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NEGOTIATING MASCULINITIES WITHIN DANCE

By

Corey Mariuz

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

through Sociology in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts at the

University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2016

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NEGOTIATING MASCULINITIES WITHIN DANCE

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of men's and boys' experiences within the dance world. I explore how hegemonic masculinities can influence men in dance and set the parameters for understanding what the ideal male dancer is. It draws on a narrative analysis of interviews with six male dancers between the ages of eighteen and thirty in Southwestern Ontario and my own auto-ethnographic accounts of life as a male dancer. The study examines three main themes associated with men in dance namely, family and peer perceptions, compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic ideals. The research examines hegemonic discourses and inform stereotypes of men in dance, that my research participants both contest and reproduce. This thesis then complicates an understanding of social pressures associated with being a male dancer on a day-to-day basis.

Key Words: Masculinities, Men, Dance, Hegemony, Gender, Active Interview,

Auto-ethnography, Social Field, Habitus

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## I.

## INTRODUCTION

The world of competitive dance in North America has grown rapidly over the last ten years. My own studio PURE Academy for Performing Arts has seen an increase in male clients of over 200 percent over the past three years. I feel that as I have traveled across North America for competitions and professional work over the last twenty years, the number of boys and men in dance is increasing. When I began dancing around 1995, there were only ever a couple boys at any given competition that I would travel to compete at. In contrast, in this past year (2015) I have witnessed in some instances over forty boys competing at the very same competitions.

One major factor that has likely contributed to greater participation including men and boys in dance is the increased public exposure to dance through the media and reality television. Television series such as: *America's Best Dance Crew* on MTV (2008 – 2012), *Dancing with the Stars* on ABC (2005 – 2016), and *So You Think You Can Dance?* on Fox (2005 – 2014) are just a few examples. Today, dance shows are more prevalent in prime time slots on major television networks than at any time in history. ABC's *Dancing With The Stars* (2005-2016) attracted 17.8 million viewers during the 2012 finale episode; MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew* (2008-2012) averaged 1.9 million viewers during their 2011 season, and Fox's *So You Think You Can Dance?* (2005-2014)

averaged 5.0 million viewers per episode during their 2011 season (Nielsen Television Ratings Data, 2012).

Dance studio life and more specifically, competitive dance however, remains relatively understudied. How does the dance world look and feel for men training, performing and competing? How is their experience in dance different or similar to public perceptions of men in dance? Do these men in the dance world have similar experiences?

This study combines an auto-ethnographic approach with interviews of six young men to reflect how we negotiate masculinities through dance in Southwestern Ontario. All of us trained the majority of our dance lives in studios almost exclusively in Windsor. However, dance also has allowed us to travel across North America for competitions and master classes with industry professionals. We have all been on stage performing or competing and some of us have worked for television and film as well. Sharing my own experiences with the insights and perspectives of these other male dancers helps paint a picture of what male dancers' life feels like and how this social field is traversed.

I remember working for CTV on the show *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*, Season 2, Episode: Top 12 as an assistant choreographer. My job was to teach contestants on the show the routines, which they would perform weekly to compete and be crowned Canada's best dancer. It was September 23, 2009 and I was taping this show live. I watched the contestants hang out backstage ready to step on the dance floor to try and convince Canada to vote for them as

the next best dancer. I recall one dancer who said his heart was pounding while he held the hand of his beautiful female partner who was wearing a two-piece bikini covered in sparkles. She clearly out-shone his simple pair of black dress pants. At the time, I was only somewhat consciously aware of the gender differences and what impacts they had on the performances. The simple black dress pant arguably reinforces the fact that a male role on stage is to not pull the audience's attention from his female counterpart. Was he simply there to frame the female as she dances across the stage?

As he stood in the wing waiting for his time to take the stage, he was stretching and reflecting, as I have often done, about how all the years of dedicated training could come down to the next two minutes on stage. His bare chest was sweating. Did his nerves race because he was about to dance a style of dance he did not even pick with a partner with whom he had only rehearsed for a few hours? Perhaps he grew up dancing in a studio dreaming and waiting for this moment just as many of professional male dancers did. As he took the stage with his partner, perhaps he hoped the steps that he was taught and the costume he was given are exactly what the public wants to see. Could the last thought that rushed through his head before the song came on be that he hoped the audience votes for me? When he steps on stage, he hears the audience roar but can barely see them because the warm lights are too bright. Three judges sit at an elevated table off to the right side of the stage each with a glass of water, pen and paper, ready to critique his every move: excitement and anxiety; jealousy and pride certainly characterize my feelings of such moments and that

of my male dancing peers.

When I worked on the 2009 season of So You Think You Can Dance Canada (SYTYCDC) as an assistant choreographer, I remember standing backstage watching this young man who went through this experience. This moment is one example of how it might feel to be a male dancer experiencing simultaneous feelings of excitement and nervousness to be on stage, jealousy of other dancers and pride for being able to compete at such a high level of competition.

As an assistant choreographer, I experienced pressure from the producers of the show to choreograph dances that clearly demonstrated differentiation between genders. I was encouraged to choreograph hyper sexualized, heterosexually themed dances, perhaps because these types of dances improved the show's ratings. For example, I remember producers asking me to have the male dancer of a vampire themed dance lick his female partner's neck. (This was not part of the original choreography). I know if I was a dancer competing on the show this specific theme in almost all of my dances would have become quite annoying as there are many other themes to explore through dance such as friendship, struggle, loss, dominance or even familial relations such as siblings. Not all dances need a specific theme or story, but it seems that dances for television often incorporate some type of narrative. The idea of dancers telling some kind of love story between a man and a woman seems tired and overdone from my perspective as a male dancer. It seems almost all the choreography was centered around a romanticized, sexualized heterosexual

narrative of intimacy: around a couple breaking up, falling in love, physically abusive relationships, male dancers pursuing uninterested or confused female dancers. These are all scenarios which are often conveyed with movement between males and females who perform and compete.

Dance is a place where someone can be free to express oneself and yet, be molded into or scripted by particular categorizations of the male and female dancer. It is this tension that provokes my interest to understand how I understand myself and how my research participants understand masculinity in relation to being a male dancer. What gender norms and expectations are at play here and does dance offer a distinct way of being male? Is dancing simply another arena where men produce gendered expectations or resist them? Perhaps dance can be a place of simultaneous reproduction and tension of gendered movement. It certainly seemed to me that there are different gendered expectations associated with dancing based on your gender.

My own experiences dancing suggest that there is a kind of affinity and opposition between men and women in dance. I feel that dancing alongside women often made me feel like more of a man perhaps because I know I am the male on stage who is there for her when it is time to partner. Both men and women seem to need each other on stage to fully paint the picture of what audiences may want to see. It seems that women are constructed in somewhat passive ways, as men manipulate their bodies by lifting them through the air and yet, female dancers are the main focus of dances as they are meant to outshine and draw the audience's attention on stage far more than their male partners. All

male dancers work with women on a regular basis and there appear to be many more females than males in the business. While it is not my intention to focus on women for this study, the oppositions that are created through gendered understandings of each other and performance expectations, a gendered script is apparent.

This study is rooted in feminist and gender studies, in particular, the notion that masculinities are plural (Connell, 2005) and situated in a complex matrix of class, racial, and ethnic difference. I examine how men experience dance and dominant depictions of masculinity. I consider dance as a 'social field' (Bourdieu, 1993) that includes, but is not limited to, the physical space of the dance studio; rather it extends beyond these walls as dance can be performed and competed on stages in public spaces as well (Bourdieu, & Johnson, 1993). By focusing on the subjective understandings of fellow dancers and my own insights, I seek to examine how masculinities are negotiated and used to shape men's identities within the world of dance.

I argue that the recognition and exploration of the world of studio dance life can contribute to much more nuanced understanding of how masculinities and dance inform the identities of men in ways beyond popular media depictions. The study seeks to understand the performative and social dimensions of performing and competing in public spaces. It contributes to a gap in the academic literature that attends to the everyday practices and experiences of young men in the dance world. In particular, it will contribute to a growing body of literature that seeks to examine how young men actually negotiate their

masculinity and identity through everyday engagements within dance.

Dance can provide the opportunity to challenge and reinforce gender ideologies (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). Dance also has the ability to reflect and communicate existing ideas and institutions, stimulate decision-making in relation to social roles, and challenge or reinforce gender ideologies, as well as incorporate physical activity movement in association with gendered roles (Gerstner, 2002; McRobbie, 1984; Polasek & Roper, 2011).

Firstly, an exploration of competitive and professional dance allows us to examine what heteronormative discourses are at play within the dance world and whether they reproduce dominant male discourses: specifically, the male as an agent representative of power, strength and dominance while women are passive docile bodies, contributing largely to the aesthetic goal of a performance or show. Competitive dancers are defined as being familiar with entertainment –based dance styles in which what is ‘correct’ is clearly defined (Schupp, & Clemente, 2010). Competitive students also rehearse in an intense training setting that often doubles as their social and recreational outlet as well (Schupp & Clemente, 2010). There is a commonly adhered to gender binary in society that we as humans use as a script to understand and communicate with each other (McLeod, 2005). This binary in society is mirrored in that of the dance studio with similar gendered understandings of, for example, a male as representative of strength and power. The very act of ‘dancing like a man’, partnering women, jumping and turning for example, helps shape and set parameters for the

definition of masculinity and legitimacy for men as 'athletes' in a sport. Other ideas include the notion that men should partner women and provide the muscle needed to lift them into the air, that if there is an error in partner work made it is always the male dancer's fault.

Secondly, the assumptions on sexuality of male dancers is ambiguous and complex (Pascoe, 2011). For example, perhaps they are assumed to be gay men who participate in effeminate movements of the body for pleasure and performance (Polasek & Roper, 2011). It seems that while male dancers are expected to convey strength and power as the frame that borders female dancing at the same time it feels as though our strength and power is overlooked. For example, when a male lifts his female partner over his head with her legs in a split, the audience may often react by thinking, 'wow she is beautiful, look at that flexibility.' Moreover, my research participants indicated they felt like audiences rarely think or say, 'wow that male dancer is very strong to have lifted her like that'. A sense of being erased or eliminated can render men's performance invalid simply because it is demonstrated through a 'medium' that is viewed as artistic rather than athletic or rather, that is not recognized for men as legitimate when compared to sports and more general depictions of hegemonic masculinity. One dancer I talked with stated that he literally "disappeared beneath her tutu" as he danced a 'pas de deux' at a local theatre in Windsor (Jeff, 22).

The picture that comes to mind when someone says 'dance,' for many, might be a bunch of women in bodysuits and tights standing at the ballet barre, which is attached to the walls of the room. The front wall of the studio is covered



with mirrors and there is a sound system in a corner with an instructor holding a coffee and yelling '5, 6, 7, 8, point your toes'. The dancers all wear pink pointe shoes, skirts and white tights with their hair in a tight bun. And yet, as you walk through a dance studio on any given weeknight the atmosphere can be electric, and it can confound generalized stereotypes of male and female dancers.

It is common for example, to see dancers of all shapes and sizes, ages, sex, genders doing so much more than the typical 'ballet barre picture': Dancers sprawled out on the floor stretching, listening to music, hanging out with friends before or after class, eating snacks; some of the younger dancers might be sitting at a kids' table colouring a picture of a ballerina with their parents. Some dancers will be in crop tops, booty shorts and barefooted ready for contemporary (an organic way of moving which most closely resembles a hybrid of modern and ballet) class, while others will be in combat boots with baggy pants and a snapback hat on backwards ready for street dance or hip-hop class. All these students and teachers share a common love for the arts; but the studio dancer definitely does not fit into that sometimes publicly perceived image of a ballerina.

I viewed myself and continue to view myself as both a hip-hop and contemporary dancer. The hip-hop version of me is much more hegemonically masculine in comparison to the contemporary dancer that I am required to be in the studio. As someone who has grown up in the dance studio and built one, I seek to explore and critically reflect on masculinity and the male dancer. Hence, I use an auto-ethnographic approach to create a self-narrative that is open to comparison and critique with others (Spry, 2001). The driving research questions

are: a) how do men construct and perform masculinities within dance?, b) how is masculinity defined in the dance world?, c) how does the concept of a hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity relate to the dance world?, and d) how does the construction of masculinity within social fields relate to the construction of one's own identity? The study therefore employs an active interview approach with male dancers aged nineteen to thirty-seven ('active interview') combined with my own memories and experiences in dance (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

As an artistic director of PURE Academy, I have been teaching secondary school dance classes for four years at Walkerville Collegiate Institute and Walkerville Centre for the Creative Arts. I have also participated in dance studio life for the past nineteen years taking part in recreational and competitive dance programs.

Additional research is needed to further explore the complex ways in which masculinity is discursively manipulated and adopted by men in an attempt to create a sense of self as recognizably masculine. A discussion on multiple masculinities calls for a much more nuanced understanding of how multiple masculinities are negotiated (Pascoe, 2011). By conducting a narrative analysis of the ways men construct identities in the dance world and interviewing six males who participate in dance or have participated, I will explore how these men articulate and negotiate their identities through hegemonic constructions of masculinity.

These constructions of hegemonic masculinity can be most evident through performances on shows such as So You Think You Can Dance Canada.

Let me take you back to the stage where you just completed your two minute dance with your partner in her shiny sequenced bikini. You are breathing heavily and the lights are bright, but although your dance is complete, your time in the spotlight is not over. You are now forced to endure an open adjudication live on national television. The judges tell you they appreciate your energy, but they felt that you should have focused more on your partner, as it is your job as the man to make sure she looks good on stage. They also suggest that perhaps you should dance with a little more power by jumping higher and bending lower. With that, North America is left to vote for whether or not they feel you deserve to win the entire show. This voting takes place even though you did not even get a chance to show them a representation of you as a dancer. It appears as though you were used as a vehicle through which the choreographers on the show could showcase their talent as permitted, manipulated and approved by the producers. North America claims to know you as a top ten dancer on the show, but they have barely even seen a glimpse of your own dance identity. In the next chapter, I situate this study in the approaches to masculinity that inform my research on hegemonic masculinity and its plural dimensions.

## II.

### THE SETTING: "My Life is Dance"

Although it is fair to say that dance is an artistic expression, which uses the body, there are many different styles of dance, reasons for dancing and practices associated with dance. For example, some dance for cultural reasons and use dance as an outward expression of their culture while others dance for

competitive purposes. An example of a cultural reason to dance would be joining a community Italian club that meets up once a week to dance the polka. Cultural dances are often physical expressions of tradition, celebrations of history and livelihood (Thomas, 2003). Cultural dance can often be used as a means of telling stories and communicating ideas through the physical act of movement. In comparison/contrast, some people are trained and tested in dance syllabi and dance for reasons not associated with any specific type of cultural heritage or history. These dancers perhaps engage in dance as a healthy activity focused around athleticism of body for example. Dance in this sense is an outward expression of creativity to be competitively judge with a degree of objectivity associated with specific technical parameters or publically enjoyed as art. Competitive dance then is mostly void of cultural influence. The cultural dance can be understood much more as a performance for audiences to enjoy while competitive dance is more of a sport with purpose to dominate another group of individuals on the dance floor. There are some elements of competition in cultural dance but far less influence cultural influence in competitive dance.

My research participants and I all speak of a specific context of dance, namely, one that occurs mainly in a studio and begins at a young age usually between six and nine. All of us dancers in this study are male and the majority have trained mostly in studios including Edmunds Towers School of Dance, The Dance Barre, Nancy Pattison's Dance World, all located in Windsor, Ontario, and PURE Academy in Chatham, Ontario. These studios are among the largest in southwestern Ontario with an estimated average of five hundred clients each. We

experience the formal dance studio training, a setting, which encompasses enrolling in classes that occur on a weekly basis. This way of experiencing dance has seen a drastic increase due to popular social media over the last ten years. The studio setting timetable matches the school year and runs according to a regular schedule, September to June and concludes with a public recital performance on stage. All of us dancers participated in the studio life version of dance where all were trained for these public performances and competitions. Most of these dancers have gone on further to have careers in dance both as entertainers and dance educators/instructors and choreographers.

I recall while dancing being very concerned whether the girls liked me, and if there was any potential girlfriend in the room. I loved the moment in class when I would be given the opportunity to dance with one of the girls. I remember as a young dancer not being overly concerned with the style and way of dancing. It is only when I reflect back on that time now that I realize that there were several processes outside of my control or perhaps even conscious thought that were shaping me as a dancer and as a person. It never occurred to me in that moment that my dance was predetermined by the instructors and choreographers that I worked with on a daily basis. Dance as a gendered performance did not even seem relevant at the time because I thought that the way males and females were expected to dance was innate rather than socially constructed and predetermined by others who claimed to be experts in dance.

### *The Dance Studio Scene*

Recreational dance students generally learn technique through repetition

of short exercises and choreography to be performed at an end of the year performance often called a recital or showcase. Some of these men were training in the dance studio approximately fifteen years ago at which time Windsor was home to approximately three multi-disciplinary dance studios and three exclusively ballet studios. Presently, Windsor Essex County is home to more than ten dance studios with over half of them offering multi-disciplinary dance classes. The average client pays approximately four hundred dollars a year for dance instruction, which does not include the competitive program fees.

Dance studios vary in mandates and syllabus taught and their vibes can be very different as well. Some studios mandate the notion that a successful studio is one that trains all its dancers to move and look as similar to each other as possible. These types of studios tend to have more sterile atmospheres with a waiting room filled with hard chairs and a receptionist. These studios have rules and codes of conduct posted outside every studio door and parents are not allowed to view their children in class on a regular basis. These dancers I feel are limited in regards to the creativity they are allowed to express. Moreover, studios that aim to produce dancers who all move and look the same (like a dancing army with same quality of movement, costumes, makeup, hair and shoes) would possibly argue that a dance studio setting which nurtures creativity on the students' part is a demonstration of a lack of discipline and respect for the art form. Dance students are to reproduce movement and demonstrate pre-established technique as accurately as possible rather than infuse their own creativity in movement. Moreover, creativity was reserved for choreographers

and artistic directors. Artistic directors of studios that produce very similar dancers pride themselves on how synchronized and uniform their dances and dancers look. These types of studios have dress codes that put all dancers in the same clothing and shoes and often do well in competition because their dances look very synchronized. Dancers are often dressed in gendered ways as the men and boys often wear pants and some type of shirt and women/girls often wear tights and a body suit or bikini style top and bottom.

In contrast, a studio that tends to have a more flexible syllabus has a much more comfortable and relaxed vibe. The rules are not hung on the walls which can deliver an almost threatening message; rather, pictures of the 'dance family' at that studio are on display. Students come in and hang out in a student lounge on couches and bean-bag chairs. This kind of studio tries to achieve the home away from home atmosphere attempting to allow the dancers to simply be themselves. I currently teach dance in the studio most like the latter. Looking back, I never realized that I was being shaped and molded to dance and perform a certain way; rather it was only until I made the transition into a dance teacher that I realized how influential a dance instructor can be in the process of shaping an individual's dance vocabulary and style.

Presently, on a daily basis I come into the studio, talk to a few clients and then continue to the staff lounge where I make a coffee and hang out and prepare lessons for the day of work with my friends and colleagues. I then proceed into the classroom where I teach a variety of styles and levels of dance to students ageing from 5-18 years. In my classes, I encourage students to

explore and push boundaries, to be different and try something new. My loose lesson planning encourages improvisation and group collaboration giving each student a chance to demonstrate something unique to them through movement during each class. For example, students in this type of class may consider exploring space with their body in a way that is not typically taught through highly regimented and standardized dance classes. I remember as a dancer taking a highly structured class and my favorite two minutes of the hour dance class was when my teacher put on a random song and said “freestyle”; it was only in this two minutes of dance class that I was truly allowed to do my thing free of concern for doing something incorrectly or unaccepted. Growing up, dancers were never permitted to “freestyle” on stage or in competition, however, we always tried to find moments here and there to insert a little piece of our own personality on stage.

The dance studio setting described above is very different than the socio-cultural forms of dance experienced in other dance settings. This setting is rooted in ballet technique and training rather than customs and traditions. When I speak of technique I am referring to a standardized set of dance moves and skills, which can be internationally recognized and adjudicated from an objective point of view. For example, ballet dance can follow several different syllabi for example the Cecchetti Society of Canada, British Association of Teachers of Dance (BATD) or Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) have all developed a graded syllabus from ages three and up for dance instructors to follow. The syllabus consists of the same moves to the same songs for all dancers who train in this style.



Examiners employed by these associations can be hired to travel to your studio and examine all dancers training in their syllabus. The exam consists of a grading and individual feedback for each dancer on every exercise performed. Instructors then follow a written manual of pre-determined dance steps and music and students are often tested on these patterns within a year or two of training at that particular level. Almost all technique based syllabi have a graduated levelling system which can take several years to complete. In this context, the motivation to dance is rooted more in the notion that you are entertaining others, rather than an outward physical expression of the self. Yet many dancers join dance class at a young age because their parents see dance as an outlet for their child to express themselves in their own unique ways.

Some of the research participants have continued on with a career in dance (as previously mentioned) after their competitive training of approximately ten years. Upon completing the competitive program around the age of eighteen, some dancers begin careers in the arts or pursue post-secondary education within the arts. Almost all of my research participants also drew on some of their more current experiences in the professional dance world in cities such as Toronto, New York City and Montreal. These experiences included commercials, dance shows, music videos and fashion shows.

Music videos for example are often jobs that are auditioned for and are relatively short term contracts. In this situation, dancers arrive at an audition and are taught a series of steps. The dancers are chosen based on how well they execute the steps based on the choreographer's opinion.

I have been in auditions in the past and I recall as a dancer auditioning, you are constantly trying to predict what the choreographer is looking for. It can be very difficult for some dancers to meet choreographer's expectations and sometimes it is impossible to meet them based on your aesthetic, demeanor, personality, and style. Based on your assumptions about what you think the ideal male dancer for a particular job looks like, you try and emulate that image. For example, if I was auditioning for a ballet company I would slick my hair, dress in tights and ballet shoes. Contrastingly, if I was auditioning for a hip-hop music video I would wear baggy clothes, hat on backwards and running shoes. Beyond this my 'vibe' or way of acting in the audition room would be completely different. In a ballet audition I would never sit, I would be standing as tall as I could with my chest out. In contrast, a hip-hop audition room welcomes a much less postured position and demeanor. I would never make jokes with a ballet choreographer. However, with a hip-hop choreographer perhaps I would show more personality making it appear as though I am just hanging out.

From here if you 'book the job' than you will generally rehearse for a few hours within the next few days followed by a day on set. On set is where hair, make-up, wardrobe and the technical aspect all come together to create a three minute music video. Mike describes this experience as:

a whirlwind of exhausting-ness...there are so many people telling you what to do, what to wear, how to act, how to dance, how to pose, where to pose, when to dance - you know?... It's like a fast moving current that you just need to let carry you through the day.

In moments like this, Mike said he was “achieving all he has trained and hoped for as a young dancer” but at the same time is “being dragged” through a series of demands and processes which convert him from ‘Mike the dancer’ to something that the directors, producers and choreographers of the music video want. In this sense “gigs can be a let-down or something you don’t tell anyone about because you’re not that proud of it” (Mike, 24). In this regard dance is very similar to acting as you are required to play a certain role and convey a certain message regardless of your own interpretations and preferences as a dancer.

This music video setting described above is considered a more professional level of dance than what Windsor, Ontario has to offer, however, many male dancers in this study would not have the opportunity to work professionally in this setting if it was not for training in the studio setting in Windsor. So I turn now to consider the dance studio setting in Windsor.

Windsor’s population is approximately two hundred and twenty-five thousand and between 1500 and 2000 of those residents aged four to eighteen are currently enrolled at a dance studio. I have chosen to focus on dance studio life because of the increase in dance studios in southwestern Ontario in general. Although these large multi-disciplinary studios’ male student body and faculty are less than ten percent of the total, being a male dancer and instructor myself has introduced me to many of these boys and men.

#### *The Competitive Dance Program within the Studio*

In order to better understand the context in which the dance world takes place, I will elaborate on some of the details of our training experience these men

received growing up. Competitive dance refers to men and women who dance competitively and professionally, and are “familiar with entertainment-based dance styles in which what is correct is clearly defined” and train in intensive studio atmospheres (Schupp & Clemente, 2010:26). The competitive aspect of dance is partially defined by the “excessively high standards for performance accompanied by overly critical evaluation from self and others” (Ommundsen et al, 2005:981). On average, the research participants attended dance for at least ten hours per week over two-four days at a studio with several other students in their classes. However, this level of commitment usually began much lower with closer to three hours a week upon first starting dance. These males were trained in many styles of dance, which creates a foundation for the dancer. These styles include tap, jazz, ballet, hip-hop and contemporary/lyrical. Tap dancing consists of black leather shoes with metal bottoms for dancers to make rhythms on the floor by tapping their heels and toes on the floor. Jazz is upbeat and full of kicks, turns and jumps and is danced in a small form fitting leather slipper of sorts. Ballet is usually a slow and controlled way of moving that can be very fluid. Hip-hop has an urban feel and is usually done in sneakers and can be seen in many rap music videos today. Contemporary and lyrical are combinations of ballet and jazz and are usually done bare footed and have a narrative element. Other secondary styles of dance and classes in which these men participate or have participated in include: acro, ballroom, musical theatre, improvisation, stretch/strength, and partnering. Classes generally range from forty-five minutes to an hour and happen outside of academic schooling hours. Many of my

research participants were formally tested each year in dance and were required to meet certain criteria before advancing to the next level of dance. Each dancer also performs in a year end recital giving the dancers an opportunity to showcase what they have learned in a non-competitive setting. Many students begin their dance career as recreational dancers (syllabi classes) attending only a couple dance classes a week. If an instructor recognizes potential in the dancer he/she will be invited to audition for a competitive team.

It is worth noting that the majority of male dancers train within the competitive stream at the studio seeing that there are so few males in the dance world and they bring value to a competitive program. The dancers typically dance from 4:00 p.m. until approximately 9:00 p.m. partaking in approximately five to seven dance classes in different styles weekly. Usually the first hour consists of warming up, stretching and conditioning the body and subsequent couple hours are reserved for ballet, tap, and jazz technique. The last half of the evening could be dedicated to learning and perfecting routines that are to be performed and competed at a later date. This consists of the instructor meticulously working through the choreography step by step ensuring that all dancers look as precise as possible.

Upon finishing dance classes these dancers usually head home to shower, eat and complete homework or study before heading to bed. This demanding schedule allows these men/boys to hone their time management skills at a young age as the life of a competitive dancer in particular requires a high degree of discipline. With this level of discipline comes sacrifice as well

including socially and sometimes academically which all of the research participants discuss in the interviews.

The competitive stream of dance is ultimately the families' decision if they are accepted into the program, which is an increased financial and time commitment. Usually there are three or four different levels of teams generally grouped by age. The average competitive dancer begins around the age of seven and competes with dancers up to about age nine. The second level or team is approximately ten to fourteen and the third fifteen and up.

The competitive students designated by choreographers in the summer (August) are taught dances above and beyond their syllabi classes. Usually they practice these dances for one year with competitions (approximately four) usually commencing from January to July. Dance styles are chosen based on choreographer's strengths and preferences as well as dancers level of ability and styles.

I remember being taught dances in the summer months by choreographers across North America. Many times these choreographers were the leading innovators in the dance world. This meant the styles were new and often somewhat foreign to me as a dancer. This contributed to the excitement and nerves associated with learning new dances to the point that I recall being so uncomfortable once with the style of dance I was being taught that I left the room and cried in the bathroom.

These men often dance with ten to forty other girls in class and on stage in costume. These costumes are generally for the male dancers comparatively plain

and simple so not to pull focus from their female dancers. Things like black pants and dress shirts are usually the typical male costume. The competitions consisted of travelling to a convention building, taking master classes throughout the day (with auditions for scholarships for furthering dance education) and competing their rehearsed dances as a group through the evening for a panel of judges and large audience. Dance competitions and conventions can be as small as a couple hundred dancers and as large as one-thousand dancers.

Competitors are judged by leading choreographers and dancers in the industry largely out of Los Angeles and New York City. Criteria for these judges include, technique, performance, costuming, choreography, and timing to name a few.

Looking back on my dance and reflecting with these research participants has allowed me to critically think about the gendered expectations and scripts associated with being a male dancer. In that very time that we were training to be dancers we perhaps did not realize that the nature of rehearsing and moving our bodies in particular ways was actually a cultivation of a particular way of being. Through the valorization of specific abilities and demands from teachers and choreographers (ex. height of jumps and kicks and speed/how many turns) we were reifying and bringing to reality a public discourse on masculinity while simultaneously challenging it as we did so through a much less accepted 'sport' for males.

I have noticed changes in dynamics of the world of dance over the past fifteen years. It seems to me that expectations for men and women in dance have always been very distinct and different most of the time and yet sometimes

expectations can seem far less differentiated. This can be seen in young boys who are trained to dance a certain way their entire youth then sometimes these expectations can change if and when male dancers find the rare dance venue or gig which allows for other types of gendered movement. Some of these changes include trends in competitive choreography (popular steps and styles), the role of the male dancer on stage, public perceptions of male dancers, the ideal body image of a male dancer and reasons for joining dance studios and competitive dance teams. As previously mentioned, socially mediated hegemonic images and ideals of the male dancer and dance life in general has contributed to the understandings and workings of everyday life for a male dancer.

Competitive choreography has increased the level of difficulty of steps, complexity of formations and staging. Competitive dances now seem much more stylized (less generic, less recognizable, standardized movement) as well in comparison to ten-fifteen years ago where you would often see many of the same dance steps done by different teams in competition. I also have noticed that now there are much more acrobatics incorporated into competitive dances where in the past acrobatics were rare to be seen on stage. The role of the male dancer is constantly changing and shifting depending on who the choreographer or coach is to the setting (recitals versus competitions). Males are often expected to execute skills that require a high degree of athleticism and strength. I recall as a young dancer always being asked if I could do this type of jump or that type of jump and/or these types of lifts. My utility for the competitive dance team was not in my ability to do dance steps rather in my ability to do dance 'tricks and



gimmicks' things that set our competitive team apart from the rest. At times the male dancer is centred and used as a secret weapon (jumping and turning) and at other times the male dancer is simply there to lift and support the female dancers on stage. I think dance is much more mainstream now and there is a cool factor associated with being a dancer for some males. This never existed in my time as a young dancer and it was arguably an alternate or subcultural experience more so in the past than it is today. the physique of the ideal male dancer has gone from tall and thin to a more athletic build which, lends more utility to choreographers who wish to incorporate lifts into their pieces.

Looking back to when I was a dance student, my experience was very different from the atmosphere and class structure I currently participate in and create for my students today. I trained in a studio which attempted to create a homogeneous dancer and my instructors presented (in my opinion) overly structured lesson plans each week. The music we danced to was always the same and there were even vocal recordings over the songs telling the dancers exactly what to do. Back then, all students strived to do the perfect pirouette (spin) all together in time like an army of what I have feel look like robotic or army like dancers void of passion and creativity. This type of dance environment lead me to understand my own value in dance only in relation to females. It also molded me to perform dances in specific and consistent gendered ways.

As an instructor today, I see the value in teaching students the fundamentals of dance and the importance of a technically sound pirouette for example. However, I also like exploring 'wrong ways' of doing a pirouette. I often

ask students to throw technique out the window and spin off balanced and in different positions. The students then are able to explore their own body and movement through the act of spinning. This experience to me is one of the most valuable in the dance class setting. It seems that by doing this it gives dancers a sense of creativity and personal ownership over their dancing. It also allows them to relax and ultimately become more creative but also more responsive to critiques of their technique. I feel like being creative in class is one way for the dancer to feel as if they have a sense of control or ownership over their dancing. This sense of ownership and control lends itself well to understanding dance from different entry points and exploring different types of gendered dance relations. However, this opportunity does not present itself to most dancers on a regular basis. I will now describe a memory I had as a young dancer in which I found another way of being in control of my dancing and having ownership over it.

I remember being in elementary school at Sandwich West Public School dancing a solo to the James Bond 007 theme song. My teachers enjoyed the dance so much that they wanted me to teach it other students and perform it at another school. The teachers chose blonde twin girls to dance with me. This dance we prepared was supposed to be presented to other schools on an Arts Tour Day. I recall the drummer from the arts tour day on the bus called me a 'dancing queen'. The girls I danced with were not trained dancers and never had the experience to perform on stage before. I performed on stage all the time so the tour did not mean much to me. When the twins in my dance laughed at the

dancing queen comment I decided to scratch the CD with a safety pin so that we would not perform on this arts tour seeing that we had no music. Although I felt like I was constantly on the defensive and in need of proving to others that dance could be for boys and just because a boy danced did not mean that his movement/costuming was identical to that of the girls. At this moment I was unable to have the strength to continue to perform regardless of the verbal harassment I was receiving. This was a very memorable experience where the very thing I loved and enjoyed caused me anxiety, stress, and sadness. I hated the fact that my craft and passion was mocked and I considered dance to be such a big part of who I was as a person. Consequently, I felt as though I was being personally attacked. This was also a way for me to take control of what I was doing. This was a song I chose, moves that I created with dancers I taught which could be classified as a stark contrast to my typical dancing in the studio. Scratching the CD was a way for me to prove that I had ownership over my steps, choreography and performance.

I continued to deal with harassment from peers and lack of support from my father through secondary school as well. However this is where things began to change for me. Secondary school brought success in dance, which boosted my confidence and self-esteem. I then became able to perform in front of my peers.

I was trained as a dancer to dance a certain way, to 'dance like a man' and now that I teach dance in my own studio more than ten years later I have begun to problematize masculinity in the dance studio. Dancing like a man

consists of being strong and powerful, being a consistently solid base for lifting girls, jumping high and turning fast for example. Men were not expected to have the same degree of flexibility as women and were often choreographed into pieces with less stage time than females in the dance. Dance steps for males could and would at times even be simplified as the male dancers often lacked the technical skill that other female dancers their age would have.

When teaching men dance I have experienced two specific approaches or teaching styles. The first is a disciplined focus on creating a macho male dancer that television wants to see. The second is more focused on nurturing the inner desires and preferences of the student regardless of its consistency or lack thereof with hegemonic ideals of the male dancer. Hegemonic ideals for male dancers consist of being a strong supportive partner, being a help to female partners by lifting them and spinning them on stage. For example, men are not supposed to be too stylized and are to be more 'tricky' with turns, jumps. There is also an expectation for male dancers to take up space on the stage travelling fast and far from one side of the stage to the other. It seems that while male dancers are challenging hegemonic notions of what male dance should look like they are simultaneously recreating these ideas through movement and the art of dance when partnering women for example.

When I first began teaching I worked at a studio that produced arguably the highest quality dancers in southwestern, Ontario. The studio was very successful in the competitive dance world largely because all the dancers looked identical and danced the same way; however, this success was precisely the

reason I was unsatisfied with the product I was creating at the studio. It seemed that both males and females has specific roles to play on stage and unwritten rules indicating particular ways of dancing on stage. These roles on stage were consistent with an aggressive, strong, dominant hegemonic masculinity for males and more passive approach to dance for females. This drove me to leave this studio and begin working at a different studio with less rigid syllabus; moreover, this new setting permits and encourages not only my own artistic liberties in the classroom but it affords my students these similar types of liberties as well.

It could be that some dance studios in bigger more cosmopolitan cities are perhaps less likely to feel subjected to the same notions of production of the hegemonically masculine male dancers as other studios rooted within more industrial towns. However, my research participants who have worked and trained in more cosmopolitan cities still feel some degree of pressure to dance a particular way in order to land jobs in television and film.

I currently teach a male dancer who is ten years old and this dancer has prompted a personal reflection back to when I was his age. I, as his teacher, have an issue with forcing and training him to 'dance like a man' in similar ways that I was trained. I experience a dissonance between giving him the tools needed to be as successful as possible in the dance world and allowing him to express himself and be his own dance artist. He is at a young enough age that he does not fully understand the different 'ways' you can dance as a male dancer, and although he is taught by male instructors and female instructors his nuances are most similar to that of his female instructors. When this young

dancer is given the opportunity to dance freely he will whip his short brown buzz cut hair cut back and forth as if he had 'hair like a mermaid'. His peers tell him that he should let the girls do this and he should do other moves. This dancer is also very physically weak in comparison to other male dancers his age and his flexibility is far better than any other male dancer in the entire studio. This is an example of expectations for males to perform and dance a certain way from not only his instructors but his peers as well.

I choreographed a competitive solo this past year for this student in the style of jazz. I allowed this dancer to have elements of himself in the choreography (hair whips) ensuring that he felt connected to the dance and enjoyed it. At competition judges record their critiques and provide them to the instructors for feedback. I generally allow the dancers to listen to the critique tapes the following week after competition. I previewed this dancer's tapes from one competition and I was ridiculed as his instructor for choreographing hair whips into his choreography as this move is arguably reserved for female dancers. I decided not to allow this young dancer to listen to his critique tape and told him that the recording did not work so to protect him from any unnecessary embarrassment. This situation shows the difference of opinion within the dance world with regards to what the ideal male dancer should look like. It also proves that some choreographers and leading dancers in the industry fully support the notion of a particular type of hegemonic masculinity expected to be portrayed by men in competition.

Reflecting back, I see that I had internalized scripts of the masculinity and

the ideal male dancer at a very young age. By my teenaged years, dance became a source of accomplishment and even status, but simultaneously I was struggling with the box that I was categorized in as a male dancer. In my teenaged years, dating was great for me because many women found the idea that I danced and was straight as something intriguing. I was rarely without girlfriends as I felt that this helped me justify my sexuality to those that would attack it because I danced. This is an example of the heterosexuality that many young boys and men experience within the dance world. I was overly concerned about being labelled gay that I became exactly what the hegemonic ideal of a male dancer would look like in order to avoid criticisms and verbal harassment from peers or family members.

I continue to struggle with this categorization and the preconceived notions associated with being a male dancer. Presently, I have witnessed the struggle from the perspective of a dance educator. My research participants' narratives reveal some other insights and struggles associated with the internalization and reproduction of their gendered expectations and expectations associated with being a male dancer.

### III.

#### METHODOLOGY

When I first started dancing, I remember sitting in the dance studio lobby the first couple weeks with my mom putting on tap shoes with ballet music in the background playing from a studio filled with dancers taking a ballet class before

me. I also remember being very shy at first because I was one of the only males in the entire building. I did not like the feeling of waiting for dance class to start because I was forced to socialize and talk with other dancers lined up in the studio hall with me outside the room waiting to go in. I often tried to stay sitting with my mom until my teacher came and got me from her. Once I got into dance class, my anxiety would subside, but these socially awkward situations for me quickly fell apart as I got better at dance and the dance studio became the place where I felt most comfortable.

### *Auto-ethnography*

My study employs auto-ethnographic techniques to draw on my experiences, reflections and memories of dance to elicit 'interactional textures' between my research participants myself and the field of dance (Spry, 2001). I have personally trained in dance since the age of six across North America with companies including Royal Winnipeg Ballet School, National Ballet of Canada, Broadway Dance Centre in New York City and Edge Performing Arts Centre in Los Angeles.

My involvement in dance over the past eighteen years permitted me to elicit a cultural and ethnographic sensitivity to context while referring to circumstances and nuances associated with men and the dance world as a way of linking research participants' experiential location to the more conceptual issues and questions at hand. I have seen first hand the dynamics between male dancers with female dancers, other male dancers, family and peers. I have spent years hanging out with many of these men discussing similar experiences and



difficulties we have had associated with being a male dancer. We have also shared many great memories of performing, competing and being in countless social gatherings together as well. I am drawing on memories of training in the dance studio four days a week, participating in competitions and performing in year-end recitals, working as a professional dancer on Holland America cruise lines and in Toronto. All of these different dance scenarios and contexts contribute to an understanding of dance training and the professional dance world.

My auto-ethnographic insights and reflections are informed by my own 'stock of knowledge' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). I constructed auto-ethnographic field notes and deemed research reflexivity crucial to the use of a partially auto-ethnographic approach, which suggests I have personal relationships with my research participants, my investments and stakes in the research itself (Luttrell, 2000). This reflexivity necessitates the effort to distinguish my insights and experiences from that of my research participants.

Feminist scholars (Anderson & Jack, 1991, Franklin & Stacy, 1991 and Stanley, 1991) call for "self-analytical approaches to be applied to the research process", noting the advantage of firsthand experience (Young & White, 2007:46). Being a male researcher also contributes to my understanding of the complexity associated with negotiating multiple masculinities. It allowed me to better understand where these men were coming from when they spoke about being a male dancer and it also gave the research participants a sense of trust and comfort when discussing dance life as they know that I understand and have

lived similar experiences. An auto-ethnographic approach in conjunction with interviews allows me to approach the field of dance simultaneously from outside and within.

### *Theoretical Understandings of the Interview & Auto-ethnography*

To foreground the negotiation and identity construction associated with doing masculinities, my study employed 'active interviews' for thematic and 'narrative analysis' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). I adopted a social constructionist approach to my interviews, which recognizes that what passes for knowledge is itself a product of interaction (Garfinkel, 1967).

Interviews were not used as a method for seeking true self or uncovering hidden meanings. Rather, they were understood as performative occasions through which people actively interpreted and produced meaning. When I was talking to these other male dancers we discussed together and reflected together what dancing was and is like. We also asked each other questions and the process was very much like a conversation between two individuals who are very passionate about the same thing. From this perspective on interviewing I was able to examine the interpretive and discursive resources these men used to make meaning of their lives and map their social relations (Holstein & Gubrium, 1992; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Tanggaard, 2009). The active interview "eschews the image of the vessel waiting to be tapped" in favour of the notion that the subjects interpretive capabilities must be actively stimulated and cultivated through an exploration of their personal communities (Holstein &

Gubrium, 1995:17). Being a dancer, dance teacher and choreographer establishes my full participation in the world of dance.

I employed a semi-structured interview format to foster a dynamic that would be conducive to the production and negotiation of complex meaning, which was constantly being negotiated. My agenda consisted of a loose set of themes or topics with some probes used to help illicit responses from my research participants. In this sense, the interview is flexible and organized fostering a collaborative uncovering subjective meanings (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Flexibility within the interview allowed each of my participants to make linkages between their life histories and the experiences of their day- to-day lives relatively free from the 'coercion' of already tested analytical frames (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

My interviews recognized the subjects as a 'narrative resource' that create context through 'communicative contingencies' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). By shifting narrative stances and encouraging multi-vocality I sought to understand, explore and build a stock of knowledge in each interview. As a researcher, I facilitated some of these shifts while challenging my subjects to take control of the interview and lead it in directions they saw fit as I treated each of them as 'an expert' of dance (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

Because I understood my research participants as narrative resources, probes were used not as mere stimuli [or catalyst] for 'reflex like production of answers' rather as a way of situating the dialogue (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This gave the research participants guidelines that they might have followed in

characterizing experiences and talking about feelings.

Research participants were encouraged to make linkages between their life histories and the experiences of their day-to-day lives. I was looking to better understand to what extent dominant cultural expectations about masculinities, gendered and heteronormative scripts and practices are affirmed, rejected and or reproduced within the male dancer. This style of interview recognizes the research participants as a subject with interpretive resources and a 'stock of knowledge' from which one may make sense of gendered and heteronormative scripts, norms and practices within dance (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:33). The narrative communicated through the active interview allows the simultaneously substantive stock of knowledge to grow, diminish and be deconstructed in emergent and reflexive ways (Schutz, 1967).

Beyond creating stocks of knowledge, the active interview attempts to increase visibility of 'horizons of meaning'; moreover, research participants attached coherent and reflexive, subjective meaning to their experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The active interview also requires the researcher to situate him/herself reflexively in the interview process by considering the ways in which situational context and the differing subjectivities between interviewer and research participants may influence the types of thoughts and expressions evoked during the interview.

### *Interview Logistics*

Being a member with recognizable identification and acceptance from the

men that I have interviewed classified me as a 'complete member researcher' (Ryan, et al, 2000). All of my participants saw me as one of them even though I was interviewing them. My participants view me as a very active dancer, instructor and choreographer in the dance world. In the past, I have danced alongside all of my participants or have taught them dance lessons in the past. Some of the participants were older than me and some younger but all participants except for one was reflecting on experiences between approximately 1996 and the present. Being fully committed to and immersed in the group benefitted the research two fold. Firstly, it allowed me to establish a certain level of comfort and rapport with my research participants (as mentioned previously) within the early stages of phase one of the interview process and secondly, it allowed me to draw on my own stock of knowledge to help create stocks of knowledge and horizons of meaning with my participants (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Challenges to the interview process that were considered were the anxieties and potential traumas that may inform personal experience. We discussed emotionally sensitive topics that may have related to violence, such as sexuality, gender, bullying and identity (Suarez-Orozco & Robben, 2000). To minimize ethical risk, none of my current students or clients were included within the interview process. All research participants were friends of mine who have participated in the dance world in the past or continue to work as professional dancers, teachers and choreographers.

Southwestern Ontario and more specifically cities and towns southwest of London, Ontario, prove to be a valuable location for this research as it offers

multiple venues for the arts including dance studios and theatre companies, many which I am or have been involved with in some capacity. Windsor and Chatham also have specialized educational programs designed for the development of the arts including post-secondary educational institutions offering diplomas and degrees within musical theatre. Windsor currently has just under ten dance studios with several of them offering multiple locations. Chatham-Kent County has just over six dance studios with three of them offering satellite locations in surrounding areas such as Wallaceberg, Florence, Blenheim, Tilbury, Forest, Lakeshore and Leamington.

The interviews were carried out with six male dancers ranging in age from 18-35. The men who have been assigned pseudonyms were very motivated to sit down with me and discuss what it is like for them to be a male dancer. Interviews with Rob, Jeff, Mike, Grant, Olly and Luke were carried out and transcribed between December 2014 and January 2015.

All of these young men (18 - 35) were of middle to upper socio-economic class as participating in competitive dance is a privilege that many people of lower income families cannot afford or do not have access to, as physical activity-related facilities were shown to be less likely present in lower-income neighbourhoods (Powell, L. M., Slater, S., Chaloupka, F. J., & Harper, D., 2006).

Many of these men are dance teachers, choreographers and dancers who participate in both dance classes at a studio or community theatre. Below is a brief description and background of each of the research participants. Although these men have many commonalities it is important to note that some of them

enter the field of dance from different social positions and for different reasons. Recognizing and comparing the habitus of these men shows how the dance field effects and operates on a more structural level.

Rob has been dancing for over 18 years and is currently a dance instructor. He has danced with me for the past seventeen years including settings such as the dance studio, competition stages, performance stages and now we currently teach secondary school together and work at a private dance studio together as well. Rob has one younger sister who is a professional dancer as well. Rob is a married, self-identified heterosexual with two young children. He played football throughout his years training as a dancer. His focus is in ballet and modern technique. Rob tries not to go against the grain or 'cause waves' in the dance world as 'the business is very small and everybody knows each other and word travels fast with those gossip girls'.

Jeff was a student of mine for four years training in jazz, ballet and hip-hop. Jeff has also been cast in community musical theatre productions as a dancer. Jeff has one younger brother who dances competitively. Although Jeff has not formally trained over the past two years he still drops by "his home" (the studio) periodically. Jeff is a single, self-identified heterosexual and is moving into his final year for a Bachelor of Arts in Human Kinetics. Jeff has struggled socially to find a girlfriend and is confused as to whether dance helps or hinders him in the "dating game."

Mike has been a student of mine in the past for two years and is currently working as a professional dancer, singer, actor, group fitness instructor and

model in Toronto. Mike has been a competitive dancer and community theatre dancer in the past. Mike is a self-identified single gay man and is very active in the Pride scene in Toronto. Mike has one older brother who is not involved in the arts scene and currently works as health sciences researcher in London, Ontario. Mike is very extraverted and conveyed that he was proud of his body and sexuality often working jobs that would be considered very risqué: dancing in bars, pole dancing, stripping and naked modelling. Mike is determined to make a career out of being an artist and he does not "care what others think because he is doing it; they are just hating."

Grant and I met through our involvement in community theatre. Grant is a self-identified heterosexual who is currently in a long distance relationship. Grant has taken dance classes in the studio periodically over the past four years. Grant has extensive training in Ukrainian dance and prefers to dance solo incorporating very large jumps, which he states is from his training as a basketball player. Grant is very confident and says everyone likes him because he is funny. He says that "when girls find out [he] dances that is a surprise bonus."

Olly has been a friend of mine for the past six years. Olly and I (like Grant) were introduced through music theatre. Olly has a large family of brothers and sisters, all of whom are athletically or artistically inclined. Olly currently works in retail and participates in dance mainly through community theatre. Olly danced competitively for his secondary school dance team and trained in the studio setting for several years. Olly has not disclosed his sexuality, but has mentioned that his status is single. Olly on the exterior seems confident and charismatic and



our interview seemed to describe a life of in dance with no problems at all; something very different than all other research participants.

Luke is the oldest of my research participants with the most years of experience within dance. Luke has studied dance across North America, and currently resides in Michigan. Luke is heavily trained in ballet and modern technique and focuses much of his energies presently on jazz technique. One of Luke's inspirations is Bob Fosse. Luke is a self-identified homosexual stating:

I prefer dating guys outside of the arts because that's my thing...Anyway I need like a gay business guy to take care of me and has his own shit going on right...It's the same for you right? You don't want your girlfriend around when you are trying to get work done right?

Luke has currently been dating the same man for four years now, and is not employed within the arts. Luke has grown up in a slightly different generation of dance than the other research participants and approaches dance from a much less commercial aspect.

### *Interview Structure*

My conversations with research participants were loosely guided by my pre-existing knowledge of the field of dance and key words and phrases such as "dancing like a man." The interview included topics such as how men do masculinities and act within the mentioned social field, the pressures these men feel to act, dance and be a certain way may speak to the subjectivity, identity policing and surveillance of the body, heteronormativity and homosociability.

Research participants were asked to talk about stereotypes, expectations,

feelings, bullying, relationships, style preferences, experiences and relation between reality dance television and the dance studio, benefits of being a male dancer and difficulties and benefits associated with being a male dancer. Some other topic questions included, what constitutes being a man/boy in the dance world, what types of reactions or pressures did/do you feel from others about being a boy/man in dance, why do you dance and how are male dancers supposed to act and dance like? The semi-structured active interview is organized into 4 thematic phases. Below is a brief discussion of each phase.

Phase 1: This is the first stage of the interview with a main purpose of establishing a comfortable interview context. General knowledge is acquired in this early stage including topics on family and cultural background, peer groups, leisure and the workplace. This phase is the beginning process of building a 'stock of knowledge' by allowing the research participant to situate himself, while establishing rapport (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Phase 2: This stage promoted an exploration of the each research participant's connections and interpretations of other participants and practices within the field of dance. Concepts related to motivation, routine, perception, ideals/values were explored in this phase. Phase 3: In this phase I expanded boundaries and delved into deeper meanings by asking research participants to reflect on gendered practices in areas of their lives on which they seem to be talking, as well as probing more deeply within dance. Phase 4: This is the last stage of the interview, which elicited deeper meanings and this is where contradictions were drawn out.

Once the interviews were complete I transcribed each interview and

began to build an analysis of the narratives by exploring them as parts of larger interactive activities, references to a world of actors and events that can be examined for coded major themes, and understood for the transcripts purposes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). Coding encompassed attention to themes, ideas, and segments in the interview that were emphasized by the participant or recognized in some form for consistent sequencing of themes and general patterns across all research participants' narratives (Luttrell, 2000).

My interview transcripts were used to better understand how men bridge the gap between the notion of multiple masculinities and the more typical binary understandings of gender through their experience of dance. I operationalize the theoretical framework through a qualitative methodology, which includes active interviewing of men in dance and auto-ethnographic accounts of the dance. A narrative analysis of the interview transcripts in conjunction with my own recollections of experiences in dance help me to better understand how men experience dance and how masculinities are interweaved through the social field.

Recognized themes demonstrate both individual and collective shared meanings, as they were understood from the process by which participants actively construct their experience with me throughout the interview.

To make a living as a male dancer is very difficult as dancing does not always pay well and job security fluctuates on a day to day basis. These men often talked about how they lost friends over the audition process, competed with significant others and ultimately experienced many different types of social stresses associated with being a male dancer beyond simply trying to pay bills.

These men felt pressures to dance particular ways and all of them discussed how they justified their dancing to peers and family. What is the relationship between setting of a dance world and these male dancers' peers and family? How does the setting influence these men and their decisions to dance a particular way?

Below I will give a brief history of some existing companies that have attempted to challenge traditional conceptions of gendered dance, ultimately attempting to move audiences beyond a singular form of masculinity and way of dancing.

### *Dance Companies Challenging Hegemony*

There are several companies around the world over the last twenty years or so that have intentionally attempted to challenge hegemonic constructions of the dance performance. These companies consist of all or almost all male dancers and are dedicated to challenging traditional gender performances. These types of companies and shows cannot simply be dismissed as underground dance movements. However, these companies do exist few and far between in comparison to other less radical or daring dance companies. These exceptions to the general rule of dance also perform far fewer shows than some of their more conservative and traditional dance companies.

Some of these companies for example are making efforts to re-masculinize same-sex dancing by embedding it in a discourse of jousting, aggression, competition, superior technique and athleticism. These companies are intentionally challenging existing norms and expectations of how men

participate in dance but only on a certain level. These companies for the most part appear to refrain from same-sex dancing around themes of love or lust, concepts that perhaps may be received with even more dissent than the former. Examples of same-sex re-masculinization include Project 44 out of Queens, New York, and Edgeworks Dance Theatre out of Washington, D.C. (2016, March 15, retrieved from <http://www.project44dance.org> & <http://www.hjwedgeworks.org/history.php>).

Other dance troupes and companies have also moved beyond hegemonic binaries and roles for male dancers by exploring more engagements of men with other men in dance including direct confrontation with gendered performance expectations. Some of the earliest dance companies to challenge gender roles in dance include Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo and DV8 Physical Theatre. The Trockadero was founded in 1974 in New York City for the purpose of presenting a ballet with a playful, entertaining view of classical ballet in parody form and en travestie meaning dressed as a member of the opposite sex. This group performs in over thirty-three countries and five hundred cities and is one of the first of its kind. DV8 was founded in London, England, in 1986 and inherently questions traditional aesthetics of dance. Both companies' websites echo similar mandates namely: to 'push beyond boundaries' and 're-examine roles of relationships' in society through a challenge to preconceptions of what dance can and should address. Some other more recently established companies include 2Faced Dance Company established in 2000 in Herfordshire, England. Also, Madboots a group started in 2011 from New York City is dedicated to 'tackling

male relationships with a queer sensibility that transcends sexuality' as their website states. Man Dance Company, America's LGBTQ dance company in California, states on their website they exist for dancers to 'express not only their athleticism but sensuality and compassion free of restraint since 2009'.

With the rise of technology and Internet websites and social media such as Youtube and Twitter, other male artists have gained exposure and have shed light onto traditional gendered notions of male dance. Current examples of leading dancers and choreographers in the commercial dance industry who challenge gendered performance include choreographer Yanis Marshall with over 47 thousand followers on Twitter and over 1.25 million views on Youtube of his choreography and dancing. Another example is Brian Friedman with credits such as choreographing for artist Britney Spears. Friedman boasts 4.8 million views for his dance and choreography on Youtube. Both of these men dance in heels and challenge scripts but it is interesting to note that it is almost exclusively in classroom settings. These men teach mainly women how to dance in heels.

Dance is a field that is constantly changing, evolving and growing from popular styles and techniques, to the number or participants in the field to the types of popular performance (live television, film, music videos, and live theatrical performances). How similar or different are these men's experiences entering the field from different social locations? How do these men understand and define themselves in relation each other and other dancers in field?

#### IV.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Hegemony*

This chapter explains how my examination of masculinity in dance is informed by a critical perspective on hegemony. I frame my research with the notion that there are plural masculinities (Connell, 1998) and I use Bourdieu's approach to how such social constructs are produced in arenas where men conduct themselves (Bourdieu, 2005). Dance is arguably once such arena.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that seeks to elucidate how class domination and subjectification is effected through a hierarchy of social and gender orders. It comes specifically from Gramsci's approach to hegemony, which foregrounds how differential allocations of social status and power are operationalized within social institutions to privilege a particular group over another (Hearn, 2004). Gramsci focused in particular on how class relations are produced in ways that subjects internalize through bourgeois institutions (Hearn, 2004). Masculinities scholars such as Hearn (2004), have drawn on Gramsci to examine the gendered character of hegemony and specifically how hegemonic dominance can constrain and shape identities of men through their masculinity.

Hegemony involves the persuasion of the masses, through social institutions in ways that appear to be natural (Donaldson, 1993). The degree to which these perceived natural understandings of the social order exist within specific fields such as dance can be explored through better understanding of the relational construction of social identities and gender of men in dance (Donaldson, 1993).

Hearn (2004) and Donaldson (1993) discuss how some men can be

advantaged or privileged over others through social constructs which are gendered. For example, a man's sexuality and occupation both exist within a gender order which permits and denies different levels of access or power and privilege. Men can also be simultaneously positioned in dominant and subordinate social positions (Hearn, 2004). This simultaneous positioning could be mirrored in the field of dance as well. For example, a male dancer may benefit from simply being male while he also negotiates a different positioning based on his passion for dance. Many argue there are multiple versions of masculinities, which constitute an engendered complex form of simultaneous dominant social expression and contention (Seidman 2013, Coles 2009, Connell, 1998). To what degree do men conform and reproduce scripts of hegemonic masculinities within the social field of dance?

A majority of men arguably benefit from a patriarchal dividend from maleness, masculinity and men. However, this is not to say that men cannot simultaneously occupy multiple, different positions in relation to hegemony (Connell, 1998:78). For example, 'gay masculinity' is one type of a subordinated masculinity (Connell, 1998: 79). Someone who demonstrates gay masculinity can simultaneously experience subordination for gay masculinity as it is not a privileged way of being in comparison to heterosexual masculinity. It is valuable to recognize that an understanding of masculinities as dynamic relations between different kinds of masculinity are essential to understanding how men do masculinity with dance (Seidman, 2013:223). Bourdieu's (2005) notion of habitus and social field helps apprehend the way masculinities inform dance.



*The Habitus within the Social Field of Dance*

The social world for Bourdieu is understood through an individual's bodily practice and how individuals develop a 'feel for the game' through a 'mastery acquired by experience of the game' which is possible (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus consists of a set of culturally determined bodily dispositions and permits a sociological capturing of this process of 'doing' masculinities while recognizing the important power relations associated with gendering and identity construction (Bourdieu, 2005). I apply habitus to the exploration of men in dance as an orientation that requires a dynamic approach and uses reflexive analysis allowing me to situate research participants' narratives not only within the social field of dance but within a larger context (Bottero, 2009).

Habitus can be used as a reflection of an individual's understanding of the power dynamics, context and situatedness associated with hegemonic masculinity (Coles, 2009). The notion of gender helps me to "understand, organize and shape our personal lives, [and] social roles" ultimately giving structure to habitus (Seidman, 2013:222). Habitus also permits an exploration and possible unraveling of a contradiction between what people say and feel with what they actually do.

Habitus is informed and constituted largely by hegemonic processes. Everyday life is organized in relation to a patriarchal power structure in which gendered social practice is constantly referring to bodies and what they do. It is the production and reproduction of this structure within the dance setting that contributes to the parameters of one's habitus and how masculinities are defined

and reified. Although habitus is a concept that foregrounds how individuals navigate through everyday life, it does so with an important caveat, namely understanding that the reproduction of social life requires some degree of flexibility and improvisation (Coles, 2009).

Habitus serves as a sociological orientation and bridge between the subjective and objective. It encompasses historical backgrounds as well as situated cultural practices amongst other variables such as race, class, ethnicity, and religion that together create a forum for an understanding between identities and more specifically, varying masculinities. Understanding the habitus of not only myself and my research participants but our families and peers as well helps to understand where definitions and conceptions of masculinity originate and contribute to the parameters of masculinities for men in dance. Habitus is a particular situatedness, which becomes internalized in the form of dispositions to think, feel, and act in unconscious ways (Bourdieu, 2005). Habitus is also a useful way of apprehending hegemonic masculinity in ways that support and critically discuss hegemonic masculinity. These critical discussions include: 1) the idea that masculinities are plural, 2) men are situated, negotiate, as well as experience and do masculinity in different ways 3) heteronormative conceptions of masculinity and identity can inform hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Recognizing that each individual's habitus is different, contributes to the complication of unified and singular notions of masculinity. Moreover, the notion that men are situated differently in different socially structured fields of power is relevant to understanding the complexities associated with the field of dance.

One must give recognition to the different contexts, scripts, discourses and interplays between hegemonic ideals that contribute to the constitution of habitus.

Lastly, the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its position in relation to femininities and in particular other masculinities is useful in “outlining the various nuances of power [resistance and subordination] set within a hierarchical framework” (Coles, 2009: 31). Habitus exists within this framework and recognizes the social reproduction of masculinities within the given social fields.

Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli (2003) suggest three useful types of labelling used in identity creation, which supports Bourdieu’s (2005) notion of habitus previously discussed. They are ascription, community acknowledgement and personal agency. These labels can help us to categorize and understand how these male dancers understand themselves within a particular social field through the institution of competitive dance. Habitus recognizes: a) how hegemonic discourse can play a role on the subjective body through day-to-day interactions and how they relate to identity construction, b) the ‘performative element of masculinity’ suggests there is more to identity construction and masculinity than mere performance (Butler, 1990). Rather, men’s bodies are understood not as blank slates, but also as an “arena for making gender patterns” (Connell, 2000: 12).

### *Masculinities*

My research uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity for the purpose of

exploring how dominant social and economic expressions of gender affect men's identities and practices in dance. The research not only examines to what degree men conform to and resist hegemonic scripts but the ways men's masculinity can be undermined and appropriated by dominant and hegemonic masculinity. More recent studies however, suggest masculinity is actually a plural notion (Connell, 2005) and is situated in a complex matrix of class, sex, gender difference, able bodied difference amongst other differences.

The definition of hegemonic masculinities encompasses the ability to inform how masculinity and identity are understood within a particular context and can be used to describe forms of "masculinity that [are] considered culturally to be most dominant at any given time" (Coles, 2009:41). For example, the notion of being masculine consists of pulling up your bootstraps. This is the idea that you can be successful if you simply try hard which serves to justify capitalism for example. More recent approaches to hegemonic masculinity point to different layers of masculinities at a structural level and explore the intricacies of their relations to one another, suggesting a fluidity of gendered identities and power (Hearn, 2004).

Hegemonic masculinity has allowed academics to understand and research how boys become men and how masculinities are implicated with relation to dominance. This reality embodies the "currently most honoured way of being a man, [and] it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (Connell, 2005: 832). A plural approach to masculinity then, points to the hierarchal character in which men are differently positioned. More recent studies

explore the plurality and hierarchy of masculinities, as well as their collective and dynamic character (Connell, 1998). Connell explains that within society there are “definite social relations,[and] often relations of hierarchy and exclusion”, which can be applied to men in dance and their experience of these types of relations and hierarchy as well (Connell, 1998:5). Furthering this notion of a plurality, Connell asserts that ‘many men live in a state of some tension with, or distance from, hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 2005: 5).

It seems that masculinity can look, feel and be performed as very different things to many different people (Connell, 2005). Masculinities can become differentiated between race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Masculinities can also occupy positions of simultaneous dominance and subordination depending on the context in which one is presenting their masculinity. For example, a male dancer who is portraying a dominant masculinity by lifting, manipulating and facilitating a females movement is a simultaneous demonstration of subordinate masculinity because in other social fields these acts would be considered less masculine than for example getting into a fight on the ice during a hockey game.

Moreover, masculinities take place in different contexts, what Bourdieu (2005) calls “social fields” and it is my goal to try to explore where and how masculinities fit within the world of dance with particular respect to the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (Coles, 2009). It seems the field of dance specifically may demonstrate the idea that there is a possibility for multiple dominant masculinities operating within subfields bound by a field of masculinity (Coles, 2009).

An emphasis on the dynamic social relations that exist between masculinities is asserted by Connell (2000:10) as “different masculinities do not sit side by side like dishes on a smorgasbord”. Relations of alliance, dominance, and subordination are all dynamics associated with different masculinities and constitute a complex gendered politic.

Hegemonic masculinities and alternate masculinities can be simultaneously collective and individual and are produced in more than just discursive ways; moreover, they coexist and interplay. Men adopt “personality traits, values and behaviours that motivate and enable them to assume power; boys grow up with a sense of entitlement and aspire to be in roles of authority” (Seidman, 2013: 221).

Dance for some men is a social field that helps them achieve their authoritative roles while simultaneously hindering the possibility of ever fully realizing the status that some men aspire to. Although a male dancer may become the lead dancer in his company or on his team, may be able to jump the highest and turn the most and is physically perfectly proportioned, he is still only a dancer, something less than many people’s definition of a masculine man. This is an example of how men can occupy positions of superiority and inferiority simultaneously (Hearn, 2004). The dance world can be complex as it makes these men feel a sense of power and subordination at the exact same time.

Dance is an art form in every sense however; when dance is competed it can also be classified as a sport. Sports can have gendered differences within and between them as can dance. These differences suggest masculinities are plural and individuals can have multiple identities. Different types of masculinity and

femininity for men and women exist within sports such as roller derby, football, wrestling, volleyball and skating to name a few (Klomsten, A. T., Marsh, H. W., & Skaalvik, E. M., 2005).

Competition consists of dancing on stage for a panel of judges who rank dances based on overall quality of the performance. Performances of masculinity occurs whether it happens on stage or in the arena or stadium. In this sense, a short review of existing literature on masculinity and sport is necessary.

### *Dance & Sport Literature*

Much of the previously existing literature on men in dance is associated with the informal, social nature of dance and describes characteristics of the dances associated with a particular geographical location or culture. Examples of this include Wulff (2005) who discusses Irish dance and its relation to the land, Wheaton (2007) who offers a comparison between folk dancing and football as examples of social bonding, and Dyck & Archetti (2003) who observe how men embody identities simultaneously through tango and football (North American soccer). There are two particular clusters of research around social dance and masculinity; however, minimal research on the world of competitive/studio dance specifically has been done to this date.

There is a small body of literature on men in dance that is rooted in psychology, which differs from my research through emphasis on feelings of stress, individual psychological states and personalities. For example, Earl (1988) discusses the psychological harms associated with being a male dancer and Hamilton et al (1989) explores personality types akin to the rigour of being a

professional ballet dancer. This study examines how men interpret the cultural framing of dance as a gender and arguably heteronormative activity. Of the small amount of research in dance media, researchers have uncovered similar constructions of gender ideology as evidenced in sports media, mainly in that male dancers dominate movement through hypermasculinity, power and muscle (Burt, 1995; Gard, 2001, 2006),

Competitive dance can be understood and categorized as a sport namely because of the nature of competition associated with dance. Competitive dancers physically train, require teamwork and compete on stage with a definitive winner and loser. Recognizing dance as a sport allows me to compare literature and findings on topics such as competition and masculinity as there is a much larger body of research conducted on sport and masculinity than dance and masculinity. Because of the similarities and consistencies between competitive dance and sport a short literature review of sport proves to be relevant.

There is a small body of literature on the competitive nature of dance and its categorization as a sport. One group of researchers conducted a survey with three hundred and twelve colleges and universities across the United States in 2001 to understand the prevalence of dance in post-secondary institutions (Hennefer, et al 2003). Their findings suggested that an overwhelming majority of the schools indicated they were funding competitive dance and cheerleading programs and felt that there were recruitable competitive dance/cheerleading athletes beyond support of other sports. Almost all research participants viewed dance as being characterized by most of the defining elements of sport and were



interested in pursuing National Collegiate Athletic Association emerging sport designation.

In addition, there was a study that conducted interviews with youth in order to determine what the dominant motivations for joining competitive dance teams were (Sobash, 2014). Sobash discovered that the booming dance competition industry has only enhanced the competitive aspect of the art form and no dancers classify dance as both performative and simultaneously a competitive sport.

The ethno-cultural diversity of men, including their racialization may bear on the way interpretation and creation of alternate or plural masculinities occurs. Based on my own experiences in dance within Southwestern Ontario, ethnic and cultural diversity of men in formal competitive dance training is however, relatively low, perhaps due to factors such as geographical location, socio-economic status and the socially mediated images of the ideal male dancer. To what extent are reality television depictions, their idealizations of the male dancer as muscular, clean-cut, heterosexualized dancers relevant or meaningful to the research participants in the proposed study? A strict gender order still persists in sport (competitive dance) as is true in society in general (Young & White, 2007).

The concept of a gender order helps us understand “the way social practice is structured” and organized with varying levels of power and authority given to different gender roles and identities (Connell, 2005: 71). The dance world suggests the possibility of social relationships that differ for men and women and differs from other possible fields. Some men have more access to

power than others suggesting some men may suffer from “levels of exploitation, marginalization and abuse ... in the workplace and other areas of society such as sport” (McKay et al., 2000:111). This can be observed through a dancer’s level of skill and whether or not he demonstrates the proper technique to become a teacher as well. Choreographers for example choose the steps they teach and dance while dancers simply do the steps they are asked to perform.

Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) discuss how boys gain and refuse membership of groups and how these boundaries are negotiated and related to constructs of gender normativity and heteronormativity as well as hegemonic masculinity. These types of negotiations lead Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli to the word ‘Mestizaje’ meaning borderland people which defines identity as a process that is shifting (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). This concept of Mestizaje has proven particularly useful in understanding how some of my research participants understand themselves within the dance world. Their conceptions of what is defined as ‘being a man’ changes based on their social setting. For example, these men may do masculinity and understand themselves differently with friends, family and or the dance studio or dance world. These boundaries are constantly subjected to policing and contestation contributing to versions of masculinities and identities. It is this imposition on the body, which is argued to be essential in explorations of sport, the body and gender (Wellard, 2009).

Multiple, non-static, power dynamics or pecking orders of masculinity exist within different social fields. Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli discuss how issues of masculinities and power impact boys in their book, *So What’s A Boy* (2003).

They derive this discussion of masculinities from its relationship to power as supported by Foucault claiming [individuals are] apart of a system of subjectification (Foucault 1986). This disciplinary space maintains its authority over subjects with the help of hegemonic discourses which are present within the social field of dance. These pressures associated with the dance world contribute to not only the shaping of what the ideal male dancer looks like but how men are trained and also how they come to understand themselves.

The dominant ideological messages around gender and sexuality are “created, perpetuated, maintained, and enforced in the social institutions and social structures of society, making dominant hegemonic categories seem natural and/or unproblematic” (Aitchinson, 2007: 97). Though there are many different ways to conduct oneself as a man or a woman, one’s gender tends to be grounded in the interpretation of two exclusive sexes: male or female. Understanding sport can occur through a recognition of two exclusive sexes and can be a “deeply gendered social institution... dominate[d] by men and masculine values” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011: 270). Critiques of sport literature entail the over simplification of the complexities associated with gender and men in sport. It can be essentialist in nature (for example, see Young & White (2007), McKay et al. (2000), Wellard (2009) and Aitchinson (2007)). More specifically, masculinity can be framed “within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes male-female difference and ignores difference and exclusion within the gender categories” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 836).

Consistent with the notion of sport being understood through two exclusive

sexes, there appears to be an 'artificial unity' that not only allows, but encourages, heterosexual desire to be naturalized and consequently, perpetuated as compulsory. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' is the "portrayal or enactment of a heterosexual identity" which is closely paired with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Aitchinson, 2007: 99). This heterosexual identity is only understood through the recognition of two exclusive sexes existing within sport or dance.

Dominant systems maintain and reproduce themselves in often challenged and critical ways. However, hegemony can also be unchallenged which is precisely a characteristic of power and privilege. This lack of introspection by people renders hegemonic ideals invisible in the discourse, which shapes men's thinking and behaviour each day. It is this process of socialized behaviour which becomes an unrecognizable influence on an individual.

Such male-female binaries are reflected in the dance field that I have examined; yet, it is important to note that hegemonic characterizations are not uncontested. The fact that there are alternate ways of understanding men and dance provides some indication that dance can be a fluid hierarchical field where plural and even alternate masculinities can flourish but only with certain sacrifices and constraints. These hierarchies are perpetuated and maintained through gendered scripts and performances by people on a daily basis.

Habitus is missing an intersubjective element, which can be characterized by an “abstract emphasis on objective structural relations” (Bottero, 2009: 401). Beyond this critique, Throop and Murphy (2002) argue that Bourdieu privileges relations between social positions at the expense of exploring the substance of these positions. These shortcomings of habitus are addressed through a feminist approach to the active interview and analysis, which helped me better understand how men can challenge and reproduce scripts while participating within a particular social field and simultaneously feeling like they do not belong or assume a position of inferiority. Given the critique of habitus, I grafted a dynamic, fluid and performative approach towards masculinities as reflected in feminist and masculinity studies onto habitus. This permits me to build an analysis of men in dance with a focus on how masculinities and identities are negotiated.

Recent approaches to masculinity take us beyond the binaries that are arguably perpetuated by earlier studies of both masculinity and feminist thought. Masculinities can be understood in relation to femininities and gender hierarchy exists among men based on different intersections of class, race, gender, age and sexuality (Seidman, 2013: 221). Young and White (2007:14) view gender as a process that “involves an ongoing negotiation of behaviors and meanings that are rooted in historical moments and understandings but that are constantly shifting and changing”. It is this particular understanding of gender which guided and influenced my research as “masculinity is a relational construct which cannot be understood outside of its relation to femininity” (Connell, 1995:71).

Masculinity in general and more specifically within the dance studio needs to be understood in relation to femininity (Butler, 2004). In other words, to understand what masculinity looks and feels like for male dancers, it is necessary to explore that through contrasting them with female dancers' quality of movement and gendered practice. This can be exemplified through a man's physicality associated with a particular way of dancing. This combined with the idea that constructs such as gender and masculinity are not fixed statuses or conditions but rather are more processual and performative helps us understand gender specifically, "is not fixed in advance of social interaction but is constructed in interaction" permitting deeper exploration of masculinities (Seidman, 2013:224). Rather than treating these constructs as passively internalized interactions, my research aims to explore the creation and negotiation of fluid gender and masculinity conventions within the social practice of dance.

### *Sexuality and Dance*

Some studies have identified examples of a larger ideological resistance to the heterosexual/homosexual binary both implicitly and explicitly, which supports the complexities and societal norms associated with understanding sexuality. Jacobson and Samdahl (1998) similarly explored the ways that stigma and discrimination influence the leisure of a disempowered group of people. Both of these studies move toward a more critical perspective of the homosexual /heterosexual binary, looking at how it is both resisted and reified by gay men and lesbians through negotiations of heteronormative ideologies.

Both a heteronormative critical perspective, as well as one that examines

a male/female binary is necessary to better understand masculinities of men; moreover, heteronormative ideologies are far more than general, overarching societal norms (Bourdieu, 1993). These ideologies pervade social fields on a much more personal and micro level as well. Patriarchal culture has constructed a well formed and readily available social identity of being labeled as gay and it is imposed on men in overly simplified ways (Connell, 1987:151). One of the ways is that 'gay men lack masculinity' and another way is that 'men are categorized as gay based on the activities he does' (Connell, 1987: 151). The social field of dance can be understood by the public as an activity consisting of effeminate physical activity and therefore a "gay" activity.

Heterosexuality and masculinity become linked in western culture through certain behaviors. Prestige is conferred on males with heterosexual tendencies through these behaviors of exploration and conquest, which occur within the dance world (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). Bodies being seen as objects of a process of social construction is considered to be inadequate as bodies are actively involved in a more intricately connected social process. I have turned to Bourdieu for a specific type of lens that allows me to operationalize my research participants 'personal communities' which encompasses hegemonic masculinities (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The operationalization of research occurs through a feminist lens and as the researcher, it is the simultaneous occupation and balance between my research participants' personal communities and my own personal community and experience which has provided particularly nuanced understandings of men in dance. Alternate ways of

dancing do exist and dance can challenge both binaries of heterosexual/homosexual and masculinity/femininity. To what extent are alternate scripts found in my dance experience and in the narratives of my research participants?

## V.

### INTERPRETATIONS OF BEING A MALE DANCER:

#### “My Dad Doesn’t Like It”

Growing up, I remember looking up to other guys in the studio. To everyone outside of dance being a male dancer was a weird thing. I am not sure why it was weird to all of my peers at school. Perhaps because it was just something foreign to them. It never seemed overly weird to my family and I always had support from them with the exception of my father in the first few years of my dance training. I remember peers asking me what I actually did at dance. At first I would answer with “jazz, tap and hiphop - like music video dancing”. I think when I was younger my peers would better understand and accept what I did if I emphasized the hiphop/backup dancer element of what I did. I believe I consciously chose to emphasize the way I was advantaged in dance through my gender by describing one particular type of empowering masculinity associated with dance.

I recall always assuring my peers that (although some boys did) I did not wear a tutu or tights and always telling them that I was forced to do ballet as part of my program. This assurance demonstrates a recognition at a very young age



that masculinities can be plural within the dance world.

Presently, I would say I am trained in all styles from break dancing to ballet class and I would say that there are many different versions of me from class to class. I also tour elementary and secondary schools exposing young children to hip-hop dance and in these workshops I have a conversation with them asking what kind of dancer they think I am before we even start moving. The male students always walk into the workshop saying we are not doing 'ballet and shit are we?'. In order for me to get these students to buy into the two-hour workshop it is essential to hook them by telling them I have back-up danced for Eminem or Rihanna. Following that bit of information I put my hat on backwards, turn up the hip-hop music very loud and tell everyone to spread out to do a hip-hop and cardio warm up.

This exchange between young dancers and myself as an instructor is an example of how I am able to challenge and reshape widespread notions of what is deemed cool and acceptable amongst young children and adolescents in the elementary school setting. It appears that before I present myself as a male dancer in a particular way these young boys have a very narrow idea of what a male dancer is and could be. By the end of our dance sessions together these young boys have the ability to recognize that there are many different types of male dancers with different styles and each style and form of masculinity hold value in and of themselves.

As I developed the themes discussed in the interviews, I simultaneously personally reflected on these themes as well. I began understanding how my

recollections and understandings of the dance world were consistent and at the same time slightly different than my research participants. Three themes however emerge from my research participants that I reflect upon while listening to and analyzing their stories of dance: i. familial and peer relations to men in dance, ii. sexuality and its relation to the male dancer, iii. their perception of and response to the image of the ideal male dancer.

The first theme, which seems to reoccur throughout a male dancer's life is familial and peer relations' perceptions associated with the male dancer. My life in dance began when I decided to take up dance classes one summer at the age of six sitting on the porch with my mom. We were flipping through the summer activity guide in the community. I decided I wanted to try tap dancing. I had seen a commercial on television for 'Riverdance' a performance based dance troupe. The power and strength of many performers all dancing in time with tap shoes on sounded like thunder to me and the male dancers were jumping high in the air; I wanted to be one of those guys leading the troupe flying through the air. I remember thinking at the time that I wanted to be like the guys in the commercial jumping high with thunder and lighting sound effects and making noise with my feet alongside other dancers sounding like an army. Prior to this, I mostly played soccer because playing a sport was just what you did as a young boy living in Windsor, Ontario, but this feeling I had was something new; it was something that excited me.

I started taking strictly tap and jazz dance classes as I wanted to avoid the stigma attached to male dancers taking ballet and wearing tutus. Looking back, I

think my parents wanted to avoid that as well. After completing my first year of dance, my instructors convinced me to take ballet pitching it to me as something that hockey and football players do for improved balance and agility. Once I enrolled in ballet, I started competing and dance quickly became so much more than a supplement for improving my soccer skills. It also helped that there was another male in the ballet classes who would arrive late to class every week and take dance in his football pants covered in grass stains.

Dancing for young girls seems to be quite normal, almost like a rite of passage. Wearing a tutu and taking a ballet class from a 'princess like ballet teacher' is many young girls' and moms' idea of a feminine activity that can be experienced with mother and daughter. In contrast, what does this mean for young males who wish to take dance class? I do not recall wishing to wear a tutu as a young dancer or be taught by a princess like teacher. I just wore track pants and a t-shirt. At that young age of six, I do recall however, that the movement we were being taught was already gendered. There appears to be a hegemonic script in dance that suggests normative gendered behaviour within dance. For example, boys would bow and women girls would curtsey at the end of class. I remember girls would wave scarves through the air, while boys waved flags. I recall teaching students the exercise with scarves and flags and my young boy in the class preferred to use a scarf instead of a flag. Perhaps this was because he wanted to blend in with the rest of his classmates or because he genuinely preferred to dance with a scarf. Regardless, if the dancer wants to be tested on this exercise and move on to the next level he must dance with a flag. I, as his

instructor felt compelled to let him dance with a scarf and tell him that for the exam he must use a flag. This exemplifies how male dancers can challenge, complicate and reproduce gendered scripts within dance starting at a very young age. This experience for him clearly caused him stress as he failed to understand the reasons for the gendered movement.

There are constant judgments passed on male dancers and perceived notions from friends and family alike. I received full support from my mother when I chose to take dance class and train to become a professional dancer. However my father only came around to support this idea after several years of competing and winning. My father would never drive me to dance class and refused to talk about the fact that his son was a dancer with family or his peers at work in the tool and die industry. I never really had an overt conversation with him about it and I think his lack of support for dance was subconscious. He never openly said 'I do not support your dance'. Rather, he always pumped up and bragged about my soccer skills. As I became older and he realized dance was not just a phase, he slowly became more supportive and proud. This was only after I began winning scholarships and receive national recognition. I never felt as though my father had any concerns about my sexuality or gender relations and he never questioned or asked me about any of these things. My mother and I were very close and I shared all my secrets and feelings with her. I feel like if my dad had any type of conversation like that I would have told my mom and he would have had some serious marital concerns because of it as my mom was very defensive and protective of me.

My father's understanding and definition of masculinity is largely shaped from his own personal habitus and social milieu. He grew up in an automotive town with many tool and die companies and automotive assembly plants filled with largely men. He worked in this industry and it seemed his notion of masculinity was shaped with little recognition of the arts or any considerations of alternate types of masculinity. Much of the economic health of Windsor is largely dependent on the success of the assembly lines and tool and die companies in the area which employ many Windsorites. This understanding of masculinity is a particularly unified notion of a singular type of masculinity. Exposure to and consideration to other types of masculinity can be largely ignored for those who are employed and live within this type of an industrial town. This conception of a singular notion of a valid masculinity was particularly noticeable when I began dancing, in comparison to his co-workers sons who may have decided to play a sport such as hockey or football. It was then that my dad was forced to recognize in his own terms that there are different types of masculinities including dominant, subordinate and hegemonic that exist within sport and dance.

Shifting the focus to the participants, all except Olly and Jeff experienced a lack of support from fathers and father figures as well as brothers. Olly stated that "All my family was cool with dance – I don't know if they liked it but they didn't bother me about it" (Olly, 23). Jeff talked about his family and how they were all artists and supportive of the arts and how they all participate in acting and dancing, "my sister is a dancer and my dad had to deal with us all. It is easy for him to ride the train rather than push it right? (laughs). Well no, he is proud of

us all for sure”.

My whole family were artists so I have always done my thing and fairy-ied around, fuck what others think. If you don't like it don't watch....When I am on stage though I am playing a part and dances require the strong straight dancer so I can do that too but in studio I'm as queer as they come (Olly, 23).

Both Olly and Jeff were born into the arts scene and brought up in the dance world with plenty of parental and familial support. These men did not necessarily make a conscious decision to be a part of the arts world. Rather, it simply became their world through their family and parents. The story was different for these two men largely because their fathers were already involved in or exposed to the arts prior to them participating in dance.

Olly's father was a musician and sound technician for artists who record songs in studio. Jeff's father was not directly involved in the arts. However, his wife (Jeff's mom) is a music instructor at a private school. She has also taught choir at PURE Academy for the Performing Arts. Jeff's father often supported his sons in musical theatre by volunteering backstage helping with props and sets.

By contrast, Mike stated with some emphasis that his “dad was far more skeptical of my dancing because he thought it was gay...My mom- she just thought it wasn't a real job”. Mike continues to fight this battle constantly having to justify himself to his parents because apparently “dancing and paying bills doing something I love and something I am good at just won't cut it” (Mike, 24).

Grant also commented that “I know he[dad] would prefer if I did sports more

seriously”.

Similarly, my peers labeled me as weird and odd as none of them could really relate to what it was I did outside of my regular academic hours. I remember them during recess at school when I would hang out with the girls all the time. They would scoff and scorn with jealousy and disgust at me and my decision to hang out with the girls more. The girls often preferred hanging out with me over some of the other boys and this would lead the other boys to call me many names including ‘faggot’ and ‘gay’. I would constantly combat these insults by saying “look who has all the girls... how does that make me gay?”. I remember a specific instance where guys in an older grade surrounded me in a circle and were pushing me and calling me a “dancing queen” and “fairy dancer”. I remember that circle was broken up by my younger brother bursting into the circle hurling explicit insults at all the older boys. When I first started dance as a young boy, I was constantly hiding the fact that I danced from my peers and showing everyone in the arts world that I danced. The social field I was traversing at the time largely dictated my ways of behaving and talking.

My peers constantly questioned my sexuality and my masculinity as many of them assumed that because I danced I was gay or wished I was a girl. I thought the only effective way to defend myself against these bullies I thought was to hyper-masculinize and heterosexualize my dance experience. I felt it was even necessary for me to describe dance to some adults and family as a sport rather than an art form that requires a higher degree of athleticism than most other sports. I would also lie suggesting that I only danced so that I could hang

out with girls in skimpy outfits. These depictions I would create contributed to the hegemonic form of masculinity that guides and constrains men within the dance world.

I found myself walking through post-secondary school with my chest out glaring at people just waiting for my next moment to step up and prove myself – physically or otherwise. It occurred to me that what is defined as ‘the way of being a male’ was different in the studio from walking the halls of a post-secondary institution. In the studio jumping high, lifting girls and turning multiple times were all examples of being a real man. However, these demonstrations of masculinity consisting largely of strength were discredited because it was displayed in the form of dance were subordinate to other types of masculinity. This ‘othering’ occurred and still does to this day. Some peers (as I grew older and stronger in dance) became intimidated when I was able to overpower them with physical prowess in sport due to my rigorous physical training in dance. Consequently, further alienation and teasing would occur. I would always challenge those who bullied me to a race or a soccer game in order to prove to them that I was not just a “fairy dancer”. Ironically many boys when it came to track and field or soccer chose me to be the captain. It seemed they were willing to ignore the fact that I danced for the opportunity to succeed in sports; however the second the game was over, I was of no use or value to my peers.

All research participants experienced some kind of dissent or uneasiness from their peers and/or family members about their dancing at one point or another. This led the men to live somewhat secret lives at dance. For example,



Rob said he never talked about dance at football for fear of being teased. He would “act all macho” to avoid any kind of peer abuse mostly in the form of verbal slurs with regards to his ‘manliness’. Rob stated that: “machoism in football is any kind of peer abuse mostly. Verbal slurs would be hurled at him with regards to his sexuality as well. It is easier to hide that you dance, it’s better that way especially if you care about having friends”. Rob mentioned that he recently became aware of another level of subordination that male dancers may experience through the act of witnessing homophobic slurs being uttered at male dancers in his classroom. Rob said that he “never realized that a homophobic slur could mean even more to a male dancer who is self identified as a homosexual”. Rob stated:

I realized my student was being doubly bullied....you know... He was teased for dancing and being gay all at once – that shit is hard to hear... I always was called gay but I dismissed it as the jab they were taking at me for dancing – Imagine if we were gay and danced that’s a whole other level asshole.

Rob recently was forced in his classroom to address the inappropriate nature of this kind of masculinity policing on several different levels. The student who was uttering this taunts received a two day in-school suspension.

Jeff told me how he tried to keep the worlds separate and when and why that all changed. For Jeff, a recognition of heterosexual encounters in the dance world gave him the confidence to allow his two separate worlds to collide.

Some saw me dance. At that time I had just quit sports. So I did this talent show, right? My season was over so my team came to the show. They

saw the girl I was dancing with and she was very busty, beautiful gorgeous... how we touched each other - even though it wasn't sexual the guys said, oh my god, he is dancing with girls like that all the time and he can jump that high and move and dance that way with her – this is what I have been missing out on (Jeff, 22).

I also found that it was particularly interesting that like Jeff and I, Rob countered much of his bullying and teasing for being a male dancer with the fact that he is constantly around women. Rob claimed that he “[he] would argue with assholes that [he] hung out with girls in tight clothes while they showered together with guys in the locker room”. Rob in this case used the heteronormative constructs that are built around men in dance to justify and defend his passion for dance. This is an example of how strong and pervasive the discourse around men in dance really is. Because of the teasing and negative peer reactions to my dancing I was forced to almost perform hyper-masculine acts. I found myself in the studio as one version of me where I was more vulnerable and my walls were down. The other me was a self-preservation type of identity that attempted to display overly masculine characteristics in order to combat the looming threats to my sexuality and gender.

Being so committed to dance also prevented me from bonding with peers. I remember being invited to birthday parties but I would be busy with dance class and could not attend. After missing several parties for dance, my peers stopped inviting me to events and hang-outs. At this time my social scene quickly became the dance studio and community theatre. It was at this point that the arts and

dance really encompassed me and was a strong part of my personal essence.

My peers discredited much of my athletic achievement until it would be time to compete against other schools in soccer or track to give examples. It was not until later in my dance life (secondary school) that I was respected for what I did in the dance studio. At this point much of the teasing was substituted for encouragement and jealousy because I was 'big pimping' or 'wheeling' or 'picking up'--all references to being in a field that had a very high ratio of females to self-identified heterosexual males. I welcomed this shift in tone from teasing to almost respect, however, my peers were largely supporting the social side of the dance world rather than my ability and talents on the stage. This was a strange feeling for me but in the end I embraced these sentiments. Before this shift occurred I constantly felt like a fish swimming upstream trying to prove myself and with this switch in peer perception, I felt a relief from the pressures of bullying but I was not satisfied as they still truly didn't understand what my world looked like.

This leads to the second theme, which I noticed is very prevalent in the story of the life of many male dancers namely, sexuality and its relation to heteronormative scripts. As a young male dancer, I constantly felt as if I had to prove my sexuality to others. I would attempt to do this by displaying outward manifestations of what we could understand as hegemonic masculinity. Being strong and proving myself in fights, dating several girls and swearing. My father would corroborate my outwardly masculine performance by emphasizing to his co-workers (fellow machinists) and friends that his son danced with attractive girls and he was a 'big player'. This heterosexual emphasis seemed to justify my

dance to other men at his work place. He also would say to his friends “don’t worry, my son is all right” in reference to my sexuality. For Rob, the initial reason for dancing (at first) was to impress the opposite sex and gain some sort of social relation/status out of dancing.

The summer of 1996 – my sister was doing a dance program up in North Bay and I got to take a couple classes there from a Raptors cheerleader and I thought she was cute [at 10 yrs. old] and I wanted to impress her, so I got up there and did my thing – and ahh that’s what started me to dance. I began dancing so that I could have lots of girlfriends and stuff (Rob 29).

Personally, as I grew older in my final years of secondary school I felt less social pressure to present myself in a particularly masculine way outside of dance in order to compensate for the artistic passion I had. I began caring less about public perceptions possibly due to the fact that I had become a very successful competitive and professional dancer. Sexuality in the dance setting itself, as I recall, was not a particular issue that dancers would worry about. Concern was more around the aesthetic nature and quality of dance movements. I felt like I could be whoever I wanted and could act how I wanted until the music came on and I had to dance. Once dancing, an unquestioned hegemonic script guided my movements and was accepted as proper and objective technique rather than a subjective stylization of the body.

I remember sitting with my fellow teammates on snack breaks at the studio and conversations of sexuality never really came up, perhaps because I along with some of my other male dancer friends were overly concerned with

flirting with the girls. However, I felt pressure at this stage in my dance life from other venues. I feel like at this particular moment in time people did not feel particularly comfortable coming out at school or dance. This was a time where there seemed to be a campaign against homophobic behaviour and attitudes but there was no talk of 'safe spaces' or equality. I recall the dance studio setting preceding school settings as being a space for people to come out and be accepted. This leads to a third and final theme I have understood to be a large part of the male dancer's life. This theme is the socially mediated image of the ideal male dancer.

The image of the ideal male dancer is arguably constructed by popular reality television shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*, *Dancing with the Stars* and *Americas Best Dance Crew*. Many of the shows emphasize partnering dancing between a male and a female where the male role is to support and partner the female. This leads to an ideal way of dancing and body type. associated with male dancing. It is these types of ideals, which the public deem to be popular. Conservative hegemonic mainstream television then defines what the average male dancers should be striving for as dancers from these shows reach a level of stardom and fame that other males in dance could only ever hope and dream for.

As a competitive dancer, I was never granted my request to compete a duo with another male dancer on my competitive team. I remember thinking 'how cool would it be to compete with one of my best friends, Rob, on stage with no girls....simply guys doing their thing on stage! I understood male dancers at this

time as a secret weapon that helped competitive teams win competitions so the logic followed that the only thing better than one secret weapon amidst a group of girls would be two powerful secret weapons on stage taking on the competition alone. I had visions of an epic dance filled with huge jumps, turns and some partnering that could only be accomplished with the strength of two guys on stage. Instead, I was forced to dance and compete in styles that my female partner preferred. This was justified to me from my instructors by suggesting that the judges and audiences I would be dancing for give advantage and preference to male/female duos over same sex duos. I was told it was cute and would always win if I continued to partner a female. My dance coaches were right and my duos with girls always did very well at competition. However, this does not mean that I would have done poorly dancing with a guy. At the time I did not question the logic of my dance coaches too much because I trusted that they had my best interest and interest of the team in mind.

My father was very concerned with me being bullied at school and he emphasized that the more muscle mass I had the more I would be respected and my peers would be scared to make fun of me. Surveillance of the body occurred not just within the dance studio by fellow dancers and instructors but with family members as well. This surveillance contributes to what the ideal male dancer looks like. This comes from a patriarchal and hegemonic conception of proper masculinity, which can be associated with men. Although this image of an ideal dancer was projected onto me not from a place of aesthetics for dance, it was still consistent with the ideal of what male dancer should look like as stated by

popular television dance shows. The heterosexuality and need for of the male dancer

The exploration of the theme in dance associated with what appears to be compulsory heterosexuality, informs dance choreography from the sex and gender of the dancers to costuming and quality of movement. Male dancers in almost every single television show and dance competition are expected to support and frame the female dancers on stage. They do this through dance moves, which assist the women to turn more, demonstrate greater degrees of flexibility, jump higher, and balance longer. Female dancers attempt to remain delicate and articulate, while the male dancer is trained in choreography to have more wide stances and take up more space (Goldberg, 2006). It seems that (almost always) the male's sole purpose on stage to enhance the performance of his female counter part. Not only can this be perceived as degrading to some female dancers who wish to perform on their own but it is also annoying to male dancers who sometimes wish to perform on their own or perhaps be showcased by others on stage.

This notion of a compulsory heterosexuality is discussed by many of the research participants in different ways. Mike stated "I didn't know I was gay until I started dancing but sexuality and preference to dancing gay and soft or with a partner doesn't really matter in dance because you always have to partner the girls anyway" (Mike, 24). I never personally experienced discovery of my sexual preferences through dance. However, I did recognize that dance at one time was

a space for boys and men to just do their thing. What I mean by this is that other males in the studio just danced, they never walk around judging or questioning people's sexuality. I am not sure if this was just an unspoken figurative elephant in the room. However, I felt that it was just irrelevant to the creative process and artistic merit of dance. We as guys did not address each other differently based any variety of characteristics. It seemed that if you were a male in the dance studio you were automatically bound together by some kind of collectively unspoken social bond. I felt like I could walk through the halls of the studio, lock eyes with a fellow male dancer and give them a nod – it was a nod that said 'we are doing this... it's cool and only we get what it is we are actually doing'. It was a sense of brotherhood and comfort that existed within the studio and even beyond the studio walls even if it was unspoken in public.

There were other comments made as well throughout the interview process by Mike that further supported the notion that sexuality was greatly monitored and controlled within the dance studio for example, "I would love to produce and choreograph a show with male on male dancing and partnering but barely anybody would go see it – that is such a particular scene in the dance world" (Mike, 24).

I have personally noticed that this type of professional work for dancers is more possible and likely at this time thanks to pop artists such as Lady Gaga and Sia who often perform with androgynous back up dancers. This scene that Mike refers to is a very small, underground dance world in Toronto, which contrasts the mainstream dance venues and performance opportunities such as music



videos, television shows and/or commercials. It is also very difficult to make a living working as a professional dancer in the underground dance scene. Mike also discussed levels of status for male dancers. He said that

There are dancers who try to dance like a macho guy, then there are dancers who don't give a shit and do their own thing... and then there are the guys who can do both own thing and then there are the smart business dancers – they get the most work. The guys that can blend different ways of dancing and still be commercial enough to dance for Disney or CTV for example.

Rob also referenced popular dance shows and suggested the less accepted dance world dreamed about by Mike. Rob said “So You Think You Can Dance right? Guy-girl partnering and hyper-sexualized. Try doing anything different and it needs to be an underground kinda small black box show” (Rob, 29).

Jeff is one of the younger research participants trying to make it in the world as a professional male dancer and he added that “ if you want to make a living out of dance – you better learn to dance like a man right? The public doesn't appreciate little bitches fluttering around on stage you know” (Jeff, 22). When I danced competitively, I remember judges at a competition told my mom that what makes me different than some other guys is the way I dance. She said I ‘danced like a guy’ and ‘don't let any teacher change him...it's very valuable in the professional dance world.

Jeff claimed that any type of ‘athletic prowess’ and ‘athletic fitness’ he had was rendered ‘invalid’ by his peers at school. Masculinities are performed within

dance in dynamic and complex ways suggesting a “layering [of] potential internal contradiction within all masculine practices” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011:260). Jeff also claimed that dancing simultaneously hindered and helped his ‘love life’ because it made him ‘fit and strong and hot’ while making others question his sexuality and masculinity rendering his relation to masculinity and dance confusing and complex.

Other research participants expressed similar experiences within the dance studio setting with claims such as “Girls love the guy who can lift girls high in the air – if you lift a girl above your head you win, you are the guy you know” (Grant, 21) and “I was taught number one rule in partnering – it’s always your fault, it’s all about the girl, you never let her fall – like throw your body on the floor to protect her from hitting floor” (Jeff, 22).

I aspired at one time to be accepted into the partnering class as a young male dancer. It was almost like a rite of passage in our dance studio to be allowed and trusted to lift girls. If you were in partnering class you were considered to be doing real dance and you were the best of the best. These references show a glimpse of not only how hetero-sexualized the experience of being a male dancer can be but also the pressures and responsibilities these male dancers feel when partnering in the studio. Mike also discussed wishing he could be free of some of these responsibilities sometimes as he stated he would want to see “what it feels like to be lifted and float across the stage – that will never happen though” (Mike, 24).

I found Grant’s discussion of online dating and how it relates to his

masculinity and dancing particularly interesting. He stated that he preferred to date girls online rather than in person because he has the ability to control what he sounds and looks like in regards to personality. This helped him calculate and mitigate his dancing within the social terrain of the dating world.

When I type an email or chat I can think of the best way to portray my dancing and that makes me the best version of myself...I get nervous in person with girls sometimes and I don't know how to talk about my dancing without sounding gay or like its a weird thing that makes me less of a man....ugh that sucks - I know....online just works better for me (Grant, 22).

The men I talked with also showed several indications that they understood masculinity as something fluid and plural. For example,

If you don't like it don't watch....When I am on stage though I am playing a part and dances require the strong straight dancer so I can do that too but in studio I'm as queer as they come (Olly, 23). Olly stated that it was "ok" for his mannerism in studio to be "light and gay" and he also said that he "knows how to man it up" outside the studio.

Olly here recognizes that he can perform masculinity in different ways depending on which social context he is currently participating in. Others showed similar notions of this plural understanding of masculinity.

Jeff said

"the way I can dress in the dance world is different then the real world"

and he also said that he does “guy stuff is like drinking beer and watching football in the real world....In the dance world guy stuff is not that- it’s more like....I dunno there isn’t really guy and girl stuff, it’s just all together you know (Jeff, 22).

In this quote Jeff says “can” which could speak to how he negotiates a sense of policing from others perhaps his family and friends with regards to how he portrays masculinity. This also shows that Jeff may recognize that his interpretation of masculinity is different than others. It seems that through this quote that he accepts the fact that he must do masculinity differently depending on his social context. This recognition of plural forms of masculinity contributes to a more complex understanding of men in dance

Rob conveys how his social identity changes according to different social contexts and social roles.

You know me Corey. I am a crazy ballet technician dancer to my students... when we dance in shows together I am more an aggressive power dancer and when work is over I am just me...husband, father, happy normal person – You [referring to myself] are the same as me I think minus the whole husband father thing. Your other side is quiet, introverted kinda’ calculated, academic....I think - no one would guess [in the dance world] you have that other side of you (Rob, 29)

Rob proceeded to explain that all these are real and different versions of himself. He agreed with me when I asked if it would be accurate to use the term ‘mestizaje’ after explaining its meaning to him. Mesizaje was described to Rob as

a mixed type of person or personality traits, habits and behaviours a person can have. He said “oh for sure!” this is accurate to describe his identity and masculinity (Rob, 29). I asked what happens when his worlds mix for example if a student is dancing beside him in a professional show that his family is at watching. He said:

it can be confusing for students who see me dance in other ways and in different settings but I think that it only adds to the fact that I am a versatile dancer with more than just technique – I can still do the big guy tricks and stuff even though I don’t necessarily show that or teach that to my students on a day to day basis...shifting is a great word – I shift depending on my setting, I think we all do right? (Rob, 29).

In comparison to Rob, Luke came across as much more hostile when asked about plural masculinity. Luke emphasized the fact that masculinity can only be understood in relation to femininity along with the fact that he understands genders as something on a spectrum that has blurry, subjective parameters. Luke seemed to be almost annoyed with the idea of having different masculinities, stating:

Why does everyone care about masculinities?...femininities is all bullshit - it’s random words that end up describing people in piss poor ways....Write what you want for your paper about me. I am what I am. If you feel like saying I’m effeminate, go for it, but don’t bother unless you know your definition of effeminate is accurate – It’s all relative, subjective....kind of a pointless discussion really

(Luke, 35).

Luke's lack of patience and openness to the discussion of multiple masculinities possibly suggest that he is tired of the ongoing negotiation, definition and justification of masculinities and how male dancers are expected to act, think, feel and dance.

Jeff indicated that when he dances he tries 'to find a balance' between what he wants to do and what he knows

the audience will appreciate...you can't go too weird or different because they just don't get it, especially if you are invested in the show financially.

You need to sell tickets and people want to leave feeling satisfied I

think...not confused (long pause) although I guess if they leave confused

you did move them in some way and you did your job as an artist (Jeff, 22).

Jeff seems to conform to hegemonic ideas of male dance but at the same time he recognizes the value in a resistance to that type of dancing as he suggests at the end of the statement that perhaps producing something 'against the grain' as he called it is valuable and needed.

I personally explored dancing in what may be considered more feminine ways but only after I stopped competing. This consisted of less jumps and turns, and more sassy sexualized moves such as hip rolls, shoulder rolls and broken wrists. I began doing it as a joke to be funny and then I realized I actually had the ability to teach this style of jazz dance. I became the instructor at a studio

responsible for all sassy jazz for teenagers. It was only when I had been teaching for a few years that I had the confidence to dance in this particular way without shame or fear of any kind of backlash. Currently as a teacher, I feel a strong dissonance between teaching my young male dancers how to dance like a man versus dancing however they feel like they should dance. Part of me feels a responsibility to train them in ways that will provide them with tools needed for a viable and successful career in dance while the other part of me wants me to let them do what they want to do in the studio. The pervasiveness of hegemonic discourse around even men in dance is a tension I am constantly negotiating specifically as a dance instructor. Ultimately, in class and recitals I allow him to perform and dance however he wants but at competitions he is trained to 'dance like a man'. This is not only confusing and complex idea to understand and execute for him but for myself as a dance educator as well. This is a constant negotiation for me on a day to day basis which proves to be very tiring.

All of the research participants discussed what being considered a good male dancer entails and included similar characterizations of the male dancer. For example, "As a swimmer I had long lean muscle which was good but it didn't make me look like a man-like a guy who was jacked" (Mike, 24). This image of an athletically built male dancer has been projected onto Mike. Although he admitted he was not out of shape and his body was conducive to dancing, he did admit that his body could be bigger and stronger for the purpose of looking jacked on stage. Luke stated that he had witnessed a change in ideal body types for male dancers. Mike also stated that depending on whom he was dating at the time

determined how he acted. He said that some guys he had dated required him to be the “quiet damsel in distress” and other guys he dated liked him for his strong dominant personality and ability to “throw a bitch around in the bedroom” (Mike, 24). This is an example of Mike recognizing that he does portray different types of masculinities outside of the dance world setting as well. This fluidity lends itself to the idea that Mike may portray a particular version of masculinity in dance versus outside of the dance world.

Luke stated that he had witnessed a change in ideal body types for male dancers over time.

There was the odd guy who was actually strong but most were little fairies in the past. Now almost all professional male dancers are ripped, they all lift weights and don't even look like dancers... They look like body builders it's so strange. People care more about the guy who can lift a girl than the guy who can do the splits these days (Luke, 35).

Luke continued to explain that he felt that this change has been happening because dance (he felt) has become “much more commercial more recently” and perhaps with that commercialism comes perceptions of strong stereotypes, expectations and policing of the body.

I also found tension in dance around the ideal male body and its capabilities in comparison to the female body. Female dancers should be flexible with lean muscle and males are required to have a much more bulky physique with a much larger muscular stature. However, males are still required to be flexible as well. I find that the more muscle, the less likely to be flexible. This is



another tension that men in dance experience around the ideal male body and its capabilities. I am constantly trying to straddle the two types of male bodies, the flexible with the muscular. It seems the flexible body lends itself well to dance while the muscular body is what the public prefers to see on stage and in performance. In this case the public I am referring to is the audience of the show *So You Think You Can Dance*. Marketing and research departments for the show often stated in pre-production meetings to have done research and understood these things to be true for their viewership as well. Although there is no documented reference of this happening I can speak from first hand experience being present in these meetings that this happened on the show. This delicate balance is constantly trying to be achieved and preserved by all men in dance and it seems that may not even be as necessary for dance as it is for the general public and their idea of what they want to see, namely, the hegemonic personification of a guy. This idea is supported by the fact that the producers of *SYTYCD* Canada controlled the song choices, costuming and styles of dance. Rob used almost identical language stating that he “never worked out in a gym to get ripped. I lifted girls instead. That’s way better, right?!” (Rob, 29). This also contributes to the compulsory heterosexuality previously discussed as well. I remember having push-up competitions with the other male dancers at my studio constantly striving not to be the best dancer necessary but to be the biggest and strongest. We use to have competitions with each other to see who could lift girls over our head and this was a way to partially measure how good of a dancer you were.

Olly had a different experience with physical body type from the other male dancers as he was considerably larger than the ideal male body type with a much less athletic build. Olly was over six feet and over two hundred pounds. He shared:

I'm a big guy but that didn't work really to my advantage...well kinda... I mean bad enough I'm a male dancer...I'm large and I am black - I am a walking target for anyone! So that's where the -I don't give a fuck attitude came from (Olly, 23).

This statement suggests that it is not enough to simply be larger than your female counterparts in dance but you need to be exactly the right amount larger with muscle tone as well. Olly also was acutely aware of his surroundings and pressures around his size particular in dance.

Olly also talked about how being 'non-white' shaped his experience in dance and more specifically community theatre. Olly described an added pressure to be a particularly great singer and dancer because he did not want other members of his cast to feel as if he "only got the part because he made the stage look more cultured and like real life" (Olly, 23). Olly's skin colour and habitus contributes to the uniqueness of his dance experience. Olly also said that "unless the show calls for some kind of ethnic folk, almost every single member in the cast is usually white....no matter what theatre group or dance studio you go to in the city" (Olly, 23). This exemplifies another level of othering that Olly recognized, felt, and dealt with within the dance world. Olly demonstrates the need for an intersectional analysis as the way he experiences dance is

potentially very different from myself for example. This reveals another layer and dynamic that some male dancers may feel the need to negotiate as they participate in the world of dance.

Olly's disposition in the interview was most equivalent to Luke as both research participants displayed feelings of angst and hostility towards the experience of men in dance perhaps due to the fact that they have had to not only deal with hegemonic constructions of masculinity in dance but also and more specifically other dynamics such as sexuality, bodily aesthetics, and even ethnicity.

## VI.

### DISCUSSION; "That's Why I Still Can't Be Me"

The themes discussed above contribute to a deeper understanding of how men experience dance and dance studio life. In what way is there a distinct social field of masculinity which frames the experience of male dancers? How do male dancers negotiate these experiences within the field?

Research participants appeared to internalize these hegemonic discourses within dance by conforming to pressures associated with dancing a particular way: a good male dancer conveys power through physical strength, a disciplined body and a restrained expression of self, one that literally in some cases, supports his female partner. These men mostly accepted and reproduced these specific scripts and ways of being for a male dancer. However, all of them described feelings of wanting to or having challenged these types of scripts. The

discussions of dancing in 'underground' dance scenes related to television demonstrated a space for men to express styles of dance that are more overt expression of themselves and their preferences over outside expectations of dance. It also demonstrates the recognition of plural masculinities and the ability that some men in dance have to adapt to particular dance styles and requirements.

Mike stated that "although dance is a place for me to express myself...I can only express as much as society allows me to; otherwise I don't get the jobs and I dance in my basement the way I want – I may as well not exist and that's why I still can't be me". These men discussed having to dance particular ways depending on who the audience was and what the purpose of the dance was for. Professional work and competitions required a strict hegemonic and hetero-normative gender performance if men want to be able to make a viable living out of dance or succeed within the competition world of dance. In contrast, the way some men wish and prefer to dance is often thwarted and suppressed as illegitimate dancing or a non paying form of dance.

The dance world reproduces hegemonic personifications of masculinity rendering the site of the male body as an object of domination and subordination. Conversely, this field also provides a space that disregards conventional understandings of hegemonic masculinity, allowing men to articulate masculinities and identities in alternate ways. We can see through some of the stories of these men in dance that a gender order does exist within the dance world as we can see the way social practice is structured and organized with

varying levels of power and authority given to different gender roles and identities (Connell, 2005). That is to say men and boys who perform hegemonic understandings of masculinity are given precedence in the professional working world of dance as well as the competitive world. In other words, men are rewarded by following such scripts. They gain the status, prestige and more importantly a livelihood through their participation in competitiveness through the parameters that define the everyday professional male dancer in a highly competitive arena.

Social science research has offered insights on our understanding of masculinities and men's gender practices, emphasizing the plurality and hierarchy of masculinities, as well as their collective and dynamic character (Connell, 1998). Men in dance can experience “definite social relations, often relations of hierarchy and exclusion” (Connell, 1998:5). Furthermore, this plurality Connell asserts, ‘many men live in a state of some tension with, or distance from, hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 2005: 5). Hegemonic masculinities and alternative masculinities are produced in more than just discursive ways, moreover, they exist and interplay resulting in complex social life.

This plurality is experienced by men on a regular basis and was specifically discussed by suggesting that he is “three different men....macho sports guy, competitive dancer and personal inner dancer” (Rob, 29). Rob references a simultaneous negotiation of what he understands to be his identity based solely on which type of masculinity he is doing within a particular social context. Negotiations of masculinity can be understood through Martino and

Pallota-Chiarolli's concept of 'Mestizaje' meaning borderland people which "seeks to define identity as being in process, mullet-placed and shifting" (Martino & Pallota-Charolli, 2003:9). These boundaries are constantly subjected to policing and contestation contributing to versions of masculinities and identities. This can be exemplified through all the men in dance and their attempts to withstand the attacks on them by family and peers for being a male in dance.

The research participants all enter the field of dance from slightly different places and each receives varying levels of support throughout their dance career. For example, Mike received less peer and familial support than Olly with regards to his dancing yet Mike continues to pursue dance as a career while Olly has found that dance to him is more of a recreational hobby. This demonstrates that the level of support a male dancer feels is not directly correlate to the success one may obtain through dance.

The degree to which these men rely on dance as a career to support themselves also varies. Rob and Jeff both entered the field of dance at a very young age as a recreational activity. Both Rob and Jeff received support from their families and pressure from peers with regards to their dancing yet presently Rob relies on dance as a primary source of income while Jeff does not. This suggests that the experience of dance for men can be unique to each dancer. Perhaps Rob was able to adapt to the structural component of the dance world better or more willing than Jeff which is what may have lead him to continue with a career in dance.

Labeling and stereotyping male dancers as "gay" reasserts male

hegemonic power. These men (in an attempt to counter allegations of being feminized through dance practice) were forced to face the gender discourses that follow traditional gender ideologies of masculine physicality and movement, such as being regarded as aggressive, strong, and muscular (Koivula, 1999; Metheny, 1965). These male dancers were and are constantly trying to find a balance between the feminized movement of dance and their masculine performance (Yamanashi & Bulman, 2009).

These men felt as though male roles in dance have largely been defined through power and aggression. Expectations of the male dancer highlight and reinforce traditional notions of masculinity and partially rid the image of effeminate male dancer, ultimately justifying and normalizing the heterosexual male involvement in dance (Nadel & Strauss, 2003; Polasek & Roper, 2011; Risner, 2002). By confining the female dancer and the homosexual male dancer to perceived roles in dance, the dominant group of heterosexual males continue to assert power and privilege in social discourse to limit the movement of bodies by a surveillance of gendered norms that are both structured by the conventions of dance and produced by male dancers themselves (Drummond, 2003; Mulvey, 1989; Wachs, 2005).

There is a distinct expression of masculinity at play here; dance is a social field which makes dancers inhabit the expression of masculinity produced, one of physical strength through a musical artistry of movement pointing to the plural ways in which men are positioned to strive for to always achieve prestige and status. And yet the terms of stats and prestige are also set by wider expectations

of family, peer relations, but also of the demands of livelihood of competition. Comradery and co-operation does inform the friendships of male dancers but it is mitigated by the terms set by conventional dance and mundane routines of 'realizing' art and skill through commercial and video auditions or the demands of teaching.

## VII.

### CONCLUSION

This study combined an auto-ethnographic approach with interviews of six young men to reflect how we negotiate masculinities through dance in primarily Southwestern Ontario. An exploration of the world of dance for men allows us to examine what heteronormative discourses are at play within dance and whether dancers reproduce dominant discourses.

This hegemonic discourse pervades the perceived inclusivity of the world dance. The analysis following the discussion around the three main themes focused on exploring a deeper, nuanced and more complex understanding of how men experience dance. Using auto-ethnographic accounts and the research participants' transcripts, these themes (i. familial and peer relations to men in dance, ii. sexuality and its relation to



the male dancer, iii. their perception of and response to the image of the ideal male dancer) help us to understand and support how masculinities can be plural and negotiated. These themes also help elucidate similar ways men in dance address and understand stereotypes in dance and how these men have challenged and reproduced hegemonic personifications of masculinity.

It is necessary to highlight some of the limits of this thesis largely due to location, social context and sample size. Firstly, the thesis is largely focused around Windsor Essex County area in Ontario with some research participants from the Chatham-Kent area. These dancers do travel to larger metropolitan areas such as the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario. However, the majority of their dance experiences have taken place in Windsor, Ontario a much smaller sized city in comparison to a metropolis such as Toronto.

The localization of the research participants does not take away from the legitimacy of their stories and experiences. However, it underscores the transcripts as lived experiences in one particular region of Ontario. Secondly, these interviews took place and dance experiences occurred within similar social contexts. Although my research participants and interviews were situated in comparable social contexts it is worth noting that there are male dancers who have experienced dance in different social contexts and my thesis does not give voice to these dancers. The number of research participants produces limits to my thesis as the

sample size may not be representative of the larger population of male dancers across Ontario for example.

My intent for this research was to highlight stories of and give a medium for male dancers to express their feelings and experiences within dance. The stories of these males was paired with my own auto ethnographic accounts of life as a male dancer rather than produce a representative sample of male dancers across southwestern Ontario.

My ethnographic familiarity gives a rich understanding of how these men enter the dance world from different locations all seeking to pursue a passion for dance. Through the years of training it appears they are molded and trained to dance a particular way as their teachers and choreographers give them the tools they need to be successful in the present dance world. Upon completing years of training these men find themselves with the burden of constantly negotiating how they dance and what they look like on stage and/or film.

It seems as though the structural component associated with the creation and training of the ideal male dancer could have a class component embedded within it. The dance world could be recognized as a field which reproduces class differentiation through structural ramifications of hegemony. Men who make a living out of dance accept that dance is both a job and an art form, ultimately conforming to the predetermined notion of what an ideal male dancer is in order to become financially successful. These men are not just reproducing masculine hegemony in

the dance world but some recognize and choose to remain in arts scenes and spaces within the arts that offer them little to no financial stability.

A hegemonic, masculine structure resonates with dance in the media (SYTYCD Canada) and with teachers and choreographers as well. These dispositions tend to give men very little flexibility within the field of dance. They may feel as though they cannot express themselves in ways that are unique to them. This structure is justified by teachers and choreographers as they tend to argue that they are preparing their male students for the professional dance world.

These men are traversing and inhabiting their social life making sense of their every day lives in ways that are refracted through hegemonic scripts. Some of these men have made a choice to reproduce the image of the ideal male dancer in hopes of pursuing a career in the arts. Others have found ways to move on in other directions with their professional lives and careers while simultaneously finding spaces (such as community theatre) where they can continue to pursue their passion for dance at an amateur level.

Opportunities do exist for male dancers to perform and dance in ways that do not reproduce hegemonic scripts in simple ways as suggested earlier. However, these spaces seem few and far between and often put men in working class positions as they do not necessarily grant these male dancers financially stable careers. It appears as though there is a class hierarchy and gender hierarchy within the dance world based on the

degree to which a male dancer reproduces the ideal image of a male dancer.

Presently, the social field of dance is relevant to my research participants' lives in different degrees. Each of these men joined the dance field from varying entry points with different levels of familial and peer support for example. Some rely on it as a primary source of income and others have carved out a space for themselves to dance and do masculinity in whatever way they want. These men found the latter space resides largely in amateur theatre and volunteer work, projects which lie outside of the economically profitable sector of dance.

Rob currently has a career in dance at the educational institutional level. Rob teaches dance classes for the Greater Essex County District School Board at a Secondary School in Windsor Ontario. He also teaches dance privately at a studio in Chatham Ontario. Rob relies solely on dance to support his wife and two children. Mike currently has a career in the arts in Toronto Ontario. He continues to 'barely get by' pursuing his passion. Mike pursues his own style and way of dancing on 'side gigs' that he has time for in between his main line of work in dance which requires him to portray himself as the hegemonically masculine dancer.

Luke is currently retired from the professional dance scene and he currently works for a local community theatre group in Royal Oak, Michigan. Luke works mainly as a choreographer and because of his training and years experience 'no one questions my dance or choreo...I'm

like a dance guru at Stage Crafters [his community theatre group]’.

Jeff currently has no career in the arts or dance and often reminisces about the days when he did community theatre. He is focused on continuing his post-secondary career in pursuit of becoming a nurse. Grant currently has no career in the arts or dance and lives with his parents in Windsor Ontario where he enjoys playing video games and working part time for his Ukrainian club. Grant has no sustainable career in the arts but still pursues his passion through community theatre and ‘the odd Ukrainian performance or demonstration’.

Olly currently has no career in the arts or dance and lives with his parents while working at a storage locker company. Olly continues to participate in community theatre searching for auditions for musicals. Olly ‘gets [his] kicks twice a week for a few hours at play practice’. All of these men carry with them a passion for dance and the arts but where they depart from each other is their willingness to conform to the structure of what an ideal masculine dancer is.

The research participants seemed to describe two different institutional fields of dances: a relaxed and exploratory approach to dance and contrastingly, a more restrictive one. Men who trained in the latter type of setting were far more likely to feel pressure to conform to a hegemonically masculine way of dancing. Conversely, dancers who train in less structured fields of dance seem to feel less pressure to dance and perform a certain way; however, this alternate masculine way of dancing

may not be as financially sustainable. It also seems that dancers who were trained in the more structured institutional field were more likely to attempt to prevent this type of restrictive classroom setting in their own classrooms as teachers. If followed, the syllabus produces a very specific type of male dancer from physique to style and abilities.

The studio is not always felt or experienced as a free space for men to express themselves through the physical act of dancer; rather a space for men to socially reproduce hegemonic understandings of the male dancer through movement of the body. While dancers can be expressive and creative, they are also responsible for executing steps and styles in particular ways associated with what audiences think they prefer to view; moreover, the social reproduction of hegemonic and heteronormative ideals consistent with a larger discourse surrounding men in dance.

Men in dance are constantly trying to negotiate how they understand themselves within dance and how others perceive them within dance. These tensions within dance for males can often prevent these men from feeling as though they are free to express themselves. This points to an intricacy of the dance world as being male and dancing how one may want to dance versus how you are expected to dance in order to be paid. There also seems to be different levels of status as a dancer depending on how you choose to dance.

The idea of compulsory heterosexuality associated with dance outlines “the various nuances of power (resistance and subordination) set

within a hierarchical framework” (Coles, 2009: 31). Factors that may contribute to power dynamics within dance include their preferred style of dance and body type. The heterosexual, hegemonically masculine influenced dancer may challenge compulsory heterosexual pairings and choreography in dance as well as hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and the ideal male dancer experience increased pressures in comparison to other male dancers.

The idea that the general audience for dance shows such as SYTYCD Canada prefers to watch hegemonic, heterosexually influenced pieces between 1 male and 1 female is supported not only by viewership ratings and research but it is also a feeling amongst competitors, producers and choreographers on the show. For example, I had choreographed a routine for and the producers of the show did not allow the dance to be aired until I “sexed it up” more and the costume department made the woman’s costume more revealing. This idea was also supported by Mike as he stated that the best way to get exposure is by doing what he called “mainstream” dance (largely the SYTYCD model of 1 man and 1 woman). Mike also said that “you gotta’ give em what they want....it’s hardly about your personal artistry”. This suggests Mike recognized and felt a pressure to deliver a particular product to audiences he danced for.

Hegemony involves the “persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through media, and the organization of social

institutions in ways that appear natural, ordinary and normal” (Donaldson, 1993:644). What Donaldson (1993) describes is equivalent with how some male dancers experience the dance world. More specifically, the perceived main role of the male dancer to support his female counterpart has influenced many men and choreographers in the dance studio to the point that male/female partner dancing and males simply supporting females appears natural and innate for male dancers. It appears as though hegemony can largely constrain and even abstract diversity and creativity on another level out of the world of dance.

Hegemonic masculinity as a concept seeks to elucidate how class domination and subjectification is effected through a hierarchy of social and gender order. An operationalization of this happens to male dancers within the social field of dance and these allocations are given to men in dance through their physical behaviours and actions within the dance studio/stage alike. In other words, there are dominant ideological messages around gender and sexuality that are constructed, maintained, and enforced within social fields, institutions and structures which ultimately makes dominant hegemonic ideals normalized and unproblematic (Aitchinson, 2007).

Allocations of status and power are determined by popular culture and all of the exposure of the public to dance is heavily mediated with television ratings and marketing in mind. This leads the image of male dancers to be portrayed in such a way that it appeals to mass audiences.



Dance shows portray images of a male dancer as a portrayal of hegemonic masculinity in every way from the musculature to the costuming and haircut. There are other elements of the male dancer that are hegemonically constructed including the styles of dance portrayed and types of steps choreographed for these dance shows. Thinking through my own life and understanding the lives of these other male dancers has shed light onto the fact that dance may not be an entirely free space for men to express themselves through movement without experiencing pressures to dance a certain way. Men are expected to dance big and strong by jumping high, turning fast and lifting women into the air effortlessly. These skills are often how men are judged in the competitive and professional world, however, these skills alone seem to barely define and describe how some of these men understand themselves as dancers.

The field of dance produces a distinct bodily movement for men which is assigned a symbolic value and a capital value as well. Dancers who contest or challenge this pre-determined conception of what a male dancer is has less a very different symbolic value which can be directly related to little to no capital value. This hegemonic blue-print or socially mediated guidelines almost give a sense of boundary to men's dancing which helps to further entrench the ideal hegemonically masculine male dancer.

Though there are many different ways to conduct oneself as a man or a woman, one's gender tends to be grounded in the interpretation of

two exclusive sexes: male or female and gender, masculine or feminine.

This ideology pervades the dance world and can be seen in dance performances on television and in live theatre. There are different allocations of power and status given to men who dance a specific way and partner those of the opposite sex.

Each of the themes these men and I discussed contributes to our understanding of habitus and how the research participants understand and do masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity has allowed a better understanding of how boys become men and how masculinities are implicated with relation to dominance. This reality embodies the “currently most honoured way of being a man, [and] it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell, 2005:832). This most honoured way of being a man is perhaps not synonymous with a male dancer; however this is not to say that each man in dance is situated identically. Recognizing that each individual is simultaneously similar and unique is crucial throughout the analysis of these men’s stories as it contributes to the complication of unified and singular notions of masculinity. Moreover, the notion that men are situated differently in different socially structured fields of power is especially relevant to understanding the complexities associated with the dance world. Hegemonic masculinities encompass the ability to impose a definition of the situation and set terms in which masculinity and identity are understood within a particular context and can be used to describe forms

of “masculinity that [are] considered culturally to be most dominant at any given time” (Coles, 2009:41).

Bourdieu (1993) offers a way of thinking about ‘social fields’ as spaces where symbolic power exists and discourses become encoded and reproduced. In this case, the dance studio is the space in which negotiations, and reproduction of a symbolic power occurs. Masculinity simultaneously empowers and positions men differently in the studio through the concept of hegemonic masculinity and their habitus. From the way men are taught to dance, to the type of dance that renders the most professional work to the type of dance taught to students.

I have also concluded that many men may initially join dance in order to explore their own creativity, to be an artist in a way that is healthy for their body. Dance and the arts for some men can provide a place to fit in if they do not perhaps feel a sense of belonging or purpose in other sports or academics. It is very interesting to me that as men progress and excel in dance their creativity and personal choice becomes almost thwarted. Even once these men become professional dancers and choreographers these men and I still feel pressure to dance and choreograph a specific way. I did not join dance thinking that there would ever be a moment in my life that dance would change from a personal passion to a job. Dance is something we are thankful for as it has been able to provide financially for us however, it can be challenging and often a site of tension for men in dance.

The dance studio and world of dance has proven to be precarious setting, providing a sense of belonging with simultaneous feelings of discomfort in certain instances for men in dance. While these men are provided with the opportunity for self-exploration within the studio setting this exploration can be thwarted on a variety of levels with most stemming from a grand public discourse surrounding a hegemonic masculinity.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: Negotiating Multiple Masculinities within Sport and Dance.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Corey Mariuz from the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology at the University of Windsor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact me at mariuzc@uwindsor.ca.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- ¥ To learn more about how young men understand and experience masculinity in dance and sport.

#### PROCEDURES

- ¥ You will be asked to share your ideas, experiences, and thoughts about dance, sport, masculinity and identity. The interview will last for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

- ¥ The interview is designed to limit physical, psychological, emotional, financial or social stress. Please inform me during the interview process if you want to temporarily or permanently discontinue the interview for any reason.
- ¥ Some personal/sensitive questions may be asked throughout the process of the interview, which participants do not need to answer if they do not want to do so.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This research will:

- ¥ Increase knowledge how young men understand identity and masculinity.
- ¥ Provide important information for people interested in more research done about young men in dance and sport.

- ¥ Finally, the research project provides the opportunity for you to express your opinions and thoughts about issues and topics important to your life.

#### COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

- ¥ No compensation for your involvement in this interview will be provided.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

- ¥ Any information that you provide will remain confidential and will be shared only with my thesis advisor Dr. Glynis George. Any other shared information will only occur with your permission. I will not reveal your identity to any one in any written or oral manner.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

- ¥ You are free to choose to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences.
- ¥ You must contact me via email prior to Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 if you wish to withdraw any part or all information you have provided.
- ¥ Youd have to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still continue to be the study. I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

#### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

- ¥ If you wish to read the results of our research project, a summary of the research will be posted in the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board website (<http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb/>).

#### AUDIO RECORDING

- ¥ This interview will be audio-recorded. At any time during the interview I will replay the recording or a portion of the recording if you want. The interview will be transcribed. At this time any identifying names of individuals, agencies, or places that might identify who you are will be deleted. The audio recording will be kept in a secure location. The investigators will destroy the audio-recording six- months after the transcript is complete.

#### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

- ¥ These data may be used in subsequent studies in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- ¥ If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

These are the terms under which I will participate in research.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANT

Title of Study: Negotiating Multiple Masculinities within Sport and Dance.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Corey Mariuz from the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology at the University of Windsor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact me at [mariuzc@uwindsor.ca](mailto:mariuzc@uwindsor.ca).

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- ¥ To learn more about how young men understand and experience masculinity in dance and sport.

#### PROCEDURES

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#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

- ¥ The interview is designed to limit physical, psychological, emotional, financial or social stress. Please inform me during the interview process if you want to temporarily or permanently discontinue the interview for any reason.
- ¥ Some personal/sensitive questions may be asked throughout the process of the interview which participants do not need to answer if they do not wish to do so.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This research will:

- ¥ Increase knowledge how young men understand identity and masculinity.
- ¥ Provide important information for people interested in more research done about young men in dance and sport.

- ¥ Finally, the research project provides the opportunity for you to express your opinions and thoughts about issues and topics important to your life.

#### COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

- ¥ No compensation for your involvement in this interview will be provided.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

- ¥ Any information that you provide will remain confidential and will be shared only with my thesis advisor Dr. Glynis George. Any other shared information will only occur with your permission. I will not reveal your identity to any one in any written or oral manner.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

- ¥ You are free to choose to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences.
- ¥ You must contact me via email prior to Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 if you wish to withdraw any part or all information you have provided.
- ¥ Youd have to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still continue to be the study. I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.
- ¥ If you wish to read the results of our research project, a summary of the research will be posted in the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board website (<http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb/>).

#### AUDIO RECORDING

- ¥ This interview will be audio-recorded. At any time during the interview I will replay the recording or a portion of the recording if you want. The interview will be transcribed. At this time any identifying names of individuals, agencies, or places that might identify who you are will be deleted. The audio recording will be kept in a secure location. The investigators will destroy the audio-recording six- months after the transcript is complete.

#### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

- ¥ These data may be used in subsequent studies in publications and in presentations.



RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

- ¥ If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C:

## LETTER OF RECRUITMENT:

Are interested in being a participant in a research study conducted by Corey Mariuz from the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology at the University of Windsor?

Please contact [mariuzc@uwindsor.ca](mailto:mariuzc@uwindsor.ca) for more information.

Supervisor Dr. G. George - [ggeorge@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ggeorge@uwindsor.ca)

## TITLE OF STUDY

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Negotiating Multiple Masculinities within Sport and Dance

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- ¥ To learn more about how young men understand and experience masculinity in dance and sport.

## PROCEDURES

- ¥ You will be asked to share your ideas, experiences, and thoughts about dance, sport, masculinity and identity. The interview will last for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- ¥ Some personal questions may be asked throughout the course of the interview process.

## REQUIREMENTS

- ¥ Research participants must be between the ages 19-35.
- ¥ Research participants must self identify as male.
- ¥ Research participants must be or have been a competitive dancer.
- ¥ Research participants must play or have played organized soccer.

APPENDIX D:  
ETHICS LETTER OF APPROVAL

Today's Date: December 12, 2014  
Principal Investigator: Mr. Corey Mariuz  
REB Number: 31929  
Research Project Title: REB# 14-203: Negotiating Multiple Masculinities within Sport and Dance  
Clearance Date: December 12, 2014  
Project End Date: May 10, 2015  
Milestones: Renewal Due-2015/05/01(Pending)

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This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the University of Windsor Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects, has granted approval to your research project on the date noted above. This approval is valid only until the Project End Date.

A Progress Report or Final Report is due by the date noted above. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period. During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. Minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered when submitted on the Request to Revise form.

Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB website: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). If your data is going to be used for another project, it is necessary to submit another application to the REB.

We wish you every success in your research. Alan Scoboria, Ph.D. Chair,  
Research Ethics Board Lambton Tower, Room 1102 A University of  
Windsor [519-253-3000 ext. 3948](tel:519-253-3000) Email: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

## VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Corey Mariuz

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, Ontario

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1990

TITLE: Owner/Director of PURE Dance Music Drama

EDUCATION: University of Windsor, Windsor Ontario B.a  
University of Windsor, Windsor Ontario M.a