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Sexual Orientation and Male Participation in Dance Education: Revisiting the Open Secret

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Sexual Orientation and Male Participation in Dance Education

Revisiting the Open Secret

Doug Risner, Ph.D., M.F.A.

Abstract

This interpretive inquiry explores the ways in which young adult males experience and make meaning of the social stigmatization associated with men in dance. General procedures for this study include interviews, confidential surveys, and field observations with six undergraduate male students (three self-identified as heterosexual, two as gay, one as bisexual) enrolled in beginning level dance technique courses at a public university in the United States. The participants' narratives reveal a deeper understanding of social stigmatization as articulated through stories that lace together five important themes: homophobic stereotypes, narrow definitions of masculinity, heterosexist justifications for male participation, the absence of positive male role models (straight and gay), and inter-

nalized homophobia. The findings of the study suggest that a more responsive pedagogical path for confronting homophobic attitudes and social stigmatization should begin with openly discussing the fact that gay and bisexual males represent half of the male population in dance, and second, seeking to understand the larger social context male youth and teens encounter as dance students.

Although the field of dance is generally more accepting of the homosexual lifestyle, there are many indications that male participation in dance remains a culturally suspect endeavor for male adolescents, teens, and young adults.¹⁻³ For dance educators, encouraging male involvement has historically included well-intentioned, but frequently heterosexist approaches that idealize noteworthy heterosexual male dancers,⁴ focus on masculinist comparisons between male athletes (presumably heterosexual) and male dancers,⁵ and encourage greater male participation by minimizing or ignoring the significant population of gay men in dance.⁶

While I am somewhat sympathetic to these practical appeals for increasing male involvement, I believe in actuality that these approaches most likely make matters worse, exacerbating the already tenuous situation and homophobic stereotyping that males in dance repeatedly encounter. All stereotypes begin to a certain degree with some particular aspect of a certain population, which is then applied or *essentialized*, to the group as a whole. But at the same time, these assumptions about men and

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young male adults in dance education are part of what D. A. Miller describes as the “open secret,” a knowledge that is present and understood, yet unspoken and unarticulated. This secret is, in Miller’s words, “a secret that everyone hides because everyone holds.”⁷

Although recent research indicates that gay and bisexual men comprise half the male population in dance in the US,^{1,8} serious scholarship and pedagogical study rarely address the experiences of gay men and boys in dance education. While we know and accept that many of our male students and colleagues in dance education are gay, we rarely discuss the fact critically in popular or scholarly discourse.

This interpretive inquiry explores the ways in which young adult males experience and make meaning of social stigmatization associated with men in dance. More specifically, what do males in dance perceive as the cultural meanings of sexual orientation through their experiences in dance education? How do young males in dance express their sexual orientation and what is the profession’s response to such expressions? What can we learn from these voices about what it means to be gay, straight, or bisexual in a homophobic world?

Methodology

Qualitative interpretive research takes as one of its central tenets that research should render a larger understanding of what it is to be human in the world. Stinson and Anijar assert the aim of interpretive research is to elicit meaning and understanding rather than proving or disproving facts.⁹ The small sample size for this inquiry is characteristic of many qualitative research studies. Miles and Huberman note that qualitative samples “tend to be purposive, rather than random.”¹⁰ My concern in this project is “personal meaning making” and the ways in which young men make sense of their experiences in dance study. Given these assumptions, I sought a methodology that would retain the richness of individual awareness contained in the dancers’ narratives.

Acknowledging that the researcher can never be truly objective, the purpose of qualitative research in Donmoyer’s words, “is not to subsume particular events under general categories but to alter the general categories and constructs to better accommodate the novelty of the particulars.”¹¹ Narrative research reveals the plurality of our human experience as evidenced by the singularity of individual existence.¹² Within this

methodology larger themes of human experience present themselves and other realities can be embraced. To perform this research in a manner that was in agreement with my assumptions and research philosophy, I chose a methodology drawn from phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry.¹³

Procedures

The general procedures for this study included interviews with seven male dancers in beginning level dance technique courses I taught at a public university in the southeastern United States. Of the six participants who completed the study, three self-identified as heterosexual, two as gay, and one as bisexual. After the initial series of interviews, one participant elected to discontinue involvement in the study. Of the remaining six, four were Caucasian, one African-American, and one Latino. For five of the six men, dance technique courses were required for either their majors in theater or education, or by their dance minor. The participants ranged in ages from 18 to 26 years of age, with the majority in the lower, 18 to 19 year, portion of this range.

Each participant was interviewed twice; interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Although interview questions focused on the dancers’ experiences as young men in dance education, the interview format was posed in a semi-structured, open-ended fashion, allowing the dancers to speak candidly about themselves and their experiences. Interview questions that would result in specific “yes” or “no” answers were kept to a minimum, as were highly specific questions other than biographical information. However, a confidential survey instrument was administered at conclusion of the study for the purposes of internal validity and discrepant data.

It is important to acknowledge that performing research with one’s students is not without its own unique set of problems and ethical quandaries. As Green has suggested about this type of dual-role relationship, “researchers must be self-reflexive and continually seek outliers and discrepant cases.”¹⁴ Although conducting research with one’s students may sensitize researchers to their ethical obligations as both teacher and researcher, these concerns do not invalidate the findings of this study, but instead more clearly frame its interpretation and future scholarly reference.

For the purposes of this research, I posed broad questions to allow the dancers’ voices to

explore their own personal histories and meaningful experiences as men enrolled in professional dance study. Questions asked included:

- What prompted you to take a dance technique class?
- Did you have an interest in dance?
- Before taking this course, what did you think about dance?
- Can you speak about studying dance as a male?
- What's your experience?
- Could you talk about what, if any, images you had about male dancers before this class?
- What, if anything, is enjoyable about dancing?
- What, if anything, is uncomfortable about studying dance?

Second interviews provided an opportunity to revisit significant issues heard earlier, and therefore were often more individualized. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Transcriptions were returned to the participants for their own self-editing, deletion, or addition, where appropriate. After reading the transcriptions a number of times, coding them, and consulting my field observations, I edited the interview material before proceeding further with the analysis. The analysis of the data generated was based on procedures of interpretive inquiry.^{13,15} Extraneous material was eliminated and emerging themes in each narrative account were identified. An independent researcher then verified the edited reductions.

From the reductions, the young men's stories were brought together conversationally for further discussion. The emergent themes reveal a wider perspective of what it means to be a male in dance education. These accounts are overlapping clusters of experience that spiral around and between the following themes: homosexual stereotypes, ways of justifying male involvement in dance, the absence of male role models in dance, internalized homophobia, and divergent social bonds in the dance studio. For the purposes of this paper, I will discuss these thematic clusters separately, all the while intimating the complex tapestry the male dancers' narratives weave.

Preconceptions

All of the participants spoke at great length about popular attitudes and preconceptions of male dancers in US culture. Unsurprisingly, they told me that, "Girls dance. Guys shouldn't dance, if they

do they're gay, and if they're gay, that's wrong." "They're more effeminate." "Only gay guys dance." "I was very interested in dancing, but you know boys don't take dance classes." And finally Jacob (pseudonyms used throughout) offered a more clinical answer, "If you were to take a survey of all male dancers, there would be a correlation between homosexuality and male dancers."

When asked where these preconceptions come from, many responses indicate the important role family members, males in particular, play in shaping their attitudes about men and young males in dance. Drew traces his preconceptions to his father and grandfather:

They're very.... they have a military background and they're very men's men. My grandfather told me that 'you need to watch out because there are plenty of fruits.' He thinks homosexuals are dangerous. He's often spouting derogatory remarks, like 'fag-got' specifically.

Travis, a former Marine, tells me:

My dad said I shouldn't take it because sissies take it. Everyone in our family was in the Marine Corps. And if I mentioned I wanted to take up dance, my dad said, 'only queers do that.' So, I ran track and played baseball instead. But I always wanted to take dance, but everyone would always call me a sissy if I did.

Brett, who describes himself as "openly gay" at the university, says of his father, "He's racist and sexist and homophobic, so he's not really the best person to talk to. I wouldn't have ever asked him for dance classes."

Others draw a connection to the attitudes their male friends hold about men in dance. A.J., a dancer and actor, explains:

I think it was really from my peers, people making fun of dance. That 'middle school' kind of mentality where... you know, everything that is not the norm is wrong. Boys play football, play all sports. And gym is the best class. If you're not playing sports, that's a sissy.

Early in the semester Jacob feared that if it became common knowledge that he was enrolled in dance, his freshmen dorm would think he was gay. Travis shared harassment difficulties he encountered throughout the semester with his roommate.

All of the participants voiced negative preconceptions of male dancers and societal barriers for young men interested in dance, but at the same

time each spoke eloquently about the satisfaction they felt while studying dance. Some examples:

To be able to use your body for expression... I think it's interesting and it's a good challenge.

When I leave dance class, I'm sweating more than my workout on the treadmill. I love dancing.

It's exciting. I look forward to it, because I love moving to music, the drums, that energy.

So how is it these young men balance these competing narratives? On the one hand, their dance education is an important source of joy, satisfaction, and affirmation. While on the other, their masculinity and sexual orientation is repeatedly questioned and surveilled.

Justifying Male Participation in Dance

Complicated meta-narratives require equally complicated coping mechanisms for the participants. As each struggles to bridge individual affirmation with societal stigmatization, their words tell multiple stories of justifying male participation in dance. Quite interestingly, their stories do not break on lines of sexual orientation, which is to say I found no characteristically straight or gay justification narratives. While their modes of coping with negative stereotypes differ, most participants negotiate stigmatization with solutions that conform to dominant definitions of masculinity.

Drew, A.J., and Brett say that if not required, they most likely would not have enrolled in dance initially. Luke, although he has always been interested in dance, cites the requirement as the major reason he pursues dance study. A.J. acknowledges, "If you *have* to take dance, rather than if you just chose to take it, it frees you up. By it being a requirement, you don't have to show that you're interested, but of course I am." Confessing further he reveals, "I think I did use it (the requirement) as an excuse with my friends back home, my family. I wouldn't talk about my dance classes much, but I'd be like, 'I have to take it; it's required.'"

Luke's words, "Yes! I *have* to take dance!" reaffirm the importance of the requirement as an alibi or excuse. Travis and Jacob rationalize their strong attraction to dance study by situating dance, at least from their vantage point, as a masculine, heterosexual sport activity. Travis declares, "I do justify it to others. Most people have misconceptions of dance, that only weak people take it so they won't have to play sports, that dancers couldn't play football. I let them know it's just as

difficult as sports. It's more than sports!" Jacob reminds me that his dorm knows that he plays soccer and that he has a girlfriend. In his words, "I guess they just think I'm weird, you know, instead of gay." A.J. also made clear not only that dance is required for his degree, but also his deep and profound attraction to both women and sports.

I have little doubt that the physical nature of dance is commensurate with that of football or soccer. Nor do I doubt, for those participants who are straight, the ontological significance of their heterosexual orientation. However, I do find it problematic that justifying male participation in dance requires testimonials that clearly serve to not only buttress homophobic stereotypes, but also to erase the experience of half the male population in dance.

First, why do these young men, gay and straight, reaffirm the very stereotypes they repeatedly confront themselves? Second, why do these men feel it necessary to deny the presence of gay and bisexual males in dance education in order to legitimate their own participation? While we can certainly acknowledge the enormous courage required of these young men to confront social stigmatization, we must also recognize the myriad ways in which denigrating some people serves to privilege others – in this case, heterosexual males.

Male Role Models in Dance

Many of the participants describe their frustration with the lack of positive male role models, including male peers, faculty, and popular images of male dancers. Drew and A.J., both actors and dancers, use theatre as an example. Drew believes:

You see acting everyday – TV, movies, commercials. We get to know these actors. You know that guy's an actor, he's straight and he's got a wife. But we don't see dancers, unless you're flipping through PBS (television). So, we don't get a chance to know male dancers. Obviously, not all men in dance are gay.

A.J. reiterates, "I think the reason males don't dance is that guys don't have any role models in dance. In theatre there's Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, whoever. I think it's a shame." Luke voices his concern about the absence of male examples, "It's tough. I don't see men dancing. Don't get me wrong, I love my women teachers, but I feel like, 'am I supposed to move that way?' No role models, it's you [the researcher] and Tyrell [another male instructor]." Travis echoes a similar position, "I mean my best friends are girls, but in dance, because I'm the only guy or only one of a couple of guys, sometimes I feel I can't relate. That's why I wanted to be in your [the

researcher's] class. I feel more comfortable with a male teacher." Brett summarizes, "I'm glad that I have a male teacher. I like it. And also, just because you're [the researcher] a male and you're gay, you're a very good role model for me."

Accepting Homophobia – Internalizing the Stereotype

Without strong role models to challenge narrow views of gender identity, Drew suggests that homosexual stereotypes become so imbedded in dominant definitions of masculinity that young males in dance often become complacent. He says:

I didn't really have any concept of homosexuality in elementary school. It wasn't until middle school that these stereotypes started coming out and... by that time I was so accustomed to them, I thought it was ridiculous. I accepted that people feel that way.

A.J., who is self-identified as straight, confesses:

I learned not to come [to dance class] too early because then you have to sit in the hallway, where you know the basketball players are walking. So I knew not to come that early. I'd be sure I'd get there so that I could just walk right in. It was just kind of uncomfortable. You know what I'm saying? I wasn't like frightened about what they would think, I just wanted to keep a low profile.

Oh, and when the teacher would leave the door open, I'd get really embarrassed because all the sports jocks would stop and look in at the girls. And I'd feel like, you know, "oh, God they're looking at me doing... frappes." That was embarrassing.

When I was in ballet I was really embarrassed by carrying around my ballet shoes and stuff. Walking toward the gym but not going into the gym, but going into the dance studio. Like a couple of my friends had this joke where after dance class we'd act like we had just come from weightlifting. Now it doesn't really bother me that much. I'm so used to it.

Travis, who came out to me in our final interview, resists this kind of complacency:

Everyone always assumes that men in dance are gay, like Bridget. She automatically knew that all the men in our class were gay, that's what she said. She wasn't sure if I was gay, but assumed I was because I was taking this class. But it doesn't get talked about – you know, the gay thing. That makes me so angry.

Jacob (who identifies as straight) and Brett (who identifies as gay) seem to have accepted the homophobic responses they often garner, but also attempt to minimize the personal impact of such. Jacob admits, "It's really annoying, but I don't give it much heed. I mostly try to avoid those people altogether, but it still hurts, especially in the dorm." Brett confides:

In high school I got called faggot everyday of my life. Now I make sure I surround myself with people and situations where I won't experience homophobic remarks or actions. But I mean it's going to happen, just walking down the street, people still drive by and yell 'faggot' or 'queer.' I just accept it's gonna happen.

Divergences

For the remainder of this paper, I want to focus upon areas of this research in which the participants' narratives appear to divide on lines of sexual orientation. But at the same time, and for a number of reasons, I am wary about making generalizations about the differing experiences of gay and bisexual males and straight males in dance education.

First, because if feminist theory and identity politics has taught us anything about human liberation, we know that drawing our own particular lines in the sand has frequently produced divisive territorial disputes and unnecessary fragmentation. In order to address homophobia in a meaningful way, we will need to bridge larger concerns about sexism, gender inequity, and dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity. Second, it should be clear from the examples above that homophobic prejudice is experienced by both gay and straight male dancers. Therefore, I am reluctant to distance gay dancers from their heterosexual counterparts, or to place these concerns solely on the plate of gay and lesbian dance educators.

Having said that however, I do believe we have much to learn from the divergence of these stories. From the participants' narratives, as well as my observations of these students in class, it appears that important relationships and social bonds forged in dance class tend to break on lines of sexual orientation, as does parental support and encouragement for these young men.

Social Bonds in the Studio *The Straight Experience*

A.J., Drew, and Jacob (all self-identified as straight) tended to stick together throughout the entire semester. Their support of one another was evident in many instances – helping one another with

movement combinations, cheering each other on across the floor, partnering with one another on alignment experiences, and working collaboratively on midterm and final practical projects. Drew shares his connection with other straight males:

A.J. and I... we always try to stick together. We've kind of resolved to take our dance classes together. I'm not comfortable with girls so it's nice to have another boy, another person in the class I know.

Jacob relays that:

I share a locker with Drew. We talk a lot and socialize. I've tried to make more of an attempt to introduce myself to the girls, but I usually go across the floor with him, and well, you're in a room with a number of very attractive young women. Sometimes you can't help where your eyes go. So, I usually dance with A.J., you know 'high fives' and all.

A.J. and his roommate (who also studies dance) practice together outside of class a couple times per week and often frequent the local dancewear store together, so that neither has to go alone. A.J. says, "We'll go to pick out new jazz shoes or ballet shoes if we need them, or warm-up clothes. It's fun. I'm sure that some of the people think we're gay."

The Gay and Bisexual Experience

For Travis, Luke, and Brett (all self-identified as gay or bisexual), the story is quite different. None formed important bonds with other men in dance – straight or gay. Sometimes this was caused by the powerful ways in which heterosexual male dancers exclude them by forming close bonds with one another. Travis feels a profound sense of alienation from all of the males in his technique classes. He says:

I've tried but... I feel like I'm an outcast in class with the guys. I don't know why. Sometimes, I feel they treat me differently. They stick together. So, I've bonded with the women. My best friends are girls anyway.

Observing Travis and his heterosexual peers in class, I have witnessed the kind of treatment he describes.

For straight males, homosocial bonding, Sedgwick notes, requires a complete disavowal of homosexual attraction and necessitates a homophobic attitude in order to sustain such intimacy.¹⁶ Recent research in men's studies finds that homophobia is a defining element in contempo-

rary, heterosexual masculinity.¹⁷ In the dance studio, this may explain the rationale for A.J., Drew, and Jacob's exclusively heterosexual bonding.

At other times it seems that gay males are disinterested in developing relationships with their male peers. What's more, they frequently have very little positive to say about other gay men in dance. Luke tells me, "I never talk to men in class. I prefer straight women because they're not as difficult to talk to as gay men." When I ask Luke to elaborate, he explains:

Well, we are so engulfed in our own learning, we don't identify with other gay guys. This sounds stupid, but I really don't like gay people that often. And the ones that I do like really get on my nerves. I talk to straight women. It's easier. I mean, who wants to talk to a bitchy male dancer?

Brett traces his proclivity for relationships with women in dance to his childhood experiences of girls as being more accepting:

Growing up, most of my friends were girls. Women in general are more warm and open. You know, accepting. And a lot of girls don't have a problem with me being gay anyway. Like they don't really care. Part of it is I'm a guy and they want to have guy friends. And I can talk to them. I'm not trying to get in their pants or anything. So, it's probably refreshing not to have to worry about that, like with straight guys.

Brett's relationships are also influenced by his low tolerance for those males in dance he perceives as still in the closet. He chides:

I know many openly gay men in theatre, but in dance, many are closeted. I don't understand why. I get so frustrated with them. I mean, I know it's difficult and I don't judge them, but please, we're in dance... and these closeted gay guys try so hard. It's all about their girlfriends. I just figure I'm not gonna waste my time.

The words of Brett and Luke indicate, like some gay men and lesbians unable to escape the pervasive nature of heterocentric bias and homophobic prejudice, an internalized homophobia, in which although they self-identify as gay or bisexual, they develop negative feelings about homosexuality and gay people.^{18,19}

Because I found this complicated phenomenon surprising, I asked these three in particular if they felt that dance was a supportive environment for

gay men. Although the group uniformly believed that dance provides an extremely open and supportive atmosphere for gays, each struggled to articulate the ways in which they experience the support to which they attest. Brett says, "There's some sort of sense of support in that nobody's calling you names. It's not hostile." Luke believes, "It's a big escape in the studio. When I come out of dance class I feel it all coming back on me, to be a certain way, to answer to all these people." Travis considers dance supportive because, "There's no harassment from the other dancers. It's... neutral and that feels extremely supportive."

The interesting picture these young gay and bisexual men paint, in conjunction with my field observations over the semester, depicts a contradictory landscape characterized by a strong sense of gay and bisexual support and affirmation on the one hand, but a deeply 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. What this small picture may be showing us is that young males in dance — gay and straight — tend to distance themselves from gay males and homosexuality.

Differences in Parental Support

In addition to differences in social bonding, one other important difference between gay/bisexual participants and straight participants focuses on the kind of support and encouragement these young men experience from their parents. Heterosexual dancers describe their parents as much more supportive of their dancing compared to gay participants' parents. Bailey and Oberschneider found the same phenomenon in their psychological study of 90 professional male dancers, with only 13% of gay male dancers citing parental encouragement (as compared to 60% of straight male dancers).¹ The lack of parental support and approval experienced by gay male dancers may be attributed to parents' more general disapproval of dancing, or to dance as a career choice for their sons. It may well be the case that larger fears of homosexuality inhibit parents from encouraging their male children to pursue dance study, especially if one or both of the parents harbor homosexual suspicions about their male child.

Gay Youth Today

For dance educators, it is worthwhile to situate these concerns in a larger educational context. A recent survey finds that nearly 70% of lesbian, gay,

and bisexual students face verbal, sexual, or physical harassment or physical assault while at school,²⁰ and nearly half of all gay and lesbian youth suffer violence from their families, peers, and strangers.²¹ The *American Journal of Public Health* finds that teenagers (mean age: 15.5 years) with same-sex attractions are nearly three times as likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youths.²² Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay & Lesbian Students has shown important statistical links between levels of student harassment experienced and attempted student suicide. According to the Human Rights Watch, a non-profit advocacy and research organization, millions of gay teenagers may be subjected to such widespread harassment and teacher indifference in US schools that they do not receive an adequate education.²³

While there is vast individual variation, young gay males tend to begin homosexual activity during early or mid-adolescence. Since adolescents are only beginning to possess the capacity for formal reasoning skills that allow them to cognitively integrate their sexual experiences, dance educators must realize that gay male adolescents and teens are extremely vulnerable to gender criticism, homophobic attitudes, anti-gay slurs, and the absence of positive gay male role models. Young gay males may also suffer from internalized homophobia learned throughout childhood in which self-hate, low self-esteem, destructive behavior, and further confusion characterize their underlying attitudes and conduct.

Moreover, gay adolescents and teens often have far fewer resources available to them for understanding homosexuality and same-sex attraction in a balanced and unbiased manner. Social support networks for the young gay male are rare. Leaving the dance studio often means returning to the embarrassment and humiliation of being labeled the pansy, fag, or queer. This kind of environment is stressful and often threatening, particularly since these are young people struggling to claim and affirm their sexual orientation in a frequently hostile social atmosphere. Dance educators, aware of it or not, have a profound impact on this environment.

Conclusion: Revisiting the "Open Secret"

While I have little doubt that the field of dance education is generally more accepting of homosexuality, I believe this study illustrates the ways in which this kind of quiet internal "acceptance" obscures larger social issues that males in dance repeatedly encounter. Through

the dancers' words heard here, an account of what it means to be a male in dance education is revealed. By bringing the participants' narratives into conversation with one another, a deeper understanding of social stigmatization is articulated through stories that lace together four important themes: homophobic stereotypes, narrow definitions of masculinity, the absence of positive male role models, and internalized homophobia.

Interpretive inquiry often reveals issues previously concealed, and in doing so, frequently more important questions, rather than generalizable answers, arise. The findings of this study not only point to further questions, but also show for dance educators and researchers, what I believe is a more responsive path for future inquiry.

When I listen carefully to the courageous words of these students, I realize that in many instances, we have probably been on the wrong path. A great deal of past discourses about men in dance education, albeit limited, have focused primarily on two questions: How can dance attract more males? And, Why are gay males over-represented in dance?

The question of increasing male involvement seems reasonable and relevant. However, from the narratives heard in this study we might benefit greatly from knowing more about our *current* male students,² their attitudes and experiences, rather than trying to increase male numbers with strategies that attempt to re-engineer dance in traditionally "masculine" ways (i.e., dance as sports, competition, jumping and turning).⁵ Our questions, too, might be more responsive if we pay attention to the larger social context male dancers encounter and what in fact currently attracts young men to dance study.

I find the question of *why* gay males are disproportionately drawn to dance^{1,4} of little relevance to dance educators. Moreover, even if we knew such information, I struggle to understand how such knowledge would be used. Given the findings of this study, our energies would be more wisely spent by first, openly discussing the fact that gay and bisexual males represent half of the male population in dance, and second, seeking to understand the ways in which young gay men and teens might be better served by dance education. By not only acknowledging, but also acting upon the educative potential the profession holds for reducing homophobia and anti-gay stigmatization, dance education has the ability to play a profoundly important leadership role in re-shaping our culture's negative mes-

sages about difference and prejudice. Regrettably, by maintaining the "open secret," the legacy we have unwittingly nurtured is one that not only breeds further societal suspicion and narrow definitions of masculinity, but also one that ignores the vast contribution that gay men and young adults make to the profession.

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