>4</sup> Away from the set Davis helped shape performances through editing. The art of movement and the craft of editing—the team in front of the camera and the one behind it—dislocate visible signs from fixed meanings. A collaborative process among women of different races, ages, ranks, and backgrounds, the film plays to different thresholds of skill and experience.

One of the film's primary challenges to the viewer is whether to read the bouts of unruly physicality allegorically—and what it would mean to do so. There is a long and respected literature on hysteria as a creative form of female protest, as a response to the constraints of societal and sexual expectations, to being overlooked and unheard, to being defined by the body.<sup>5</sup> The most obvious reading of the fits is thus a gendered one; their onset coincides with Toni's initiation into the group of girls and, ostensibly, to normative femininity. In the film's final parade performance, at once eerie and ebullient, Toni's gray boxing sweats will be unzipped to reveal her sequined costume, her intent gaze transformed by a plastered-on smile, and her prodigious self-control bound by the dance team's synchronous choreography in what cannot be read clearly as either a triumph or a defeat.

But what about race? The film's focus on a black girls' dance squad complicates an allegorical reading of hysteria solely in terms of gender protest. Images of black bodies out of control are loaded ones; these girls are depicted as uniquely vulnerable, not "othered." Through the discipline of drill the film incorporates signs of black cultural practices, histories, and constituencies while refusing to impose an interpretation. The axis of race and the axis of gender are irreducible; there will always be a lack of "fit" between text and readings that favor one or the other. In its depiction of both hysteria and dance competition, *The Fits* opts for physicality over allegory. Toni must navigate the spaces between.

## Female Trouble

Freud explained the phenomenon of mass hysteria in 1921 in terms of a girls' boarding school:

Supposing, for instance, that one of the girls in a boarding school has had a letter from someone with whom she is secretly in love which arouses her jealousy, and that she reacts to it with a fit of hysterics; then some of her friends who know about it will contract the fit, as we say, by means of mental infection. The mechanism is that of identification based upon the possibility or desire of putting oneself in the same situation.<sup>6</sup>



This mysterious image of Royalty Hightower as Toni was used on the film's poster. Courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories

Freud's account seems rather convoluted—he insists that the girls identify with each other's romantic disappointment rather have a direct tie with each other. Sexuality is confused with pathology, desire and its prohibition are intertwined.

In *The Falling* (2015), one of several recent films by women directors about groups of girls, British director Carol Morely treats such a textbook case brilliantly; the film was in part inspired in part by a 1962 epidemic of fainting in a girls' school in Blackburn, England. *The Falling*, which made the festival rounds just ahead of *The Fits*, is tricked out in short schoolgirl uniforms, flash cuts, and creepy a cappella vocal arrangements as pleasurable as any lover of Italian horror could wish for. Sly, stylish, and featuring Maisie Williams (*Game of Thrones*'s tomboy warrior Arya Stark), the film is a tour de force that stresses the knowingness of girls, their internal power games, and their erotic and aggressive obsessions.

Similarly aestheticized if more predictable is the French drama *17 Filles* (*17 Girls*, 2011), the debut feature of sisters

Delphine and Muriel Coulin, based on a 2008 case of eighteen simultaneous teen pregnancies in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The film's vision of young, white, ineffable but normative femininity recalls Sofia Coppola's adaptation of Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), the story of five blonde adolescent sisters as told from the point of view of neighbor boys. The Turkish film *Mustang* (Deniz Gamze Ergüven, 2015) also harks back to *The Virgin Suicides*: here, rather than kill themselves, five young brunettes defy their strict religious guardians; the sisters do it for themselves.

Freud's elaboration of hysteria in Victorian-era Vienna does not mean that the disorder is exclusively white or bourgeois, either as a singular conversion disorder or en masse. Several of these films underscore the centrality of issues of social class to symptom formation, and the disciplinary regimes of gender, race, and empire that work through institutions such as girls' boarding schools are invoked in *The Falling* and one of its models, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975), with its schoolgirls in white dresses picnicking



on aboriginal sacred land. The fetishistic qualities all of these films share are missing from *The Fits*, however, with its innocuous Midwestern community center setting and its sensible tomboy heroine. And the media attention accorded recent American cases of mass hysteria has been stoked by outbreaks among white girls.

In fall 2011, in one of the most widely publicized recent incidents of MPI, fifteen students—all but one of them girls—in the town of Le Roy in upstate New York started displaying tics, twitches, involuntary vocalizations, and other uncontrollable symptoms. It began, not incidentally, with the cheerleaders, but soon spread, capturing wide media attention. Erin Brockovich was called in to investigate environmental toxicity. Soon others, including adult women, were affected. Many remained symptomatic for months. The girls' appearances on daytime talk shows and their own use of social media were thought to have spread the "mental infection" all the more effectively, and in fact, the symptoms declined when the coverage abated.

Le Roy, as Susan Dominus reported, was a working-class community affected by the economic downturn.<sup>7</sup> Citizens who looked for external causes for the breakout such as environment toxins, however plausible, were overlooking some of the endemic familial and material circumstances shared by the most vulnerable girls. If the girls were speaking through their symptoms, however, the message was lost in translation.

Symptoms spread by anxiety and identification can afflict any tight community under stress—whether from nerves or sociopolitical pressures or both. What does protest signify in *The Fits's* vision of an African American dance troupe afflicted by MPI in the era of #BlackLivesMatter? The irruption of uncontrollable behavior, the lack of individual responsibility, and the possibility of mass participation combine to make the fits potent signs of black bodies as, and under, threat.

## Black Girls Matter

*Black Girls Matter* is the title of a 2015 policy report by feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw that decries the underreporting of the effects of "zero tolerance" school disciplinary policies on African American girls, who are left, as the report's subtitle sums up: "pushed out, over policed, underprotected."<sup>8</sup> Among other cases, the report tells of a six-year-old Florida girl arrested for a temper tantrum. Without the data, without listening to girls' experience, the report warns, research and policy frameworks will never "move beyond the notion that



**The Q-Kidz, taking a break, behind the scenes.**

Courtesy of photographer Tayarisha Poe

all of the youth of color who are in crisis are boys, and that the concerns of white girls are indistinguishable from those of girls of color." The report found that issues like sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and familial responsibilities were inadequately addressed in meeting black girls' specific needs at school.

I invoke Crenshaw's work not to read the film sociologically but rather to underscore the importance of the film's representation of the *matter*—the physical embodiment—of black girlhood. The film's cast asks the viewer to consider whether "the concerns of . . . girls of color" are indistinguishable from those of white girls. The *Lionesses* are not "in crisis" by most measures. They thrive in the kind of community-based program and institutional setting that can serve as a bulwark against both the dangers of the streets and the disciplinary excesses of schooling. Yet crisis comes: not in the form of violence, drugs, or pregnancy, but as bodily spasms. The fits may well signify African American communities in the grip of powerful forces beyond their control—economic inequities, environmental hazards, and police surveillance—but they also exhibit resistance to those forces and to intersecting disciplinary regimes of gender normativity, compulsory heterosexuality, sexual and racial objectification, structural disenfranchisement and anonymity. In her wary approach to the drill team, Toni assesses her options. What does she risk by taking up her place, what must she relinquish?

Mass hysteria is mimetic; outbreaks are spread by sight and sound. A dance squad is structured by precisely the sort of tight vertical and horizontal bonds that facilitate an outbreak; falling into a fit is not that different from learning a routine somatically. The girls follow their captains through dance steps—then follow them into a dis/embodyed space



**The Q-Kidz dance team in formation.** Courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories

between conscious and unconscious, presence and absence, empowerment and otherness. As they witness one after another of their teammates succumb to the fits, Toni and the Crabs talk about the episodes by turns as something to be feared, scorned as fake, even desired as a rite of passage. “Maybe it’s some boyfriend disease,” they wonder, holding the sexual expectations of puberty at a distance.

*The Fits* doesn’t spectacularize the episodes. They are mostly blocked from view by barriers, bodies, and cell phone screens, or recounted secondhand. In one endearing episode, Toni’s new friend Beezy (Alexis Neblett), a scene-stealing sprite in Afro puffs, recounts a fit she’s witnessed, miming the victim’s choking, twitching, and zombie gaze with gusto. At one remove from the afflicted body, she takes possession of the unknown.

Instead of the spectacle of black girls getting *out of line*, Holmer’s *The Fits* shows staying *in line*—in formation—as an art form, through the discipline and community of drill team dancing. When the Lionesses parade, they are perfectly in sync. Jones-Woods started the Q-Kidz community dance program twenty-nine years ago “for something the neighborhood kids could do after school to keep them safe and productive” and has nurtured it ever since.<sup>9</sup> The film was cast from the squad, with Hightower and Neblett among the first to audition. The current Q-Kidz team captains Makyla Burnam and Inayah Rodgers play team captains Legs and Karisma in the film. The press notes describe the team members as co-authors of their characters; Holmer

recounts that Hightower crossed out lines she felt superfluous in an already terse script.

Drill isn’t an exclusively African American dance form, but it has an extensive history in black communities, especially in historically black colleges and universities in the South. Other, more direct representations of black girls’ dance team cultures—majorette, step, and drill—include *Our Song* (Jim McKay, 2000), a lovely independent drama featuring a young Kerry Washington and the Jackie Robinson Steppers of Crown Heights, Brooklyn; the documentary *Step* (Amanda Lipitz, 2016), about a group of seniors at a Baltimore girls’ school; and the Lifetime series *Bring It!* (2014—), now in its fourth season. On the slicker end of the spectrum, Beyoncé’s “Formation,” which became a sensation on Super Bowl Sunday 2016, not long after *The Fits* premiered at Sundance, borrows from drill: in the accompanying video, “ladies get into formation” in a drained swimming pool, like the Lionesses in *The Fits*. Beyoncé’s empowerment message is intentional: a Portland paper interviews women who wore Black Panther-style drill team uniforms back in 1968 like those sported by the dancers in “Formation.”<sup>10</sup> It is also inclusive. The choreography of Beyoncé’s video for “Single Ladies” was influenced by black gay “J-Sette” dancers who evolved the street dance form from moves popularized by Jackson State University’s legendary dance team, the Prancing J-Settes.<sup>11</sup> Without being directly referenced, these histories and borrowings are built into *The Fits*. Visual representations of dance teams that travel through such disparate social fields as independent film circles and YouTube



**The current Q-Kidz team captains Makyla Burnam and Inayah Rodgers play team captains Legs and Karisma in the film.**

Still photography courtesy Tayarisha Poe

channels bring different audiences and looking relations into play.

In the press notes, Jones-Woods contributes a useful account of styles of drill that include field show, parade, and stand battle. The stand battle especially appealed to Holmer's desire to tell stories through movement. In this call-and-response dance challenge, one performer or squad competes against another. The incorporation of everyday gestures—brushing one's hair or throwing a punch (Toni's best move)—into the choreography of stand battles is mirrored in reverse by the film's incorporation of dance into ordinary actions. The stylization of gesture, its communicability, comes to define the film's aesthetic as well as its themes.

The entire film and its performances are governed by patterns of movement. In one scene early in the film, Toni trudges down the hall with her boxing gear slung over her back when the Lionesses burst through the door behind her and stream around her as if part of one organic flow. Her dark hunched form plays against their flailing limbs and high-energy squeals, a moving figure/ground composition. In the scene that is Holmer's (and my own) favorite—a slow-cinema lover's sequence-shot dream—Toni runs a push broom back and forth across the gym that fills the frame, while the pint-sized Beezy scampers alongside her chatting, blocking her path, and turning it all into a game. Two kinds of motion—Toni's methodically geometric sweeping and Beezy's joyous prancing—animate the strongly horizontal composition.

At times, the virtuosic battle choreography resembles religious possession. A stand battle between team captains Legs and Karisma set to drums and chanting is glimpsed through the doors of the gym. The powerful impression this makes on Toni is registered in a slow-motion point-of-view

shot of Legs in medium close-up accompanied by muffled sound. Later, when one girl's performance mutates into a fit the onlookers don't at first notice, she falls to the floor as if in a Pentecostal service or possession ceremony. By evoking traditions of religious fervor as well as dance, the fits signal the power and creativity enacted within these sanctioned spaces of black female agency. At the threshold of adolescence, Toni is confronted with conflicting models of bodily expression and belonging. What matters is how she works it out.

### Crossing the Threshold

The microbudget production is not unlike the community center in which it is set: its restricted means and concentrated production period limit it to this one location, and frequently limit entire scenes to one master shot. The pared-down plot, sparse compositions, wide frames, and long takes combine to give the film the feeling of a self-enclosed world whose borders seem to coincide with the edges of the frame. The young characters are self-sufficient (adults are only glimpsed in the background, and seldom), never leaving the building or its immediate environs—the drained swimming pool, steps, curb, and pedestrian overpass upon which the characters stage their everyday interactions.

Toni and her brother can be seen, at times, crossing the grass toward home. Yet more often, Toni helps her brother after-hours in his job at the community center, where the siblings fold laundry and sweep the floors, settling into a comfortable domesticity (their mom works late). The boxing gym is coded male and the practice room female, but Toni has the unique ability to go everywhere in the sparsely populated building; there's even a kitchen and basement that make it seem strangely like home.





**Toni (Hightower) working it out in the climactic scene from *The Fits*.** Courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories

In a key scene of girlish play, Toni and Beezy, waiting after practice for the latter to be picked up, conjure that strangeness. Exploring forbidden rooms in the dark, they find the box of sequined costumes for the Lionesses' upcoming parade and try theirs on. When Toni jumps out to startle Beezy, the latter pees her pants, foreshadowing the loss of bodily control that will afflict the team members and suggesting its link to age and maturation. By day the center's institutional architecture is used as a playground. Beezy turns cartwheels in the locker room, and Toni does a solo headstand on the banister. The movements of the Crabs activate the location as a dance stage, to uncanny effect.

In this liminal world between public and private, no one sees or notices these spontaneous performances except the film's viewers, who are also confined to the center. Since the Lionesses are felled at practice they are unable to compete before an audience. And unlike in the *Le Roy* case, the fits here seem to draw minimal attention from the outside world. As Toni roams about the building, she catches a snippet of local TV news reporting an investigation of the building's water and later glimpses a community meeting with some of the concerned moms in attendance. The idea that the water supply may be contaminated surprises no one, though perhaps the fact that it is being investigated does.

The act of shedding her gray sweats for purple workout clothes like those worn by the other Crabs signifies Toni's status as a threshold figure in terms of gender. Toni's sexuality

remains submerged, and though there is a clear trajectory toward normative gender assimilation into the performance style of the dance team, the film's themes of girl cliques, contagion, and unruly bodies are queer ones. Her physicality is as intense as the dancers' but has been shaped by the differently coded bodily discipline of boxing. Where the girls move en masse, all angles, curves, and hair, Toni is declared "straight as a rail" when fitted for her costume, and she throws punches with targeted precision. She also occupies or attends to thresholds in the space of the school: she wipes glitter from the window looking into the Lionesses' practice room with her finger as if trying to decode this elusive substance; from inside the comfort of the boxing gym she sees Legs and Karisma watching the boys practice from the other side of the window; she lingers in a bathroom stall to watch them at the mirror. Perhaps fits are no more mysterious to her than the looks exchanged between Legs and her boyfriend; both signify bodily impulses that are not natural to her.

But while she hides herself from view in the world of the film, Toni commands the screen from the opening shot. In order to look with her, the audience must look at her—the repetition of the shot taken as if from the mirror effects this transubstantiation. As she does sit-ups and pull-ups, she's monitoring her progress; later she will look into that same mirror with the dawning female consciousness John Berger once described in *Ways of Seeing*: "she comes to consider the





Members of the dance team who are not highlighted in the film. Courtesy of Tayarisha Poe

surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.”<sup>12</sup>

As Toni practices her drill routines, with as much dedication but significantly less grace than when she trains with her brother, she struggles to align her bodily schema with the place on the team she is destined to assume. At Beezy and Maia’s (Lauren Gibson) urging, Toni takes on the conventional markers of femininity in imitation of the older girls, and even pierces her own ears (without even screaming). But when the fits begin to spread through the squad, she instinctively backs off, picking off the nail polish and taking out the earrings—“they were infected.” But it isn’t so easy to shed these markers—however performative, they stick. A shot of Toni peeling off a temporary tattoo Beezy gave her is emblematic of the obdurate materiality of skin and the will to control this threshold between the self and the world.

As more and more team members fall ill, their friend Maia pronounces the fate of the Crabs: “It’s going to happen to us you know,” she tells Toni. Soon enough Maia and Beezy succumb, opening a rift in the younger girls’ friendship. Finally, the curiosity and anxiety sparked in Toni burst

out volcanically in the most spectacular “fit” yet witnessed: when it is her turn, she walks on air. The film’s final sequence takes flight to Kiah Victoria’s song “Aurora,” which bridges Toni’s fit in the corridors of the center and a full-dress, full-company parade performance on its grounds. Both scenes mark a departure from realism in visual and sound design. A close-up traveling shot of Toni’s bare feet ascending rounds a corner to reveal the feet and legs of the other girls as they gather in alarm. The audio mix accompanies the nondiegetic lyric, “Do we choose to be slaves to gravity?” with the sounds of Toni’s breathing. A collective gasp, a cut to a medium long shot, and Toni lands on her feet before them. Finally, all eyes are looking at her, as Toni’s body twitches and sways in slow motion.

The song continues over a dissolve to the last scene: Toni is back at her customary position on the railroad overpass, where she and her brother trained on the stairs. Initiating a precision dance number as surreal as the fits, she stands in profile and unzips her gray sweats and hoodie to reveal her blue-and-silver-sequined Lioness uniform. The team marches up on both sides and she takes her place in line.

They dance in formation in the empty pool, they dance in the boxing ring. Toni's makeup and smile form an alien mask.

But the film, refusing to end on this spectacle, folds the grand performance back into the space of Toni's own fit. In the final shot she falls to the ground and meets the viewer's gaze in an overhead, upside-down close-up. In this echo and inversion of the film's opening shot, a hint of a smile plays at the corner of her mouth. Is it satisfaction that she's crossed a threshold, or smugness that she's pulled off a ruse? After the cut to black, the Lionesses' chant is heard on the soundtrack, riffing on the term "pride." Refusing to settle down and privilege a single reading, the film instead takes flight in Toni's gaze, her gait, her gravity.

If mass hysteria is "identification based on the possibility or desire of putting oneself in the same situation" as another, Freud's definition could also describe being part of an audience—or a nation defined by hierarchy. The girls in *The Fits* transcend being defined as "at risk." The film makes their experience communicable, without presuming to explain it. The symptoms that befall the Lionesses travel the same path as the dance routines; in turn, the audience "gets" the performances. This modest movie of one black girl whose identity is on the line emerged in a moment of unprecedented black female visibility: with Sasha and Malia living in a White House built by slaves, as their mother Michelle Obama reminded the world; Venus and Serena winning Wimbledon; Queen Bey making *Lemonade*. Black girls matter: balancing publicity and precarity, *The Fits* takes this message viral.

## Notes

1. *The Fits* was made during the Biennale College-Cinema's third cycle. Producer-director teams pitch their ideas in the fall, and if their project is one of three selected annually, work with mentors and a fixed budget (150,000 euros, approximately \$163,000) to finish a feature in time for the festival in September. *The Fits* had its U.S. premiere at Sundance, followed by a berth in New Directors/New Films and a limited theatrical release by Oscilloscope in June 2016.
2. Anna Rose Holmer, who studied to be a director of photography and crewed in camera units before turning to directing, had produced the vérité documentary *Ballet 442* (Jody Lee

Lipses, 2014) with the New York City Ballet; Sacla Davis had edited *Ballet 422* as well as the independent feature *Northern Light* (Nick Bentgen, 2013) that Lisa Kjerulff had produced.

3. Anna Rose Holmer, Director's Statement, Press Notes, Oscilloscope Laboratories, <http://thefits.oscilloscope.net/>
4. Holmer, Rowlson-Hall, and Poe were all among *Filmmaker Magazine's* "25 New Faces of Independent Film" in 2015, representing a next wave of female talent in microbudget filmmaking. Celia Rowlson-Hall's own debut dance feature *MA* also premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2015. A prolific director of music videos, she also coordinated the Pantsuit Nation flash mob video shoot in Union Square on the eve of the presidential election. The heroine of Poe's online story and first feature in development, *Selah, and the Spades*, is a black teenage girl who runs a gang.
5. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune Née* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996); Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 146; Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
6. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959 [1921]), 39.
7. Susan Dominus, "What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy," *New York Times Magazine*, March 7, 2012.
8. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw with Priscilla Ocen and Jyoti Nanda, "Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected," African American Policy Forum and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015, [www.aapf.org/recent/2014/12/coming-soon-blackgirlsmatter-pushed-out-overpoliced-and-underprotected](http://www.aapf.org/recent/2014/12/coming-soon-blackgirlsmatter-pushed-out-overpoliced-and-underprotected). See also Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Black Girls Matter," *Ms.* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 26. On intersectionality as a concept see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (July 1991): 1241–99.
9. See the Q-Kidz website: [qkidz.com](http://qkidz.com)
10. Casey Parks, "Beyoncé Takes a Page from Jefferson High School Drill Team," *Oregonian*, February 26, 2016, [www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2016/02/before\\_beyonces\\_formation.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2016/02/before_beyonces_formation.html)
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