



EDUCATIONAL COMPANION + DISCUSSION GUIDE

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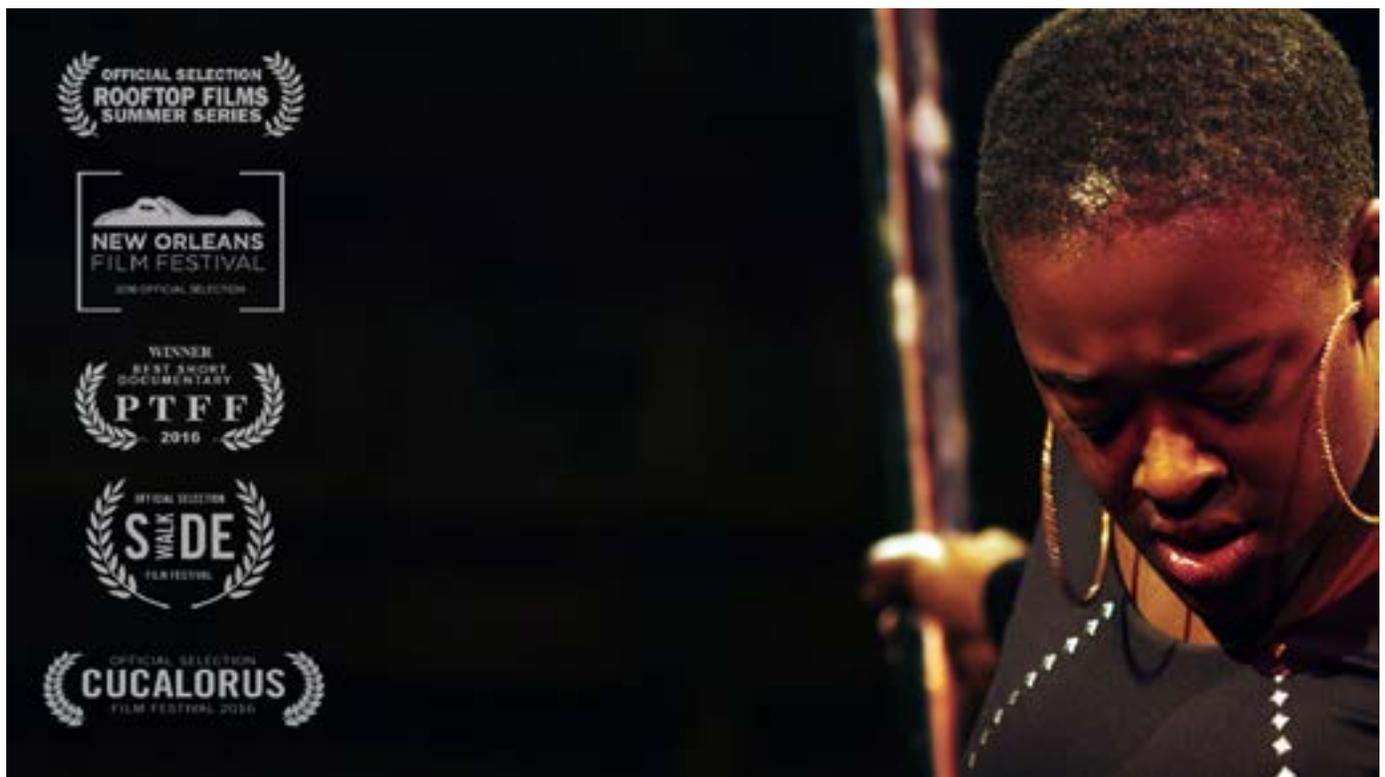
# DANGEROUS CURVES

# DANGEROUS CURVES: WATCH THE FILM

DANGEROUS CURVES is a short documentary profiling plus-size pole dancer Roslyn Mays, as she navigates newfound media attention and various types of public exposure.

**WATCH THE FULL, 12-MINUTE FILM ON VIMEO:** [click here](#)

**WATCH AN ABBREVIATED, 7:15 MINUTE VERSION OF THE FILM VIA THE NEW YORK TIMES:** [click here](#)



## CREDITS

Director/Producer: Merete Mueller  
Director of Photography: Jake Christopher  
Editor: Tony Hale  
Co-producer: Dominique Herard  
Music by: Nora Kroll-Rosenbaum

## CONTACT US

For more information about DANGEROUS CURVES or to coordinate a group screening or Q&A with the filmmakers and subject of the film, please visit our website, [dangerouscurves-doc.com](http://dangerouscurves-doc.com).

# INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

As a film, *Dangerous Curves* very much focuses on Roz's personal story and her specific experience in her own body. With this focus in mind, we did not explicitly touch on much of the context or the larger issues that surround Roz in her daily work. For viewers who are interested in learning more about the pole dancing community, the body positivity movement, or the long lineage of thinkers, writers, performers and activists who have been thinking about the relationship between power and the physical body—this guide is meant to be a starting point for further explorations.

Even as Roz is defining her own story and influencing others, her own experience is informed by the way our society does and does not empower or make space for bodies like hers. Our hope is that the film and Roz's personal story can be used as a jumping off point to explore and discuss some of these larger issues: around race, gender, sexuality, power, acceptance and the representation of bodies in all forms of media. Roz's story represents just one experience and one perspective.

**For those of you who would prefer to stick to the film, Part 1** of this guide provides a bit of background on the filmmakers' intentions when making the film and a list of suggested questions that can be used to spark a group discussion or can be used as written essay prompts after a viewing of the film.

**For those of you who would like to continue exploring, Section 2** has suggested articles and books that we think may contribute to a discussion of the larger issues surrounding Roz's story. There is a long lineage of work that has examined the relationship between power and sexuality, as well as the discrimination against all types of marginalized bodies in our society. Roz is aware of this and her work is very much a part of this lineage. Hers is one voice within a very active movement that is advocating for equal and inclusive representation of all bodies. We encourage you to assign some of these articles as supplemental reading to continue larger discussions and to place Roz's story within a larger context.

**Our own opinions are expressed more openly in Section 3**, which is a transcribed Facebook Live conversation that took place between director Merete Mueller and Roz Mays shortly after a version of the film was published online in *The New York Times*. After reading some of the negative comments the film was receiving online, Roz suggested we publicly discuss and dissect a few of them. Many people have asked us how Roz handles the negative feedback she often receives online. This convo is a great illustration of her approach to negativity and it also clarifies and deconstructs a few of the common misconceptions about her work.

Thank you for watching and for reading. We hope these resources will help to continue your own exploration of the issues and ideas introduced in this very personal short profile of Roz "The Diva" Mays. We are also interested in continually expanding this guide, and our own understanding of this story. If you would like to suggest alternate or additional reading materials or discussion questions please send us a note!

~ **Dominique Herard (Producer) and Merete Mueller (Director)**

# PART 1: THE FILM

## DIRECTOR STATEMENT: HOW AND WHY THE FILM WAS MADE

I first met Roz when we were both 15, as teammates on our high school soccer team. Even back then Roz was bold and outspoken. I remember her reciting poetry during all-school meetings and leading cheers during soccer games from her position on the defensive line. I was a shy teenager, more comfortable observing people from the sidelines. I was awed by Roz back then and remember wondering what it must feel like to be so self-assured.

We reconnected years later through our close mutual friend Dominique Herard, who co-produced this film. At that point Roz had been teaching pole-dancing classes and participating in amateur pole shows for about five years and had lost three jobs because of the photos and videos of her performances that existed online. She'd made a deliberate decision to not take any of the photos or videos down and instead was using her college business degree to build a career out of her pole-dancing passion. She was about to host an event, called "Dangerous Curves," to showcase other curvy and plus-size dancers. Dominique and I decided to film it.

During the year we filmed with Roz, other media outlets began to pick up on her story. We saw her portrayed as an "anomaly" and possessor of "self-confidence secrets." Which is true in many ways. But those articles — much like my teenage self — seemed to oversimplify Roz's experience. Confidence is so often portrayed as a static thing. We either have it or we don't. In this film, I wanted to represent a version of confidence that is more a moment-by-moment conversation between Roz's physical presence and the world around her. Her performances are an expression of this conversation. She's forming herself in front of other people.

Which is a brave thing to do. Women in particular seem to get less leeway to be works in progress. We all know, in our own ways, what it feels like to be disapproved of or not taken seriously. Roz is testing boundaries, refusing to fit expectations or to make herself smaller or more palatable for the status quo. And as she explores the relationship between her body and the world, she's providing a space for others to feel safe doing the same.

## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM: SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ESSAY PROMPTS

- How would you define 'beauty'?
- How is beauty quantified? How do you think it should be quantified?
- Based on the film, what do you imagine is Roslyn's motivation?
- Do you see power in Roslyn's stance on confidence and beauty? Why or why not?
- Describe your understanding of the similarities and differences between strip club dancing and fitness dancing. Do you see a difference at all?
- Many see confidence as a fixed state. How would you define confidence? What is the origin of that definition?
- How does this narrative change if Roz were a Size 4? Or White? Or Rich?
- What is surprising to you about this narrative?

## PART 2: ADDITIONAL READING

### Section A: Additional Reading about Roslyn Mays

[“Want to Maximize Your Self-Love in 2016? Roz Mays Tells You How”](#)

Essence, January 2016

[“Plus-Size Roz Mays embraced ‘tree trunks’ to become a pole dancing instructor”](#)

ESPN, August 2016

[“Too Fat for Fitness? Not Roz the Diva Pole Dancer”](#)

The Guardian, September 2015

[“Roz Mays, Fitness Entrepreneur and Competitive Pole Dancer: Job Hacks”](#)

Inverse Culture, July 2015

[“Roslyn Mays Encourages Curvy Women to Find Body Confidence with Pole Dancing”](#)

People, December 2016

[“This clothing brand fat shamed a plus-size pole dancer on Instagram — and she had a brilliant response”](#)

Revelist, March 2017



#### *Suggested Discussion Questions to Accompany These Readings:*

- How do you see the media portraying Roz?
- Which words or descriptions are most commonly used to depict Roz? Do you agree with this representation?
- Do you see any themes that are revisited in many of the articles?
- Why do you think people are drawn to Roz's story and her work?

## Section B: Academic Resources on Feminism, Power & The Erotic

Greene, M. (1988). *Dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

King, Angela (2004). *The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(2), 29-39.

Lorde, Audre. (1984). "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power" *Sister Outsider*. CA: Crossing Press.

Whitehead, Kally. et al. (2009). 'Empowerment' and the Pole: A Discursive Investigation of the Reinvention of Pole Dancing as a Recreational Activity. *Feminism and Psychology*, 9(2), 224-244.

Moorti, Sunjata and Ross, Karen. (2007). Introduction: Gender and the plus-size body. *Feminist Media Studies*, 5(2), 237-260.

## Section C: Writing on "Plus-size" Representation in Fashion and Mainstream Media

["Being Pretty is a Priveledge, but We Refuse to Acknowledge It."](#)

Allure, July 2017

["Plus-Size Wars"](#)

The New York Times Magazine, July 2010

Greenberg, B. S., Eastin, M., Hofschire, L., Lachlan, K., & Brownell, K. D. (2003). Portrayals of Overweight and Obese Individuals on Commercial Television. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(8), 1342–1348.

["Women of Color and the Myth of the Plus-Size Pass—Why Stereotypes Linked to Race and Weight Are So Harmful"](#)

Bustle, December 2014

["Episode 589: Tell Me I'm Fat"](#)

This American Life, June 2016

## Section D: The Body Positivity Movement

[“Body Positivity 101”](#)

BuzzFeed, October 2016

Edut, Ophira. (2003). *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Body and Image*. Emeryville: Seal Press.

*\*This collection of personal essays also includes an appendix of prompts and exercises for classroom discussion.*

## Section E: Articles Addressing Differing Perspectives on Feminism & Pole dancing

*The following articles represent a variety of perspectives on the differences and relationship between pole dancing as fitness or dance performance, and pole dancing as it takes place in strip clubs. Written from a variety of perspectives and from people with differencing levels of experience or knowledge about pole dancing, we hope these articles will provide some context for the discussion that is actively taking place within the pole dancing community, as well as the discussions that are taking place around it. (Roz’s own opinion on the subject is addressed more clearly at the end of our transcribed conversation in Section 3.)*

[“The Non-History of Pole”](#)

Spinning Love Story, September 2014

[“Pole Fitness Classes?”](#)

Feminist Philosophers, May 2009

[“What ‘Why I Dance’ Gets Wrong About Pole”](#)

I Was a High-School Feminist, July 2015

[“Whether you like it or not, pole dancing perpetuates sexism”](#)

Feminist Current, September 2016

[“Yes A Stripper: Sex Workers Need to Take Back Pole Dancing”](#)

Harlot Media, March 2016

[“Pole dancing is left up for interpretation of the performers”](#)

The Sundial, April 2014

## PART 3: DISCUSSING CRITICISMS

### A CONVERSATION BETWEEN DIVA & DIRECTOR

*In December of 2016, The New York Times published an abbreviated version of Dangerous Curves online in its Op-Docs series. Roz had the idea to sit down and discuss some of the comments that were posted in response to the film. This conversation was streamed live on Roz's Facebook page on December 15, 2016. The transcript has been edited slightly for length and clarity.*

**Roz Mays:** For the last nine years, I've been going out of my way to hold my tongue when people come out with these crazy comments online. But, you know, I've learned a lot from them.

First off, I want to make it clear that I'm not sad. Peeps, we've got this. People have said some really nasty stuff but I don't want you to think—especially my Mom, I'm ok! I promise. [Laughter.] I'm not sitting at home crying because someone called me a fat whale. Which has happened, a lot, on the Internet. It's more that I'm fascinated by it now. It's fascinating to look at different comments across platforms and see what people care about. And there have been a few things that I've noticed.

**Merete Mueller:** What I think is really interesting is that you are going into this with curiosity, which is the opposite of what a lot of these commenters have done. A lot of people, they see something they don't understand and they respond without being curious about it first.

**RM:** Tonight's convo is mostly going to focus on the Dangerous Curves documentary that was on the front page of the New York Times. I read all of the comments. I know, a lot of people tell me, "Never read the comments!"

**MM:** I haven't read the comments!

**RM:** Don't worry, you don't have to. Youtube is often the black hole. People there are just rude. But *The New York Times* actually curates their comments. The respondents type in full sentences, they have a thought-out argument, they are eloquent. You can get caught up thinking, "Oh, these commenters are smart, I should probably believe them because this is the *New York Times*." It's packaged so well, yet the comments are still full of shit! So, I thought it was important to unpack and discuss some of these comments. On Youtube they'll tell me I'm a slut, but, in the *Times*, they'll ask me to "reconsider my representation of the female form." Does that make sense?

**MM:** Definitely. Just because something sounds eloquent doesn't mean that it's correct.

**RM:** I wanted to bring up a few specific comments. Get ready.

**MM:** I don't know if I'm ready!

**RM:** It's OK. *"I wish plus-sized women could find empowerment through political activism or*

**social change.**” So let’s talk about plus-sized women finding empowerment through social change. [Sarcastically] Because there’s nothing social about pole dancing.

**MM:** [Sarcastically] Right, I mean, you’re not trying to change the minds or perceptions of a vast majority...

But seriously, what’s interesting about that comment to me is that it’s very passive aggressive. The condescension implied in it and the disapproval is, I think, something that women get a lot related to sexuality. Anyone who is just kind of enjoying their own body, there’s a layer of “Oh, that’s so sad that you find the need to do that.”

**RM:** Oh yeah, there is. There’s a sadness. I’ll come back to that later. Let’s move on to the next comment... ***“I’m very torn about this stuff as a health practitioner...on one hand, yay for body image! On the other hand, your risks for so many illnesses are increased that it is never something I would condone if their weight was at a point that it would impact their health.”***

This is an extremely common thing with me—the negative comments I get that aren’t outright vile, are usually something along the lines of: “I’m just concerned about your health. I’m not attacking you personally, it’s just I’m concerned you’re going to have a heart attack and die.” People think that my existence on video doing something, they think that automatically says there is nothing wrong with



being my size. But when did I ever say that there were no health risks related to obesity? You filmed me for about a year and a half. Do you ever recall me saying, “Hey, let’s go chase this butter with the lard...”

**MM:** [laughs] It was something you brought up in conversations all the time... [Both laughing] No, not the butter! I meant health! You’re a certified trainer. You know a lot about health. So [the health risks] are something you are aware of.

**RM:** Absolutely. [When] people ask me “When did you start pole?” I make it a point to tell them that I was trying to lose weight. Not as much now, but, especially when I first started pole, pole helped me to lose weight. I don’t push that as a primary thing anymore because I don’t want people to think that’s the main reason why I do pole. But pole was the first sport, the first physical thing that I did that got me to this healthy point. And even if I’m definitely not as slim as I’d like to be—it’s less about aesthetics now, but I’m still carrying around 237 pounds. I still eat dumb shit. But the whole point is that this commenter made up the scenario that I claimed that there’s nothing wrong with obesity, but I never said that.

**MM:** The film is very much about being a person in a body and that experience. It's not about how we should or should not feel about health.

**RM:** No, it's absolutely not. If anyone follows me on my Facebook page, I'm the first person to talk about my weight. It's not something I shy away from. I'm the first person to tell my followers, "Guys, my blood pressure is high." Does my weight contribute to my elevated blood pressure? Yes. Is that a problem? Yes.

**MM:** But it doesn't mean that you need to have another layer of guilt and shame on top of that.

**RM:** Exactly. Ok, so another one! From "Rico": ***"Yucky armpits! Got to look at some Lady Gaga armpits to cure the cancer I caught looking at that gross armpit."*** [Roz laughs and leans back on couch, lifts her arm in air with armpit to camera.] I actually agree with you, Rico. This isn't cute [touches armpit]. Rico may be on to something...I'm just going to rock this for a second [Keeps arm up in air. Laughter.] For Rico.

**MM:** [Sarcastically, laughing] Because clearly this all for Rico. Clearly, the point of the video is whether or not he approves of your body.

**RM:** Oh shit. Let's see, another one. From "Marc": ***"If size is an issue for you, join the rest of us fatties and start eating less and retain a normal human form. You know the rules of nutrition and how to work out. Apply them."***

So, this comment represents something that doesn't necessarily have to do with just weight: when people oversimplify the human experience. When it's something they don't understand or they don't get or they just don't like, they say "Why can't you just lose weight?" That's like going up to somebody who is making \$12/hour and saying, "Why don't you just get a higher paying job?" Oh, you're not qualified? "Why don't you just go back to school and get your degree so you can get a higher paying job?" It oversimplifies the human experience, and it makes it seem like [my weight] is my personal choice. Now, do I feel like I have a shit ton of personal agency in my health? Abso-fucking-lutely. I will never blame my weight on something else, someone else, something mysterious. I'm extremely fortunate that I don't have any health conditions that contribute to my weight, but can you just change your metabolism like that? If you can, really, let me know. Because then I could do all kinds of wild stuff on the pole. I see all of my pole dreams coming true if Marc can just make me a new body. [Laughs]

**MM:** A question a lot of people ask you is, how do you...you put yourself out there so much and you get so much negativity back in response. It seems like it slides off you. Does it?

**RM:** Well, I'm so used to this. I assume it's going to happen. I'm coming into it as a dark, Black woman who is not a stripper, but people think I'm a stripper...I'm going into this like, "I already lost." Not because I think I'm a loser but because we know how America functions. [Not only do I represent all of these things America is confused about, but] I have the nerve to bring other people with me. I have the nerve to, even if I'm not confident in myself all the time, I can fake it for a class. People are really angry about confidence. It's overweight, it's race, it's gender. I mean, you name it.

**MM:** Sexuality. Our mainstream culture doesn't really know what to do with a woman who is enjoying being sexual, other than make her feel disrespected.

**RM:** And here's the wild part: the video had nothing to do with sexuality.

**MM:** Well, it's a pretty sexy video.

**RM:** Ok, yeah, I look fly as fuck, so it's damn sure a sexy video. [Laughing.] But I mean, if you want to see some sexy pole routines, go check out my Youtube page. And then we can talk. It's funny because, in my context, my limit to what I consider sexy or risqué is like out of this world. The bar is set so high in my mind.

**MM:** [Laughing] Yeah. But I think, for The New York Times, our video was pretty risqué.

**RM:** So, there's a couple more comments I want to talk about. From Ron: ***"Hillary is not going to break the glass ceiling. And neither is your friend. She will have as comfort her sense of grit, her sense of determination, and her sense of integrity."*** One interesting thing about The Times: I had so many people bring up [just-elected President Donald] Trump. There were a lot of comments that were angry because we have Trump to worry about, and the Times had the nerve to cover some-



thing else.

**MM:** Yeah. But, a story about women taking up space and a Black woman taking up space and encouraging other women to take up space in our world is, I think, very relevant to what's going on in the news and in politics.

**RM:** OK, so, back to the comment. I mean, love her or hate her, I'm not even close to Hillary. Let's keep it in context, what I'm doing. I mean, I don't take myself that seriously. I'm not necessarily trying to break a glass ceiling. I can climb up to their top of your glass ceiling, and I can do that upside down in booty shorts...but that's not necessarily my goal right now. I am trying to change perceptions, and I'm also trying to make a living and build a career.

**MM:** There's something else here though. I mean, is he saying that a pole dancer could never have the impact that a politician could have?

**RM:** Yeah, I think he took this video as, we're trying to break barriers and we're trying to put ourselves on the same pedestal. The interesting thing though is that he took up the time to bring up Hillary's fail-

ures. As if, she failed, so why do you think you're not going to fail? Like, if she failed, then you certainly don't deserve success. But he's making up these fake goals for me to begin with.

**MM:** Right.

**RM:** I mean, first thing: Hillary, if you're watching this, please come take a class. The most problematic thing about this comment is the part, "She will have as comfort her sense of grit, her determination, and her sense of integrity." So he's saying, she's never going to succeed but she'll still feel good about herself and she'll have that as a consolation prize. As if those things don't actually matter.

**MM:** Even just the idea of failure vs. not failure...

**RM:** Lord Jesus. Let me see if I can find one more, and then I'm going to talk about amazing things. Oh, this one! From "Anya": ***"I just don't get it. She's an educated woman from a good middle class family and working a pole in her underwear for her goal? I grew up poor and had the stereotypical looks for this type of thing, but cashing in on my body seemed like the most degrading thing to do. I worked so hard to get through community college, state schools, etc. to become independent and to avoid having to market my looks. It's hard to comprehend somebody with the privilege of a good education and options seeking this out."***

**MM:** So, I think that's a legitimate and interesting criticism. But there are also a lot of misconceptions in there...

**RM:** I mean, it's not like I'm a drug dealer. If I was dealing drugs and talking about this, then yes, you can ask me why I'm using my educated middle class background to deal drugs because that hurts people. But pole dancing...that leads to positivity, and it leads to a much healthier version of myself and all of my students. And it's led to a career. My parents worked so, so hard for my and my sister's school tuition. But suddenly, my education doesn't mean anything because I'm a pole dancer.

**MM:** There is a difference between doing pole dancing for money in a club or stripping situation and doing pole as you've done in more of a fitness, workshop, burlesque context. I mean, for people who make the decision to [strip], I think if it works for them, that's great. And the fact that the woman commenting didn't want to do it is also great. But I do think it's worth talking about the differences between what you do and the type of pole dancing she is referencing in her comment. Is it different?

**RM:** Why is she assuming I'm a stripper? I think you went out of your way in the film to show pole in the most un-stripping-like context possible.

**MM:** Still though, it does borrow a lot of the aesthetics of stripping.

**RM:** Absolutely. There's no question that me personally—not the rest of the industry—me personally, would I know anything about pole if it wasn't for strippers? No. Am I saying I look up to them? Well... yeah, actually I do. So, it damn sure is similar. It's got a ton of similarities. But what's different is the purpose and the context in which pole dancing vs. stripping is happening. But people don't understand the difference. In no point in the film did we talk about the male gaze and doing this for money or earning this for someone else or putting my sexuality on display in order to pay rent. Now, in a lot of ways, I do kind of put my sexuality on display. But not in a way that I expect other people to accept. It's more, "Oh, I happened to have a camera around when I was performing. Now, you're gonna watch it."

**MM:** You have complete ownership and control over you enjoying and celebrating your own sexuality. It's very much on your own terms.

**RM:** Exactly. It's not about someone else.

**MM:** One of the biggest things I learned from filming with you: it made me think about how we don't know how to respect a woman who is enjoying her own sexuality. And filming with you made me realize: what is more vulnerable and intimate and joyful and tender than sexuality? And why is it that we don't know how to make that safe or respectful for a woman? We just try to make women feel bad for it.

**RM:** It's people who are just afraid of losing power. There's a lot of power in sexuality.

**MM:** So, the moral of the story is...what's the moral of the story?

**RM:** The moral of the story is: drink before you read the comments! The other moral of the story is to reassure your mom that you are not curled up somewhere in a ball crying your eyes out.

**MM:** Because you're really not.

**RM:** I'm really not. And I don't want to give too much energy to the negativity. I've gotten hundreds of comments that are like, "Roz, you are so fucking fly."

**MM:** And on this video too.

**RM:** Yes, on this video too, across every platform. The hate is consistently drowned out by people who say, "Thank you for doing what you are doing." They seem to get the biggest picture and our intent. I do feel bad that we spent the last hour talking about the worst ones.

**MM:** I really respected that you wanted to do this. I do think it's important to point out and deconstruct and discuss...there are a lot of blind spots and stereotypes in these comments that were scarier than usual because they were so eloquently written. But hopefully this discussion can lead to more discussions... I definitely feel like I learned some things, so thank you Roz.