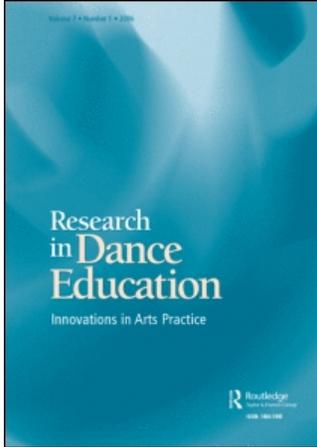


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Rehearsing masculinity: challenging the 'boy code' in dance education

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Rehearsing masculinity: challenging the ‘boy code’ in dance education

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Dance education experiences of boys and male youth are investigated in terms of dominant constructions of contemporary Western masculinity and the potential limitations these hegemonic discourses may place on male participation. Recent research on boys and male youth in dance, although limited, suggests prevailing social stigma, heteronormative assumptions, narrow definitions of masculinity, and internalized homophobia in the field. For boys and young males, however, choosing to dance may be an important vehicle for investigating dominant notions about masculinity, gender, sexual orientation, and the body. From emerging research, this review essay explores the ways in which male youth in dance confront heterocentric bias, gender norms, and gendered bodies, as well as peer pressure and dominant cultural ideology in dance training and education. Focal points include key social questions of difference, pleasure, marginalization, and the larger effects and limitations of contemporary masculinity.

Introduction

This review essay explores dance education experiences of boys and young males in Western theatrical concert dance¹ through a lens of dominant constructions of contemporary masculinity (Pollack, 1999; Kimmel, 2005) and the effects these hegemonic discourses place on dance more broadly. Although research indicates that 50 per cent of male dancers in the United States are gay or bisexual (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997; Hamilton, 1998), the dance community has only recently begun to illuminate the silence that surrounds gay and bisexual males’ experiences in Western theatrical dance and its training. Recent scholarship on male youth in dance education suggests various kinds of prevailing social stigma, including narrow definitions of masculinity, heterosexist justifications for males in dance, and internalized homophobia in the field. Illuminating the experiences of boys and young males in dance education provides an

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important vehicle for researchers interested in exposing dominant notions about masculinity, gender, privilege, sexual orientation, and the body.

From emerging research in the US (Risner, 2002a,b, 2003b, 2007; Risner & Thompson, 2005; Williams, 2003), Australia (Gard, 2001b, 2003a, b, 2006), the United Kingdom (Keyworth, 2001), and Finland (Lehikoinen, 2005), the aim of this paper is to identify and synthesize literature that investigates the ways in which male youth in dance experience heterocentric bias, gender norms, and gendered bodies, as well as social pressures through dominant cultural ideology in dance training and education. Presented as a review of literature, this paper examines social questions of gender, difference, pleasure, marginalization, and the larger effects of contemporary masculinity within the realm of dance education.

At the outset, it is important to note the dearth of research and scholarly attention applied to this burgeoning area of dance education study; much of the literature reviewed here emerges from studies with small sample sizes and therefore drawing firm, generalized conclusions is not the aim. Rather, this review seeks to assemble a useful body of knowledge, albeit limited, providing some evidentiary resources in an under-researched field for further inquiry. In tandem, the nascent development of research in this area also requires a wide-ranging review of literature, providing context and point of reference for readers.

Given this range of literature, I employ the term 'dance education' in this paper to broadly reference education, training, and preparation in Western theatrical concert dance settings. The use of 'dance education' implies formalized dance study in K-12 (age group 5–17 years), teacher preparation programs, postsecondary, tertiary, private studio, and other professional conservatories and schools. Within this context and where possible, I briefly identify each study's particular dance education context and sample description.

Gender and dance education

Dance education and training have long been associated with gender and gender roles in world culture (Kraus *et al.*, 1991; Sanderson, 1996; Posey, 2002; Stinson, 2005). While dance in many cultures has been, and continues to be viewed as an appropriate 'male' activity, the Western European cultural paradigm situates dance as primarily a 'female' art form, and has done so since the sixteenth century (Hasbrook, 1993). Moreover, research indicates that the overwhelming majority of the student population engaged in dance education and training is female.² Dance education researchers have gleaned considerable energy from the area of social foundations in education, especially in the realm of schooling and its impact on gender identity. With hybrid research agendas and methodologies from feminist thought, critical theory, gender studies, critical pedagogy, and most recently, men's studies, dance education literature has begun to focus on the ways in which socially embedded assumptions about gender and dominant structural power relations produce unjust educational and socio-cultural outcomes.³

Gender and its social construction play an important role in students' participation and attitudes regarding dance study.⁴ Beginning as early as three years of age, girls,

unlike boys, often grow up in dance as a taken-for-granted activity of childhood, adopting values 'which teach that it is good to be obedient and silent, good not to question authority or to have ideas which might conflict with what one is being asked to do' (Van Dyke, 1992, p. 120). Thomas (1996) asserts that understanding 'the "feminization" of theatrical dance in the west is critical for studying gender and dance for dance educators, because viewed primarily as a feminine activity, males who dance are always in danger of being classified as effeminate' (p. 507). Due in large part to dualistic thinking which separates mind from body, intellectual activity from physical labor, and dance's close association with girls and women, dance is often perceived as part of the women's domain, whereby its denigration for its dense female population is possible. Historical notions about the body often link the *feminine* with intuition, nature, the body, and evil; conversely, the intellectual, culture, and the mind historically have been perceived as *masculine* (Risner, 2001). Dance education scholar, Edrie Ferdun summarizes:

The term 'dance' is usually associated with girls and feminine qualities by a significant portion of the dominant culture. Labelling dance as female prevents dance from functioning fully as an educational medium. It limits participation by anyone, male or female, who does not want to be associated with stereotyped gender images and practices. (Ferdun, 1994, p. 46)

Some approaches for confronting gender stereotypes in dance teaching and curriculum have been identified.⁵ Central to most of these strategies is a concerted effort to make gender a conscious variable in all aspects of dance education (Ferdun, 1994) and the affirmation of individual differences in gender and culture (Bond, 1994; Kerr-Berry, 1994).

Males in dance often benefit disproportionately because of their gender (Van Dyke, 1996; Garber *et al.*, 2007). Despite women's majority in the dance population, dance does not necessarily offer more opportunities to women than to men (Adair, 1992; Van Dyke, 1996; Samuels, 2001). Because of the seeming legitimacy men bring to dance, although they comprise a definitive minority, males often receive more attention and cultivation in their classes, training, and scholarship awards. Some research indicates that dance teachers may emphasize the need to make boys and young men in dance 'feel more comfortable' by inviting them to actively contribute ideas for movement, music, costumes and choreographic theme (Risner *et al.*, 2004), by developing lesson plans and movement (sports movement, vigorous actions) that allow boys a feeling of ownership (Baumgarten, 2003), and by emphasizing the challenge and satisfaction of jumping higher, shifting weight faster, moving bigger and balancing longer (Gard, 2001b).

In order to cultivate more male participation in dance and dance education, normalizing strategies over the past two decades have frequently centered on noteworthy heterosexual male dancers (Hanna, 1988), masculinist comparisons between sports and dance (Crawford, 1994), and minimizing the significant gay male dance population (Spurgeon, 1999; Risner, 2002a, b). Even so, research continues to indicate that participation in Western European dance remains a culturally suspect endeavor for male adolescents and young adults (Sanderson, 2001; Stinson, 2001; Risner, 2002a; Gard, 2003b, 2006; Williams, 2003; Leihikoinen, 2005; Fisher, 2007).

Dance is for girls: rehearsing masculinity

Current discourses in contemporary masculinity and gender, as well as the findings of leading researchers on boys and young males indicate a direct correlation between post-modern masculine identity and homophobia (Kimmel & Messner, 2001). Understanding more fully the experiences of boys who dance requires particular attention to the parallel relationship between masculinity and homophobic attitudes.

Dance scholar, Ramsay Burt (1995), gives a highly rigorous explication of the cultural, social, and political history of masculine representation in dance, most notably the twentieth century construction of prejudice toward male dancers and the homophobia that today continues to surround gay or straight men in dance. In his seminal text, *The Male Dancer*, Burt (1995) charts the development of homophobia as a means for males to rationalize their close attraction to one another. In this scheme, men can only bond socially when homophobic attitudes accompany such intimacy. In other words, although men might enjoy watching other men dance, in order to do so, they must profess an absolute repulsion for homosexual desire or attraction. Straddling this important boundary between acceptable homosocial bonding and repressed homosexual attraction is the crux for the heterosexual male spectator watching men dance. This notion is a key element in understanding many men's culturally prescribed anxiety toward gay men. It is instructive for dance educators to realize that similarly uncomfortable boundary crossings might reasonably apply for many fathers, siblings and friends attempting to watch or support male dancers. Without facing these foundational aspects of culturally defined masculinity, there is little hope for any real progress. Research in men's studies reveals much the same conclusion; homophobia is a key defining element in contemporary, post-modern masculinity (Kimmel & Messner, 2001).

Within the current politicized debate about boys' achievement and behavior in schools, sociologist Michael Kimmel (2005) notes the importance of examining contemporary masculinity in order to constructively address boys' needs. Although post-modern feminist theory has greatly expanded our understandings of multiple subject positions, as well as the notion of diverse femininities or ways of being female for girls and women, it appears that contemporary masculinity has become even narrower, or like a 'gender straightjacket' for boys and men (Pollack, 1999, p. 6). In the pioneering *Real Boys*, William Pollack (1999) outlines the significance of a cultural re-evaluation of prevailing ideas about boys, men, and masculinity:

The boys I see in schools and in private practice often are hiding not only a range of their feelings but also some of their creativity and originality ... The Boy Code is so strong, yet so subtle, in its influence that boys may not even know they are living in accordance with it. When they do (stray from the code), however, society tends to let them know—swiftly and forcefully—in the form of a taunt by a sibling, a rebuke by a parent or a teacher, or ostracism by classmates. (p. 7)

The gender straightjacket and Boy Code have profound effects on more than just the lives of boys and young males (Katz & Earp, 1999; Pollack, 1999; Kimmel & Messner, 2001; Kimmel, 2005). Unchecked traditional values of masculinity—emotional

detachment, suppression of feelings, feigned bravado and self-confidence, dominance, aggression, and valorized individual achievement—diminish all human experience. Katz and Earp (1999) describe this phenomenon as 'the crisis in masculinity', in which 'behind the bravado and tough guy posturing, there is human complexity ... the results of a sensitive, nuanced experience of the world that rarely airs in public' (Katz & Earp, 1999, p. 3). Sociologist Timothy Curry (2001) reminds readers of the socialization process in which boys learn to be masculine by avoiding all that is feminine, homosexual, or *unmasculine*.

When we consider seriously this mask of dominant masculinity that society imposes on boys and young males, we see more clearly not only the disruptive cultural resistance, but also the courage necessary for our male students to pursue dance study and consider a career in dance. Dance educators would do well to look more closely at the dominant social structures and cultural assumptions that guide our own practice and research, as well as the ways in which our actions wield the power to deplete or enrich an empowering common humanity. Obviously, there are additional complexities involved in unpacking the social experiences and gendered bodies of males in dance: for example, the marginalization of male dancers in a culturally feminized field, combined with the privilege, benefit and authority of being male in a patriarchal society.

What we know about boys who dance

While research on adolescent male dancers and their experiences is scant, what we do know provides cause for concern, linked as it is to dominant notions of masculinity, pervasive homophobia, and boys' neglect and harassment (Gold, 2001; Patrick, 2001; Williams, 2003). Recent research about psychosocial understanding of male adolescent dancers emerges from a quantitative/qualitative study, *Examining Psychosocial Issues of Adolescent Male Dancers*, by Deborah Williams (2003), whose research was conducted from a human development perspective. Using an ethnographic approach, the qualitative portion of the study of 33 boys (12–18 years of age) enrolled in summer intensive dance training programs (at three sites) revealed three significant themes: the participants feel social isolation; have unmet needs; and, despite lack of social support and negative experiences, they persevere in their dance study (Williams, 2003, p. iii).

Williams notes the following aspects of social isolation among her subjects:

- a lack of same-gender peers/teachers in the dance environment
- a need to talk about issues but not having a supportive person to talk with
- in some cases, having family members who did not support or discouraged their desire to dance
- a need to keep their dance life a secret from academic peers
- fear of or actual teasing and harassment by peers
- perceptions of homosexuality regardless of the dancer's sexual orientation
- teachers, parents, and directors attempting to justify dance activities by relating them to sports. (p. 57)

Williams' accompanying qualitative interview data illuminate the boys' social isolation and their frustration with misguided efforts by teachers, parents and directors to justify dance for males in traditionally masculinist ways. As one participant stated, 'I'm an artist, not a football player! Why does everyone keep insisting on comparing me to a sports star who takes ballet for exercise as though that should make it alright to dance?' (Williams, 2003, p. 59). In previous work, I have been critical of these kinds of hegemonic approaches (Risner, 2002a, b) and have advocated, with others (Crawford, 1994; Gard, 2001b, 2003b), for more rigorous questioning and informed strategies that focus on greater understanding of dominant notions of masculinity, societal stigma about males in dance, and that dance education researchers attempt to unearth cogent, relevant research about the experiences of males who dance. Williams' study, though limited in scope and generalization, provides valuable information for future research.

While male adolescent dancers indicate the necessity of perseverance (in their words: *a love for dance*) for confronting negative stereotypes and social isolation outside the dance studio, it appears that an internalized homophobia within dance education may be powerful as well. Teachers, directors, and peers sometimes use homophobic language in order to emphasize the importance of adhering to strictly masculine behavior, gesture, and movement execution. For example, the male teacher who coaches a young male dancer to execute movement more strongly states, 'You're a beautiful dancer, but you dance like a fag. We'll need to show you how to dance like a man' (Williams, 2003, p. 71). For another participant struggling to affirm his gay identity, the pejorative societal stereotype of the gay male dancer looms largely in his consciousness when he states, 'I recently came out [as gay] to my friends and family. I feel guilty because I let my fellow dancers down. I'm exactly what everyone thinks male dancers are. I'm ashamed of that' (Williams, 2003, p. 60). This kind of shame or low social worth is typical of internalized homophobia (Margolies *et al.*, 1987).

Recent research in dance education and physical education has begun to explore the ways in which hegemonic masculinity, as an institution, can be challenged through the participation and experiences of boys and young males in dance (Gard, 2001b, 2003a, b; Keyworth, 2001; Risner, 2002a, b). Central to this work is the notion that dance education may serve as an important means for disrupting dominant cultural assumptions about acceptable ways of moving for males and to challenge cultural stereotypes about male dancers and non-heterosexual modes of sexuality. This is not to say that all boys and young men in dance consciously enter the dance studio with the intention of challenging dominant paradigms of masculinity, nor can it be denied that some males in dance reaffirm narrow definitions of masculinity and heterosexism through their actions and discourses. Rather, this area of research suggests that the experiences of males in dance education can provide powerful insights into hegemonic assumptions about dance, gender and sexuality, as well as dominant codes that govern the former.

Saul Keyworth, in his critical autobiographical (Jackson, 1990) study of himself and nine male participants, found significant feelings of isolation, both for himself and his

physical education study's male dance participants who acknowledge their pejorative status, as the 'dancing queens' on campus (Keyworth, 2001). For this qualitative study, Keyworth employed a 'collective story' methodology (Richardson, 1990; Barone, 1992), comparing his own critical narrative with those of his peers engaged in dance study within a teacher training program for physical educators. Although participants in this narrative inquiry enjoyed their dance experiences, many were reluctant to pursue further dance study away from the 'safety' of a university sport and athletic program. While optimistic that more males in dance will be sensitized to 'question and ultimately subvert their own gendered conditioning', Keyworth concludes that participants will 'continue to carry their gendered legacy' (p. 133). More simply, the power of narrowly defined masculinity and its 'boy code' continues to police the behaviors of young men, regardless of the joy and pleasure they experience while dancing. This contribution to the literature opens an important area for future inquiry investigating male pleasure and satisfaction in dance education.

Michael Gard's (2001b, 2003a, b) recent work focuses on the possibilities that dance education offers for 'disruptive and discomfiting experiences', as well as pleasurable ones, for students in schools and universities, more specifically, exhuming the taken-for-grantedness of gendered male bodies and heterosexual embodiment (Gard, 2003a, p. 211). In his unpublished doctoral thesis investigating the discursive construction of male theatrical dancers in Western culture, Gard conducted interviews with 19 male dancers of differing ages and career achievements (Gard, 2001a). Within this research the notion of gendered investments, or committed ways of deploying the body, in dance education are explored. In a life history narrative culled from this study with Ralph (pseudonym), a professional male dancer, Gard (2003b) found an interesting correlation between the absence of 'enjoyment' or pleasure and an acute awareness that 'boys don't dance' (p. 109). This kind of love/hate relationship with dance stems from the idea that males are enculturated to manifest a particular kind of body and a specific way of moving that evidences a strict heterosexual regime (or set of governed practices). A highly proficient professional dancer, Ralph's narrative account of dancing is one of repeated ambivalence, 'bereft of any talk of bodily pleasure' (p. 113). Gard argues that this kind of uncertainty hinges upon a struggle to reconcile enjoyment of dancing with other bodily investments more consistent and characteristic of dominant male heterosexuality, like Ralph's skills in rugby and surfing. The study suggests that challenging dominant gender norms, whether intentional or not, requires an intense internal struggle with external forces and expectations.

Previous qualitative research on male participation in dance that I conducted with six introductory level male undergraduate dance students (average age 19) in the US revealed five themes that may illuminate a better understanding of social stigmatization: homophobic stereotypes, narrow definitions of masculinity, heterosexist justifications for male participation, the absence of positive male role models (straight and gay), and internalized homophobia among male dance students (Risner, 2002a). Within the small convenience sample of this action research study, it should be noted that three of the participants in this study self-identified as heterosexual; two self-identified as gay and one as bisexual. While it is unknown

how representative this study is to the whole of male undergraduates in dance education, the findings provide some fairly significant insights.

Resisting cultural norms for these young men began with confronting homophobic stereotypes held by their own families and peers, in which the participants' negative preconceptions of male dancers figured prominently as each contemplated and began dance study. At the same time, participants later spoke eloquently about the personal satisfaction they felt while studying dance. Similar to the work of Gard (2003b), Keyworth (2001), and Lehtikoinen (2005), understanding the ways in which young men in dance balance these competing narratives deserves further examination. Although males' dance education appears to be an important source of joy, satisfaction, and affirmation, their masculinity and sexual orientation is repeatedly questioned and surveilled. Complicated meta-narratives may also require equally complicated coping mechanisms for young men in dance (Risner, 2003b). Justifying their participation in dance emerges as an important arbiter of masculinity for young men who dance. Justification, or 'excuses' as Gard refers to them, often result in heteronormative half-truths; that is to say that a 'real male' would never actively choose dance study on his own volition. As AJ (pseudonym), whose degree program requires coursework in dance, acknowledges, 'You don't have to show that you're interested, but of course I am. I did use it [the requirement] as an excuse with my friends back home, my family' (Risner, 2002a, p. 87). Like Williams' study of male adolescents discussed earlier, many of the male students described their frustration with the lack of positive male role models in dance, citing the need for more affirming examples of men as dance teachers, professional dancers, as well as popular media images of men dancing. Without strong role models to challenge narrow views of masculinity, some of the participants suggested, homosexual stereotypes become so embedded in the culture's association with dance that young males in dance accept the homophobic responses their dancing frequently garners (Risner, 2002a, p. 88).

While there is little doubt that the physical nature of dance is commensurate with that of football or soccer, discourses that colonialize dance in traditionally masculinist ways obfuscate critical issues of homophobia and societal stigma directed toward male dancers (Gard, 2001b; Stinson, 2001; Garber *et al.*, 2007; Risner, 2007). With the intention of making dance more accessible for boys and palatable to their peers, family and culture, these discourses regularly position dance for males as acceptable only as sport. Nor is it doubted, for those participants who are straight, the ontological significance of their heterosexual orientation and the ways in which dancing may challenge some of their deepest feelings about what it means to be male. However, masculinist justifications frequently serve to not only buttress homophobic stereotypes, but also to erase the otherwise positive and pleasurable experiences of young men in dance. First, why do these young men engaged in dance study—gay and straight—reaffirm some of the very stereotypes they repeatedly confront themselves? Second, why do these men feel it necessary to deny the presence of gay/bisexual men in dance education in order to legitimate their own participation? While one can certainly acknowledge the kind of courage required of the young men like those discussed in these various studies, it is also important to recognize the myriad ways in

which denigrating some people serves to privilege others—in this case, heterosexual males and dominant notions of masculinity.

Dominant masculinity and gay males in dance

For young gay males, the protection offered by the dance studio often carries the cost of isolation for a number of reasons (Risner, 2002b; Williams, 2003). First, young girls significantly outnumber their male counterparts in dance. Second, both gay and straight boys who suffer from negative stigma associated with males in dance often go to great lengths to display traditional heterosexual markers, often isolating themselves further from peers, family and their own sexual orientation or questioning. Leaving the dance studio often means returning to the embarrassment, humiliation, and contempt of being labelled the 'pansy', 'fag', or 'queer'. Although studies are limited, research appears to indicate that young gay and bisexual males in dance receive far less parental/family encouragement and support for dancing than their heterosexual peers (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997; Risner, 2002a).

Young boys' avoidance of their homosexual orientation is facilitated by social devices perpetrated by a pervasively heterocentric culture, especially when considering the overwhelmingly ridiculed status of 'sissy boys' in American society. Education researcher Eric Rofes (1995) notes that the widely accepted sissy/jock paradigm operates as a key element in male youth culture, whereby traditional masculinity is narrowly described in highly misogynist ways. Boys in dance, unlike their male peers in athletics and team sports, are participating in an activity that already sheds social suspicion on their masculinity and heterosexuality. For gay male youth in dance, coping with this double bind situation (marginal in a marginalized field), is a complicated dilemma. While there is vast individual variation, many young gay males tend to begin homosexual activity during early or mid-adolescence; similar activity for lesbian females begins around age 20 (Anderson, 1995, p. 18). Because adolescents are only beginning to possess the capacity for abstract thought or formal reasoning skills to cognitively integrate their sexual experiences, dance educators must realize that boys and especially young gay males in dance are extremely vulnerable to gendered criticism, homophobic attitudes, anti-gay slurs, and the absence of positive gay male role models.

Young gay males may also develop internalized homophobia, in which self-hate, low self-esteem, destructive behavior, and further confusion characterize their underlying attitudes and conduct. Many gays, incapable of resisting persistent heterocentrism and homophobic prejudice, internalize negative attitudes about homosexuality, themselves, and other gay people (Lehne, 1976; Margolies *et al.*, 1987). As Luke (self-identified as gay) told me, 'I never talk to men in class ... we [speaking for himself as a gay man] don't identify with other gay guys. This sounds stupid, but I really don't like gay people that often ... who wants to talk to a bitchy male dancer?' (Risner, 2002a, p. 89). When the gay and bisexual participants were asked if they felt dance was a supportive environment for gay men, the group believed that dance provides an open and supportive atmosphere for gays, though

each struggled to articulate how they experienced that support. One participant summarized, 'There's some sense of support in that nobody's calling you names. It's not hostile' or 'It's a big escape in the studio ... when I come out of dance class I feel it all back on me' (Risner, 2002a, p. 90). The emerging picture this small sample of young gay/bisexual men paints appears to be a contradictory landscape characterized by a strong sense of gay/bisexual support and affirmation on the one hand, but an internalized homophobia on the other. This landscape, when combined with the homophobic attitudes characteristic of homosocial bonding, tends to isolate gay males from their straight male classmates, as well as from each other. Although speculative at this time, taken in conjunction with other research findings in this review, this small picture may be showing us that young males in dance—gay and straight—tend to distance themselves from gay males and homosexuality at all costs.

This kind of environment is stressful and often threatening for gay and bisexual male students, particularly since they are vulnerable young people who are struggling to claim and affirm their sexual orientation in an often hostile atmosphere of homosexual denigration. For closeted gay youth, the weight of this burden over a long period of time causes many other psychological and emotional hardships, though at the time, recognition of these dilemmas may be unacknowledged (Besner & Spungin, 1995, p. 95).

Summary: challenging the 'boy code'

The aim of this paper has been to identify and synthesize literature on male youth experiences in dance education, with particular attention to social pressures of dominant masculinity, or the 'boy code' including questions of gender, difference, pleasure, marginalization, and the larger effects of contemporary masculinity within the realm of dance education. Much of the literature reviewed emerges from recent studies with small sample sizes; drawing generalized conclusions has not been the aim. Instead, this review has sought to assemble a useful, although limited, body of knowledge, to provide some significant resources in an under-researched field for further inquiry. To conclude, let me briefly summarize the larger salient points and make a few recommendations for future research.

First, it is critical to understand that dehumanizing discourses and their continued implications for boys who dance are part of a much larger cultural re-evaluation, one I believe compellingly requires participation by the dance education community. Much of the prevailing societal stigma associated with boys in dance can be traced to powerful, long-standing meta-narratives that, though sometimes well-intentioned, have reproduced a deleterious mythology about *all* males in dance, regardless of sexual orientation. Until recently, many of these narrowly defined heterocentric paradigms have gone unquestioned. Future research might include larger studies on boys' affective domains and self-concepts in diverse dance education environments.

Second, while the appeal of cultivating a larger male population in dance, one that more closely resembles its particular community, school, and culture, is admirable

and worthwhile, denying the presence of gay and bisexual male dancers is likely to be pragmatic and short-sighted. Though well-intentioned, masculinist comparisons have most probably forfeited opportunities for educating the dance profession about homophobic prejudice and heterocentric assumptions. When recruitment strategies ignore important issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and homophobic attitudes, dance education may unintentionally reproduce narrow derogatory stereotypes of gay dancers, and in so doing, demean the entire male dance population, its diverse contribution, and the field of dance as a whole. The field would benefit significantly from research that investigates its current male population's attraction and retention to dance training and education.

Third, a number of liberatory pedagogical approaches have been identified that overlap critical feminist approaches to teaching dance, including choreographic exploration of the body as a living laboratory (Arkin, 1994); use of African dance to encourage male and female students to express themselves through gender-flexible movements (Kerr-Berry, 1994); openly discussing gender identification and the experiences of dance students (Risner, 2002b); and exploring gender-bias, sexism, homophobia, elitism, and power relations (Horwitz, 1995). Based on these studies, future pedagogical research might investigate approaches for teaching practices that address non-gender-specific movement, gendered bodies, and the social construction of gender, and gender identity.

Finally, dance educators would benefit from taking an inventory of their own unwitting heterosexist beliefs, gender assumptions, and taken-for-granted actions that unintentionally create an environment of shame, humiliation or embarrassment for males in the studio and classroom.⁶ Although dance teachers probably understand their authority and power as positive role models for dancers, as well as the respect teachers inherently garner from their students, it is important to identify teaching methods and in-class language and practices that reinforce narrow definitions of femininity and masculinity. Research in the future might investigate teacher and student perceptions of sexist and homophobic practices in dance education and training.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that 'boy code' extremes (individualism, independence, emotional detachment, and bravado), by social osmosis, may also influence our own individual interactions, relationships and teaching practices. By definition, dominant discourses prevail and hold sustained sway because they often remain unquestioned. It is my intention that this review at minimum heightens readers' sensitivity to issues of males in dance education, and more specifically, motivates awareness of the need for continued questioning and future inquiry.

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, the term 'dance' is intended as a synonym for concert dance, theatrical dance, and Western European dance.
2. Though seemingly obvious, see for example Adair, 1992; Van Dyke, 1992, 1996; Sanderson, 2001; Higher Education Arts Data Survey/HEADS, 2003.
3. The last decade's work in dance education scholarship and research in this area includes Arkin, 1994; Clark, 1994; Horwitz, 1995; Marques, 1998; Shapiro, 1998, 2004; Smith, 1998; Green,

- 2000, 2002–03, 2004; Keyworth, 2001; Schaffman, 2001; Doi, 2002; Risner, 2002a, 2004a, 2005; Blume, 2003; Gard, 2003a, b; Letts & Nobles, 2003.
4. Social construction of gender in dance education receives interrogation in the following important works: Stinson *et al.*, 1990; Flintoff, 1991; Van Dyke, 1992; Cushway, 1996; Sanderson, 1996, 2001; Stinson, 1998a, b, 2001; Gard, 2001b, 2003a, 2006; Green, 2001, 2002–03, 2004; Risner, 2002a, b, 2004.
 5. Readers may be interested in approaches for confronting gender issues and inequity in dance teaching and curriculum as articulated by Arkin, 1994; Bond, 1994; Crawford, 1994; Daly, 1994; Ferdun, 1994; Kerr-Berry, 1994; Risner, 2002b; Clark, 2004; Dils, 2004; Stinson, 2005.
 6. See for example Morrow and Gill (2003), documenting heterosexism and homophobia in physical education.

Notes on contributor

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