WOMEN OVER 50 CLUB: AGE AND TIKTOK DANCING IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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With the COVID-19 pandemic came the rise of TikTok, a video-making and -sharing app where users often choreograph and post short dances to song clips. TikTok is commonly associated with teens; however, this overlooks that there are many older women on the app, identifying through hashtags such as #over50club and #grandmasoftiktok. The question this paper aims to answer is how TikTok dancing videos created by women over 50 represent their community while navigating concepts of success. I employ Diane Goldstein's folklorist's toolbox and Richard Bauman's ideas of framing while keeping in mind the contexts in which these videos came—the COVID-19 pandemic and stereotypes that older women face. I categorize TikTok videos under five subgenres: knowledge, age, confidence/self-positivity, calls to community, and amusement. Women over 50 use dancing videos to play with and reject stereotypes associated with each subgenre (except calls to community), claiming autonomy in narratives about their community.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, millions of people around the world—myself included—found themselves more online than ever before. Work, school, entertainment, and even socialization became primarily a digital experience. As such, platforms for digital experiences grew in popularity, one of which included TikTok, a videomaking and sharing app. With a sophisticated algorithm that suggests videos for users to watch based on their predicted preferences, the app is a platform that presents a plethora of vernacular expressive forms, or folklore, all captured as short, looped videos. Particularly of note is the genre of TikTok dancing, where users create videos with choreographies to accompany song clips, which subsequently turn into trends, with thousands of people all over the world creating their own renditions with variation in dress, location, movement, and sound.

Women ages 18-24 are one of the primary demographics of TikTok users.[1] As a household name, TikTok is commonly thought of as entertainment specifically by and for the youth, yet if one were to use the app for a little while, they would find that it is not only teens and young adults who use it. A whole community of TikTok users—those who both consume and create videos—are older women. They identify themselves through hashtags such as #over50club and #grandmasoftiktok. More specifically, those who dance may use tags such as #grandmadance. Despite this presence, the small yet growing academic literature on TikTok has thus far tended to focus on the youths' experiences.[2]

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[1] Natalie Jarvey, "TikTok Boom! How the Exploding Social Media App Is Going Hollwyood," *The Hollywood Reporter*, hollywoodreporter.com/features/ tiktok-boom-how-exploding-social-media-app-is-going-hollywood-1293505, quoted in Trevor Boffone, *Renegades: Digital Dance Cultures from Dubsmash to TikTok* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 27.

[2] See Trevor Boffone, *Renegades: Digital Dance Cultures from Dubsmash to TikTok*; and M. Kennedy, "If the rise of the TikTok dance and e-girl aesthetic has taught us anything, it's that teenage girls rule the internet right now':

There is certainly value in understanding the experiences of the quantitative majority—it helps us better understand how the app is most used, for one. But ignoring a community on the margins is to leave out an important side of the holistic picture. Understanding TikTok, a piece of technology so well-known within its historical context—that is, in conjunction with the pandemic that rose to prominence simultaneously—can help us gain insight as to how our technological experiences and folkloric creations affect our lives and wellness during stressful times, furthering scholarship on newly developing digital folklore. The aim of this thesis is to explore TikTok dancing as a folkloric form and how it operates in the lives of women over 50 in light of the pandemic, especially in regard to body image.

I chose to focus this study on women over 50 because of the unique tensions they face due to gender, age, and the pandemic. Aside from the fact that TikTok is thought of as a young person's app, older generations of people are typically stereotyped as being technologically behind; specifically, they (allegedly) have a hard time updating and adjusting to new technology.[3] In addition, women specifically often must deal with restrictive beauty standards that value youth and stigmatize old age. In an app that started in the last five years,[4] where bodies often become the focus in a stream of videos about dancing, fashion, skits, makeup, and more, women over 50 are often faced with these stereotypes yet resist and/or play with them in different ways. Inherently, this group resists the notion of being technologically behind just by being in a relatively new space dominated by the youth. Their videos often address ideas about body image, which will be a key theme throughout this paper.

TikTok celebrity, girls and the Coronavirus crisis," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 6 (2020): 1069-1076.

[3] H. Wandke, M. Sengpiel, and M. Sönksen. "Myths about older people's use of information and communication technology," *Gerontology* 58, no. 6 (2012): 564-70, doi.org/10.1159/000339104.

[4] Joe Tidy and Sophia Smith Galer, "TikTok: The story of a social media giant," *BBC News,* August 2020.

Literature Review

Defining Folklore

We can use many modes of cultural analysis to examine the videos of a community and what they might represent, but a folkloristics lens is especially useful as we can consider TikTok videos a form of folklore. While folklorists have complicated and rejected the historical (and colloquial) connotation of "folklore" being confined to fairy tales, falsehoods, or just something old, the definition of the word certainly remains a topic of debate in the field. Dan Ben-Amos suggests that folklore is "artistic communication in small groups,"[5] and this well-known definition continues to influence thought today. However, with so much artistic communication happening on the Internet in more recent times, the term "small groups" has complicated the definition; after all, people all over the world have access to the Internet. This calls into question whether TikTok videos count as folklore. I find a definition by Daniel Wojcik more helpful:

> …most (folklorists) agree that the concept refers to vernacular culture and expressive behavior that is largely informal, usually related to communal or local identity, and frequently regarded as traditional. Folklorists study cultural heritage, traditions, and symbolic behavior in everyday life, and provide critical analyses of important cultural practices that often have been neglected or devalued.[6]

With this definition, TikTok videos would certainly fall under the category of folklore—TikTok videos, and specific to this thesis, those that include dancing, are a form of expressive behavior as their creators construct the videos artistically according to their sensibilities, whether that is according to what they think the audience would like or what they themselves like. TikTok videos are largely informal (although there are plenty of companies who mimic TikTok

[5] Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 3-15.

[6] Daniel Wojcik, *Folklore Studies Today*, unpublished manuscript, 2002.

trends with their own TikTok accounts to appeal to the market audience) and community-based, what with community-forming hashtags (#over50club, for example) that demarcate folk groups. And of course, the expressive form itself brings people together as a shared knowledge of a subject usually creates a sense of connection. On one level, there are so many different trending choreographies that grow every single day as individuals express their creativity. But on a larger scale, there are also works of creation by communities when a trend comes forward. That is, when a trend becomes at large, each new video/TikTok user that participates in the trend interacts with others like it and contributes to a mosaic that makes up the face of the trend.

The Theoretical Toolbox

A source that I have found most foundational to developing this project is Diane Goldstein's "Not Just a 'Glorified Anthropologist': Medical Problem Solving Through Verbal and Material Art," which explores what makes folklore different from other disciplines. The chapter considers three important concepts to be critical in a folklorist's "toolbox," that is, the skills and training they use in their work: genre, transmission, and tradition. Genre has to do with expressive creations, essentially the "thing" that is passed from person to person. Transmission is the process of spreading information between people, implying a sender and a recipient. Lastly is tradition, which draws genre and transmission together.[7]

As a folklorist, I employ these three tools (genre, transmission, and tradition) in my work and have dedicated the following sections to breaking down each tool in more detail. I have added a section about performance, as well, because this is a great complement to the other tools that I have also used in analyzing TikTok dance videos given the performance-based nature of

[7] Diane Goldstein, "Not Just a 'Glorified Anthropologist': Medical Problem Solving Through Verbal and Material Art," *Folk in use: applications in the real world* 1, no. 1 (1993): 15-24.

them. Before getting into these sections, however, I want to establish how I conceptualize the folk, which is critical to the way one uses the toolbox and in itself could be a tool, a lens with which to select and view what can be considered folklore based on who "the folk" might be.

The Folk

Historically, folklorists have always been concerned with what people call the "folk." Elliot Oring writes about how folklorists tend to orient folklore according to a selection of concepts:

> As we have seen, folklorists seem to pursue reflections of the communal (a group or collective), the common (the everyday rather than extraordinary), the informal (in relation to the formal and institutional), the marginal (in relation to the centers of power and privilege), the personal (communication face-to-face), the traditional (stable over time), the aesthetic (artistic expressions), and the ideological (expressions of belief and systems of knowledge.[8]

What I would like to highlight here is the common, the informal, and the marginal, which all pertain to how we can describe what we call the folk. It has historically been important that folklorists make this distinction that the folk are generally not those in power in a given space, but rather the marginal, "the common people," or as Alan Dundes and Carl Pagter write, "the rural, uneducated 'peasants' or 'folk' groups."[9] Dundes and Pagter add that this idea of rural uneducated peasants as the folk has changed over time to become more inclusive of urban people and therefore less problematic. I will expand on this below, but in terms of power dynamics, the idea of the folk being regular people often still applies. Women over 50 on TikTok certainly fit this mold in a broader perspective because they are not what people see as powerful on

[8] Elliot Oring, "On the Concepts of Folklore," in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1986), 17-18.

[9] Alan Dundes and Carl Pagter, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), xvi.

TikTok—they are not the majority of users, they are not usually who comes to mind when people think of TikTok, and they are not usually major, app-wide trend setters.

A famous definition of folk that is more inclusive and useful for the purposes of this paper also comes from Dundes, who writes that "folk" includes "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor."[10] This definition is useful because it puts the focus on people who are in groups, rather than the groups themselves. This means that we cannot include institutions and organizations with this definition (although we could include the people who are involved in institutions). In the case of this paper, women over 50 are the folk who share in common their dancing presence on TikTok. Note that this includes the people who use TikTok, and not the TikTok platform itself, as that would be an institution, not folk.

Women over 50 who dance on TikTok, and online communities in general, are remarkable in that the people would not necessarily ever meet or find each other in-person. When it comes to making folk groups, much like someone can go out and join an in-person dancing club and form bonds and share a love of dancing together, people online can seek each other out by showing up digitally and finding others with whom to bond and chat about their interests. They send out a message to the world and rely on technology to do its work and find others with like minds and similar experiences. One way they do this is through hashtags (which is how I frequently engaged with the community myself) either by searching them to find others or by putting them in their videos to affect the algorithm, so that the video will land on others' For You Pages, or FYPs, which are the main feed where users see content.

[10] Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 2.

Note that in Oring's excerpt, he talks about how folklorists are concerned with "the personal (communication face-to-face);"[11] it is clear that online interactions are not literally face-to-face, but can operate in similar ways. Dundes and Pagter write about faxes and copy material, but the same idea can be applied to online folklore: "As each item moves from person to person, change is almost inevitable. Each person (and ultimately each society) makes the item of folklore his own by consciously or unconsciously placing his personal interpretative stamp upon it."[12] There are some differences between an online folk and an in-person folk, though—the nature of being online affects how people might behave due to the more (though not complete) anonymous feeling that comes with it, such as what they find appropriate to say in a comment. I explore some examples of rude and unsolicited comments (not from this community but directed toward members of this community) in Chapter 4. Now that I have explicated ideas about the folk, the following sections present ideas about the folklorist's toolbox: genre, transmission, and tradition.

Genre: The What

Lynne McNeill writes that when folklorists are concerned with genre, they are concerned with the folk's creation, aka the lore itself, whether that be a material or ephemeral creation.[13] In other words, genre deals with the substance, the "what" of folklore: community jokes, nursery rhymes, blankets, pottery, and in the case of this study, TikTok dancing videos. According to McNeill, "Folklorists know that the communicative choice of one genre over another provides

[11] Elliot Oring, "On the Concepts of Folklore," 17-18.

[12] Alan Dundes and Carl Pagter, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire,* xxi.

[13] Lynne McNeill, "And the Greatest of These Is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century," in *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*, eds. Trevor Blank and Robert Glenn Howard (University Press of Colorado, 2013), 175-176.

insights into a teller's or performer's motivation, identity, and worldview."[14] When we think through folklore using ideas of genre as a tool, we can look at these creations and identify patterns and categorize what we see in order to help us understand what is going on.

A large part of my work in this thesis is identifying genres within TikTok dancing videos in the women over 50 community. I do this using Richard Bauman's idea of genres, where he writes: "From this perspective, genre appears as a set of conventional guidelines or schemas for dealing with recurrent communicative exigencies—greetings for example, as a means of establishing interactional access (Gunther and Knolblauch 1995; Luckmann 1995)."[15] Using genre as a lens for analysis transcends local singular happenings of a given creative expression because it indexes prior uses, carrying with it the connotations of other single instances under the same genre.[16] In essence, when thinking about genre, we can look for a set, or package, of patterns that can be used to identify what kind of folklore it is, based on the foundation of other similar instances. This coincides with how people interact with folklore on a day-to-day basis—for those familiar with TikTok, what comes to mind when they hear the term "TikTok video"? Connotations and experiences with the app are different for everyone, but chances are they will at least think of a short, looped video that shares audio with other videos and is most likely casual and/or entertaining in nature, because that is how the pattern has historically manifested. That also means that one can have the same genre used under different circumstances, such as a TikTok video someone views on the app itself, one that is posted to another website, or one that

[14] Lynne McNeill, "And the Greatest of These Is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century," 176.

[15] Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 5.

[16] Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words*, 5.

is shown in a classroom for educational purposes. In all of these instances, we can still recognize it as a TikTok video.

The videos from the community this paper focuses on are subgenres of TikTok videos. They are still TikTok videos, and so the same package of characteristics that comes with TikTok videos as a genre apply, but the characteristics the community chooses to express out of that package are more specific and selective. For example, take the common characteristic of floating captions. TikTok videos in general often have a set of written words that are in the video, much like a caption, in addition to the caption that we see under the video. But in the dancing videos by women over 50, we often see those captions in colorful fonts and with emojis. The question then becomes, in the guidelines of what makes a TikTok video, why did the creators make this particular aesthetic choice? Why did they choose TikTok, of all places, to express themselves? This will be something I explore later on in the paper.

With genre, we can identify and dig more deeply into the "what," and we know that the "what" exists through communications between people, if it is a product coming out of a community. That leaves the question of how the "what" gets from person to person. The answer is transmission.

Transmission: The How

Goldstein considers transmission to be "how information moves through time and space."[17] Lynne McNeill adds that transmission depends on the idea that such information has both a sender and a recipient, and that not all transmission is folk transmission: "Cultural materials transmitted via mass broadcast or institutional networks—materials that are identical at

[17] Diane Goldstein, "Not Just a 'Glorified Anthropologist': Medical Problem Solving Through Verbal and Material Art," 20.

every point of reception and are authoritative in their original form and content—are not folklore."[18] It is true that TikTok is an institutional network and that TikTok videos are often mass broadcasted, but I would argue that TikTok videos still count as folklore through their lack of authoritative form and identicality between each other, and therefore folk transmission still applies. There is no one TikTok video that is *the* official, authoritative TikTok video. Rather, the millions of TikTok videos are equally valid as TikTok videos in their own right, and are published by the people, aka the folk, not the institution. Further, there are no two TikTok videos that are just alike.[19] Although the algorithm ultimately broadcasts TikTok videos of the folk's creation, the way that the interaction looks is more like a person-to-person interaction, where the video creator passes on unique information to the viewer. Although the algorithm's programming makes it slightly more complicated, we can compare this situation to friends gathering in a Walmart. Walmart itself is not folklore, but people can gather there (as though it is a platform) to tell each other folklore and play games in the aisles, which do count as folklore. In all, the qualities of institutional network and mass broadcasting which usually discount materials as folklore, namely, the lack of folk and the lack of person-to-person transmission, do not apply here.

TikTok videos are in a unique position as a type of folklore because of their being in digital format, or rather, a type of media, and as a result the idea of (folk) transmission requires closer analysis. Craig Mishler writes:

> Starting in the nineteenth century, oral tradition has become more and more entwined in mass media, and the process of that entwining, called mediation, consists of various

[18] Lynne McNeill, "And the Greatest of These is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century," 176.

[19] There are TikTok videos that are reposts of older videos, although here I am mainly thinking about original creations. But even still, reposts have different qualities from their counterparts, whether it be posted by another user (and therefore accompanied with a new profile picture, username, and likely, quality and caption), or a repost by the same user, in which case the caption (usually) and therefore context is different.

> forms of communication. The mediated world consists largely of books, newspapers and magazines, radio and television, records, tapes, and compact discs, the telephone and smartphone, and the Internet. Except for telephones, smartphones and the Internet, these are essentially impersonal one-way means of communication. And, compared to oral tradition, they are oftentimes commodified.[20]

TikTok of course falls under smartphones and the Internet, where there is, most of the time, at least a two-way means of communication, thus leaving us a pathway for transmission and communication of folklore. That is, we can think about what is transmitted on TikTok not as folklore transformed into mass media, but instead as folklore that is negotiated through the tools of mass media. According to Ruth Finnegan, "These material media of various kinds are often surrounded by clusters of uses and practices which in themselves present accepted options and constraints for communicating."[21] Here Finnegan is literally talking about material art, but the quote also applies to technological media, including TikTok. When we see dancing videos on TikTok, it is not the TikTok form of communication itself that undergoes transmission but instead, the uses and practices represented in the video, such as dancing, text usage, and overall performance. Where TikTok is the medium, the performance and material is the folkloric substance. And, as Finnegan writes, "At the same time we have to remember that no medium, from stone pebble to written page, ultimately communicates in its own right, but only as it is

[20] Craig Mishler, "The Mediated and Theatrical Tale," in *The Blind Man and the Loon* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 119. I would like to point out the second part of Mishler's quote, which is that mediated forms of communication can be commodified. This is certainly the case with TikTok, as users can get enough popularity that they qualify for the TikTok Creator Fund, where creators are paid for their work. Secondly, but perhaps more frequently, creators with a lot of followers often make partnerships with brands, where the brand pays the creator to promote products in their videos. This likely happens less frequently with people who mostly make dancing videos with their TikTok account compared to people who focus their account on making tutorials or talking about style or objects (such as fashion, makeup, tech, or home design-focused TikTok accounts), but it still could happen. This does not diminish their folklore; rather, the creators are paid for their folklore work. Imagine a folk singer hired to sing at a party—their folksongs are still folklore, regardless of the fact they are paid for them.

[21] Ruth Finnegan, *Communicating: the Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41.

used and interpreted by human enactors."[22] Therefore, when we think about transmission, we can pay attention to what is communicated between creator and audience in a given video.

If we are to use transmission as a tool to observe as folklorists, it allows us to see what parts of a given piece of folklore remain between generations—what many folklorists call the conservative element. In the case of TikTok dance videos, we can ask ourselves while we observe, "What do we see happening in this video that also happened in the last video?" Oftentimes, this can look like a repeated choreography, repeated sound clips, or with duets and stitches. The duet and stitch features are an especially helpful place to look for transmission because these features allow users to put their video alongside another person's video, or to include a clip of another's video in their own. When we have two videos side by side or immediately following one another, we can more easily see 1) the juxtaposition between the two and 2) how the creator is framing their content in conversation with others. When a creator makes the choice to use a duet or stitch, they are consciously inviting us as viewers to consider them in tandem with the video they dueted or stitched.

There are some similarities between genre and transmission. Both involve looking for patterns of characteristics in videos. The difference lies in how we interpret these patterns, and it is a thin line to walk. Where we see patterns in terms of genre, we see how those patterns work to create a packaged set of characteristics that paint the overall genre; this is informed by the history of previous iterations. Transmission is when a creator is putting forth this package of characteristics, or genre, into the world so that others can also use the package and make their own content within the genre. Were I to teach someone to make a TikTok video, I can transmit what characteristics of a TikTok video are acceptable to change and what characteristics are not

[22] Ruth Finnegan, *Communicating: the Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection*, 41.

acceptable to change. As a folklorist, I am watching this pattern happen, hence looking for patterns between videos.

The specification of using transmission as a tool this way is important to distinguish. Some might think of transmission more literally, that is, in terms of the operation that a piece of folklore goes through in order to get from one person to another. This has more to do with communication processes than it does the folklorist's tool for making sense of a given piece of folklore. But I will still consider this communication process here, at the risk of being tangential, because it brings up some interesting points about community making. On TikTok, people rely on technology's algorithm to pass on information. Once someone creates a TikTok video and posts it, it is up to TikTok to push it onto other people's FYPs, or rather, the recipients. What I want to consider here is how users take this algorithm into account in their content.

Users often try to purposefully influence their own algorithm through interactions and comments. According to TikTok, the algorithm chooses videos to go on a given user's FYP through their likes, comments, viewing patterns, and demographics. People often use hashtags to help their video reach the right audiences. But there is more—when watching the general videos that come across my FYP, I have seen people in the comment sections say something such as "Commenting to stay on CapyTok"[23] (for example). There are also videos where the creator proclaims that they have "landed on the wrong side of TikTok," requesting comments and likes from people in their target audience. We know that ultimately it is the FYP that makes the final decision to transmit information on TikTok, but even still, with hashtags, comments, and content such as these, users express a sense of agency in their FYP and algorithm. Continuing with the example of CapyTok, such a comment immediately places a frame in which to view the video

[23] Capy is short for capybaras, and Tok is short for TikTok. Together, this means Capybara TikTok.

(which we may assume is about capybaras): this video about capybaras is just one out of a larger number of capybara videos and it is associated with a community of users who are interested in capybaras. Transmission, then, is a result of this operation—we end up seeing a pattern of these community-binding elements (comments about CapyTok and hashtags, etc). Transmission happens in the midst of performance—it is what people get out of it, and then choose to transmit when they join in making the folklore (make their own version of a TikTok video).

Tradition: The Why

The third tool in Goldstein's toolbox is tradition, which she argues is the most important of the three because it is what draws genre and transmission together. As McNeill puts it, "The presence of an expressive genre, plus the addition of some kind of informal process by which to share that genre, results in something traditional, or in a tradition."[24] What makes tradition especially important is that it adds an overlaying sense of authority to the folklore. Robert Glenn Howard writes, "On the one hand, *tradition* can refer to the empirical quality of an act as having been handed down, while on the other hand, it can refer to a noninstitutional or vernacular authorizing force perceived by those participating in an act."[25] He considers tradition to be "discursive formation" that is tied to vernacular authority.[26] Note here that vernacular authority only includes the vernacular, and does not include official institutional authority such as the TikTok company.

[24] Lynne McNeill, "And the Greatest of These is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century," 183.

[25] Robert Glenn Howard, "Vernacular Authority: Critically Engaging 'Tradition,'" in *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*. (University Press of Colorado, 2013), 73.

[26] Robert Glenn Howard, "Vernacular Authority: Critically Engaging 'Tradition,'" 76.

McNeill's explanation of tradition does well to demonstrate how folklore can be passed down from generation to generation. She explains that tradition adds a sense of continuity through its use of conservative elements (elements that stay the same to "identify a new iteration as 'the same thing' as a previous one")[27], and dynamic elements, which are the new creative twist. Thus, tradition does not necessarily mean old, or that each creator of an iteration is one generation passing it on to the next. Rather, it means that each new iteration of the same type of creation is a generation. This continuity involves how people talk about it and engage with their idea of vernacular authority. According to Howard, "The sense of tradition as an authorizing force, however, is more sharply in focus when researchers approach folklore as performed expressive behavior or 'discourse.' Approached as discourse, the quality of being traditional is a perception among participants that their action is the result of social connections that have endured through space and across time."[28]

Like both genre and transmission, using tradition as a tool to examine folklore requires looking for patterns between videos and identifying common elements. Patterns in transmission show us what elements are transmitted from video to video; genre is a package of those patterns, a set of elements that persist so much so that they become a matched set; tradition, then, is the pattern of elements and discourse around them that persist from one intertextual piece to another that gives a sense of continuity and that has a sense of vernacular authority. Tradition is unique in the three tools because it can be part of a performance itself (although not always), but ultimately is rooted in the discourse around the folklore. A TikTok video creator uses tradition as a way to give themselves credibility, although they might not frame it as tradition outright, but

[27] Lynne McNeill, "And the Greatest of These is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century," 177-180.

[28] Robert Glenn Howard, "Vernacular Authority: Critically Engaging 'Tradition,'" 73.

instead refer to whatever they consider authoritative or traditional. A viewer uses tradition as a tool to decide if that credibility is actually valid (they might ask themselves, "Does this line up with what I've seen before?"). A folklorist uses tradition to see what values might be evident in the communication process. As Howard says, "A critical approach to 'tradition' would specifically seek to understand claims to vernacular authority as assertions of power in specific contextualized communication events and then seek to evaluate those claims in terms of their impact on broader social formations."[29]

The following section explores performance, which, while it is not included in Goldstein's general folklorist toolbox, is still an important complement for the above tools given this particular topic.

Performance

Colloquially, the term performance often refers to one whole presentation—a performance in the theater, for example, would include the whole show, the set, the actors, the costumes, the dialogue, and so on, all bundled up into one presentation. When I talk about performance in the context of this paper, however, I am more thinking about it in the lines of how different ideas presented within a video are enacted. Since there can be multiple ideas present and influencing each video, that means that there can be multiple performances going on simultaneously. There is so much that goes into identifying performances—the ways in which the performer (aka, the video creator) acts to indicate what kind of video it might be, what qualities she selects to highlight certain aspects of herself and why, and how the audience reacts, whether or not they end up in the same "wavelength" as the creator. In order to explore these

[29] Robert Glenn Howard, "Vernacular Authority: Critically Engaging 'Tradition,'" 80.

aspects of performance in more depth, I will first turn to Richard Bauman, whose discussion of framing in performance is foundational to this thesis.

Bauman, who writes about verbal art, says that we can distinguish verbal art from regular speech through the frames with which we consider it.[30] For example, in American society, we consider poetry to be more figurative than regular speech, so when we look at a piece of poetry, we are not necessarily looking for something that makes literal sense, but rather, is full of symbolism and perhaps even hidden meaning. By comparison, even though regular speech can often be figurative and have hidden meaning, we usually expect it to be more direct to the topic at hand. We know which sorts of frames to use when looking at a piece of folklore through genric markers—features and structures within a piece of folklore, such as certain movements, song clips, et cetera—that give us clues specific to cultural context. Poetry in English is often indicated through rhythmic meter and sometimes rhyming (the list goes on, but these are two of the common identifiers). In other words, markers can tell us what kinds of performances to expect.

Of course, verbal art and speech is very different from TikTok videos in many ways, but Bauman's ideas about performance framing are still applicable to TikTok videos because they share the same qualities that Bauman identifies as important to the topic. Oral poetry is "conceived essentially as cultural objects: durable, repeatable, classifiable, linked to other texts by relationships of descent (both textual and national) and generic similarity."[31] Applying Bauman's above ideas to TikTok, I look at each video through multiple frames that operate often

[30] Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *American anthropologist* 77, no. 2 (1975): 290–311.

[31] Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), quoted in Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*, 2.

at the same time: online social media, i.e., how TikTok users interact online through these short, looped videos; and gender and age, i.e., how TikTok users represent themselves as women at or older than the age of 50. These frames can indicate to users/viewers what kinds of performances they are watching and how they as an audience can judge them; some are more obvious than others, such as performances of TikTok, because that is inherent on the app, while others are at times less obvious, like age. It is because of the viewer's evaluation and potential rejection/miscommunication of frames that performance is always risky to some degree. I will more deeply explore how the markers in these frames help us categorize TikTok dancing videos into subgenres, and why that is useful, in later chapters.

When performers use markers to put together a performance of something, they are also constructing a sort of persona to present to the audience, and it is here I turn to the ideas of Thomas Turino. He writes about how people can choose different habits and aspects of themselves in order to construct an identity that they want in any given situation, particularly in order to fit into a "cultural cohort."[32] Specifically in regard to gender, Ellen Waterman explains that performance is "a process of working out roles and relationships that went through fixed stages but with an outcome that could not be known in advance and that was never final."[33] So when women over 50, the cultural cohort of this thesis, make TikTok videos and mark them with hashtags such as #womenover50 and #grandmasoftiktok, they have selected what habits and aspects of themselves that they want to represent them as women of their age on TikTok.

[32] Thomas Turino, "Chapter 4: Habits of the Self, Identity, and Culture," in *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 95.

[33] Ellen Waterman, "Performance Studies and Critical Improvisation Studies in Ethnomusicology: Understanding Music and Culture through Situated Practice," in *Theory for Ethnomusicology* (Routledge, 2019), 145.

Throughout this thesis, I will look at more than 50 markers coming from video captions, dance moves, apparel, video background, audio, and hashtags, a list of which is in Chapter 2.

Reasons to Dance

The section above explores the theory that informs the methods behind this thesis. Here, I would like to discuss what literature says about the function of art and/or dance in people's lives. One good example of this is Wojcik's work with outsider art, which follows the works of artists who feel isolated from society in various ways and in many cases use their art as a way of feeling a sense of control.[34] In a pandemic—COVID-19—where control seems out of reach as sudden quarantines are required, social events are canceled, and older people are especially at risk, never knowing exactly when one might catch the virus, many people have turned to TikTok for expression and community. In fact, Trevor Boffone mentions how TikTok has been a place of community building for youth, although this is complicated by TikTok being a space where Whiteness is valued over Blackness.[35] The following literature explores how COVID-19 might affect women on TikTok, which is useful in the context of this thesis because it provides more context to the experiences I learned about while talking to community members (see Chapter 3).

When it comes to dealing with the pandemic's constraints, there is literature about how people deal with it online more generally. Siti Mazidah Mohamad writes about how youth in Brunei talk about/cope with COVID-19 online, breaking it down into several different

[34] Daniel Wojcik, "Outsider Art, Vernacular Traditions, Trauma, and Creativity," *Western Folklore* 67, no. 2 (2008): 179-198.

[35] Trevor Boffone, *Renegades: Digital Dance Cultures from Dubsmash to TikTok.*

narrative categories: fear, responsibility, annoyance, fun, and resistance.[36] We could apply this framework of thinking to how older women deal with the pandemic on TikTok in light of COVID-19. Much of it may fall under "fun," which Mohamad describes as a coping mechanism, but it could be an act of resistance or annoyance in some cases such as when people dance with subtitles responding to disrespectful comments, or when they dance in a public place, and in doing so, mix up the norms.

One realm that Mohamad's framework does not cover is that of exercise, which is important to consider as movement and health can be at issue during a pandemic, especially to those who may be older. Urs Granacher, et al., coming from a physical therapy perspective, write that it is not uncommon for PTs to suggest playing with children or salsa dancing to older patients as it helps with balance and strength. Importantly, it is also fun and has a social element, which helps with motivation, critical to making a habit and seeing healthy improvement.[37] With the pandemic closing access to social dances, salsa and other sorts of dancing were not available to who may need these attributes in their exercise routine. While investigating the quantifiable health effects of TikTok dancing is beyond the scope of this paper and more in the realm of physical therapy than folklore, I want to nod to the physical experiences and consequences of dancing as they certainly play a role in this folkloric form. This thesis focuses more on the social aspect of dancing, exploring the interactions between users and forms of motivation.

The Perception of Age, Body Image, and Fashion

[36] S.M. Mohamad, "Creative Production of 'COVID-19 Social Distancing' Narratives on Social Media," *Royal Dutch Geographical Society* 111, no. 3 (2020): 347–359.

[37] Urs Granacher, et al., "Effects of a Salsa Dance Training on Balance and Strength Performance in Older Adults," *Gerontology (Basel)* 58, no. 4 (2012): 305–312. doi.org/10.1159/000334814.

Lastly in the literature section I want to explore Western stereotypes and assumptions about older women that can affect the way that they move through spaces. As Mary and Kenneth Gergen write, "Across the life span, the stereotype of the aging woman is the most negative of all age and gender groups. She is often portrayed as a marginalized figure—ugly, undesirable, and weak—in the late stages of physical and mental decline."[38] This is especially portrayed in fashion and media. Federica Fornaciari and Laine Goldman conducted a study in 2019 on media about the fashion industry, finding that negative ideals about aging are still very prevalent, although there are some minor moves within the industry to have a little bit more representation than there has been in past years.[39] There is also the fashion trend called "granny chic," which Maria Mackinney-Valentin defines:

> Granny chic is understood here as a contemporary fashion phenomenon characterized as the celebration by younger people of elements that may generally be considered to belong to the realm of older women. Old or pre-owned clothes, style revivals, grey hair, crafting, orthopaedic shoes and a frumpy or dowdy look may fall in the category of granny chic.[40]

I am less concerned here with people who wear granny chic, which is more in the realm of younger people, and more concerned with the image that granny chic paints about how an older woman looks in the eyes of society. The association with older women and grandmothers or "grannies" also speaks to the stereotype that women should reproduce and that all women are mothers and/or grandmothers.

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[38] M. M. Gergen and K. Gergen, "Positive Aging: Reconstructing The Life Course," in *Handbook Of Girl's And Women's Psychological Health*, eds. J. Worrell And C. D. Goodheart (Oxford University Press, 2006), 416.

[39] Federica Fornaciari and Laine Goldman, "The silver generation and beauty: Does American culture provide models for positive ageing?" *Critical studies in fashion & beauty* 10, no. 2 (2019): 191–219, doi.org/10.1386/csfb_00002_1.

[40] Maria Mackinney-Valentin, "Age and Fashion: A Study of Ambiguous Status Representation in Granny Chic," *Critical studies in fashion & beauty* 4, no. 1 (2013): 125–146.

These ideas about older women's looks and mannerisms, in addition to the perception that older people struggle with technology,[41] are important to pay attention to because it affects the way that people see themselves, as well as the way that people interact. Foraciari and Goldman write that "Our beliefs about our self and our relationships are shifting, partly in response to how the media frame them. As we age, we socially construct a new narrative about our own mortality, often borrowing from frames that are made available in media discourse."[42] Whether it is through internalizing, rejecting, or playing with these stereotypes, women over 50 on TikTok often address these concepts in their videos as the space often calls for it given the age connotations of the app explored earlier.

Methods

My methods of investigation involved creating a TikTok account dedicated to the project. This way I would start out with a clean slate for my For You Page (FYP), which is the TikTok main screen that suggests videos for the user based on their past likes, views, searches, and related activity. I visited this account, either to scroll on the FYP, my "Following" page (where it shows videos from only those I follow), or to search hashtags periodically during the months of March 2022 through May 2023. The number of videos created by women over 50 that I have seen is inexact given the nature of TikTok's scrollable design; however, according to my watch history, the total number of videos I have viewed is more than 970. During my sessions, I would take detailed notes on a separate app or device (usually my phone's Notes app or my

[41] H. Wandke, M. Sengpiel, and M. Sönksen. "Myths about older people's use of information and communication technology."

[42] Federica Fornaciari and Laine Goldman, "The silver generation and beauty: Does American culture provide models for positive ageing?" 197.

computer) of what I saw, especially if I noticed a pattern or a video that went viral. When going back over my notes, I would look for patterns, choose a good example of the pattern, search it on TikTok, and save it or screenshot it to my phone for easy reference later. I selected a sample of 60 videos to present quantifiable data for readers. I have chosen 11 of these videos to more deeply analyze in Chapter 4. A full list of the 60 videos with associated URLs can be found in Appendix A. I also made a few TikTok videos of my own in order to understand the process and to connect with the community. After all, Deidre Sklar argues that understanding bodylore—in this case, TikTok dancing—is difficult without having the body go through the motions and the subsequent sensations of it.[43]

The data and analysis that I present also takes into account four roughly one hour-long interviews with women who are involved with the over 50 community in one way or another. One interview is with Lizzette, who I connected with through TikTok and Instagram. She uses TikTok frequently and uses #over50club hashtags. Two interviews are with Peggy and Margaret, who are not as familiar with TikTok but have passingly used it. They both have danced a lot in-person, Peggy being a retired professional modern dancer who runs a dance studio and Margaret having done a lot of different kinds of dances recreationally in her former years. Lastly, Erin, who was not yet 50 at the time of interview, has experience teaching choreography with many women over 50, and often uses TikTok for inspiration. While she is not a part of the community directly, her perspective enriches our understanding of the process of dancing with members of the community and viewing their content on TikTok.

It is important to note that the interviews are not intended to represent the cultural cohort of women over 50 who use TikTok as a whole. One person is not a spokesperson for an entire

[43] D. Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" *The Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 423 (1994): 9-22.

group of people, many of whom likely do not even know each other. Furthermore, the number of women over 50 who use TikTok is unquantifiable—we have no way of knowing the number, and it changes every day as people stop and start using it. Four people, then, is not an adequate sample size to represent the values of the group. What I mean by having these interviews in the data and analysis is to include voices from the community within this project and highlight their experiences, rather than speculating without making connections.

Overview and Conclusion

Here I would like to give a brief overview of what to expect out of each chapter and finish this chapter with some final thoughts. In Chapter 2, I present in more detail the experience of using TikTok, as well as the data I have collected, including a table of all the markers I analyzed and how many videos out of 60 included each marker. Chapter 3 analyzes this data, using the markers to categorize the videos into five subgenres:[44] knowledge, confidence/self-positivity, age, calls to community, and amusement. After explaining each of these subgenres in depth, I discuss the multiple avenues of success that women over 50 can find with their TikTok videos, especially going viral versus feeling genuine in the art. Chapter 4 illustrates success in multiple avenues through analysis of 11 different videos, considering the relationship between success and genre, trends in viral videos, and creator-viewer communication through framing. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis, drawing together final thoughts and further paths of study. There is also an appendix with a list of the 60 videos from which I quantified the markers (Appendix A) and an appendix that lists which videos had which markers (Appendix B).

[44] I call these subgenres of the main genre, which is TikTok videos. All of these videos are TikTok videos, and so I focus on the subgenres when talking about what sets this community apart.

I hope that this study will help readers to better understand women over 50, a group that is historically often left out of the conversation. I also hope for it to help paint a better picture of how spaces like TikTok can be used to nurture community and find outlets for fun and creativity, especially as conversations about banning the app in the U.S. ripple across the nation.

CHAPTER II: PAINTING THE PICTURE

Introduction

On one sunny afternoon in Eugene, OR, I attended a local dance class to get myself thinking about dance and potentially connect with some more dancers who could talk to me about their experiences. I was explaining this project to a couple of interested people, and one of them wanted to know more about TikTok and how one might define a TikTok dance. "If we were to set up a camera in our class today, for instance, could that be a TikTok dance?" she asked. Another woman in the group answered. "Yes, it could! It could be anything!"

In many ways she was right—the variety of dances on TikTok is limitless. There are recordings of dance classes and performances for in-person audiences; videos of different dance styles such as ballet, hip hop, and hula; videos performed directly for the camera; this list goes on. But when people talk about "TikTok dancing," chances are, they are talking about something more specific. What TikTok is likely most famous for is those dances that are performed for the camera and integrate movements from hip hop especially, as numerous news articles and websites suggest.[45] However, the variation can make TikTok dancing complicated to pin down, and thus, for analysis and understanding, it is critical to think about what exactly we mean when we say "TikTok dance" as it pertains to the women over 50 community. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a vivid understanding of the TikTok platform in terms of looks and operation, present the data I have collected using the methods and tools described in Chapter 1, and overall, give the reader a better understanding of what typical dancing videos look like from the community of women over 50 on TikTok.

[45] Carolyn Twersky and Briannah Rivera, "Ten TikTok Dances That You Can Learn in No Time," *Seventeen,* February 2023; Koh Ewe, "Yes, TikTok Dances All Look the Same. Here's Why," *Vice,* April 2021; and Niall Edwards-FitzSimons, "The secret of TikTok's success? Humans are wired to love imitating dance moves," *The Conversation,* March 2020.

Data

When one first opens the TikTok app, they are met with a video—often an ad, but if not, an algorithm-selected video—that takes up the whole screen. The video begins playing immediately, and once it finishes, it begins again. With one scroll up, the user can switch to the next video suggested by the algorithm. The TikTok algorithm is based on what the viewer has watched, liked, and commented on, and who the person has followed, as well as their location.[46] Ways to navigate, interact, and get more information border the screen around every video. Along the top of the screen is navigation, showing from left to right: a logo shaped like a TV that says, "LIVE," where users can scroll through algorithm-suggested live-streamed videos; "Following," where users can watch videos exclusively by accounts they follow; "For You," the main page where users can watch any algorithm-suggested videos, regardless of following status; and a magnifying glass, which brings up a search function.

The right side of the screen offers ways to interact with the video. Users can click the plus sign of the video creator's profile to follow, or the heart symbol to "like" the video. There is also a talk bubble-shaped button where users click to view and add comments, a button to save to "Favorites," and a share button, where users can send the video to their friends, other social media apps, or save it to their phone if the creator allows it. It is not uncommon for people to look at the comments to see the discourse around a video. The bottom of the video features the video creator's username, the video caption, and any hashtags used. Lastly, the bottom of the video also includes a link to the "sound" of the video. See Figures 1 and 2 for an annotated screenshot of a TikTok screen.

[46] TikTok, "How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou," *TikTok*, June 2020. newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you.

One of the unique features of TikTok that sets it apart from other well-known social media apps—or rather, did, until apps such as Instagram and Snapchat adopted their own versions—is that it is very sound-oriented, which may be why dancing is so central to TikTok. It sets the stage for dancing. TikTok users can use previously recorded sounds often made by others to accompany their videos. That is how there are more than 25 thousand videos that all use a clip from "Shivers" by Ed Sheeran, for example. The sound feature is also the foundation for a lot of trends, as someone might create a choreography to the sound and others will reenact the choreography, but to fit their own lives.

Let us return to the "Shivers" trend to explore the way that dance trends work, using examples from the women over 50 community. Trending choreography (by @yurgurlgabbie) that goes along with the "Shivers" clip features the dancer clapping and rocking to a musical intro. When the lyrics start, the person in the frame reaches out as if shooting a bow and arrow, then wipes their face with alternating hands as Sheeran sings "I never kissed a mouth…" The dancer then crosses their arms over their body, rocks their hips, and mimes wiping their lips, playing the guitar, and driving to coincide with the lyrics. While in @yurgurlgabbie's original video, she dances in a sweatshirt in the bathroom, others dance in other spaces and outfits that are more suitable to their lives and/or tastes. @3ruleme wears a skirt and boots and dances on a brick path with palm trees behind her. @kathymelba wears a shirt with a smiley face on it as she dances in the house, adding some words in the video that overlay her body: "I had to hit this trend 🤣." In @being_just_lisa's version, she also wears a t-shirt, but this time dances outside with a fence or wooden wall for a background.

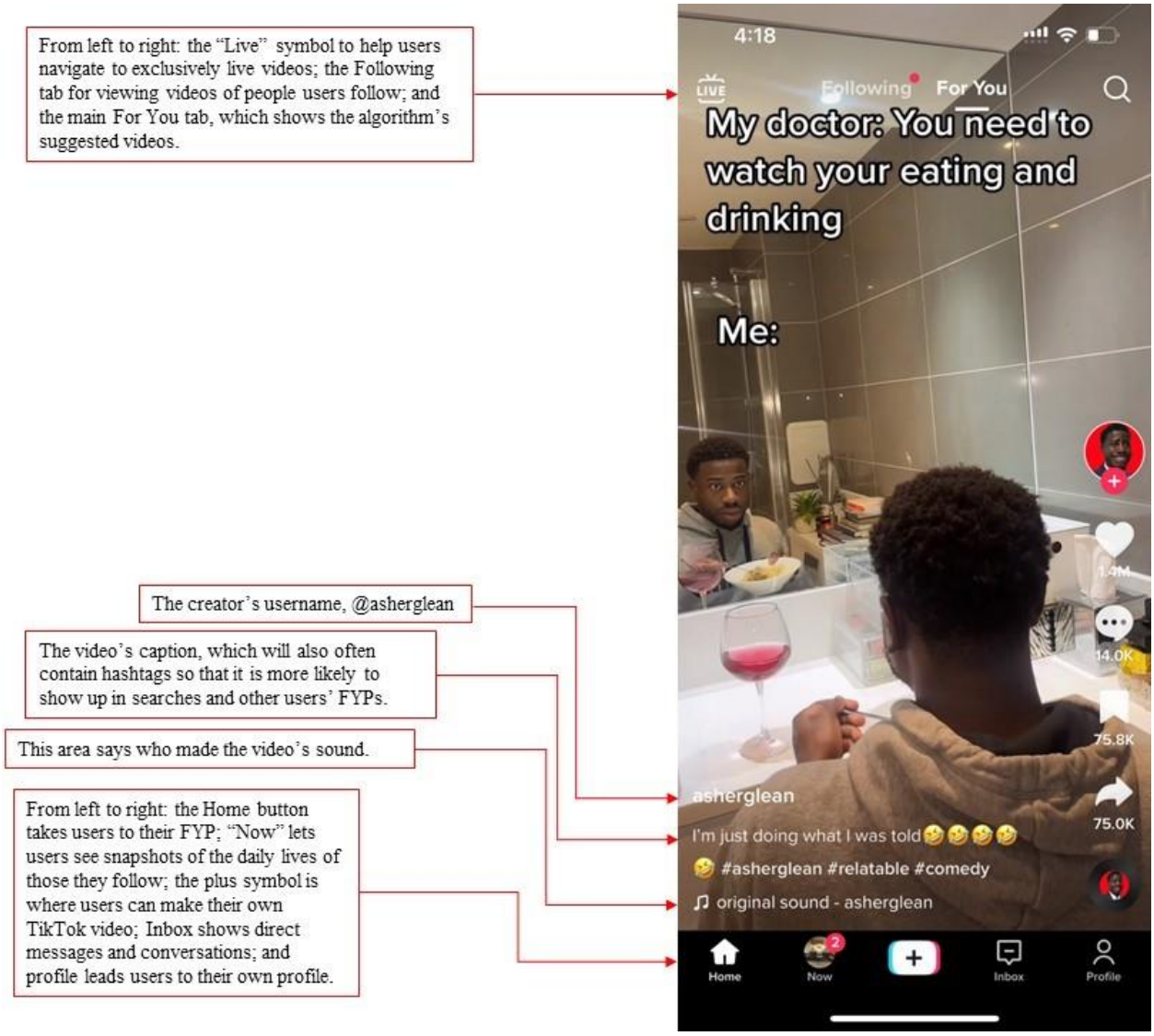


Figure 1: The left-hand operations on a TikTok video. Video by @asherglean.

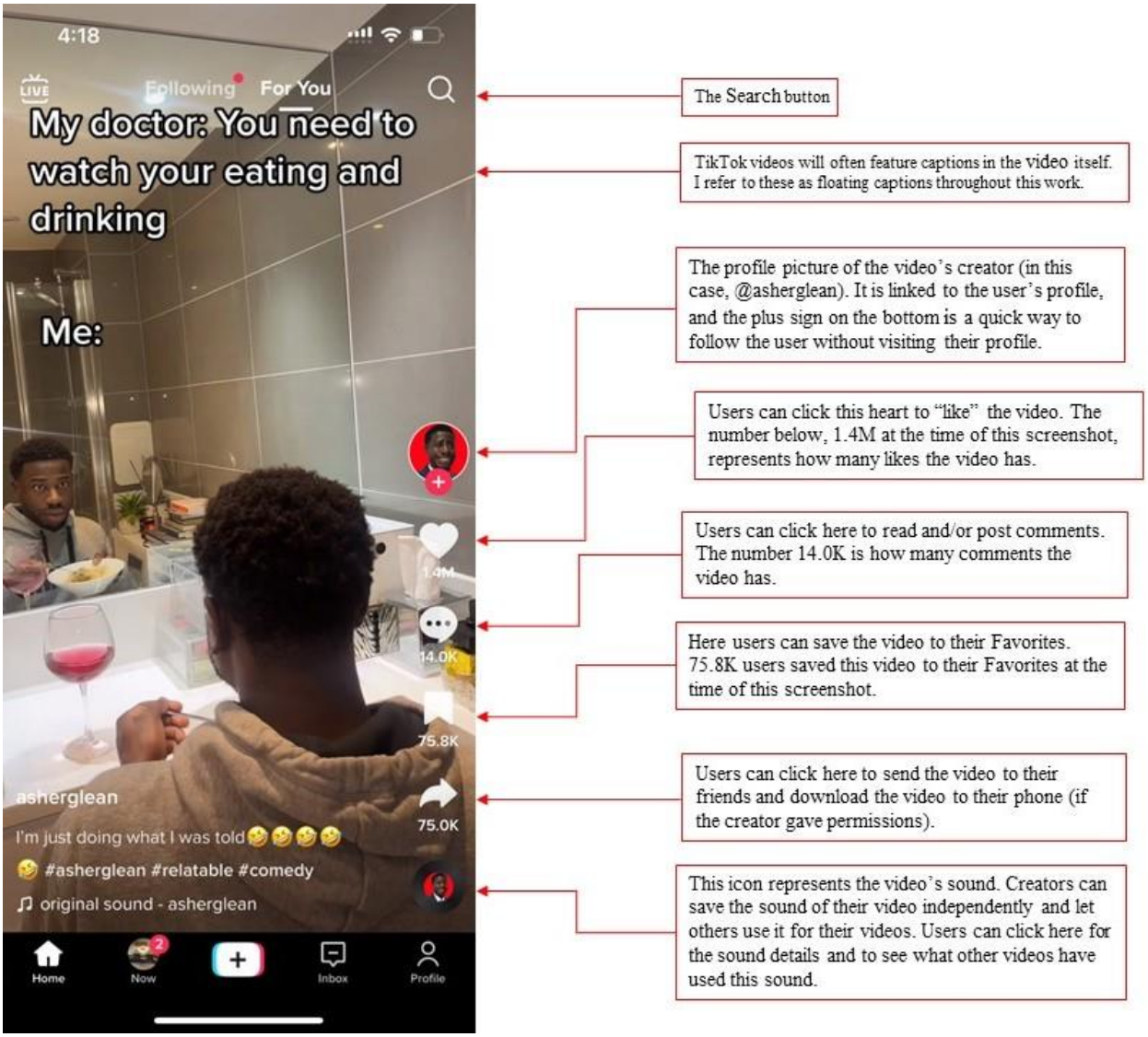


Figure 2: The right-hand operations of a TikTok video. Video by @asherglean.

The phenomenon of a trending dance is not limited to just this sound clip. There are likely millions of sounds, and that number keeps growing every day. Not every sound comes with a dance trend, and not every dance is part of a trend. Trend or not, a typical TikTok dance video under hashtags such as #womenover50club, #over50club, #grandmadance, and #grandmasoftiktok will feature a woman in the center of the screen dancing to a music clip that is somewhere between 15 seconds to three minutes long. She could be anywhere—in a house, in a yard, in the grocery store. Often, there will be a caption under the video with or without

hashtags. Sometimes, the TikTok creator will also include "floating" words in the video; these will appear over their heads or around or over their body and can be there for the whole video, change, or disappear after a while. The dancer(s) might interact with the words, such as pointing to them, underlining them with their hands, or nodding along with them for emphasis. The words are, of course, different in every video. However, there are some common themes among videos with the hashtags listed above. They might often say something about the woman's age, dancing, a joke, the TikTok experience, or the trend, but could be about anything.

The videos included in this analysis are limited to a portion of the roughly 970 videos that I viewed over the course of March 2022 through May of 2023—the videos themselves were created between 2020 and 2022. While that number is high, it is a tiny chunk of the millions of videos (and growing) on the TikTok app. A rough estimate of 200 videos out of the 970 videos were not created by women over 50. Given TikTok's scrolling nature that allows a user to easily watch several videos in a minute, this number is not exact, and so in order to be as fair as possible in analyzing these videos, this 200-video estimate is on the high end. Out of the remaining 670 videos, I saw significant repeated patterns which I categorize into five subgenres later on. The analysis, as it is based only on the videos I have watched, can only be applied to these videos, but can still provide an approach and suggestions for future research.

Characterizing Dancing Videos Made by Women Over 50

Before discussing the subgenres of TikTok videos within the women over 50 community, we must first distinguish how to set the videos by women over 50 apart from the rest of the limitless TikTok videos available. My primary—and most reliable—way of identifying videos by women over 50 was through the use of hashtags which describe themselves as such, or otherwise associate themselves with the concept of older women

(#womenover50, #grandmasoftiktok, #dancinggrandmas, etc). There are also some usernames that users choose to nominate themselves as a part of this community, such as @grandmasdance and @over65andsassy. Of course, after that, there is talking or captions in videos that explicitly mention age. Otherwise, content can show clues as to what community a creator may belong to.

Other than hashtags and being created by/featuring women over 50, what else can tell a viewer that they are watching a video specifically from this community? One way is through font and filter choice. One cannot broadly generalize that every woman older than the age of 50 uses filters or colorful fonts in their TikTok videos. However, I have found that in comparison to the general body of TikTok videos I have seen, women who have marked their dancing videos with 50+ age signifiers (as discussed above) often use more colorful, bold fonts, emojis, and filters that add content to their videos with blurring, sparkles, or other shapes as opposed to the standard white letters commonly used across the app. I looked at 30 videos that were specifically of dancing women over 50 (all different creators) compared to 30 videos that popped up on my FYP and were not from the women over 50 community. I compared how many of each had 1) colorful or nonstandard font in their floating captions (such as cursive, all capital letters, or bubbly characters); 2) emojis in the floating captions; and/or 3) filters that added clearly identifiable blurring, sparkles, shapes, or color changing to the overall video. Keep in mind that there are still filters some videos might have used that were not meant to be so obvious, like the subtle beauty filters that lightly touch up faces. I am not counting those filters in these numbers as they are most often used to be invisible, unlike these other more obvious filters. See on the next page two charts to compare use of what I will refer to as the colorful aesthetic. All of this is not to say that the colorful aesthetic is a determining feature of a video from the community, but it is a common preference among the community that is frequent enough that it is worth mentioning.

The numbers in the graphs below (Figures 3 and 4) are of course influenced by algorithm suggestions based on my TikTok activity, demographics, and the general popularity of the videos, but I still bring them up here because they help to paint a picture of what I have seen throughout my research. Note that all six of the 30 videos that were not from the women over 50 community still used black or white standard font; the only aspect that made them count was that they had emojis in the floating captions, and so aesthetically, these six videos were still not fully immersed in the colorful aesthetic.

Figure 3: Dancing Videos by Women Over 50

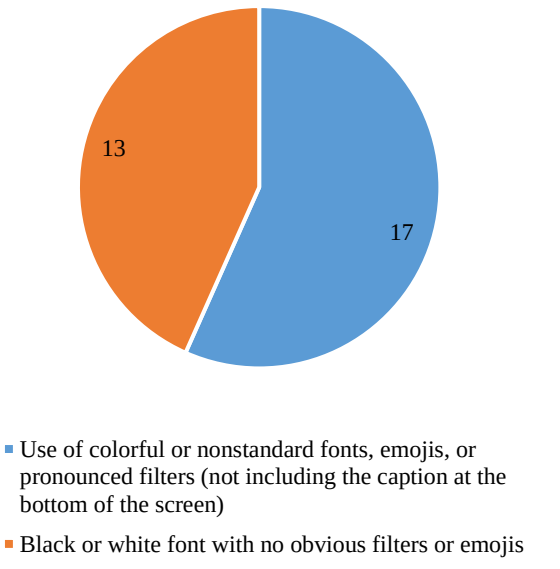
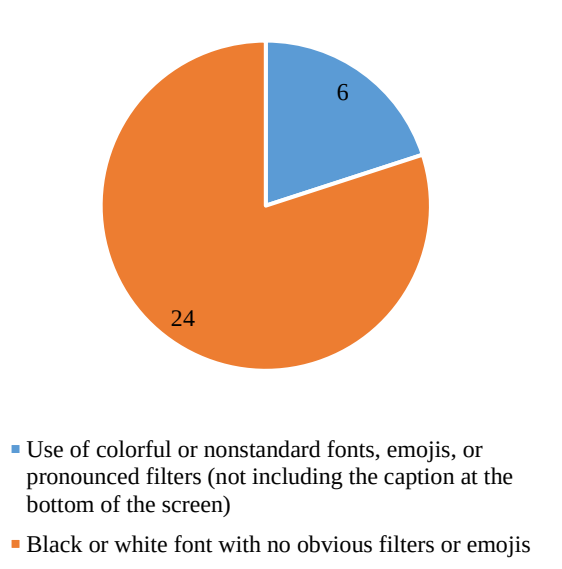


Figure 4: Videos from My FYP (Not From the Dancing Women Over 50 Community)



There are many more markers within the community's videos that are perhaps less aesthetically obvious, but no less important. Table 1 lists these markers, categorizes them, and shows how many there are of each in a sample of 60 videos.[47]

[47] Note that I have seen these patterns in many more than the 60 videos this table is based on, but because of the fleeting nature of TikTok, retracing these videos and quantifying them was not possible. Thus, I used a sample of 60 in order to illustrate through numbers the prominence of each marker.

Table 1: List of Markers, based on a sample of 60 dancing videos			
Category	Marker ID #	Marker Description	How many videos displayed marker
Floating Caption	1	Advice about life/talking about their life experience	18
	2	Claim that TikTok dancing is self-care or useful in some way	2
	3	Mentioning feeling weird, awkward, or not confident, sometimes overcoming it	3
	4	Feeling self-confident (either in general or despite something)	4
	5	Talking about living life to the fullest	4
	6	Saying something that suggests just having fun, such as jamming, vibing, having fun, or loving the music	7
	7	Mentioning or referencing age	24
	8	Mentioning being on TikTok while also referencing age	2
	9	Jokes about not looking like a “regular” grandma	2
	10	Jokes about age in general	2
	11	Call to the audience through request or invitation	6
	12	Responding to a comment or video	2
	13	Emojis	6
	14	Animations (Stickers)	8

Table 1, continued			
Category	Marker ID #	Marker Description	How many videos displayed marker
Main Caption	15	Advice about life/talking about their life experience	14
	16	Claim that TikTok dancing is self-care or useful in some way	2
	17	Mentioning feeling weird, awkward, or not confident, sometimes overcoming it	1
	18	Feeling self-confident (either in general or despite something)	4
	19	Talking about living life to the fullest	2
	20	Saying something that suggests just having fun, such as jamming, vibing, or having fun, or loving the music	15
	21	Mentioning or referencing age	6
	22	Mentioning being on TikTok while also referencing age	1
	23	Jokes about age in general	1
	24	Call to the audience through request or invitation	3
	25	Responding to a comment or video	2
	26	Emojis	9
Clothing	27	Backwards hats	2
	28	Fedoras	3
	29	Sundresses	2
	30	T-shirts	13
	31	Crop tops	2
	32	Swimsuits/bikinis	4
	33	Athleisure	5
	34	High heels	6
	35	Barefoot	10
	36	Tattoos	2

Table 1, continued			
Category	Marker ID #	Marker Description	How many videos displayed marker
Audio	37	Jokes about age	1
Background Content	38	Dancing outside in a yard, park, or grassy area	10
	39	Dancing in a house	32
	40	Dancing in public (in town)	3
Dance Moves	41	Arms extended out to the side or above head	36
	42	Hands move to touch or almost touch face or head	20
	43	Pointing fingers	14
	44	Shaking or moving shoulders	18
	45	Hip swaying	34
	46	Shaking, twerking, or wiggling of behind	21
	47	Line dance	2
Hashtags*	48	Saying something that suggests just having fun, such as jamming, vibing, or having fun	7
	49	Hashtags specifically made for getting views from a general audience, such as #foryoupage, #fyp, #foryou, or #viral	21
	50	Hashtags mentioning body positivity or confidence in some way	6
	51	Hashtags about spreading #kindness, #joy, or good vibes	8
	52	Hashtags about loving nature	2
*I found these videos through searching hashtags such as #over50club, #grandmasoftiktok, and #grandmadance. Thus, the hashtag section does not include hashtags that are only about age on TikTok or dancing because that would skew results.			

My intention in this chapter has been to lay a good foundation with which we can understand the data I have found throughout my research. In the following chapter, I will use these markers to identify subgenres of dancing videos among the community. These subgenres will help to explain how piecing together the details and performances can better illustrate the nuances and character of the overall community.

CHAPTER III: MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA: SUBGENRES AND SUCCESS

Introduction

In the last chapter, I presented a number of markers in TikTok videos by women over 50; here I will start making sense of it, and I plan to do this by using genre as a tool for analysis. We could consider TikTok dancing a genre of dance in itself—in essence, short dances performed for the camera and posted on the app. Defining TikTok dancing this way is useful because it helps us identify what falls under the category of this thesis's examination, at least before identifying qualities that are more specific to the community at hand. I want to break this larger genre down more specifically into subgenres because it will help to identify qualities of the community of women over 50 in a way that the broader genre could not. Under the main genre of TikTok dancing, I propose that there are five subgenres of videos among the community of dancing women over 50: knowledge, confidence/self-positivity, age, calls to community, and amusement. As Makeda Easter reports, dancing was a big part of life for people of all ages during the pandemic, at least in the beginning when the article was written.[48] The videos I have looked at for this project were created between 2020 and 2022, which is the span of much of the pandemic quarantining in the U.S. Thus, these subgenres can give us snapshots of older women's life experiences during the pandemic. The subgenres can also give us ideas about how videos are perceived as successful based on framing criteria, which I will explore at the end of this chapter.

The Subgenres

[48] Makeda Easter, "It's not just teens: We're all in the TikTok-dance-challenge phase of quarantine now," *Los Angeles Times,* April 2020.

I formed the five subgenres by finding patterns between markers. That is, I found that many of the markers listed in Chapter 2 had common themes, and so the subgenres are based on these themes. This means that there can be some crossover between the subgenres, where a video in one subgenre might have some qualities of other subgenres, too. These categories do not have hard and fast boundaries—in fact, videos in these categories are always in flux because people are making new videos with varying ideas, even as I write this. Rather, these subgenres are a tool that I have created in order to more easily understand the themes that the community is putting forth. The following list explores and defines each subgenre:

- *Knowledge* is where TikTok users will dance while communicating a message about life, either in the form of advice, or of telling a story about their life. I grouped advice and life stories together under one subgenre because both involve passing along knowledge about lived experiences that the creator considers important enough to include in a video. What often characterizes these videos is that while the video creator dances in the background, floating captions will appear above them, discussing a topic that is personal to them (although advice or information can also appear in the main caption). Often, the dancer's gestures or facial expressions will accompany the words, giving an overall emotion to the video. An example of this is @kad480's video that takes place in a living room. The video starts with a floating caption that asks, "How do you make it through the week?" When she starts dancing, the caption changes: "just keep dancing." She is both giving advice and talking about her personal experiences here, making the video's theme fit in with this genre.

  Note that knowledge videos are not quite calls to action in the sense that they are actively asking for response (although that can happen). Rather, it is more like they are putting

information out into the TikTok world, and people can take from it with they will. These videos can go against the stereotype of how older people transmit stories just through the fact that they are in TikTok video format. Usually, when someone pictures an older person telling stories, they might think of a long, in-person storytelling while sitting in armchairs by the fire. Here, however, the older women dance to upbeat tunes in 15-60 seconds (sometimes but rarely more, always no more than 3 minutes) while delivering their stories and advice.

- *Confidence/self-positivity* videos center around body image and living life to the fullest. This can often look like a proclamation about feeling good about oneself or telling a story about their own confidence journey. In the case of the latter, they have a lot in common with the last subgenre because people talk about their experiences with and even give advice about confidence and self-positivity. The difference between these two genres, however, is that the knowledge subgenre focuses on the communication of lived experiences generally, whereas confidence/self-positivity focuses on body image—weight, skin texture, hair color, et cetera—and/or embracing oneself, notably with a positive twist that resists mainstream beauty standards. This is an especially prevalent theme in the community, especially considering the sorts of tensions women over 50 face in terms of age and beauty standards, as discussed in Chapter 1.

  Confidence/self-positivity videos can look like someone explaining that they feel positively about themselves. Or, they might include a moment of vulnerability where the creator explains something that they have struggled with in terms of confidence, yet it usually ends with a positive, encouraging sentiment. A good example features @grandmaswhodance whisking about the screen while floating captions appear in the

frame, explaining that she had been feeling self-conscious about weight gain and had thus avoided posting to TikTok for a while. “At least for tonight, my insecurities can suck it!” the caption reads.

- Videos that fit into the subgenre of *age* generally feature women dancing and pointing out their age with floating captions or captions at the bottom of the screen, often making a connection between the age and the dance and/or their TikTok presence. Usually, these videos are either celebratory of their age, or at the very least, playful about it, sometimes making jokes or pointing out how their age might be hard to guess. I want to make an important distinction here that these videos focus more on age as a number rather than age as body image. Of course, one cannot separate the two as each carry with it connotations of the other. However, these videos reference numeric age specifically and often resist some of the stigmas around it, and many leave out direct mentions of body image altogether; thus, I separate them from body image, which is more represented in the confidence/self-positivity genre.

  An example of a more celebratory age video by @cj.mccann (shown in Figure 5) features just her face and shoulders in the frame, dressed up with makeup and a filter and smiling. Her floating caption reads: “I turn 57 today!” with a bottom caption that reads: “I started my TikTok on my birthday exactky [sic] two years ago!! #birthday #superager.” Of course, she implies that she is celebratory of her age by celebrating her birthday, which is a symbol of age. With the #superager tag, she implies that her aging is something positive and that she is good, or “super” at it.

An example of someone being more playful about age comes from "Nana Bear."[49] The video uses a sound from another user that starts out with music, but then stops suddenly with a cracking sound and a groan, and there is laughter in the background. In Nana Bear's video, she walks into the frame and starts a dance, but she times it so when she reaches her arm up, the cracking sound starts, and she fakes being injured.

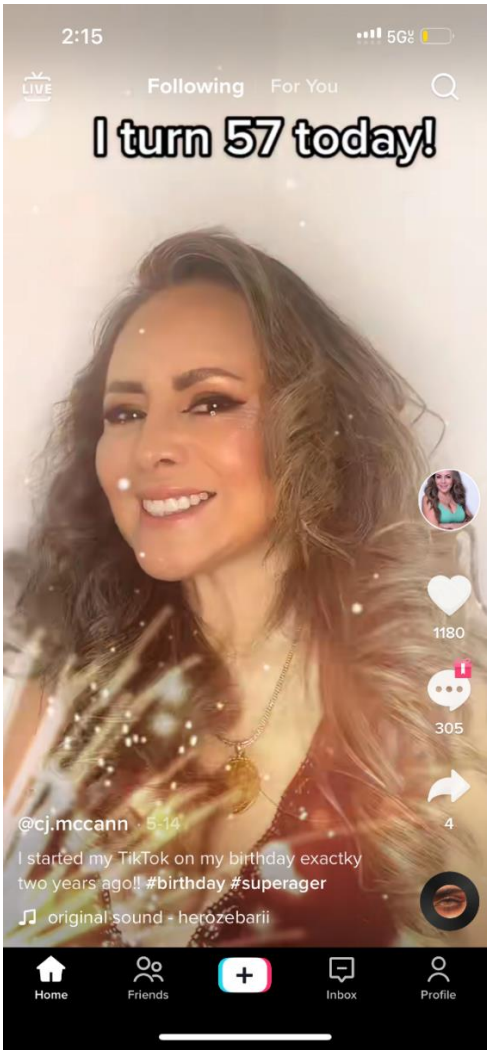


Figure 5: A celebration of age by @cj.mccann..

[49] Username is omitted to protect the privacy of a minor who is frequently in this user's videos (although not in this specific video).

- *Calls to community* are often invitations to others to join in, often through captions, the comment section, or in making a stitch or duet. Stitches and duets are features on TikTok where users can respond to others' videos with their own videos. One TikTok user @jennyjtiktok calls to community in a video where she dances with a Christmas tree in the background. The floating caption says, "Where are all the Queenagers? 👑 Hi, I'm Jenny! If you are a little crazy & love to dance, Lets [sic] be friends! 💖" and she writes in the bottom caption, "Thank you ,TikTok , for all of the pandemic entertainment! TikTok is like a choreography candy store! #queenagers #momhypecrew #spreadjoy2020."
- The last subgenre is *amusement*, which is where users do not necessarily have a prominent main message to give, but rather, are just dancing for a good time or for entertainment. Often, these videos do not have as many words in the captions as the other genres, but when they do, they usually communicate something about just having fun in some way, commonly by mentioning that they are "vibing" or "jamming" through a hashtag. For example, a video by @carol_personified has two women dancing in what looks like a driveway or street. The caption says, "Happy Independence Day," and they have a number of hashtags, one of which says #justdance. It is clear that this video is meant to be about having fun. Amusement videos do not usually actively resist anything in content; however, they do inherently resist the assumption that people only have fun in their younger days.

The prominence of the above categories seems to highlight a few characteristics about what the community values in this video-making art form. They are unapologetic, celebratory, and inclusive of lots of wisdom. They are welcoming, but as a community, not tolerant of

negativity, and in many cases, like to use these videos as a way to have fun, as the subgenre of amusement suggests. Each of these subgenres—except for calls to community, which is unique in that it calls to action in order to directly build a network—resists or plays with assumptions and stereotypes of older women in some way, which aligns with what Lizzette, a TikTok creator from the women over 50 community, said in an interview with me about her dancing videos:

> (I want to show) that I'm fun, I'm young, and I'm silly. It also shows the younger generations that my generation is not my past generations. My 50s and 60s are not going to be the 60s of my grandmother. We're definitely a different breed. We're not like that—our mindsets are not the same, what we're doing in life is not the same.

I will next discuss how the community's videos can be examined in terms of success.

Ideas of Success

Having multiple subgenres come forward through repeated patterns in the data suggests that there is something successful for those who are making the videos, whether that be through personal satisfaction, garnering views, or something else—otherwise, why would these themes persist? There are unlimited factors that can influence someone's motivation to post a TikTok dance as feelings of satisfaction and goals are different for everyone. Thus, success in the broader genre of TikTok videos can be measured in many ways—popularity, fame, personal satisfaction, and sense of accomplishment are just a few examples. On the creator level, success can look very different from video to video. Any Google search of what makes a TikTok video successful shows that many people think of successful TikTok videos as ones that have a lot of popularity in the form of likes, comments, views, and followers.[50] So, while it is not safe to assume that everyone within #over50club, #grandmasoftiktok, or any related tag posts simply

[50] Werner Geyser, "14 Tips to Create TikTok Trending Videos," Influencer Marketing Hub, June 22, 2022. influencermarketinghub.com/tiktok-trending-videos-tips/.

looking for the marks of appreciation, we can still start thinking about a "successful" video in these terms. The data also reflects that many people within the women over 50 community are thinking of success in these terms at least to a certain extent, given the number of people who use hashtags specifically designed to land on the FYPs of the general audience, such as #fyp and #foryou (see Chapter 2). This is a common practice across TikTok in general.

When it comes to viral videos among the women over 50 community, it is important to remember that all those views, likes, and comments are not just from those in the community. In fact, comment sections in such videos are full of people who are not of the community. For example, take the countless comments in viral videos that admire the creators' ages by saying they want to be like them. See the following comments (Figures 6 and 7) from multiple videos for examples:

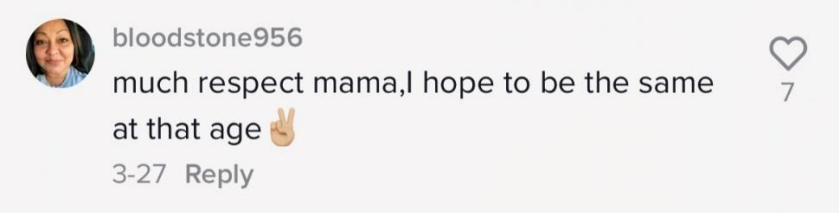


Figure 6: (Top) A comment made on a video by @demtria70ish.

Figure 7: (Bottom) This comment was left on a video by @grandma_droniak. Note that we do not know the ages of the commenters in Figures 6 and 7.

Even though the likes and views are not necessarily representative of the community, it can still tell us important details about how the community presents to the world. That is, the community does not have control over what goes viral, but they can see what goes viral and

make adjustments to their videos accordingly, provided they are looking for success in terms of many interactions. Considering Turino's ideas of persona construction as discussed in the literature review,[51] we can think of how women over 50 and grandmas construct their TikTok videos in two ways: for one, the women have highlighted qualities of themselves in order to create their community—they celebrate in particular their age or grandmother title and associate these qualities with dancing. The other way we can think of how Turino's ideas apply is that the women can highlight the qualities of themselves that they think would best go viral (aka, be most successful). That means that people outside of the community have a vote as to what the community might look like to someone who only sees the most viral of videos on their For You Page. This is a good example of how when posting online, TikTok users often grapple with addressing multiple audiences at once. Women who look or act unexpectedly from grandmotherly stereotypes often get more likes, whether that be because of going against body image expectations associated with old age, their dance movements, or their life decisions. I will explore examples of this in the following chapter.

Analyzing success between creator-viewer interaction is where the subgenres become especially useful. If we can categorize a video in one of the subgenres, that means that it uses certain framing associated with the subgenre with which the audience is meant to view the video. For example, a knowledge video comes with a frame that the user is passing on a message about life and should be heeded. To classify this video as successful, the audience must on some level connect with that frame with understanding. In the eyes of interviewee Peggy, who is new to TikTok but has spent her life as a professional modern dancer, what is most important is the successful framing of a dance. Success to her, is, among other things like a good mindset and

[51] Thomas Turino, "Chapter 4: Habits of the Self, Identity, and Culture," in *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 95.

being in time with the music, “communicating well with the audience and reaching out and trying to emphasize whatever it is, the feeling, the right feeling that you're trying to express.”

A good way to measure successful framing is by looking at the sorts of comments on a video. Perhaps the comments express appreciation for the knowledge, or comment on how they agree. The frames are of course different for each genre: confidence/self-positivity frames might induce encouraging comments or comments from people who relate; age comments may discuss age in a positive light (a good example of what this would look like is Figure 5); calls to community would have people responding to the video’s requests and answering the video’s questions; and amusement videos would have people responding with similar energy in the comment section.

While the above comments’ criteria illustrate the groundwork for positive success, there is the potential for comments that indicate failure in framing. Such comments are frequently mean or disrespectful in some way. Even if these comments still have to do with the same topics the frames do, I consider them as an indication of failure in that the creator’s performance did not convince the commenter. I want to make it clear that by using the word “failure,” I am not justifying hateful comments or putting the blame for the hate on the video creator. What I mean by calling these comments an indication of failure is that the creator and the audience are not using the same frame and that the frame failed to transmit from the creator to the audience. This could be for a number of reasons, including the prejudices (especially ageism) on the part of the commenter. Even when a video has an indication of failure, there is still a way for creators to redeem themselves, and this comes in the practice of sassy responses. On TikTok, creators have the option to respond to a comment with a video; when they do, the response video will often feature a comment bubble with the comment in one of the top corners. Usually in the case of

mean comments, the response video will have a degree of sass and rebuttal, and these videos frequently garner support in the comment section, admonishing the rude commenter. I will explore an example of this in the next chapter.

Framing and going viral are not the only avenues for success, however; perhaps they are the most easily measured successes, given that the app lends itself well to them, especially going viral. On a TikTok video, the like button shows the number of likes underneath it and one can see how many comments there are before even looking at them. When searching a hashtag, one does not see the number of videos posted with the tag, but rather, how many views a tag has in total from all of the videos using it combined, as illustrated in Figure 8.

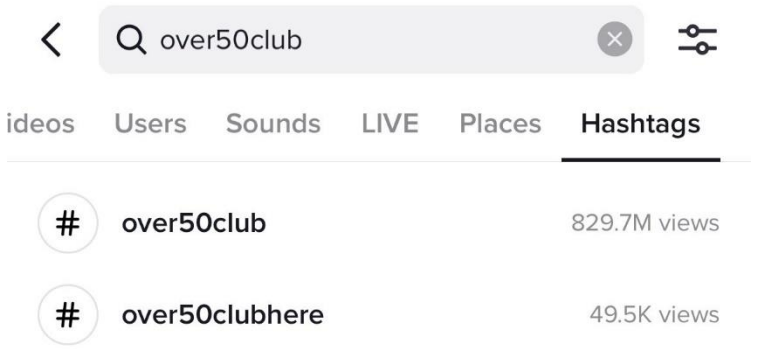


Figure 8: A quick hashtag search for over 50 club shows a number of related hashtags, with how many collective views each hashtag has listed on the right.

Perhaps what is a less quantifiable idea of success is that of personal satisfaction and genuine enjoyment. Lizzette said this when asked about what makes her feel that one of her videos is successful:

> I'm smiling throughout the whole thing and I'm laughing and I don't look stressed doing it. I'll see it on my facial expressions because, as you can see, I'm very animated, that if I'm looking at the recording and I look like I'm thinking of what my next move is, (and) I'm going through and I look self-conscious, I go, 'Nope!' I have to see that it just flows even if it was silly or even if I was off beat.

This concept of success is reflexive, meaning she is relying on her own tastes and preferences as she makes a video and posts it, which resists the idea of chasing viral fame. She said the same

idea of genuineness goes for when she is thinking about the success of other videos. “They are generally just doing it for their enjoyment, for their well-being, and that comes off the screen. That really does come off the screen, you know if someone is just doing this for their mental health or they're just enjoying it and they just want to share.”

This perception of genuine enjoyment is another criterion for success, but it is much harder to measure, given that it is based more on viewer judgement of whether or not the person is genuine. This is where the folk can transcend the boundaries laid by the platform and make success in their own terms. The following chapter will explore creator-audience idea exchange more with some more specific analysis of a handful of videos.

CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDIES: SUCCESS AND THE UNEXPECTED

Introduction

After delineating different avenues of success in the last chapter, the goal of this chapter is to perform more specific analysis of a handful of videos that exemplify the various ways women over 50 can achieve success with dancing TikTok videos, the sorts of values they exhibit, and the kinds of public interactions they have online. I do this by looking at videos from each subgenre, particularly assessing what success looks like in terms of framing, employing Richard Bauman's ideas of frames, markers, and performance.[52] I also consider the issue of popularity. The subgenre of age has a lot of success in terms of popularity, especially when doing something unexpected from what viewers may consider the norm of women over 50. What I have found is that each subgenre has its own way of addressing stereotypes about women over 50, whether that be through embracing, resisting, or playing with them.

Note that success both in terms of framing and in terms of popularity involves people who are outside of the women over 50 community, as my methods of measuring success—through likes and comments—come from the general audience of TikTok. I still consider the general audience in the context of this paper because their interactions with these videos tell us about what kinds of obstacles women over 50 might face in terms of how people perceive them as a TikTok community and the sorts of interactions they might experience. Even so, the way that women over 50 interpret and/or value audience perception can vary. TikTok creator Lizzette said in an interview, "I find personally that we should care about what other people think about us only when it's constructive." She, of course, is just one example, but this is something to

[52] Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *American anthropologist* 77, no. 2 (1975): 290–311.

consider moving forward as I explore framing success and comment/creator interactions in the following pages.

The following sections are organized by subgenre, starting with age as it particularly has a lot of viral videos, and continuing with confidence/self-positivity, knowledge, calls to community, and amusement. All video examples can be found in Appendix A for reference.

Age

The first age video I want to discuss features @802pam143[53] with her arms outstretched, swaying to a music clip talking about the late sixties, her eyebrows raised as captions above her state she was born and raised in the 1960s-80s. She moves her hand to her mouth in feigned shock when the final caption reads, "Realizing you are one of the few using this sound actually alive in the 60's [sic]." She has long, light brown hair with blonde highlights, neatly curled with a middle part (a current trending hair style). She wears a sports bra and colorful shorts. The video has 42.2 thousand likes and the comment section is full of people reminiscing about the 60s.

What makes this video stand out is that it goes against expectations. The creator, while proclaiming her age, is dressed in an outfit that one would be more likely to find on a younger person, not to mention that she is on a platform that is known for being mostly used by the younger generation, which she points out. This is how she frames the video, calling the audience to consider how people of her age are few and far between in this space. Technology, in general, is stereotypically used by younger people, although there are some places that are becoming more and more associated with older populations, such as Facebook.[54] People over 50 make the

[53] See Appendix A, Video 28: "Born in the 60s," by @802pam143.
[54] Kieran Press-Reynolds, "Facebook wants to attract young people, but Gen Z teens say it's a 'boomer social network' made for 'old people,'" *Insider*, November 2021.

technological choice to use TikTok, meaning that they are picking TikTok over other apps—of course, it is possible that they also use other apps, but spending time on one app takes time from another. Here, @802pam143 makes a point to show that she is going against the norms. With so many people agreeing and resonating with this in the comments, it is clearly not unusual for someone to be on TikTok at this age, yet there is a perceived sense that she is going against expectations, and thus, her framing is successful.

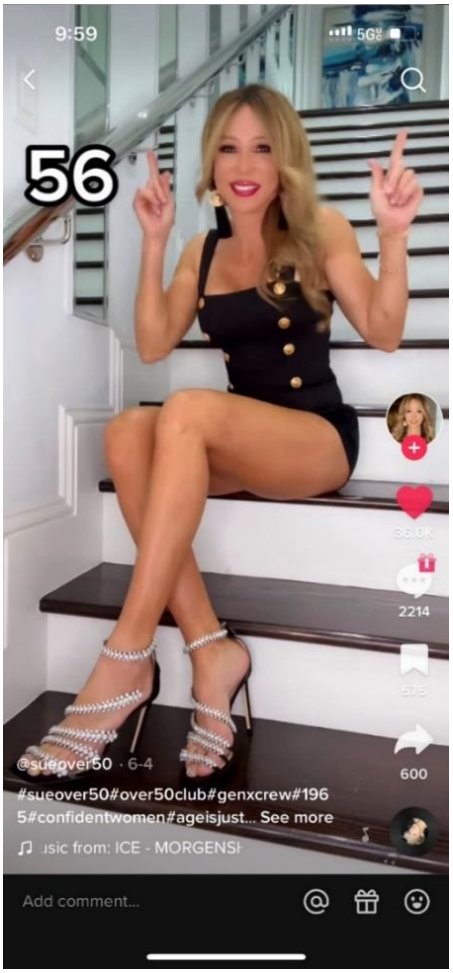


Figure 9: A screenshot from @sueover50's video.

Another example where a creator goes against expectations is in @sueover50's video, pictured in Figure 9.[55] She sits so her long, slender legs are toward the camera. She is in a small

[55] See Appendix A, Video 27: "Sue Over 50," by @sueover50.

black outfit—possibly a swimsuit or jumpsuit—with jeweled stiletto heels. She has the same hair style as the last woman, a balayage parted in the middle. The audio is a song where the singer says "mm-mm" multiple times. Each time he says "mm-mm," Sue points to a number that could be her age and shakes her head: 40, 37, 50, 60. Finally, she reaches 56, and she sticks both her fingers into the air and wiggles her shoulders in celebration, smiling the whole time. The video got 36 thousand likes at the time of viewing and so many comments praised her looks.

Here, it is as if the viewer should not believe Sue's age because she does not look it, with her outfit that a young person would wear and a very young-looking, fit body. It makes sense that a video with the #over50club tag focuses on looks, given that the tag highlights age and age for women is often tied to beauty standards (see Chapter 1). This video, in particular, is notable because of the way it plays with the idea of visual age standards, simultaneously rejecting them and embracing them. She rejects notions of what being 50+ looks like by pointing out that people might be confused about her age by looking at her. However, she does this through using markers of youth—smaller outfits, high heels, colored hair—and by doing so, associates herself with concepts of youth.

A third example of women defying expectations and garnering thousands of likes is a video by @livinlevedaloca (Figure 10),[56] where she shakes her behind, moves her arms up and down and swivels her body while wearing a blue and red flannel, jeans, glasses, and short, white hair. She includes the words: "Being that I'm 81….. I don't want to look back at my life and think…. Shit…I should have made a TikTok! Join me on my journey!" The comment section is full of people saying, "Go Grandma!" The video has 23.2 thousand likes. Unlike the videos I have mentioned so far in this chapter, @livinlevidaloca is not wearing crop tops, stiletto heels, or

[56] See Appendix A, Video 19: "Should Have Made a TikTok," by @livinlavedaloca.

other clothes associated with the youth. She has not dyed her hair, and instead wears it short and white, a haircut much more often associated with older age. Yet she still defies this concept of what a grandmother should be in her language. She says "shit," normally a word that does not coincide with the sweet, soft attributes often adhered to grandmothers. To further this, she includes the tag #grandmasgonewild, as if her actions are not regular.

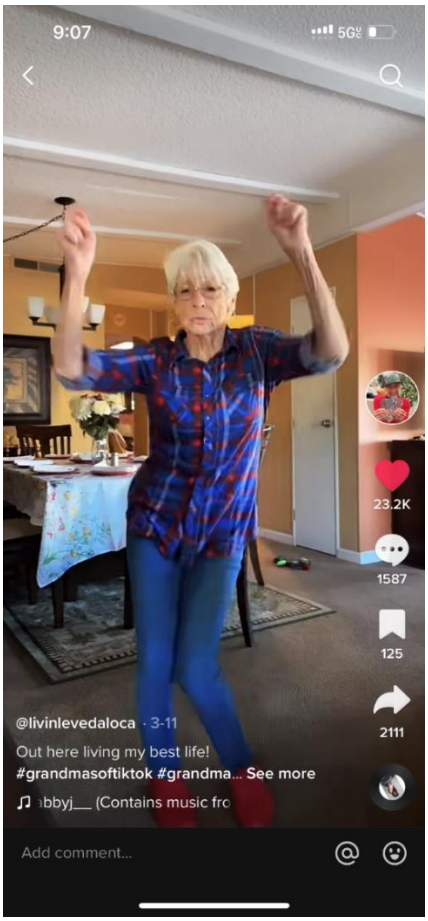


Figure 10: @livinlevedaloca's video.

Another good example we can observe is that of @10secondswithgma,[57] pictured in Figure 11, dancing in a one-piece swimsuit to a sound clip by @johnnysibilly01 that says, "Hit it, hit it hit it, hit it, get it, get it, get it, get it, ow, ow, show them girls." She marches around,

[57] See Appendix A, Video 18: "Hit It," by @10secondswithgma.

wiggling her behind, arms moving back and forth as she marches and sways to the music. Under the video she wrote, “89 next month!” Her hair is short, curled and gray. She has 607.9 thousand likes, and the comments are yet again quite supportive. Take this one for example: “Get down grandma. Stay youthful. 😅” and “She looks younger and moves great! what’s the secret ? 😀” Both of these comments suggest that dancing around—especially shaking her booty—in a swimsuit is not necessarily something someone would associate with old age—if the video creator dances around, she must have some secret. To “get down,” must be a youthful thing to do.

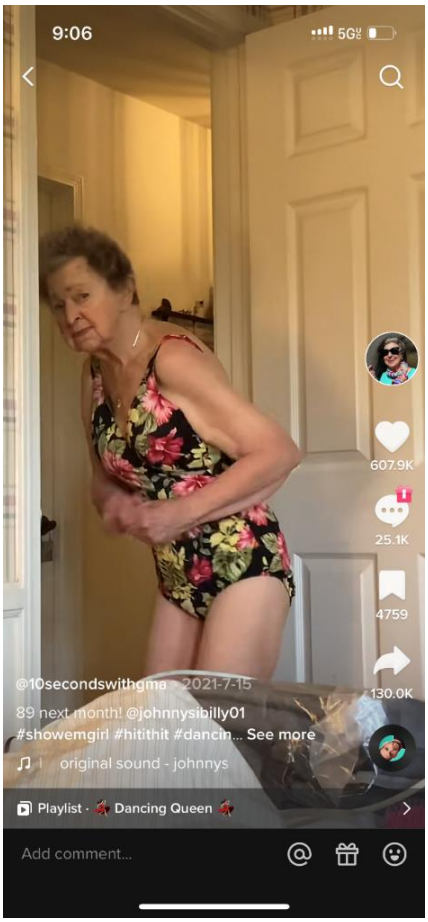


Figure 11: @10secondswithgma’s video.

By mentioning their ages in both of these videos, @livinlevidaloca and @10secondswithgma do what all creators who make age videos do—they frame their video as a

performance of age. Making their age a prominent factor of the video communicates to the viewer that they ought to consider the video in terms of their age. When these videos contradict a stereotype, it can act as a commentary (whether conscious or not) on how that stereotype is not accurate. The unexpectedness, as I have shown, extends to many examples that have gone viral, and I am not the only one to make this observation. Erin, who is not over 50 but uses TikTok and sees a lot of dancing on her FYP, said in an interview with me that it is:

> Usually either the younger generations doing the dancing in the highly successful ones (videos), or something unexpected in over 50. Something like, "Oh, they can actually dance." Those are the types of comments I see on those videos. And it has to be surprising, it has to be unexpected for it to be successful in that same thing (area).

There is a lot that can play into why this is. In the case of @sueover50's video, I discussed pressure to keep looking visually young among women, yet this extends further in that mainstream Western society (which is very much present on TikTok) devalues women as they age.[58] Activities that distance a woman from the stereotypes of old age resist the idea that women must fit into this devalued box, while at the same time showcase their adherence to their youthfulness. The general audience, which comes from a diverse age population, has a few reasons to "like" this. People from the same age community may resonate with this resistance and claim to youth; a younger audience may find unexpectedness entertaining or see inspiration for when they too will have an older age. As Erin puts it, "I love watching people do what they do well and I like (watching) people have a great time doing something that's out of their comfort zone. I think those are two very different realms but TikTok is a great place to see both." Additionally, seeing people defy expectations can change expectations. However, audience

[58]M. M. Gergen and K. Gergen, "Positive Aging: Reconstructing The Life Course," in *Handbook Of Girl's And Women's Psychological Health*, eds. J. Worrell And C. D. Goodheart (Oxford University Press, 2006), 416.

feedback can sometimes reinforce the idea that something unexpected is an exception, not the norm.

Confidence/Self-Positivity

The example of confidence/self-positivity that I will explore here is a video by @grandmaswhodance,[59] which I described in the last chapter. To recap, she dances while floating captions explain that she has been avoiding posting to TikTok due to self-consciousness about weight. But for this video, she declares her insecurities can "suck it." At first glance, being hesitant to post on TikTok when feeling self-conscious suggests that TikTok is an obstacle when it comes to body image; in TikTok dancing videos, the body comes into a spotlight in a way that regular movement does not because it is part of the performance in the TikTok video. That provides us with a frame in which we can view her video—as a place of vulnerability. She draws attention to the vulnerability which elicits supportive relatability among viewers. After all, most people have felt self-conscious in their lives about their body at some point. Keeping in mind Thomas Turino's ideas of how people enact certain habits to perform an identity,[60] we can see @grandmaswhodance picking an aspect of her life (self-consciousness) to highlight in the performance and construct her overall presentation of a confidence/self-positivity dance. By admitting self-consciousness while in the spotlight, @grandmaswhodance showcases how confident she is, turning that self-consciousness on its head.

[59] See Appendix A, Video 22: "Insecurities Can Suck It," by @grandmaswhodance.

[60] Thomas Turino, "Chapter 4: Habits of the Self, Identity, and Culture," in *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

@grandmaswhodance's video is also a good example of what Bauman calls a "disclaimer," which is a hedged performance,[61] in this case of dance and body image. She limits her performance by using a qualifier, as if she is saying, "Don't take this too seriously, I'm doing the best I can even though I'm feeling down!" The disclaimer also operates as a marker for us to consider the video in a new frame, one that moves the focus away from the dancing itself and instead, prompts the viewer to focus more on the concept the video might be exploring, such as confidence and perseverance. That prompting can also ask the viewer to redefine what success looks like—in this case, in terms of weight—and in doing so, give the creator's performance a better chance of making it successful.[62] Interactions with the video can tell us more about how successful the video is in reframing.

For @grandmaswhodance's post, audience interactions indicate she was successful in that commenters responded using her same framing of body image. There were three comments (not counting creator comments) on that post, each directly addressing either weight or confidence, shown in Figure 12. The framing thus operates as another way for users to find common ground and connection. It is worth noting the possibility that original posters delete some comments, so we can never know for sure the true number and quality of comments unless we ask. Shaping and tailoring the comment section could be a part of the performance of what creators might think of as a successful video.

[61] Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

[62] Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*, 115-116.

Figure 12: Comments on @grandmaswhodance's video.

Knowledge

The first example I want to explore in the knowledge section is a video by @kad480[63] which I described in the last chapter. She dances while floating captions read, "How do you make it through the week?" and later, "just keep dancing." The video has 42 likes and 11 comments, five of which are from the creator. Those numbers indicate that the video is not viral; however, she is still successful in framing. Her discussion of the workweek and dancing frames her dancing as therapeutic and recreational, especially as she uses tags like #justforfun and #justdance. The comments show that the audience has received this framing with understanding—one @tammyditmore1 (who I will note is also a part of the women over 50 community) writes: "Dancing helps can't dance for a couple weeks but I will make up for it." Another comment from @sheilas_essence agrees: "I love to dance I just need new moves

[63] See Appendix A, Video 3: "Make It Through the Week," by @kad480.

😁😘.” Most of the other comments are supportive in general, with one that jokingly says they like energy drinks to help get through the week, too.

There is one comment that I want to draw attention to by @jeepman12342, who writes: “darn right cutie,your [sic] dancing helps me make it too!! 😁” This is a bit of a play on words—@kad480 likely meant that dancing is what works for her getting through the week, and if others wanted to feel the same, they should also dance. Yet @jeepman12342 turns the words around, joking that it is her dancing that is helpful. This is rather flirtatious and implies that he likes watching her body move. Since I cannot see who she follows, it is unclear if @kad480 has a relationship with this person, but her reaction indicates that perhaps his comment was not welcome, as she liked and positively responded to every other comment except for this one. @jeepman12342’s comment is a good example of a common interaction that a lot of women over 50 on TikTok have to experience: comments on bodies, often unsolicited, especially from men.[64] Another example of unsolicited commenting is on a call to community video by @tgip,[65] where she says, “Over 50 club Let’s Do This.” Out of 471 comments, she has liked almost every single one, but among the ones that she has not liked or responded to is one by @odelleanderson837 that says, “are you seeing anybody.” I will explore the success of this video more thoroughly in the calls to community section.

Unsolicited comments can come from people of all genders, but I underline men as main actors due to historical patriarchal structure where men objectify women.[66] Often, commenters’ gender identity is indicated through usernames or profile pictures, as is the case with

[64] Although I am not a woman over 50, I have also experienced unsolicited comments on my body from men on my dancing videos during this research, which suggests that this extends beyond the community to women in general.

[65] See Appendix A, Video 26: “Let’s Do This,” by @tgip.
[66] See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), 45-64.

@jeepman12342. TikTok creator Lizzette said an interview that she gets unsolicited interactions about dating from men on the app, too. “I get a lot of men treating this app as if it was Tinder.[67] So they (direct message) me a lot and I've had to make a post about that. This is not Tinder, people.” Her audience’s comments thus affect what she chooses to post, as she says she avoids posting videos where her dancing could be deemed as sexual and a man would (falsely) interpret it as an invitation. “I have to be very careful, so that's part of my process. ... There's nothing wrong with being sexy, of course I do shake a move, but I'm very careful about how I do it, how much of it I do.”

Returning to our knowledge example, even though @kad480 had to experience this likely unsolicited comment on her knowledge video, overall, it is still successful in its framing because the majority of comments respond within the same frame she provides. Another example of a knowledge video comes from @barbcs13.[68] In a video where @barbcs13 gave a routine in which she used Dove soap to wash her face, a user commented, “You look like you’ve used dove of 60+ years [sic]. It didn’t do no favors [sic] for you.” @barbcs13 responds with a video that contains a talk bubble with that comment, and she dances, shaking her butt and walking away from the camera, while her floating caption passes by: “Cannot pass a teachable moment / Since I’m a retired teacher and grandma / The correct English is ‘It didn’t do any favors for you / Stay in school!’” I argue that this is a knowledge video because she is passing along a double message—the first is her words at face value, which is that commenters should adhere to the Standard English that is valued within Western society. The second message

[67] Tinder is a popular dating app.

[68] See Appendix A, Video 29: “Dove Soap,” by @barbcs13.

comes from her sarcasm, that people should make sure they are watching their own mistakes before trying to call others out.

This exchange is a great example of what I discussed in Chapter 3 about a way that someone might deal with a failure in audience acceptance, and how this that might prompt an audience to have the typical supportive response that ultimately offers redemption for the performer. Not only is the sass in a response video once again a way to publicly banish negativity, but it also offers an opportunity for community reassurance—this, in a way, could be interpreted as a form of digital applause. It is quite often the case that videos that respond to mean comments are full of comments that cheer on the performer, as if the public display of sass was an invitation to join in defense. If we think of this in terms of Bauman's framing, @barbcs13 has set up a frame of defense and confidence, and the users commenting have successfully caught on. The comments are filled with reassurance: "You are gorgeous! This is the generation of disrespect and, apparently, ignorance." "You look Beautiful …and the Teacher in You ..Still TEACHING" and "You look FANTASTIC! If this is what 60+ years of dove looks like SIGN. ME. UP." And, of course, the video itself is unapologetic and celebratory of oneself, highlighting especially the wisdom of one's elders.

There are 493 comments (that were not by @barbcs13) on this video, and all but two are either complimenting the creator, encouraging her or applauding her, or joining in on insulting the person who had insulted her. The two negative comments appear to respond to another comment by a different user, @txfilmtravelfoodie, not to @barbcs13 and the video directly. See Figure 13:

Figure 13: Potentially negative comments on @barbcs13's video.

@wyomingtrashbag, by saying that @txfilmtravelfoodie's supportive comment is "dumb," implies that they do not approve of @barbcs13's video, at least if we are to take it as face value. It is possible, however, that @wyomingtrashbag just responded to @txfilmtravelfoodie's comment thread on accident and meant to start their own comment thread, unrelated to @txfilmtravelfoodie. If that is the case, they could be referring to the negative Dove soap comment as "dumb." I find this latter case more likely, given that they say, "you like fly," which could be a phone's autocorrect or a misspelling of "you look fly."

The second negative comment, by @rtsbuilders, has a lot of blue billed cap emojis, which are often used as Internet slang for lying.[69] This suggests that they think @txfilmtravelfoodie's comment is a lie or perhaps a gross exaggeration. However, while it appears that these two negative comments are in response to @txfilmtravelfoodie, it is very common for people to delete their own negative or hateful comments if a lot of people start arguing with them in comment sections (hence why the original hateful comment that

[69] "🧢," *Urban Dictionary*, accessed January 30, 2023. urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=%F0%9F%A7%A2.

@barbcs13's video responds to is no longer available), and so it is highly possible that the negative comments above are responding to something that was deleted.[70] Overall, 491 out of 493 affirming (at least toward @barbcs13) comments is a strong indication that she was successful with this video, especially through her defensive framing. This video also goes against stereotypes of older women being sweet and meek as @barbcs13 publicly stood up for herself with sarcasm to an audience of more than 13 thousand people.

Calls to Community

Here I would like to return to the call to community video by @tgip (Let's Do This) that I mentioned earlier. While this video had some comments that responded with the wrong frame (unsolicited comments from men), the grand majority resoundingly connected with her frame of community solidary. As she calls to the "over 50 club" community and says, "Let's Do This," the comment section is filled with users saying their age: roughly 165 comments out of 471 respond by saying their age or that they are a part of the club. Most of the rest of the comments say something generally in agreement, such as "Yes," "Represent," smiling emojis, or saying she is beautiful. While this video is not quite viral, it still has nearly ten thousand likes. This particular call to community is interesting in that it gathers up a large team of people to stand together and dance, which plays with a few ideas. One, that people 50 and over are few and far between on the TikTok app, which ties into my discussion in the age section about older people and technology. Clearly this is not the case as this video drew more than 150 people over 50 out

[70] Note that many of the comments have a mark that says, "liked by creator." We do not know exactly why @barbcs13 liked each comment without asking her. But seeing this note on TikTok videos can serve as a reminder to the audience of the fact that creators look through the comments (and potentially delete them). I will also note that some creators (none in the women over 50 community that I have seen) have said in the past that they "like" comments not because they genuinely like them, but because they use the "like" button as a way to mark comments that they have already read. This could be the case here, which would also explain why @barbcs13 liked the potentially negative comments.

of the woodwork.[71] The second idea this video plays with is that older people cannot dance. @tgip dances while proclaiming "Let's Do This," showing that older people can in fact dance and so many people agree and applaud for representation in the comments.

@jennyjtiktok's video,[72] another call to community that I call "Queenagers," has fewer likes, coming in at 11. With this call to community, she dances with some Labrador retrievers with floating captions: "Where are all the Queenagers? 👑" "I'm Jenny! If you are a little crazy & love to dance, Lets by friends! ❤️" She adds in the comments that "Yes, I have 4 crazy dogs right now! 💞." There are two comments from others: "Love it and you [sic] labs are so adorable 💖 ❤️ ❤️ 🐾 🐾" from @melindafromthebay aka Melinda and "Aww brilliant, your dogs 🐕 wanted to join in too 🥹🥹" from @lilfranny7 aka Fran. Although they are positive, both of these comments seem to focus more on Jenny's dogs than her call to community; however, I do not think this is necessarily an indication of a framing failure as these users may already follow Jenny, which is how TikTok users can mimic friendship.[73] This is certainly the case with Fran, who follows Jenny, but for Melinda it is unclear given that her following list is private. In the case of Fran, and perhaps Melinda, if she does follow Jenny, their comments can still indicate success because they are already friends and Fran is supporting Jenny as an audience member.

[71] These people were of any gender, as I did not verify the gender of each commenter, but rather, just counted how many people responded in the comments by mentioning their own age.

[72] See Appendix A, Video 20: "Queenagers," by @jennyjtiktok.

[73] Following accounts on TikTok for a lot of people means either one of two things: one, that the follower likes the account's content, which is more akin to someone subscribing to a YouTube channel; or two, the follower wants to be or already is friends with the person who runs the account. In the latter situation, following is comparable to sending a Facebook request or being Facebook friends. Some people on TikTok call people who follow each other "mutuals." This could be because they are more like acquaintances who are familiar with each other's work than actual friends. Nonetheless, it indicates something of a relationship which is a step in the right direction when someone says, "Let's be friends," or something similar on TikTok.

Another possibility is that Fran followed Jenny when she saw this video, in which case the video would be especially successful.

Amusement

Many of the amusement videos come with frames of recreation and casualness. @tracilyn70's video[74] exemplifies this, as she dances in the kitchen with floating captions, "When Mom's [sic] over 50 join TikTok for fun," and, "And they become Obsessed!" Like several of the examples I have already explored, the comments meet the video in the same frame of recreation, as users agree: "yes it's so addicting 💙 💙" and "That's me 😂 😂 😂 😂." But what about examples where framing fails?

One 62-year-old woman's account has 3.1 million followers. She goes by the name Queen Cheryl, and she constantly has thousands of likes and views, yet the comment sections for her videos are usually quite unkind.[75] The dance videos she makes often feature her fiancé, who is 37 years younger than her. These videos are full of people with hateful comments, such as: "Truamatized [sic] 😱" "THIS IS MY LAST STRAW" "Community gudline [sic] where u at" and "it's not safe here kids." But these sorts of comments extend to her videos that just have her, too.

Take for example a video she posted of herself[76] (pictured in Figure 14) where she bends her knees in twerk position and gyrates her hips and behind. Her hands fly around her and she's

[74] See Appendix A, Video 53: "Joining TikTok for Fun," by @tracilyn70.

[75] Note here that it is possible for people to pay for likes, views, and followers. That could be the case with this example, although it is hard to say. The high number of negative comments suggests otherwise, as the more comments a video gets, the more the algorithm will push the video onto FYPs, so it increases the number of views per video. This person also has been on television before, and thus she has a starting level of fame already.

[76] See Appendix 1, Video 17: "Barbecue," by @oliver6060.

grinning the whole time. Her hair is blonde, and she wears skinny jeans, a white flowery top, and some flip flops. Some people holding cameras and boom microphones in the background suggest that they might be filming something for a show. The caption reads, "Enjoyed the 🦃 with family," which places this video as an amusement video because she frames the video with "enjoyment." Even though she has 251.8 thousand likes on this particular video, the majority of the comment section is vicious: "She's totally throwing that dust off 💀"[77] "Who saved this to their favorites 💀" and "Everyone is just looking away from the embarrassment."

This woman, while her comments are less than positive, is still finding success if we are thinking of success in the form of popularity and going viral, and not necessarily in terms of audience support. She is still doing something unexpected for a woman her age, which is dating a much younger man. This controversial topic contributes to her online fame, as the numerous pop/buzz sources that appear when searching "Queen Cheryl" on Google suggest.[78] Yet, in this video, her framing and gaining positive support from the audience is less successful. She is performing a dance at a dinner with family, framing it as something casual and just having fun, yet the audience does not respond to that framing positively. Instead, they negatively fixate on her looks and her age, as is the case with so many of her videos. Queen Cheryl's videos certainly contain something unexpected—a woman who is in a relationship with a much younger man. Yet the harshness and lack of acceptance in the comments suggests that there is a line that the unexpectedness can cross. In an amusement video in which one shares details about their personal life, resistance against the norm can only go so far for the TikTok audience.

[77] Skull emojis are frequently used as a way to indicate laughter, as though they laughed so hard they died.

[78] "Queen Cheryl," *Famous Birthdays*, accessed May 18, 2023. famousbirthdays.com/people/queen-cheryl.html; Ethan Singh, "'Read the Caption': Why is 'Queen Cheryl Dead' Trending?" *The U.S. Sun*, April 2023; Greg Evans, "TikTok worried about Queen Cheryl and Quran McCain's relationship after tearful video," *indy100*, April 2023.

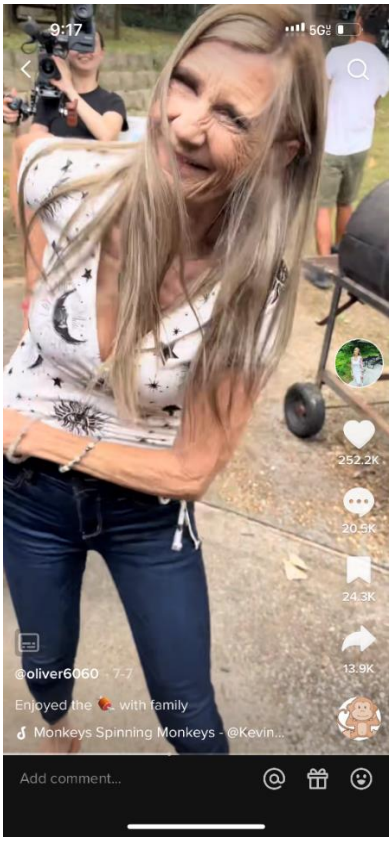


Figure 14: Queen Cheryl's video.

Conclusion

These examples have demonstrated how women over 50 can attain multiple forms of success in TikTok videos. There are other forms of success not included here that are more on a personal level, such as a feeling of satisfaction for having posted something or feeling genuine (see Chapter 3). When it comes to success in popularity, it is important to remember that the videos that are viral are viral at least partly because of the general population on TikTok. Because of this, findings about what goes viral say more about the values of the general TikTok population rather than the values of the over 50 club and grandma community on TikTok. However, it does tell us how concepts and assumptions about older women can manifest online and how that affects the reality of women over 50 as they move through these spaces.

We can also see the effects of these concepts on a more personal level by looking at success through framing and audience response to that framing. When the framing is successful, there is often a system of support from the audience. Frames, especially when they are tied to themes specific to subgenres, can also function as a way to resist or play with stereotypes that women over 50 are often subjected to. Since so many videos in this study highlight the attributes of confidence and self-love, we can see that these are likely important values to the community of women over 50 who make those videos as they move through TikTok facing assumptions and expectations about their age.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Final Thoughts

Life during the COVID-19 pandemic was a rollercoaster of changes that came with new challenges for everyone. The need for community, entertainment, and an outlet for expression rose exponentially for all, and TikTok provided an avenue for these purposes. Throughout this thesis, I have explored how women over 50 on TikTok express themselves during the pandemic through dancing videos and how their messages connect with the general audience. I have done this by identifying patterns in markers, grouping those patterns in terms of subgenres, and then assessing what kinds of frames are drawn in videos from each subgenre. The prominence of these subgenres—knowledge, confidence/self-positivity, age, calls to community, and amusement—and their associated frames can tell us about what is important to the community to talk about during these times. The subgenres correlate with many of the stereotypes, pressures, and beauty standards women over 50 face, and this is likely not a coincidence. As women play with and/or resist stereotypes correlated with each subgenre, they redefine themselves and the community on their own terms. Consider this quote from my interview with TikTok creator Lizzette:

> The 20s and the 30s see the 40s and the 50s thinking we should be in a bata (housecoat) ... that's how we always envision our grandmothers, in a housecoat and her hair's always gray and she's very conservatively dressed, and she sits at the party with her hands folded and she watches everybody else. I think that's what they expect, but dance and TikTok has opened up the doors for us to say, ‘Yeah, no.’

Redefining the community could potentially act as a way for some women over 50 to feel more autonomy over their image during a time when all else feels unstable, especially as opportunities for representing oneself diminish and narratives about COVID-19 dismiss older

people because they are more susceptible.[79] Of course, the older one gets, the more this is at issue; people in their 70s and 80s are definitely more at risk than people in their 50s. This thesis did not look at the nuances between the various ages of people in the "over 50 club," nor men over 50, but these could be areas for future study.

In addition, the themes of community and amusement which are reflected in the subgenres make sense in the context of the pandemic as the world shut down and many people became isolated. In terms of amusement, dancing in general can be a tool for freeing oneself of worry, which Margaret, another interviewee for this thesis, states:

> If I started to dance, I could feel myself thinking through things and figuring them out and coming to a more peaceful place. I always would end dancing feeling much more well-being than when I started. I can walk in with a lot of anxiety and anxiousness, and then I would lose it. I could kind of see things in a different way when I'm dancing or feel through things.

Lastly, TikTok has certainly served as a place for community-building during the pandemic. TikTok creator Lizzette said she has developed friendships from it and often goes on to ask people's perspectives about various things going on in her life, as well as to express herself. As she puts it, "I think when I get on TikTok, it's really to share me, to share who I am. I guess I'm not the best dancer in the world, but I'm going to share that. I'm going to share my experiences. I'm going to share what bothers me. I'm going to share what makes me happy. And sometimes I just feel like I have to say something."

[79] I am thinking about how many younger people would excuse their lack of mask or quarantining by saying something to the effect of, "I will be okay, it is just older and immunocompromised people who have to worry." Such comments were dismissive as it was common knowledge that the pandemic was highly contagious and thus one young, healthy person with the illness could spread it to someone older or not as healthy.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study had a few limitations and areas for future discovery and research. Despite many attempts, I was unable to connect with more women over 50 community members on TikTok. A study that incorporated more interviews would provide a lot more firsthand insight into what it is like using TikTok as a woman over 50. In addition, paying more attention to the nuances between #womenover50, #over50club, and #grandmasoftiktok would provide more perspective and depth to this study. I conducted this research by looking for ways to identify women over 50 on TikTok, which happened to be through a few hashtags, rather than starting from specific hashtag communities as folk groups themselves. There may be distinct differences between #womenover50club and #grandmasoftiktok, for example, as women face stereotypes surrounding reproduction and the assumption that every woman is or wants to be a mother and/or grandmother.

Exploring the nuances between hashtag communities would be an excellent area for further research, as well as looking at the differences between videos posted in various phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Videos posted in the early pandemic when people first went into quarantine could have varying content compared to videos posted during the first vaccine phase, for example. This would be interesting to investigate as it could tell us more specific details about how people used TikTok videos to react to different kinds of stresses associated with the pandemic.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: VIDEO REFERENCES

Video ID #	Title*	Creator	Date	URL	Description
1	Maria	@mariagracia130	Oct 2, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8r31h/	The woman in the video, Maria, starts dancing by moving her hands in a heart motion, putting them together as if praying, and then rolling her body as the beat drops. The video has a filter so that the person dancing shows up three times, as if they had backup dancers.
2	Get Me Famous	@dancinggrandmaa	July 26, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8hb5F/	A woman walks into a laundry room, picks up a handheld vacuum. Then the video switches to her in the kitchen, waving her arms and kicking to the beat of a song clip. She does the Charleston and turns around. The video is sped up, and includes some hashtags, including #getmefamous.
3	Make it Through the Week	@kad480	Sept 8, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8h8M4/	The video starts with a woman looking into the camera with the words above her: "How do you make it through the week?" When the beat of the song clip drops, she steps back with a smile and starts wiggling her shoulders with the words: "just keep dancing."
4	Carla	@dancing_grandma31	Dec 15, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK88CLc/	A woman moves around, shaking her body and twerking to a Drake song in a living room.
5	Sunset	@tracygaynell	Feb 21, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8YQGk/	A silhouette against a sunset on a beach, the dancer wavers her arms above her and starts to turn. She finishes her dance by squatting and looking out over the water.
6	New Attitude	@demetria70ish	Dec 4, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8r4tm/	Demetria, the creator of the video, bobs and shuffles around a living/sitting room. She wears a red blazer and red boots. A caption reads: "I'm 72 and I got A new attitude!"
7	Mid-Life Beginning	@ajgirl1	Apr 5, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK	A woman pulses to the beat of a song, her arms out as though she is a bird. The view behind her is of a body of water,

				8NWej/	and across the way there is a city skyline. Her floating captions say that a "mid-life crisis" is more like a beginning, an adventure, where people can be themselves.
8	Jamming in my Jammies	@over65andsassy	Dec 6, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8YbLK/	A woman starts the video by saying, "My background dancers and I will be jamming in my jammies." Two blue cartoon men are behind her, mimicking her movements. She begins to snap, rock, and bend her knees to the music.
9	Café	@over50_fabulous	Apr 7, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8JTKE/	The video starts with an animation of milk pouring into a latte, but instead of a design, it shows the face of Lizzette, the creator of the video. She starts bobbing her head to the music, which repeats, "Quiero café" (I want coffee) a few times.
10	Lynda	@lyndaramsay56	May 5, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8a9qV/	Lynda, the creator of the video, jabs her elbows to the sides, lifts her arms up, and starts moving her hips to the music.
11	Dancing In My Car	@loladaugherty	Sept 4, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKR3GB3/	A woman sits in her car and starts moving her hands in front of her face and bouncing to the beat of a song.
12	In a Restaurant	@lavonna_grandma_p	Dec 28, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKRgGyK/	A grandmother spins around and takes little zig-zagged steps while waving her arms. She is in what looks like an empty restaurant or sitting room.
13	I'm a Ghost	@loriannparker	Dec 31, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8v5f6/	The video starts with a woman jumping and posing with her arms out, and with the help of a filter, a translucent version of her jumps out and starts moving her knees and arms in and out to the beat of a song. All the while, a picture of her body remains in the background, until the translucent version of her clashes back with it and she moves as a whole once more.
14	Spread Kindness	@lisarehbock	May 3, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK	Video creator Lisa makes fluid movements with her hands as she pulses to the beat. She steps closer to the

				Rvu3b/	camera, makes a heart with her hands, and waves. Her floating caption says: "My niche….is you / will you be my friend." And: "Be the kindest person you can be! Or Die trying! Love u [sic]."
15	New Swimsuit	@beckywvmountains	Apr 2, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8Re7M/	Becky, the maker of the video, shakes her hips in a blue bikini with a shawl. A floating caption reads: "new swim suite [sic] / love it / 51 / 160lbs 5'9" / love all of me."
16	Who Me?	@mysticalcurves	Apr 4, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKRxhoC/	A woman starts out in a gray t-shirt, mouthing along the words to the song, "Slumber Party" by Ashnikko. When the voice gets lower, the video switches to where she is wearing a red outfit and makeup. She bobs to the music.
17	Barbecue	@oliver6060	July 7, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKRQPNF/	Queen Cheryl, the poster of the video, dances around outside as others in the background film and barbecue. The comment section is vicious.
18	Hit It	@10secondswithgma	July 15, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKRPnQT/	The video starts out with a woman rocking and shaking her behind in a doorway. She is wearing a flowery one-piece swimsuit. She walks into the room, jogging her arms. The caption reads, "89 next month!"
19	Should Have Made a TikTok	@livinlevedaloca	Mar 11, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKRunyG/	A woman moves her knees side to side while clapping and shaking her behind. Floating captions read: Being that I'm 81….. I don't want to look back at my life and think…. Shit…I should have made a Tik Tok! [sic] Join me on my journey!"
20	Queenagers	@jennyjtiktok		tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdcVdx/	A woman, Jenny, invites people to be her friend if they like dancing and are a little crazy. She bobs to the music with her dogs running around her. The main caption says TikTok has been entertaining for her during the pandemic.
21	Birthday		May 14, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdWfyj/	The video features CJ McCann's face and shoulders in the frame, and she smiles and counts down, drumming her hands to a drumroll. The video

					transitions so that now she is wearing a full face of makeup and her hair is styled; she bobs to the beat. The floating caption says she turns 57 today.
22	Insecurities Can Suck It	@grandmaswhodance	Dec 3, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKRdb8e/	@grandmaswhodance walks up to the camera and begins dancing side to side while her floating captions explain that she has been struggling with self-image lately. She ends with, "Atleast [sic] for tonight, my insecurities can suck it!"
23	Shivers-Kathy	@kathymelba	Oct 17, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdr5xy/	A woman, Kathy, dances a choreography to "Shivers" by Ed Sheeran. She wears a pink t-shirt with a smiley face on it and includes the caption: "I had to hit this trend."
24	Shivers-Steph	@3rulme	Oct 21, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKduGFn/	A woman dances a choreography to "Shivers" by Ed Sheeran. She stands on a brick path and is wearing thigh-high boots.
25	Grandson Dance	"Loving Life" (username omitted to protect privacy of minor in video)	Mar 20, 2022	URL omitted to protect the privacy of minor in the video.	A grandmother and her grandson dance a vigorous choreography together.
26	Let's Do This	@tgip	Dec 12, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdhwMK/	Tammie, the creator, dances a choreography that involves pointing to her eyes, swaying side to side, clapping, rolling her body, and swinging her arms. A caption reads, "Over 50 club Let's Do This."
27	Sue Over 50	@sueover50	June 4, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdVHx3/	Dressed in either a bodysuit or swimsuit and stilettos, a woman sits on some steps. Some different ages pop up, and she points and shakes her head at each one. When the beat drops and the number is 56, she starts to wiggle her shoulders and dance, indicating she is 56.
28	Born in the 60s	@802pam143	June 24, 2022	tiktok.com/t/	A woman sways up to the camera, her hands in the air, as she explains what

				ZTRKdrHeX/	decades she was born and raised. She ends with her hand over her mouth, and a floating caption: “Realizing you are one of the few using this sound actually alive in the 60’s.”
29	Dove Soap	@barbcs13	Mar 18, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdhVT9/	The video is a response to a comment that says, “You look like you’ve used dove for 60+ years. It didn’t do no favors for you.” The woman in the video, @barbcs13, corrects the comment’s grammar in the floating captions, turns around, and shakes her hips to the beat as she walks away.
30	Insanity in Dancing	@barbcs13	Apr 1, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdXCHg/	This video is a duet, aka response to, another user, @wildrising. The two videos are side by side, both with black and white, old film filters. The two women do the Charleston, kicking up their feet, in black dresses. @barbcs13, who is the creator, is on the left, and has a caption above her: “At 77 years old there’s a bit of insanity in dancing that does me so much good.”
31	This is Your Fault	@barbcs13	May 26, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRKdmPwj/	The video starts with a woman in a bathrobe and cap, standing in front of a walker. She smiles, puts her hands up, and as the beat kicks in, the video switches so she is now wearing a backwards cap, hoodie, and pants, actively swaying her hip with a walker nowhere in sight. The captions say, “TikTok This is your fault! This is not what my family thought they would be getting!”
32	Respect	@jtp069	May 18, 2022	tiktok.com/@jtp069/video/7099205668384591147	A woman dances in a grassy yard to a song that repeats, “Put some respect on my name.” Her floating caption says that old folks do not belong in a nursing home just because they are of a certain age.
33	Entertainer	@jtp069	May 18, 2022	tiktok.com/@jtp0	A woman swishes from side to side while waving a toy—perhaps a fake fish on a stick—in the air around her. A

				69/video/7099213038695402798	floating caption says that she used to entertain her mom as a kid to make her laugh.
34	This is Me	@strice2	May 6, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3PurW/	A woman dances by a pool, in a bikini, explaining why she is more comfortable dancing with a coverup. She ends the video by saying, “This is 55 and this is me.”
35	Sleeping Over 50	@chelespell	Aug 1, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRK8v5f6/	A woman in pink silky pajamas starts going to bed as a song seems to be finishing out. A floating caption reads, “What it’s like going to bed after 50 years old.” But she gets up and starts wiggling her shoulders as the song unexpectedly starts in a new key. This happens a few times, and each time, the captions give a reason for needing to get up again/interrupted sleep.
36	In Da Building	@unapologeticallywhoiam	Dec 18, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3f9JY/	A woman in all black sways side to side and movers her hands in a series of gestures to the beat. She finishes with a peace sign, fingers facing her, which she pulses twice as she smiles and walks off camera. The floating caption says, “Over 50 Club in da building.”
37	Jamie	@jgfitfam	June 12, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3rVyg/	A woman does a line dance that involves kicking to the side, touching knees, and turning to face different directions. She wears a black shirt and navy shorts and has tattoos on her bare feet.
38	Vibe with Me	@stilettozz0	Feb 27, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3Ucsq/	Dressed in a shiny silver coat, a black dress, stockings, sunglasses, and stilettos, a woman moves side to side and kicks her feet while clapping. She has a filter that makes her appear five times, as though she has people dancing behind her.
39	Cha Cha	@sugarfreefun	Oct 2, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3un9S/	A woman in workout clothes does a cha cha choreography with a mirror behind her.

40	Do it for the TikTok	@mssilverqueen	Oct 7, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3UHvw/	A woman is dressed in fringed shorts and a cowboy hat. She slides from side to side, moving her hips and grabbing her hat. Floating captions say, “Over 50 Crew,” “Do it for the TikTok… Doing it my way…” with an emoji with a tongue sticking out.
41	Pull Up Tonight	@fashonluvr	Dec 4, 2022	https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTREpBypc/?t=2	Five women dance a choreography outside, swaying, getting low, and clapping. The main caption says, “we [sic] gone pull up tonight! Or at least we gone attempt to!” with two laughing emojis.
42	Fun Monday	@incabomer1959	July 19, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw36dBX/	A woman dances in a living room, moving her hips side-to-side and gesturing along to the words of the music. She is wearing sunglasses and says in the caption, “Make it a fun Monday” with a heart and clapping emoji.
43	Heather	@56.kicks	Nov 21, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3ME11/	A woman swishes from side to side and spins around. A floating caption reads, “At 58, Im [sic] still Dancing!”
44	Ouch	“Nana Bear”	Nov 4, 2022	URL omitted to protect the privacy of minor.	A grandma comes in and starts dancing to a song, but when she lifts her arm, the music stops and there is a cracking sound. Someone groans while another laughs (this is the sound of another video, so the cracking and laughing isn’t coming from her). The woman pretends to be injured.
45	Love This Mashup	@carolyns_wells	Nov 11, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3mMd5/	A woman wearing a fedora comes into a house through an open door, snapping and doing some classic Michael Jackson moves. The video is in black and white, and the sunlight comes through behind her, obscuring her face much of the time.
46	Workout Wednesday	@agentwooska	Aug 9, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3y5Bp/	Two women sway to the beat of a quick song. They are standing outside, barefoot in the grass, and a caption says, “Workout Wednesday ! [sic]” and there

					is a little animation that says, “Let’s get moving” with an arm doing bicep curls.
47	Dress and Heels	@dancingdebiukmodel	Nov 25, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3Pgqk/	The video starts with a woman dancing at a party in a dress and heels, then a slideshow starts of some selfies of her and her friends. Captions say dancing in a dress and heels isn’t easy. She introduces her friend, and says how her lady-like look didn’t last (this over a picture with a silly face).
48	Parking Lot Whip	@allthingsresa	Nov 26, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3Hrdn/	A woman dances with the car door open, standing in a parking lot. “Let It Whip” By Dazz Band plays.
49	50 Club Where You At?	@3rule me	Sept 23, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3SBvX/	A woman dances with a big smile on her face, asking in a caption, “50 club where you at?”
50	Happy	@mskimhale	Mar 31, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3F7q8/	A woman in a brightly tie-dyed shirt with a heart claps, jumps, and rocks to the beat of “Happy” by Pharrell Williams.
51	Age has No Factor	@gwen60js	Apr 27, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3Pw6g/	A woman dances, moving her shoulders and hips, sitting down, getting back up and turning around. The main caption says age doesn’t matter when you just want to have fun.
52	3 Sons	@realannettevaillant	June 6, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw3aRxA/	A woman salsa dances in the bathroom as she dedicates the video to her three sons, who forgot her birthday.
53	Joining TikTok for Fun	@tracilyn70	July 18, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwcw3jA/	The video starts with a woman folding towels in the kitchen with a floating caption that says, “When Mom’s [sic] over 50 join TikTok for fun.” She turns around, waves, drops the towels and starts dancing. A floating caption appears: “And they become Obsessed!”
54	Freestyle 4 ever	@dmelendez24	Nov 16, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRw	A woman jumps and moves to the beat with a floating caption that reads, “Thursday freestyle 4 ever….” A little cartoon man is in the corner.

				tKTHU/	
55	Loving This Beat	@...alex_j_a_n_d_r_a	Nov 13, 2022	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwtCqJj/	A woman moves her hips to the beat with a floating caption that reads, “I’m loving this beat.”
56	Happy Independence Day	@carol_personified	Jul 4, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwttue3/	Two women do a line dance in the middle of a road or driveway on a clear, blue-sky day.
57	Mom Discovers TikTok	@minita1969	June 7, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwtCfur/	A woman walks into the frame, waves, bobs her head, then starts vigorously shaking her butt with her hands over her head. The floating caption says, “When moms over 50 discover Tik Tok, [sic] but have no moves!”
58	Shivers at the Club	@l.amos68	Dec 15, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwtKAUT/	A floating caption reads, “When you’re over 50 and single at the Club… And SHIVERS plays…” A woman dances and pretends to walk out of the frame, but comes back to dance when the Ed Sheeran song says, “Bring it right back.”
59	Still Dancing at 57	@melissag111	Nov 10, 2020	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwtPdqH/	A woman steps into the frame of the camera while the words “Don’t Scroll!!” and “Still Dancing” pop up one after the other in the floating captions. She wiggles her hips, moves her hands around her, and jumps around while inviting others to join in.
60	The over 50s can do it	@jackie6868	Sept 24, 2021	tiktok.com/t/ZTRwtkaDq/	A woman, with a filter that makes her appear as three figures, dances with a floating caption reading, “Over 50s can do it to” [sic] and a laughing emoji.
* I made these titles based on the content just for easy recognition and reference. TikTok videos do not typically come with a title of their own, unless the user specifically says so, which is rare.					

APPENDIX B: MARKERS IN VIDEO SAMPLE

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