

Marketing Dance to Boys and Men: New, Complex and Dynamic Practices of Masculinities

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Abstract

Dance has traditionally been marketed to boys and men by aligning it with traditional masculinities. Within a culture of shifting gender relations and declining homophobia, new possibilities emerge for dance to be marketed to boys and men in different ways. This chapter examined such possibilities, analyzing the online marketing practices of dance organizations from Anglo-American cultures. The findings document how dance continues to be (re)positioned within orthodox discourses of (hetero)masculinity. At the same time, new marketing strategies promote the “all singing, all dancing boy” and the “(hetero)sexy male dancer.” Ultimately, these marketing strategies deploy various blends of old and new masculinities which consistently seek to safeguard dancers’ masculinities. The chapter raises concerns that this marketing approach is limited and short-sighted.

Keywords

Dance; marketing strategies; thematic analysis; masculinities; postfeminist masculinity; orthodox masculinity.

Anglo-American cultures have traditionally constructed dance as a feminine activity, thus devaluing it, making men who danced vulnerable to homophobia (Burt 1995; Risner 2009a). The typical response of dance organizations was to actively deflect the associations between femininity, homosexuality and male participation in dance (Adams 2005; Gard 2006; Risner, 2009a) and to promote dance by aligning it with traditional masculinities, what Fisher (2009) refers to as “making dance macho.” This consisted of two interconnecting strategies to represent male dancers as “athletically masculine and resolutely heterosexual” (p. 33). The “athletically masculine” strategy legitimates male participation through associating dance with the more assuredly masculine practices of sport and athletics. Male dancers are depicted as supreme athletes with their outstanding physical prowess and mastery of dance made visible through powerful, gravity defying leaps and bounds. Here the “resolutely heterosexual” strategy involves erasing the sexual ambiguity and associations with homosexuality surrounding male dancers, locating their participation in dance as a tool of seduction and a mechanism for attracting women.

Although making dance macho aimed to increase men’s possibilities for taking up dance, and garnered relative success in promoting the Billy Elliot movie [2000] and musical [2005] (Owen 2014) and in attracting boys and men into concert dance (Keefe 2009), these strategies neither defended nor validated gay, camp or effeminate characteristics, but instead rejected their attribution to male dancers. In so doing, these strategies reproduced, rather than challenged, the discourses of masculinity that stigmatizing male dance practice produced in the first place (Adams 2005; Risner 2009a).

However, located within a culture of shifting gender relations (Harman 2019; Rumens 2017), declining homophobia (Anderson 2009), and the proliferation of complex, digitally mediated

online environments (Light 2013), new practices of masculinity continue to emerge in the world of dance and elsewhere. A number of theories attempt to conceptualize these new practices, including postfeminist masculinity theory (Genz et al. 2009; Rumens 2017), which explores how men are responding to feminism and the growing expectations for gender equal relationships with women. Postfeminist research documents complex processes through which traditional masculinities are being challenged and more self-expressive and selfreflexive ways of performing masculinity made available (Rumens 2017). Responses to these new expectations about masculinity are varied. Some men creatively shift between the multiple forms of masculinities on offer, while others demonstrate confusion and nostalgia and actively seek to reclaim traditional gender roles (Genz et al. 2009; Rumens 2017). Postfeminist masculinity theory—increasingly used in the study of contemporary media representations of masculinity and gender relations (Gill 2014)—is yet to be harnessed in the study of men who dance.

Inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson 2009; Anderson and McCormack 2018) provides another important framework for conceptualizing new practices of masculinity, whereby a decline in homophobia in Anglo-American cultures reduces the requirement for boys and men to repeatedly prove their heterosexuality. In turn, inclusive masculinities, according to Anderson (2009), enable the enactment of softer, more feminine masculinities. Peterson and Anderson (2012) evidence inclusive masculinities through observing the actions of heterosexual-identifying, white British middle-class male university students dancing in Student Union night clubs. Their study documents young men performing same-sex dances, touching each other, and sometimes enacting pseudo same-sex sexual behavior on the dance floor. The researchers interpret these actions as evidence of a wider cultural shift away from the dominance of orthodox masculinity (based on homophobia, compulsory heterosexuality

and anti-femininity) and the emergence of more fluid gender codes associated with inclusive masculinities.

Owen and Riley's (2020a) ethnographic study of British male university students' engagement in Latin dance provides further evidence of these shifts. The authors identify how young men learn to move their hips in sensuous and sinuous ways, an activity historically associated with femininity and by association homosexuality in Anglo-American culture. In an analysis of YouTube videos of male dancers copying Beyonce's "Single Ladies" dance routine, Owen and Riley (2020b) argue these playful performances can act as a force of innovation and creativity, allowing male dancers to temporarily escape, destabilize, and subvert restrictive and essentialist forms of orthodox masculinity, and to experiment with new and more diverse performances of inclusive masculinities. However, both studies also show how ostensibly inclusive practices and performances recuperate orthodox discourses. For example, by associating men's hip movement with heterosexual prowess, or by presenting men as incapable of successfully performing femininity reinforces essentialist gender differences. Taken together, these findings locate dance as an important site for analysis and understanding of new, complex and dynamic practices of masculinities.

In such a context with new opportunities and expectations regarding gender relations and the performance of masculinities, numerous possibilities emerge for dance to be repositioned and marketed to boys and men in different ways. In this chapter, we examine such possibilities by analyzing the online marketing practices of dance organizations from Anglo-American cultures. We focus specifically on how dance organizations conceptualize the "problem" of male dancers, what discursive strategies they employ to encourage boys' and

men's participation in dance, and we critically appraise the affordances and limitations of these approaches.

Analyzing the marketing of dance organizations

We used an online search engine to find relevant articlesⁱ using the key terms “why boys/men don't dance,” “the problem with boys/men and dance,” “encouraging boys/men into dance” and “benefits of dancing for boys/men.” We collated and grouped all articles and blogs discussing relevant topics according to media format (dance organizations [27 articles and blogs]; mainstream newspapers and television [11]; online lifestyle magazines [17]; personal blogs [6]; and academic blogs and magazines [4]). Focusing on the articles produced by dance organizations (including dance businesses, companies, classes and magazines) based in the UK, US, Australia and Canada, we separated those focused on boys [14] from those on men [13] in order to examine similar and different messages toward each age group and potentially different audiences and generations. The final selection included articles from renowned businesses that teach dance, including the Arthur Murray Dance Centers and Fred Astaire Dance Studios; local dance clubs specializing in ballet, ballroom and theatre dance; companies that sell dance products; and community dance organizations.

Employing a social constructionist approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), the first author read, re-read and coded the data focused on boys, while the second author did the same for men. Each then produced a summary sheet of initial codes relating to the problem of male dance(rs) and the marketing strategies used in response. The codes were then collaboratively discussed, and codes that coalesced and spoke to each other were put together to form themes. We then considered how various theories of masculinity and gender

relations could be used to make sense of the themes. Ultimately, we agreed that insights from inclusive masculinity theory and postfeminist masculinity theory, accompanied by literature relating to masculinity and dance, offered the most appropriate framework for making sense of the themes. Finally, we identified relevant exemplars that most clearly and evocatively illustrated the central tenets of each theme. In the following section we offer our analysis, which answers our research questions. First, we outline how dance organizations conceive the problem and employ marketing strategies associated with boys who (don't) dance, and second, we follow the same structure with the men's data. By analyzing how the problems and solutions are conceived for boys and men, we offer a holistic understanding of the marketing material while also highlight synergies and contrasts. We address the relationship between the material on boys and men in the discussion section.

Mislabelling dance as “just for girls”

Scholarship that discusses the “problem” with boys who (don't) dance invariably conceives it in terms of a mislabelling of dance. Dance is said to be historically viewed as an activity “just for girls” and is therefore inappropriate for boys. Furthermore, boys who do participate are often found to face stigma (Risner 2009a). However, several articles refer to improvements in public understandings of boys who dance. The excerpt below from a professional arts magazine illustrates that the redefining of dance as an appropriate male activity is frequently linked to its increased visibility and popularity of male dancers in prime-time television shows, movies and social media.

In the past ten to fifteen years, dance has crashed into mainstream. Strictly Come Dancing, Billy Elliot, the Step Up movies and the explosion of social media are all helping to spread and inspire a new generation of males who no longer automatically perceive a stigma around dance being ‘just for girls.’ (Ganberg 2017)

While the redefining of dance as an appropriate male activity is a common message, numerous articles also propose that the dancing is just for girls discourse is still prevalent in society. The stereotype of dance was said to be apparent among adults, some of whom play key roles in the lives of boys who wish to dance. For example, several articles attribute the problem to parents: “Most of the bias comes from parents envisioning dance class as being only tutus, tip-toes, fairies, and princesses” (Small Fry Dance Club 2015). Additionally, some articles attribute the problem to schoolteachers. One such article, published by a community dance organization based in the UK, comments on the lack of dance provision for boys in secondary schools and raises concerns that “often teachers’ own prejudice concerning boys dancing influences their [the boys’] attitudes and expectations” (Jobbins 2005).

Interestingly in these accounts, the problem with boys who (don’t) dance is not with the boys themselves but rather the biases and prejudices they are exposed to from significant others. As such in the first example, parents are presented as clinging to an outdated assumption about the association between dance and femininity, an assumption presented as somewhat foolish by associating dance solely with stereotypically hyper-feminized clothes, movements and characters (“tutus, tip-toes, fairies, and princesses”).

Offer “boy friendly” dance

Responding to the continued mislabelling of dance as “just for girls,” the articles offer a wide range of strategies and recommendations to attract and retain boys in dance classes by making the whole experience “boy friendly.” This includes calling on dance clubs and

organizers to offer more boy friendly marketing schemes and dance spaces. For example, a blog from the International Dance Supplies website offers a critique of the presumed feminization of dance spaces:

Maybe the pink walls, fluffy cushions and flashes of sparkle aren't what boys are used to - can you make one studio a little more gender neutral with bright contemporary decor and male dance images on the walls to inspire them? (International Dance Supplies, 2018)

Here, stereotypically feminized artifacts ("pink walls, fluffy cushions and flashes of sparkle") are identified, emphasizing the perceived hyper-femininity of dance and dance spaces. This depiction works rhetorically, positioning such spaces as inappropriate for boys, based upon the assumption there are fundamental differences between boys and girls and thus a need to de-gender or masculinize the spaces through appropriate decor and visual imagery.

Several articles also recommend dance teachers and institutions adapt their curriculum to be more boy friendly. This includes offering dance classes that engage with activities and themes with established masculine capital (De Visser et al. 2009), such as risk sports and skateboarding; prioritizing the teaching of specific genres, such as hip hop, physical theatre and capoeira to harness their association with orthodox masculinities.

The most common recommendation for promoting boy friendly dance is to avoid classes with large numbers of girls and seek out boys-only dance classes. The excerpts that follow illustrate frequent claims that placing a lone boy within a group of girls is highly problematic due to boys feeling "intimidated or out of place" (Laho and Holasz 2017):

“Make sure your son is not the only boy: You don’t want your son to be the dance studio’s first male student” (Warber 2011).

“[Boys] feel intimidated or out of place in a group of mainly girls” (Laho and Holasz 2017).

“We need to gently persuade boys, their parents and friends that dance is for boys and does not threaten their gender in any way... [Boys] thrive in a single gender dance group... it can be a positive and safe environment which celebrates a union of masculinity” (Ganberg 2017).

Interestingly, the excerpts also expose the “fear of the feminine” (Jackson 2003) that implicitly underpins most boy friendly recommendations. Indeed, all-male dance groups are frequently depicted as a solution by providing a “positive and safe environment,” free from the dangers of associating boys with any trace of femininity, and thus enabling “a union of masculinity” (Ganberg 2017).

Dance as a means to cultivate an “all-singing, all-dancing boy”

The second major strategy to encourage boys’ participation presents dance as a means to cultivate an “all-singing, all-dancing boy” (Rodosthenous 2007). In other words, dance is promoted as an activity that allows boys to develop a wide range of valued skills and abilities. For example, it is not uncommon for dance institutions to offer a long list of benefits boys can accrue from learning to dance: “[Dance] Improves Physical Fitness... Boosts Self-

Confidence... Develops Motivation... Improves Gross Motor Skills... Improves Concentration and Focus... Encourages Self-Expression... Improves Balance and Flexibility... Improves Coordination... Provides Personal Fulfilment” (Daychak 2019).

In turn the diverse benefits of learning to dance are frequently discussed in comparison to sport. A number of articles call on parents to recognize how dance can support their son’s (presumed) participation in sport. Claims about the benefits of dance are supported by examples of famous sports men who use dance training to improve their physical capabilities. Aligning dance with sport and sportsmen is far from novel. It is a key element in the traditional “making dance macho” marketing strategy and well documented in the dance and masculinity literature (Crawford 1994; Fisher 2009; Gard 2006; Keefe 2009; Markula 2018; Risner 2007, 2009a, 2009b). Indeed, scholars evidence a long history of male dancers, dance teachers and dance shows employing sporting and athletic themes, even male sportsmen themselves, to legitimate male dance (Adams 2005). By drawing parallels with the more assuredly masculine practice of sport, this marketing strategy tries to break the stereotypical association between dance and male effeminacy.

Alongside this well-worn strategy, a new approach to legitimating male dance is also employed. Beyond presenting dance as a means to an alternative end (i.e. being better at sport), this normalizing strategy represents dance as harder, better and requiring more diverse skills than sport. One such example was published by a US-based dance theatre company:

Dance is the Ultimate Sport – One of my daughter’s favorite tee-shirts reads “Artist + Athlete = Dancer.” It’s so true. To be a successful dancer, men need to be graceful and strong. It helps if you can leap like a gazelle, and it doesn’t hurt if you can spin like a top. Male dancers don’t catch footballs or baseballs, they catch other dancers. In the course of one show, you will run and jump and catch and dance and you will do it all fluidly and artistically. (Kleber-Diggs 2015)

By simultaneously aligning with and seeking to go beyond the boundaries and limitations of sport, dance is represented as the ultimate means to cultivate boys' bodies and selves. This strategy is embodied in the idealized figure of the "all singing, all dancing boy" (Rodosthenous 2007). In his analysis of the production and marketing of the *Billy Elliot* musical, Rodosthenous (2007) identified how the choreography and media imagery incorporated acrobatic, muscular and dangerous activities into Billy's dance performances. This representation had the effect of presenting the male performer's "all singing, all dancing body" as an iconic symbol to be "celebrated, admired and looked at purely for its strength, muscular energy and beauty" (p. 88).

Interestingly, the findings from the current study demonstrate how the figure of the allsinging, all-dancing boy has been taken-up in wider dance advertising and marketing. In numerous articles, parents are encouraged to enlist their son in a dance program that will enable him to work on his body and self in diverse ways, to ultimately turn himself into this idealized, embodied figure. Notably, the figure is indicative of postfeminist masculinities that act as a "melting pot" (Rumens 2017, p. 249) for orthodox and inclusive masculinities (Anderson 2009). The blending of masculinities is evidenced in the above excerpt. On the one hand, dance is celebrated as a means to cultivate traditionally manly skills and qualities associated with orthodox masculinity ("Not only do you need athleticism, strength," "run and jump and catch"). At the same time, male dancers are encouraged to develop more diverse skills and qualities associated with softer, more feminized, inclusive masculinities ("men need to be graceful," "you will do it all fluidly and artistically").

Overcoming men's reluctance to dance

The articles focusing on men are underpinned by an assumption that men do not want to dance. As a remedy, the articles challenge some of the perceived reasons underlying this reluctance. Linking to the above section on boys, many articles highlight the gender differentiated socialization of males and females into or out of dance. As one article on a USbased ballroom dance website explains:

Young girls often learn ballet, gymnastics or cheerleading. They take lessons or learn from each other. Girls socialize by sharing dance steps and dancing together. It's socially acceptable for girls to dance together. By practicing, girls learn they can learn to dance. Our society also teaches girls that they can be silly or playful with dance without being judged as looking stupid.

Not true for the guys!

Unless the guy is lucky enough to be taught by a parent or sister or have an ethnic background that exposes him to dance, he thinks he can't dance. Guys do not want to look stupid dancing & will not risk it. (New Energy Ballroom 2020) (*underlining in original*)

By highlighting different patterns of gender socialization, the articles explain men's reluctance to dance due to feelings of being "judged as looking stupid" (New Energy Ballroom 2020) or through "over-thinking" dancing (One Dance UK 2017). Judging themselves too harshly is presented as a problem that prevents men from initially attending dancing lessons. Emphasizing women's head-start in dance works to overcome men's potential self-consciousness. The article also assumes the audience are white, where whiteness is associated with lack of dance experience and self-consciousness. In addition to the barrier of self-consciousness, a psychological connection between dance and femininity was also mentioned in the articles. An article from the Fred Astaire Dance Studios (2016) explained, "it almost seems like it's a point of pride for a guy, as if he is too cool to want to dance – that it is feminine to want to." Yet this association, like the discussions about

gendered childhood association of dance with femininity, is not fully unpicked. The implication is that the understanding of dancing as a pursuit mainly for girls and women has put men off from dancing. However, an in-depth discussion of structural issues contributing to men's lower numbers is not provided. Furthermore, the solutions appear to be primarily on the level of the individual, focusing on removing barriers in men's minds and emotions. Focusing on male dancers' individual psychology fits with larger scale neoliberal trends of individualization, self-improvement and working on oneself within reflexive modernity (Giddens 1991).

Part of self-improvement in contemporary body-focused culture is a focus on physical fitness and sport (Shilling 2012). The articles focused on getting more men into dancing reflect this concern. As with the articles focused on boys, they associate a masculinizing of dance with sportsmanship (Fisher 2009). In the article from the Fred Astaire Dance Studios (2016), the process of learning to dance is explained using the language of sports, which it is assumed men are more familiar with:

Most men have some experience in sports, martial arts or music, all requiring a teacher, a coach and practice. I work as a coach and teacher by telling you how to do the step, then repeating it until it is habit.... Next, we practice the step and the timing, followed by practicing the step, the timing and the lead. Last, I add the style to make it look good on you! One part at a time. Your golf pro would never ask you to practice your swing, stance, grip and timing all at the same time, right? (Fred Astaire Dance Studios 2016)

Echoing the findings from the boys section, an emphasis on qualities and rituals associated with orthodox masculinity, such as sportsmanship, work ethic and discipline continues. For example, an article on male ballet dancers (Mironova 2018) offers accounts of famous, traditionally masculine sportsmen, martial artists and body builders who have incorporated dance into their training, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Rio

Ferdinand. The selection of hyper-masculine examples to legitimate male participation in dance can be seen to challenge the perceived association between dance and femininity. A man may be guided to think if ballet is not too feminine for Arnold Schwarzenegger, he too can participate without becoming seen as feminine. This alignment with sport and masculine actors works to promote heterosexuality.

Cultivating the “(hetero)sexy male dancer”

The solution put forward to challenge men’s perceived reluctance to dance is an image orientated around (hetero)sexy masculinity. This links dance to sexual and romantic relationships with women as a hook to encourage male participation. As one article marketing ballroom dance to men argues:

“I have learned that there are two main motivations for men to learn to dance:

1. To get a woman &
2. To make a woman happy

If I do my job right, your motivation will change because you will love it!” (New Energy Ballroom 2020)

As suggested in the quotation above, the image of the “(hetero)sexy male dancer” is visible as a marketing strategy to men perceived to be in different relationship situations. The first is men in relationships with women where dance is presented as a way to keep their partners happy. The second is men who are single where dance is presented as a means to attract female partners. Both situations assume heterosexuality, and they will now be discussed in turn.

Articles focused on men in relationships emphasize that their wives and girlfriends want them to dance. In fact, one such article posted on the Arthur Murray Dance Centers website bypasses men completely and speaks directly to their female partners. It encourages them to get their male partners to dance by bartering date night activities and suggests that they “Withhold dessert if he skips any part of the evening” (Lynam 2014). The implied withholding of sex is an interesting example of gender power relations, whereby the assumption is that each party must be satisfied.

A number of articles also claim dancing can add something to existing relationships. As the previously cited article explains: “Learning to dance together can do wonderful things for your marriage and ability to communicate. Hopefully this is the start of something great in your relationship” (Lynam 2014). Such articles focus primarily on partner dancing, namely ballroom dancing, which has historically been based around male-female heterosexual partnerships with a lead-follower dynamic (Harman 2019).

Dancing is also marketed as a tool to attract and get physically close to women whom men are not in a relationship with before starting lessons. Several of the articles emphasize that dancing makes men sexually attractive to women. For example, the article from the Fred Astaire Dance Studios (2016) tells readers, “Pay Attention Fellas! Here’s the Reasons Why Women Love Men That Can Dance.” The article suggests dancing is “a woman’s chance to size up a potential mate” and that characteristics women are seeking include “Strength and stamina – leading, physical ability to keep the body moving, rhythm and coordination, balance and control. Intelligence and mental capability – Social ease, etiquette, ability to let go and have fun” (Fred Astaire Dance Studios 2016). The assumption is that dancing offers

men the opportunity to learn and display these characteristics. At the end of the article, men and women share their experiences. Michael K. commented, “You have an automatic ‘in’ - women are always looking for dance partners. You (as a man) have an automatic opportunity to meet them, stand close, hold them.” Moreover, even if male dancers are unsuccessful in attracting single women, dancing is still presented as a win-win situation because dancing men will gain physical contact with a female dance teacher: “If you’re going solo to pick up some moves, you’re going to be learning from and practicing from a professional female partner” (Fred Astaire Dance Studios 2016).

Running across both potential audiences –partnered and single men—is the suggestion dancing can help with men’s (hetero)sexual attraction. As one article proclaimed, “dance is basically a metaphor for sex” (Alaburda 2015). Articles also suggest dancing will improve men’s sexual performance, therefore securing more sex. Hip skills, rhythm, passion, give and take, stamina/endurance, confidence and an adventurous attitude are the key features mentioned in the article “7 Reasons Men Who Can Dance Make Better Lovers” (Alaburda 2015). Thus “internal energy,” confidence and communication are all attributes supposedly transferred from the dance floor to the bedroom.

Nonetheless, the articles are not representing a domineering kind of masculinity, but a refined version of orthodox masculinity. As an article from the Prestige Ballroom (2017) argued, “A man who can dance is suave and respectful.” Refined orthodox masculinity is thus conveyed both through men’s willingness to learn to dance and their behavior on and around the dance floor. The need for restraint is conveyed within some articles, such as in one by BBC Radio 5

Live where Anton du Beke, a professional dancer on *Strictly Come Dancing* was interviewed.

He explained that, "...if you're a bit sort of lascivious they don't like that, if you're a bit too close, don't like that, bit too sweaty, don't like that. Just be nice and dance well, girls will talk about you in the powder room". (One Dance UK 2017)

Being well-mannered and well-groomed are also key features in the image of the ideal male dancer. Yet there is no doubt men are still meant to be in control:

It's a very particular social interaction where you are the guy and she is the girl - you're in charge. You're the leader and she's the follower, no questions asked. This is your time to stand out. You're the initiator. You're perceived as competent, confident, aggressive, athletic, a risk-taker and a guy who can think on his feet. Not just anybody will do; she wants to be held and led by a man. But she also wants to be respected, which only a man with character can do. (Prestige Ballroom, 2017)

In sum, the masculinity portrayed is rather traditional notwithstanding the dancing, grooming and communication elements – it is clear he is still in control, heterosexual, sexually active and confident.

DISCUSSION

Both sets of articles articulate a problem with boys and men who (don't) dance, but the nature of the problem varies. In the articles about boys, dance is said to be historically mislabelled as "just for girls," and despite increasing media visibility, is still positioned as a problematic activity for boys. In the articles about men, the problem is conceived in terms of men not wanting to dance. With the identification of two different problems, different solutions are offered. For boys, the articles consistently recommend making the entire dance experience "boy friendly." They also promote dance as a means for boys to cultivate diverse skills and abilities that enable them to become an "all-singing, all-dancing boy." In contrast,

the articles focusing on men make dance more attractive because it makes men more (hetero)sexually attractive to women. Interestingly, both advertising strategies construct dance as a means to cultivate culturally idealized forms of postfeminist masculinity. We also noted the articles about men tended to speak directly to men (or occasionally their female partners who were assumed to want them to dance), whereas the articles about boys did not address boys directly. Rather, they focused on their parents and dance studio owners.

Offering an amalgamation of diverse qualities associated with both orthodox and inclusive masculinities (Anderson 2009), the figure of the all-singing, all-dancing boy markets an idealized form of postfeminist masculinity. This figure gains legitimacy through associating dance with the assuredly masculine practice of sport. At the same time, the marketing also facilitates the wider physical and emotional development of boys through the cultivation of artistic and aesthetic sensibilities. Opening up a broader multi-faceted image of boyhood masculinity may be readily championed. However, it is important to retain a critical awareness of how dance is subsequently positioned as a means for more extensive physical transformation and self-improvement. As such the marketing and promotion of dance is located within a postfeminist, neo-liberal cultural context wherein there exists an incessant imperative to consume (Brown et al. 2020) and a requirement for men and women to work on their bodies and selves to become more effective citizens (Elias et al. 2017; Riley et al. 2018). The marketing strategies employed by the dance organizations tactically engage with these imperatives and implicitly market dance to parents as an opportunity to get “more for your money.” In other words, within the competitive marketplace of childhood (Lareau 2003), where middle class parents in particular are expected to invest in the development of their children (Hays 1996), learning to dance is positioned as a means for boys to cultivate an even wider array of valuable skills and thus gain a competitive advantage in their personal development. This marketing strategy is also based on the assumption parents having the

required time and money to invest in their son. It leaves little room for boys to take up dance just for fun, and it may be problematic for boys of lower ability who are not able to make the transformation into the all-singing, all-dancing boy.

The articles focusing on men position dance as an activity that makes men more sexually attractive to women. The primary reason given for learning to dance and becoming a (hetero)sexy dancer is this is what women want. This is an explicit example of postfeminist gender relations. Women are depicted in a position of relative power, implicitly directing how men should act. At the same time, men are positioned in a responsive and reactive role, called upon to adapt and update their bodies and selves in line with the proposed desires of women (Gill 2014; Rumens 2017). Moreover, the idealized figure of the (hetero)sexy dancer embodies hybrid elements associated with postfeminist masculinities (Genz et al. 2009; Rumens 2017). On the one hand, women are said to desire seemingly more acceptable elements of orthodox masculinity, such as separate gender roles and for men to still be in charge (at least on the dance floor). Yet men are also told they must perform this role in a civilized and suave manner. The resulting refined orthodox masculinity (be powerful but not lascivious) is seen as benefiting both parties, and it enables dance schools to represent their classes as safe spaces for men and women to interact.

At the same time, men are called on to respond to women's proposed desire for men to be sexy. Numerous commentators on postfeminist media culture evidence an obsession with highly sexualized female bodies in contemporary visual culture (Gill 2012; Wood 2017). The incessant calls, obligations and imperatives for women to be (hetero)sexy are evidently spreading to men and performances of masculinity, with dance identified as an ideal means

or ‘technology of sexiness’ (Evans and Riley 2014) to facilitate active processes of self-work. Such work is presented as a requirement to either keep wives and girlfriends happy or for single heterosexual men to attract female dancers. Yet, the articles present the pay-off for men to cede to women’s supposed wants and desires as the opportunity to be physically close to and potentially “pull” women. From a critical perspective, we see women presented as commodities or objects to be accessed through dance. This disconcerting approach echoes findings from McMains’ (2006) ethnographic study of the DanceSport industry in the U.S., where she documents how female dance teachers were often encouraged to flirt with male customers to maintain their interest and attendance. In both McMains’ and our own study, a transactional relationship between men and women is constructed with men positioned as sexual consumers and dance as a mere means to access women’s bodies.

Of course, this approach misses a range of physical, emotional and social benefits that can emerge from male-female interaction in partner dancing. For example, qualitative research in salsa and ballroom dance classes in Brazil and the UK highlights how the close, interactive elements of partner dancing offer opportunities for collaborative self-discovery, the valuing of embodied connections between dancers, and the cultivation of mental, physical and emotional well-being (Lima and Vieira 2007; McClure 2014). In turn the marketing of dance as a means to meet and keep women happy can be criticized for offering an essentialist and heteronormative account of masculinity with taken-for-granted assumptions all men who wish to dance are heterosexual. Men who identify as gay or bi-sexual and their desires for dancing are rendered completely invisible. Furthermore, no consideration is given to men who wish to dance for reasons not connected to dancing with women, such as escapism, learning new routines and physical repertoires, or for the love of dance (Harman 2019; Risner 2009a).

Problematic constructions of gender relations are also (re)produced through the frequent recommendation to make dance classes boy friendly. At first sight, the boy friendly approach seems to offer well-meaning strategies to challenge traditional constructions of dance as just for girls and to constitute dance as a safe and normal activity for boys. As such, several strategies identified in the data have also been championed in previous dance research. In Holdsworth's (2013) study of the pedagogical strategies employed in teaching a reluctant group of young male dancers in the West Midlands (UK), she documents the creation of a traditional boxing club atmosphere. The exhibition of power moves by professional male dancers, and the initial teaching of dance styles with established masculine capital were successful in accommodating to the men's insecurities, whilst challenging any residue prejudice. Watson and Rodley's (2015) research into an all-boys cheerdance group in Northern England also highlighted how boys negotiated traditional forms of working class masculinity in order to dance and embody agency.

Despite such findings, Gard (2001) raises concerns that boy friendly approaches can be misguided and potentially counterproductive. He argues, in attempting to erase the effeminacy and sexual ambiguity traditionally associated with male dancers, a problematic reliance on strategies that homogenize, essentialize and dichotomize boys and girls, and masculinity and femininity emerges. Indeed, in the current study, articles repeatedly (re)produced the assumption boys are fundamentally different from girls and thus sought to make dance "safe" for boys by providing them conditions to repeatedly assert their difference and distance from girls and femininity. Arguably a short-sighted strategy, it fails to challenge the negative status attributed to femininity and homosexuality, fails to validate the characteristics of male dancers' performances that might be deemed feminine or queer,

and consequently restricts the types of performances male dancers can enact and legitimate (Gard 2001; Risner 2007, 2009a, 2009b).

Gard (2001) and others (Christofidou 2018; Clegg et al. 2019; Risner 2007, 2009a) recommend an alternative approach that recognizes how dance can offer a pedagogical space where male students and practitioners can reflect on and question their own gendered constructions of themselves and others. As Gard (2001) elaborates:

Students might discuss, create, enact and reflect upon movement sequences that explicitly challenge heterosexist assumptions about what qualities male and female bodies can exhibit, and who and under what circumstances they can touch... [and we] might promote thought and discussion about sexism and homophobia. (221)

Yet potential for promoting dance as a tool for social change and personal exploration remains undermined by relying solely on marketing strategies that seek to make dance safe and non-threatening to boys' and men's performances of masculinity and by aligning dance exclusively with orthodox discourses of masculinity.

What is missed, silenced? Intersectionality

In the marketing of dance to boys and men, issues of intersectionality were typically absent or silenced. Intersectionality theory harnesses the lens of race, gender, sexuality, and social class to analyze intersecting social identities and understand complex social representations and lived experiences (Hill Collins and Bilge 2020). Across both boys' and men's data sets, the marketing strategies imbue heterosexual assumptions. Discussion of dancers' nonheterosexual orientations or concerns related to homophobia remain absent. The obvious silencing and unspeakability of homosexuality and homophobia present a particular concern because research points to the obvious presence of many gay men in dance (Gard 2006;

Risner 2009a, 2009b). Avoiding these issues likely relates to a fear that voicing them would reduce the customer-base due to anticipated prejudice from parents. We contend that the lack of acknowledgement of non-heterosexual boys and men in dance is exclusionary, outdated and limits the audience of these communications. Research exploring the intentions of producers and writers of marketing materials is therefore needed.

As well as sexuality, other relevant social divisions are revealed within the messages portrayed in these articles. Social class is not explicitly mentioned, yet within the figure of the refined (hetero)sexy male dancer, a middle-class image is implicitly put forward as aspirational. This image conveys guidance not to become too sweaty (with connotations of manual labor), or out of control. The need for disposable income to pay for dance lessons is rarely explored in the marketing material. In addition, the articles about boys often align with reported efforts that middle-class parents make in investments of various capitals for their children (Lareau 2003). Whiteness, which commentators argue is often presented as an unspoken norm (Pitcher 2014; Bhopal 2018), also characterizes the majority of images accompanying the text along with one or two small details about ethnic minority men finding dancing less uncomfortable. Whiteness is constructed as an unspoken norm and holds a position of relative power (Bhopal 2018) and this is an area for further future analysis in dance.

A piecemeal change: same old marketing strategies with some postfeminist updates

Although attracting more male dancers may be worthwhile (Risner et al. 2018), most marketing materials typically respond to traditional associations between dance and femininity by deploying well-worn, normalizing strategies. Many strategies seek to

safeguard dancers' masculine identities by (re)positioning dance within orthodox discourses of (hetero)masculinity thus continuing to make dance macho (Fisher 2009). We raise concerns this approach is limiting and short-sighted, as it not only fails to disavow the discourses (based upon sex and gender essentialism) that structure much of the prejudice, it also inadvertently reproduces them.

At the same time, the findings of this study document new marketing strategies centered around promotion of the ideal postfeminist figures of the “all singing, all dancing boy” and the “(hetero)sexy male dancer.” Interestingly, these figures embody a wider set of characteristics presented as acceptably masculine. Calls for more extensive and diverse cultivation of boys' embodied masculinities are legitimated through neo-liberal discourses of self-improvement and working on oneself, and postfeminist discourses incite men to tactically negotiate with women to get closer access to their bodies. In summary, we have argued the marketing of dance to boys and men deploys various blends of old and new masculinities which consistently seek to safeguard dancers' masculine identities.

Overall, this study analyzed how dance organizations have attempted to put dance on the agenda for boys and men. We argued the representations in the marketing materials still fall within narrow repertoires; for example, there is little attempt to portray dance spaces as inclusive in relation to sexuality and ethnicity. We therefore call for dance programs and organizations to critically reflect on their dance marketing, especially the spoken and unspoken norms and messages they send. Of course online articles comprise only one source of information about dancing. Further research could examine the interaction of online marketing articles with other strategies used by dance organizations, such as posters, videos,

open days, social media posts and word of mouth. Research could also examine how the marketing messages are received by potential customers.

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ⁱ In this study we viewed ‘articles’ as consisting of ‘marketing posts’ and ‘blogs.’ Marketing posts were typically written by the dance organisations, with no option for reader comments. Blogs were typically written by individuals (i.e. dancers or dance teachers) and invited comments.