

Dancing Identities:

The Dynamics of Sexuality and Gender in the Lives of Men Who Dance

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Abstract

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Title: Dancing Identities: The Dynamics of Sexuality and Gender in the Lives of Men who Dance

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This qualitative master thesis explores the experiences of gay male dancers in Norway as related to concepts of sexuality, gender, and identity. These dynamics are seen in light of a social constructionist perspective. Relevant and salient literature within the fields of dance, sexuality, and identity is introduced as a theoretical framework. In terms of methods, snowball sampling was used to recruit seven participants who identified as gay men pursuing a career in dance. They took part in in-depth semi-structured interviews and answered a range of open-ended questions. The data from the interviews was analyzed and organized into themes guided by the Braun and Clarke model of thematic analysis. Consistent with the demands of qualitative research, personal reflexivity was taken into consideration throughout the entire process. The results were organized and presented in four main themes representing the participants' experiences within and outside the dance community. The cultural, historical, traditional, and societal expectations of gender and sexuality as seen in Norwegian society were reflected upon in this context. The complexity of identities and the dynamic process of constructing, negotiating, and making sense of the self were discussed. Limitations in terms of methodology, literature, and analysis were discussed in the conclusion.

Introduction

The field of dance as it relates to sexuality, gender, and identity is not a widely researched or appreciated topic. While there is no shortage of literature on the latter concepts of sexuality, gender, and identity, scholars have not been convincingly interested in its relationship to dance. This dynamic, of how the dancer identity intercepts with gender and sexuality and vice versa, inspired me to research it more closely.

As a dancer and psychology student, I was intrigued by the gay experience within the dance community and curious about how male dancers constructed their identity. During my years of dancing I had first-handedly heard and experienced conversations and episodes on behalf of both dancers and non-dancers about the supposedly gay nature of male dancers. I often wondered how and why it had become an assumed truth that male dancers were gay, and furthermore, if there was any substance to this assumption.

In this master thesis, I wanted to approach this issue as a qualitative explorer and did not aim to test or confirm this commonly held assumption. I was interested in hearing about the rich experiences, background, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and reflections of men who were gay and who had chosen to pursue dance. I was curious about how they understood, constructed, negotiated, and made sense of their identity and self-concept. I was also interested in how they positioned themselves in relationship to other people and to the larger cultural and societal context in Norway. In general, I wanted to know what life was like for a gay male dancer.

I engaged with literature from the very beginning of the project and continued to explore theory and research along the way. I made an effort to find literature that provided richness and variety, although research in the field of dance was sparing. The history of dance and important male figures in dance are given a brief introduction in the literature review in order to set the research questions in a historical context. Research in dance seems to support that male dancers experience being stigmatized and suspected or accused of being gay and/or effeminate (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997; Burt, 2007; Fisher, 2007; Hamilton, 1999; Hanna, 1987; Risner, 1987). The stereotype of the male dancer icon as gay and effeminate seems partially a result of the historical and traditional parameters of western dance (Burt, 2007; Hanna, 1987; Kolb, 2009).

The social, political, historical, geographical, and cultural landscape surrounding the dance community, are important contextual factors influencing the experience of male dancers. The concept of a heteronormative culture seems to favor and takes for granted the

fe/male relationship as a natural point of origin (Anderssen & Hellesund, 2009; Goldberg, 2007; Nagel, 2000; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Warner, 1991). Furthermore, in order to understand the concept of male dancers identity, it seems necessary to apply a broad understanding and framework of identity such as seen in the research of Ohnstad (1997, 2008), Damon (1983), Horowitz and Newcomb (2002), and Kristiansen (2004).

Developing my research questions was a journey of adjustment, reflection, and re/definition in terms of how I could best approach the topic. This process was important in terms of narrowing down my ideas and focusing the intention of the study. The research questions developed and took on different meanings during the course of the interviews, literature review and data analysis, as I became more familiar with the participants, the literature, and the data.

I wanted to know about the participants' backgrounds and experiences, and what made them pursue dance. I was interested in what life was like for a gay man in Norwegian society and what life was like as a dancer. I was curious about how they identified and defined themselves, and how they constructed and negotiated the self. The intention was not to explore cause-and-effect relationships, but to understand the individuals' experience of being a gay male dancer. The guiding research questions eventually took the following form:

What is the relationship between being gay and choice of career path?

What is it like to be a gay male dancer in a heteronormative society?

How do gay male dancers construct their identity?

How do gay men construct the relationship between sexual orientation and dance?

These questions form the basis for the understanding of my master thesis and serve as a guiding framework. The following chapter is a review of relevant empirical research literature related to these research questions.

Literature review

Research at the intersection of dance, sexuality, gender, and identity at the time of this research project was neither dense nor pleasingly thorough. Finding research on gay men who danced was a challenging task, especially in a country like Norway where professional dance is something of a rarity and a field of minor interest. My experience was that a lot of the existing literature was outdated and quantitative, lending itself to narrow and categorical

concepts of sex and gender, and looking to confirm already existing hypotheses on the male dancer image. I was disappointed to find that recent nuanced research in this field was almost non-existent. It was therefore necessary to combine a variety of disciplines, fields, and perspectives to form a sensible literature review. This literature review consists of a brief insight into the dynamics of dance, gender, sexuality, and identity. First, I briefly consider the history of dance in light of the male dancer. Then I look at how Norwegian culture and society relates to gender role expectations and the concept of heteronormativity. Lastly, I consider theories and research on sexual orientation, gender, and identity.

A Brief History of Men Who Dance

Dance critic and anthropologist Hanna (1987), explained that the predominance of women and gay men in dance was rooted in their history of oppression and stigmatization. Traditionally, dance was a low status and poorly paid occupation that was not attractive to heterosexual males, and was therefore a place where minorities sought refuge. Dance scholar Burt (2007), wrote a book about the male dancer image and the history of its development and transformation. He explained that during the nineteenth century, ballet was not considered a respected art form on the same level as music, poetry, and painting. The notion of the male genius expressing itself through art was an important aspect of the romantic period, but not applicable to ballet because it was considered inferior to other art forms. Burt claimed that this, along with the fact that it was considered a feminine expression, deterred men from entering the dance field.

Although men initially had been the founders of ballet, they disappeared in favor of the ballerina during the romantic period (Burt, 2007, p. 12). A social change in attitudes towards the male body and masculine physical expressions was partly to blame for this. A shift in aesthetic taste both within other art forms and society at large encouraged men to refrain from drawing attention to their body as an object. As a result, it became difficult for male audience members to acknowledge pleasure in watching other men perform, Burt wrote. Men slowly started disappearing from the ballet scene, as they became less in demand, and were more frequently cast in theatrical parts. The ballet world became a highly female dominated field, something we still see traces of today in the corps de ballet (the synchronized group of dancers dancing behind the soloists), which consists of strictly female dancers.

During the course of dance history however, there were some noteworthy icons that broke with traditional gender roles in dance and reintroduced the image of the male dancer

(Kolb, 2009). First and foremost was Sergei Diaghilev, impresario of the Ballets Russes, who was later considered a catalyst in attracting gay men to the dance scene (Burt, 2007). Michel Fokine and Nijinsky were others, who side-by-side Diaghilev in the early 1900's Russia, advocated for gender equality in dance and moved away from traditional forms of partnering and superficial elements of technical bravura. Both Kolb and Burt wrote that this was considered revolutionary in dance history because it reintroduced an artistic vision to ballet and challenged it as a commodity of pure entertainment. The artist as opposed to the dancer was in the spotlight. Thanks to Nijinsky's unique artistry and androgynous portrayal of the faun in "Afternoon of a Faun", the male dancer gained momentum as socially acceptable in the west (Hanna, 1987).

A shift also occurred in the audience during this time. Previously, spectators had primarily been well-to-do men fond of female ballerinas, whereas now the theatres were crowded with a more diverse audience of artists, women, and gay men (Kolb, 2009). According to Burt (2007), there was no indication of audiences being conscious of a gay association to male dancers prior to the era of Diaghilev and Nijinsky.

These important icons made it possible for the male dancer to step out of the shadow of the female ballerina. However, the stereotype of the male dancer as gay was also strengthened. This was an association that some male dancers did not subscribe to. As dance scholar Fisher (2007) wrote, modern dance icon Ted Shawn was among those who adamantly highlighted the powerful and masculine qualities of dance and rejected the image of a male dancer as feminine. He was among those who confirmed the "choreophobic and homophobic tendencies" during the late 1930's in North America (p. 48). Shawn was a gay man himself, but made it his mission as a choreographer and dancer to erase any traces of homosexuality. According to dance writer Keefe (2009), Shawn spent much of the latter part of his career convincing the public that dance was more akin to sports and was a masculine and tough endeavor.

During the mid to late 1900's, male dancers Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov introduced the image of a straight, virile, and masculine-looking ballet dancer, winning the hearts of many female spectators (Fisher, 2007). They became media sensations and audience favorites due to their spectacular athletic abilities and appealing backgrounds as having defectors of The Soviet Union. Nureyev was well known for his many sexual relationships with women and remained in the spotlight until the very end of his career. Speculations about his sexual relations with men had long been swarming although according to Solway's

biography (1998), Nureyev himself never discussed his sexuality openly. Nureyev was eventually diagnosed with HIV and died of AIDS, and remained a controversial legend.

Another revolutionizing event for the male dancer occurred in 1996, when Mathew Bourne introduced a controversial re-interpretation of the classical ballet *Swan Lake* (Drummond, 2003). A woman and a man originally danced the love story of the fragile swan and the noble prince, along side an all-female flock of swans. In Bourne's gender-bending version of *Swan Lake*, he cast only male dancers and re-created the love story for two men. Drummond suggested that by doing this, Bourne not only challenged the gender roles in the already scripted ballets, but also brought a gay storyline to the forefront. Bourne encouraged "a long-simmering relationship between homosexuality and dance out of the closet and into mainstream popular culture" (p. 237).

As seen from the literature review thus far, there were several reasons why the stereotype of the gay male dancer became solidified. A few studies over the past three decades researched the validity of this stereotype. Among them was a quantitative study by researchers Bailey & Oberschneider (1997), in which they interviewed 136 fe/male dancers, and looked at the association between career choice and sexual orientation. Interestingly enough, the researchers found it difficult to interview lesbian women due to their apparent under-representation in the dance world. All the gay male participants in the study considered the dance community to be particularly open towards homosexuality. In terms of a causal relationship between being gay and being a dancer, all except one participant said that they would have come out as gay regardless of if they had started dancing or not, and that their sexual orientation had nothing to do with their life as a dancer. Heterosexual female dancers were asked about their relationships to gay male co-dancers and the majority responded that they had closer friendships with gay men than with fellow heterosexual male dancers (p. 440). In what way or why this was the case they did not report. An interesting finding was that the gay male participants in the study were not fond of the stereotype of male dancers being feminine. Bailey & Oberschneider also pointed to cross-cultural differences in dance communities such as Russia and Latin America where ballet was not considered a strictly feminine activity and therefore was frequented by more heterosexual men.

This was not consistent with research conducted in the United States, Guatemala, Brazil, and the Philippines by Whitam (1983). He found that there was a cross-cultural predominance of gay men within the arts and entertainment industry. This connection between sexual orientation and professional dance was disputed amongst several American

social scientists. In Whitam's opinion, rejecting this connection meant taking credit away from the significant contributions gay men were making to the occupations they frequented.

In an article written for *Dance Magazine*, dance writer and columnist Hamilton (1999) estimated that about fifty percent of American male dancers were gay or bisexual, whereas only two percent of female dancers were lesbian or bisexual. She refuted the myth that dancing in some way fostered a homosexual orientation. There was no research to support the myth that boys who started dancing became gay or that the gay-friendly nature of the dance community had an effect on a person's sexual orientation. Hamilton brought attention to trends of stigmatization based on sexual orientation and the negative influence it had on the dance community and the experience of being a gay male dancer.

In the article "Make It Maverick", Fisher (2007) suggested that the dance world's agenda to rid itself of the stigma of male ballet dancers being feminine had taken a wrong turn. The growing trend had been to redefine ballet as something masculine by working in opposition to the "feminine" stereotype and going to the other extreme. This was not based on a spectrum approach, but rather a binary model where everything had to be defined as either feminine or masculine. Turning ballet into something macho was a western strategy in trying to make it a more acceptable occupation for men (p. 61). This was considered a faulty approach because ballet would always remain a delicate art form, and not a physically driven sport, and would therefore be unlikely to land the term "macho". Men who chose to dance had to accept that they were moving into a feminine realm: "They have to come to terms with the color pink because it will shadow their lives, whether they wear it or just come into close contact with it often" (p. 63). Fisher did not imply that ballet was not masculine, physically strenuous or powerful, but that labeling it "macho" was not helpful in the quest to make it a more acceptable occupation for men and challenging the stereotypes associated with it. Instead a new approach to masculinity and the male dancer was needed. Therefore the term "maverick" was introduced in referring to men who danced, in hopes of creating the association that men who chose to dance went their own way and dared to be different. Her agenda was to change the rhetorical expressions around men and ballet.

As a community, the dance culture included and accepted a wider range of people and lifestyles (Hanna, 1987). The following explanation was suggested in order to explain the abundance of gay men in the dance world:

On the fringe of society and receptive to the unconventional, the art world offers them an opportunity to express an aesthetic sensibility that is emotional

and erotic, an insulation from a rejecting society, and avenue of courtship, and an arena in which to deal with homosexual concerns (p. 33)

In dance, gay men could feel accepted and free to express themselves and their sexuality among other men. By choosing to dance, gay men also exposed themselves to critique and prejudice from the outside world, a world that they often felt unaccepted by. At the same time, the praise they received from outside spectators for their dancing and artistry was indispensable, and built confidence and feelings of achievement.

An interesting article by Risner (2002) was based on an analysis of autobiographical material that he had produced over a three-year period. He found themes within his analysis that identified “internalized homophobia and heterocentric bias in dance education” (p. 67). Based on his own experiences growing up in the dance community and eventually coming out as gay, he reflected on issues of “escape and isolation, secrecy and denial, and silence and abuse in dance training” (p. 67). The dance community functioned as a false safe haven and an imaginary universe where feelings of shame and conflict were avoided and not confronted. Risner claimed that the stigmatization and ridicule experienced as a boy in dance, despite one’s sexual orientation, could result in denying one’s sexual nature. Boys that dance were quickly labeled gay and effeminate and were forced to consciously contradict people’s assumptions about them. Girls, on the other hand, were praised for their graceful femininity that coincided with social expectations of gender.

Dance scholar Burt (2007), took it upon himself to look at the representation of gender in dance in light of political, cultural, and social influences. He looked at how the image of the male dancer had developed throughout history, and confirmed that there were a lot of gay men in dance, but that there was a general misconception that they were all gay. Burt considered masculinity a social construction that had been negotiated and tweaked throughout history in order for men to uphold their dominance in society. For dancers, the body was the instrument that communicated with the audience, and because the body also expressed gender, dance was a place where gendered identities were unveiled. The personal way in which choreographers and dancers represented gender on stage, and the way spectators interpreted it, was a result of individual experiences as well as historical, cultural, and societal contexts.

Gay Men in Norway

Heteronormativity is a term that attempts to describe the heterocentric model that many Western societies base themselves on (Warner, 1991). It can be defined as those pervasive traditional, societal, and cultural values that through establishments, institutions, practices (rhetorical and cultural), and norms suggest, both implicitly and explicitly, that society is structured around the male and female reproductive ability and their reciprocal attraction (Anderssen & Hellesund, 2009).

The term came about as a result of researchers shifting their attention away from the marginalized, which then referred to women and gay men, to the dominant group, heterosexual men (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). The term was grounded in a criticism of the essentialist perspective that took for granted the fe/male binary model grounded in biological truth, and that only sexual attraction within that frame was natural. Heteronormativity described how gender roles and norms, political and social structures, and traditions of hierarchy were established truths in society.

From a historic perspective, heteronormativity was intrinsically connected to ethnicity and sexuality as seen in “sexualized racism, homophobia, and misogyny” (Nagel, 2000, p. 19). Together they upheld and confirmed boundaries that confined people’s social roles and maintained expected normalcy. These dominating beliefs and power structures were solidified through traditions, institutions, legislation, and education. According to Nagel, cross culturally, heteronormativity was among the strictest social forces.

The implications of heteronormativity could be seen in various institutional practices, such as the Norwegian same-sex adoption debate where the “anti” side argued that the inherent qualities in men and women as established in heterosexual relationships made them more fit for parenthood (Anderssen & Hellesund, 2009). Heteronormativity set the boundaries for a category that excluded people who fall outside the dimensions of heterosexual orientation and/or those who distinctively defied traditional gender role expectations (Goldberg, 2007).

I would like to make a brief note that although I use the term heteronormativity in this thesis, I acknowledge that it is a disputed and controversial term because it generalizes and categorizes heterosexual identities (Brown, Browne, & Lim, 2007). I use the term here in the way it was initially intended, to “challenge the way society is structured around the two gender model” (p. 33).

In “Queering Norway”, Norway’s liberal political structure was brought into question (Bjørby & Ryall, 2009). The pitfall of a system that was perceived as more generous and lenient than others resulted in an apathetic attitude towards change or transformation. Bjørby

and Ryall suggested that action was not actively taken to improve conditions for minorities because the general impression was that the social structure was fully functional and satisfactory for all groups.

Anderssen (1997) suggested that negative attitudes towards the gay population in Norway were a result of narrow categories of gender, traditional favoring of the binary model of fe/male relationships, and the history of the Christian faith. He also noted that the research on sexual orientation was scarce, and the scales used to measure phenomena were not reliable. Kristiansen and Pedersen (2008) found that sexual identity was very different for women than for men, and that there seemed to be a trend of deconstructing and allowing more fluidity in terms of female sexuality. Their impression was that men were more bound in terms of their expression of sexuality, whereas women could engage in physically intimate relationships with women and men without necessarily being labeled gay. For men it was one or the other because "heterosexual practices and identity preclude homosexual practices and identity, and vice versa" (p. 97). If a man gave any indication of male attraction he was quickly labeled gay, according to Pedersen and Kristiansen.

Dance is not considered a sport in the dance community, although it is equally physically challenging, time consuming, strenuous, and demanding (Keefe, 2009). The major difference between dance and sports is that the focus is not on competition or setting records but on how the body expresses and disseminates an artistic vision on stage (p. 92). Dancers are comparable to athletes in the sense that they focus on perfecting movement execution and training the body as the main instrument. Eng (2008) wrote about Norwegian athletes who identified as gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual, and how they experienced "doing sexuality" in the sports community (p. 103). She referred to Norway as a heteronormative society in which traditions, norms, expectations, and social codes were centered on the male-female relationship. The sports arena was by no means exempt from these influences. What society deemed masculine or feminine was made obvious through which extracurricular activities were considered appropriate for girls/boys. Assumptions were then made about what sports gay girls/boys would choose, and consequently strengthened the existing stereotypes of typical "gay activities". Gay women were assumed to frequent soccer and gay men to frequent dance (or other aesthetically comparable sports). Furthermore, this stigma encouraged other gay boys/girls to seek those specific sports, possibly because they perceived them as more accepting. Eng suggested that a motivating factor for gay/lesbian people to enter those sports could be that the heteronormative discourse was perceived as less

pronounced, and hence there was more leeway to display attraction, express sexuality, and form romantic relationships. This was also a way in which subcultures and “heterotopias” could arise, a safe haven were they could be “more “out” than in other areas of society” (p. 116). The dance community could have been considered a subculture in which they found a sense of belonging and freedom to be openly gay.

The use of the word “gay community” to describe how gay wo/men organized themselves socially, was criticized by Warner (1991). This was partially due to its political past as a way to describe and categorize minority groups based on ethnicity, race, disability or other marginalizing factors. The way in which society labeled a group had implications for how that group was conceptualized and identified, and referring to a “gay and lesbian community” set standards for who, how, and when a person belonged to the community (p. 15). The concept of belonging and identifying with a group at one point also meant that the person did not belong to the group previously, bringing into question the prerequisites for entering the community and validity or usefulness of the term.

In terms of defining what a community is, I lend myself to Nelson and Prilleltensky’s (2010) concise words; “community implies a group or groups of citizens who have something in common” (p. 103). What, how, when, and to what extent people have things in common varies and people can belong to one or several communities simultaneously. In this research study, I referred to the “dance community” as the group of people who frequented, participated in, or associated with dance. This term included all participating aspects of the dance profession, regardless of age, gender, life style, social status, preferred dance style, level of “accomplishment”, or any other socially defined labels. I considered the “dance community” to be a quite inclusive category, and used it in order to distinguish between phenomena within and outside dance and to make sense of the data in terms of analysis.

Identity, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Identity as it relates to gender and sexuality continues to be a complex and controversial topic. Many theories of identity development exist within the field of psychology, but only a handful could be presented here. A long withstanding, but luckily fading belief, is that those who identify with something other than a heterosexual orientation are abnormal (Ohnstad, 1997). Other more constructive frameworks of how to conceptualize and make sense of identity and sexual orientation have come to the foreground. The social

constructionist versus essentialist perspective on sex and gender is central to this research study and deserves a brief introduction.

The essentialist perspective is concerned with the perceived essence or foundation in a person, with the understanding that there is a true biological and natural state of self (Beasley, 2006, p. 251). This essence represents a collective and enduring set of qualities. Post-modern feminists are examples of antagonists of the essentialist perspective and have been concerned with challenging the very idea of identity and of course a fe/male identity (p. 24). As described by Beasley in his book on gender theory, post-modern feminists reject the concept of an in utero essence, along with gender categories and identities, because there is no truth to them. People are inevitably at the mercy of imposed and inherent power structures and it is these influences that create and organize the social expression of gender and sexuality.

Beasley (2006) continues to understand gender through the social constructionist view, which in its most basic form, is also a rejection of the essentialist perspective and the idea that there is an inherent and static human truth. Identities are not stable entities, but fleeting ones, colored by the historical, social, and cultural context surrounding the individual. Focusing on differences in sex and gender are futile because “people are not marginalized because they are different but made different by marginalization” (p. 23). The focus needs to be on the larger structure that marginalizes and therefore defines people as different.

The social constructionist viewpoint is more optimistic than post-modernism in terms of acknowledging the individual’s agency and resourcefulness in operating within his/her world and negotiating with social conditions and expectations (Beasley, 2006). They devalue theories of gender differences and believe these only contribute to highlighting “the essence” of the self instead of directing attention towards power relations and dominating structures. Beasley points out that “rather than attending to what people are, Social Constructionism is concerned with what people do together” (p. 99)

As opposed to using phase theories to understand identity in terms of sexual orientation, Norwegian psychologist and researcher Ohnstad (1997), recommended a broader framework such as social psychology. A more useful way to define identity is to look at the way in which a person deals with and negotiates expectations within a social structure. Identity should not be confused with a stationary, isolated, and concrete aspect of the self, but a fluid and dynamic process influenced by one’s surroundings, experiences, and perceptions. There is a constant interaction between the self and its relevant social and cultural circumstances in which identities are continuously re/defined; “Identity is a process where we

construct and deconstruct who we are in relation to others and the society that we are a part of” (p. 96). This process is difficult and requires an ability to determine and rely on one’s own decisions and values in the face of social resistance and/or disapproval.

According to Ohnstad (1997), the feeling of being different from others is not an uncommon experience among gay wo/men. Defining oneself appears to be an especially problematic process when there is a shortage of terms and codes to make sense of one’s experiences in a meaningful way (p. 100). This often results in confusion and frustration. Defining oneself as different can be a positive experience if it means breaking boundaries or norms that were previously inhibiting, but also negative if it creates more distance and concern about one’s own sexuality and self-worth. For those who fall outside the parameters of heterosexual identity, Ohnstad says it is important and necessary to acquire the skills needed to cope with societies expectations and prejudice.

In terms of coming-out as gay, Ohnstad (2008) discussed the concept of being “invisible” versus “self-illuminated” in her doctoral dissertation on lesbian identities. In interacting with the outside world there is the predicament of either being treated as “invisible”, in which one’s sexual orientation is silenced, or being treated as “self-illuminated”, in which one’s sexual orientation is made distinct, as a gay wo/man (p. 12). Both of these scenarios are experienced as difficult to deal with because both alternatives operate at opposite ends of the spectrum. Negotiating and settling at a happy medium is an important process.

According to post-modern feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler (1988), the way in which social bodies perform or act out gender is similar to that of an actor performing a part in a play. She coined the term gender performativity; the way in which gender and sexuality are social constructs and a result of socially, historically, and culturally imposed norms and categories (Beasley, 2006). Given the association between gender performativity and the physical expression of the body, dance as a performing art is an interesting realm in which to consider the performance of gender (Burt, 2007). As people (and as dancers), we live in physical bodies in the context of time and space, and as such carry with us norms, traditions, and discourses of social and cultural nature. In light of dance and the understanding of what constitutes masculine movement, Burt attempts to understand Butler’s theory of gender performativity. If the bodily expressions and styles as represented through the body in dance are remains of inherited gender scripts, then these could explain the “nature of gendered bodies” within dance performance (p. 17). Gender is not a reality or a truth that can be

isolated, yet its performance is accepted and contracted through society as being right and a wrong. Not performing in line with social expectations of gender has latent and overt consequences and repercussions. Similarly, performing in line with the essence of ones assigned gender has social and cultural rewards.

I now turn to my own research design and process of conducting qualitative research in the methods chapter.

Methods

This research follows a qualitative design, using data generated through in-depth interviews, and analyzed by the model of thematic analysis.

Recruitment Procedure

Prior to recruiting participants, approval for the research project was sought through The Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services (see appendix). Once the project was approved, the process of recruiting participants and moving forward with the project began. A recruitment add was posted online through a dance and distribution center in Norway (Danseinformasjonen), inviting gay male dancers of all ages and career stages to participate in in-depth qualitative interviews about the dynamics of dance and sexuality (see appendix). Some potential participants were contacted and recruited through personal e-mails and social networks, and some were contacted personally in the context of casual social settings. The majority of the participants were eventually recruited through snowball sampling, meaning that they were invited to participate by word of mouth through other participants (Browne, 2005). Once participants had been introduced to the project, they were e-mailed an information sheet with detailed information about the project (see appendix). They were asked to read through the information sheet and ask questions about the process. They were then invited to meet for an interview at a private and mutually convenient place.

The recruitment process proved to be time-consuming and challenging. There was little response to the online recruitment add and difficult to get people interested in the project. This is why snowball sampling ended up being the most useful recruitment procedure. Initially the goal had been to recruit between eight and twelve participants. A couple of potential participants dropped out of the process prior to be interviewed, either in

the form of saying they were not interested after all, or by discontinuing contact. In one case, suspicion was raised about why I wanted to conduct research on gay male dancers. I responded to this with information about my motivation and intentions, my background, and a description of my research proposal. The participant discontinued contact after this.

I finally ended up with a sample of seven participants who were interested in participating and who followed through from beginning to end. Despite a quantitatively small sample, I believe the *quality* of the sample was good and reliable. These participants were open and flexible throughout the entire process and provided rich data. The participants were motivated and willing to talk candidly with me about their experiences. I experienced the time I spent communicating with and finally interviewing the participants as enjoyable, interesting, and inspiring.

Participants

Seven participants between the ages of twenty and fifty were recruited to participate. They all identified as gay men and as dancers. Two participants were still completing their dance education and five were working professionally, either as full time employees or as freelance dancers. All participants were Norwegian and originally from rural areas in Norway, but had moved to a bigger city to pursue a dance career. The participants came from different backgrounds in terms of dance styles, ranging from classical ballet to contemporary dance. Given that the dance community in Norway is quite small, and given the use of snowball sampling, several of the participants frequented the same social circles. Some of the participants were also acquaintances or people I knew of before hand. Participants were not given information about, or made aware of, who the other participants were unless they themselves had shared this information, of which I am not aware.

Interview Procedure

Participants were interviewed between September and February of 2011. Prior to starting each individual interview, the participants were invited to ask any additional questions they might have about the process and then asked to sign a consent form (see appendix). They were also offered refreshments and informed that each interview was going to be audio recorded. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. After each interview was completed, the participants were given a gift card from a local coffee shop at a value of 100

Norwegian kronor as a thank you. Participants were not informed about this prior to being interviewed as it was not intended to sway their decision to participate or not.

Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, with mostly open-ended questions. In some cases it was not clear what term or expression the participants preferred in reference to their sexual orientation, in which case this was clarified prior to beginning the interview (queer, gay, homosexual). Participants were asked eleven questions from a prepared interview guide (see appendix). The order of the questions changed somewhat during the course of the interviews depending on the participant and in what direction the interview went. The interview guide was used as a rough map for discussion topics, and not as a rigorous recipe. When participants touched on themes that fell outside the interview guide, an effort was made to follow up on these, especially if it seemed particularly relevant. Verbal prompts were used throughout the interviews to encourage participants to share more detail and to ensure rich data collection.

Most questions were open-ended, giving the participants the opportunity to flow into a variety of experiences, reflections, and interpretations. The goal was not to rigorously stick to the interview guide but rather to use it as a guide that would give the participants room to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. At the end of each interview participants were encouraged to add anything they felt they had not had the opportunity to mention during the interview. My assessment of the level of cooperation and openness during the interview process was satisfactory and productive.

Subjectivity

Many qualitative researchers have emphasized the importance of acknowledging one's own subjective position in the process of conducting research (Bott, 2010; Willig, 2001). Willig (2001) wrote about the importance of researchers being conscious of how they influence and impact the research process, and realizing that objectivity is not attainable, nor realistic. Each researcher brings with them a unique background of experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and identities that color the development and shaping of their research (p. 10). Bott (2010) discussed that a key concept in reflexivity was that the researcher remained open and flexible during the entire research process, and was willing to “remain in dialogue with research practice, participants, and methodologies” (p. 160).

Even prior to embarking on this master thesis, my life experiences, perspectives, and background influenced this research. As a dancer and as a psychology student, I have always

been interested in research at the intersection of dance and psychology. Deciding to look at the dynamics of dance and sexuality was inspired by close relationships with male teachers and dancers in the dance community, as well as personal experiences and reflections on gender and sexuality in the context of stage performance.

The participants in my study were aware of my involvement in the dance community prior to participating. The fact that the participants knew I was a dancer could be viewed as either positive or negative. I believe both are true. On a positive note, it allowed them to freely mention names of people, companies, and schools without having to identify them or give further description, which may have been difficult with someone who was not acquainted with their community. It also meant that they could communicate with me as a fellow dancer and assume that at the very least, we shared certain interests and knowledge. On the other hand, being a dancer could have made them weary of speaking negatively about certain experiences or potentially shared acquaintances within the community. Our shared identity as dancers also meant that some things were taken for granted and not made explicit. This was illustrated in the results/discussion section.

Process of Analysis

The main choice of method for analysis of the collected data was thematic analysis, primarily guided by the model of Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is “a method of analysis for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). This method was a natural choice given the qualitative nature of the data being in the form of descriptive accounts. With thematic analysis the researcher stays close to the participants’ accounts and uses an inductive approach in which the data, not theory, is the main focus (p. 80). Thematic analysis rejects the thought of themes emerging from the data because it suggests a passive researcher that does not actively and rigorously use methods to recognize patterns and themes (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). This means it must be made clear how the researcher has approached the data and arrived at themes and codes with detail and rigor.

In the case of this research study, interviews were systematically transcribed in chronological order without the use of additional software programs. Word-for-word transcription was used, and non-verbal elements (such as sounds and pauses during speech) were not included. Thoughts, reflections, and impressions of beginning themes were noted after each individual interview was transcribed. Interviews were transcribed in my own dialect, rather than reflecting the actual dialects of the participants and compromising

anonymity. Name, age, birthplace, geographical information, and other possibly identifying factors were replaced in brackets (examples: “(name of school)” or “(age of participant)”). In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality in-text, the participants were not given pseudonyms or labeled in an organized manner. This was a way of ensuring that participants would not be identified through the context of the data presentation. When using direct quotations in-text, I used [...] to indicate areas where I had removed elements of speech in order to make the text more reader-friendly.

Notes were taken during the transcription process including general impressions of the interview and the interviewee’s accounts. After this I read through each transcription thoroughly while taking notes and highlighting key words, quotes, and phrases. The goal was to stay close to data and the participants’ own language and not create new terminology. Key words, quotes, and phrases were then typed up in chronological order, organized in meaningful clusters, and then placed in a grid/table. Meaningful quotes were included at the bottom of the grid for easy referencing, along with a running list of potential themes for each participant. After this process was completed, the data sets and suggested themes were compared and contrasted in terms of experiences, expressions, background, opinions, stories and so on. An inclusive table of themes from all data sets was created and organized, and various headings or subheadings were assigned to them. Lastly, themes were narrowed down and defined. For reasons of anonymity and confidentiality on behalf of the participants, the mentioned tables have not been included as appendices.

While completing the results section, themes were still not set in stone because I wanted to allow room for adjustments along the way. This flexibility made it possible to review, rework, and adjust themes when necessary. There were however many ways in which the data and the themes could have been arranged and organized. Another challenge was that several subthemes overlapped in ways that made it difficult to isolate subheadings and still maintain the integrity of the overarching theme. A choice had to be made in terms of what seemed most meaningful, clear, and true to the participant’s accounts. Themes and subthemes continued to be evaluated, reworked, and improved several times during the course of the writing process. Finally, four main themes were determined, each consisting of a handful of subthemes that identified important aspects within each theme.

Epistemology

Because of the flexible nature of thematic analysis, several epistemological and methodological approaches were possible (2006, Braun and Clarke, p. 78). Initially, I was sure that the “contextualist” approach to methodology, in which the essentialist/realist and constructionist perspectives are combined, was the most fit for the purpose of this research study. Later, I realized that the epistemological framework of social constructionism was more suitable. Social constructionism refers to the psychological theory in which there is no inherent essence or truth, and that expectations, beliefs, and perceptions are a result of cultural, historical, political, and societal influences (Beasley, 2005; Lips, 2005). The individual is shaped by the context s/he lives in, and identity is not understood to be a stable or fixed unit of the self. In terms of identity formation, the social constructionist perspective understands it as an interaction between the individual and her/his social surroundings, and “that the meanings the individual gives to these factors influence the development of self-constructs and identity” (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001, p. 1). As opposed to an essentialist perspective, in which identity is a result of an essence or biologically based truth, the individual is an active agent that negotiates, makes sense of, and ascribes meaning to identity within a social and cultural framework, in the eyes of social constructionism (p. 13). Although I viewed this research from a social constructionist perspective, I realized during the course of writing my results/discussion that I too had certain socially and culturally embedded patterns of thoughts and assumptions that were essentialist. I made a note of this in the mixed results and discussion section.

Moving from literature to results to discussion

Although I was actively searching and interacting with literature both prior to project development and after completed analysis, the literature section was written after I had completed the analysis (but prior to moving into results/discussion). This was a conscious choice because I wished for the data to have a voice of its own prior to an extensive in-depth literature review. I did not wish for the literature to determine in what direction the analysis and results would take, although I realize that many other factors and pieces of information undoubtedly have colored the way in which the entire process developed.

In the literature review, I tried to foreshadow a few relevant aspects of the results and discussion chapter at the intersection of gender, sexuality, identity, and dance. By introducing a brief history of western dance and the role of male dancers, along with research on

heteronormativity in Norway, concepts of gender roles and sexuality, gender debates, and identity theories and processes, I hoped that the remainder of this thesis would resonate meaningfully. At the very least I hope that the structure and presentation is meaningful, because as I discovered, identities at the crossroad of gender and sexuality might never resonate clearly or neatly.

In qualitative research, taking on the task of moving from data to analysis to results can be a daunting one for any researcher. The temptation to identify cause and effect was at times more present than I would like to admit. I often needed to return to the core of the qualitative researchers mission. The way in which a person makes sense of and ascribes meaning to various life experiences is at the core of this. In the words of Carla Willig (2001), the goal is “to be concerned with the quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of cause-effect relationships” (p. 9). She encourages qualitative researchers such as myself to not be bound by recipes for analysis, but rather navigate through the data much like an explorer.

I take this to mean that the curiosity and willingness to go back and forth in a playful yet conscious and structured manner is a necessity that overrides categorical analysis recipes. Although I used the framework of thematic analysis to guide my way, this is something I have tried to apply without being whimsical or negligent of detail.

In organizing the text of this thesis, I made a conscious decision to join the results and the discussion section although I realize that traditionally, results and discussion are often separate. As I started writing and organizing my results I realized that it would flow more smoothly if I incorporated literature. In doing so, a dialogue between results and literature was encouraged which in turn facilitated the development of the discussion.

Although organizing and “categorizing” data was a difficult and at times confusing task, it was also a necessary for the purpose of a comprehensible and organized thesis. I would like to point out that I view many of the subthemes in the results/discussion as fleeting and multi-dimensional in that they do not necessarily only belong to one theme but could easily have shifted themes or belonged to multiple ones. I would say then that the “quality and texture”, as Willig (2001) put it, is in the *content* of the results and discussion rather than in the inevitable identifying *labels* of the themes and subthemes.

Attached appendices are primarily in Norwegian because this was the native language of the participant.

Results and Discussion

I now move into a combined results and discussion section where my findings meet relevant literature. I have tried to create a dialogue between my results and the foreshadowed literature in a productive and sound manner. From the analysis of the seven interviews, four main themes were identified and developed: I) The Road to Pursuing Dance, II) Life as a Dancer, III) The Dance Community versus The Outside World, and IV) Negotiating Identities. Sub-headings were used to identify subthemes and distinguish between different aspects within themes, as well as organize the data in a meaningful way. The themes are guided chronologically, beginning with the early years of dancing in this first theme and ending at their present experiences in dance.

The Road to Pursuing Dance

The road to pursuing dance can hardly be considered the easiest career choice for a young man in Norway. Given its historical association in the west as a traditionally “feminine” art form and extracurricular activity, it is not hard to understand that such a career path could be experienced as a little rocky for a young man (Risner, 2009a). Yet there are boys and men, such as the seven participants in this study, who ignore the dancer stereotype and pursue dance despite the social and cultural resistance they might meet. For all participants in this research project, dance was not only a fulfilling career that they were devoted to, but also a life style. Their individual accounts of how they arrived there and how they experienced life in dance was of course unique and complex. They did however share certain common experiences in terms of their initial interaction with dance, the significance of geographical location, the relationships they formed along the way, the feeling of being “different”, and the meaningfulness of being a dancer. Within this first theme, six subthemes were explored: taking the first step, from suburb to city, “safe haven”, relationships, accomplishment, and being different.

Taking the first step: “a girl’s thing”. All participants, with the exception of one, started formal dance training at a relatively late age, during their teenage or early adult years. This trend was confirmed by dance scholar Risner (2009a), who wrote that girls were typically encouraged to start dancing at a young age, sometimes as young as three, whereas boys tended to start much later.

Several participants in this research study recalled that they were scared to take the first step and start dancing, or that they initially kept it a secret. This was due to concepts they

themselves had and thought others had about dance being for girls, and out of fear of being bullied. In explaining why he started dancing so late one participant said: “I mean it was because it was frowned upon where I came from. To start dancing I mean, then you were gay then”. Later he said:

you weren't supposed to shake your hips you know move your upper body and have limp wrists and toss your head back and just no [...] they weren't used to..it was uncommon and it was, you associated it with the feminine with a feminine expression

The untraditional way in which the body moved in dance in contrast to other sports or physical activities was considered inappropriate, especially as seen in the newer styles of dance (not folk dance for instance). The above-mentioned participant started his dance training in secret in order to avoid uncomfortable situations and comments. He came from a smaller suburb where dance had strong associations with homosexuality. For all the participants, from the very beginning, there was an awareness of dance being synonymous with femininity: “dance has been a [...] even though dancers know it's not, I guess it has been looked upon as a girls thing, girls dance and boys play soccer or from you were little then it's like the girls who dance”. As a boy choosing to dance there were certain challenges and stereotypes to overcome: “so I was bullied a lot because I did gymnastics and theatre and [...] that I liked to dance, so I was called a “fur-ball” and stuff even though I wasn't very feminine but it was that my interests simply weren't soccer”. Soccer was the expected activity for boys, and in choosing to do dance instead they broke with traditions and gender-role expectations.

Risner (2009a) research confirmed that boys who chose to dance were faced with challenges and stigma that other boys who played sports were not. Participating in dance, regardless of a boy's sexual orientation, raised suspicion early on given its perceived feminine nature, and automatically brought their sexuality and masculinity into question. This was especially challenging for young men who also identified as gay because they were caught in a “double-bind situation (marginal in a marginalized field)” (p. 68). Facing discrimination as a male dancer presented its challenges on its own, when adding another label to the equation, such as “gay”, matters did not get any easier.

From suburb to city: “larger city more acceptance”. An important transition in terms of pursuing dance was geographical re-location. All participants were originally from smaller towns, cities or suburbs in Norway, and moved to a metropolitan area later in order to pursue dance. The move from small town to metropolis is a natural one for a dancer in Norway, given the fact that most performing art high schools, dance programs, and dance

companies are based in urban centers. This move appeared to be pivotal in all participants' lives.

As mentioned previously, several participants had been hesitant to start dancing. One participant delayed his pursuit of dance until he had moved to a larger city because he was worried about people's reaction: "I sort of didn't want to be bullied in the way the other boy in town who danced was, so I never did..but then when I came to (larger city) I started taking classes". Another participant explained that it was hard to start dancing in a place where there was no dance community and that he just didn't dare to. He finally did muster up the courage to enroll in a dance course once he had gotten fed up with not daring. In both of these examples the participants referred to a period of hesitance between their initial desire to start dancing and actually making the decision to do it. Being in a community or moving to a place that was more open and had more to offer in terms of dance, facilitated this final step.

Similarly, the following participant talked about the differences in attitudes towards gay men in small towns versus larger cities:

I'm from a small place and yeah now it probably wasn't so easy when I was doing it [dancing] when I went to school I wasn't well, but that is a few years ago, now things have changed you know in relationship to homosexuality it has developed a lot and people have become more open there so, there is also a difference between major cities and small cities in that respect [...] larger city more acceptance

A sense of acceptance and freedom to pursue dance seemed to accompany the transition to a larger city and making it a pivotal move. This participant also reflected on how attitudes towards "homosexuality" were changing and how people had become more accepting of gay people over the past years. As with the rest, this participant had moved from a small city to a larger one in his pursuit of a dance career and postulated that there was generally more acceptance of gay people in urban centers than where he was from.

The process of gay men moving from rural areas to urban cities has been researched at the intersection of sexuality and geography (Brown, Browne, Lim, 2007). In 1979, Levine wrote about the development of "gay ghettos" in urban US neighborhoods, in which large numbers of gay men lived in close proximity to each other and established a socially isolated gay subculture/community (p. 364). Brown, Browne, and Lim (2007) suggested that this trend, in the context of the US, was a result of gay men seeking more liberal and accepting communities. Given the structure of the American political and social system, urban living also gave them increased political agency and opportunities (p. 6). Following an increase in gay residents, an expansion in businesses, bars, and other social venues catering to gay people

also occurred. The growth of gay businesses was a trend that had been seen in major cities in Europe and Australia during the 1980's.

Another study on urban demographics and disclosure of sexual orientation, suggested that American gay white men often move to bigger cities in early adulthood in order to kick off their career and simultaneously experience a more gay friendly environment (Canchola, J., Catania, J., A., Chang, J., & Pollack, L, 2006, p. 48). They also suggested that men in rural areas are more likely to be "closeted" (not openly gay) than those in urban areas "given historical changes supportive of gay culture in urban centres" (p. 47).

Although this research is geographically specific, I would like to suggest that it has some validity in the context of gay communities in Norway as well. After all, Norway is also considered a "western" country and is exposed to the influence of major political, cultural, and social powers such as the United States. In the book "Det Skeive Mangfald", Fredriksen and Wikstøl (1993) briefly noted in their foreword that the gay culture would always remain an urban phenomenon, also in Norway. The concept of gay men migrating to larger cities in search of an accepting community is in line with what the participants in this study shared. Although their reasons for moving to the city were not necessarily comparable to the research above, it does provide interesting framework. All participants moved to a major city as young adults partially due to the fact that it was the most efficient way to receive professional dance training (such as private coaching or performing arts high schools/colleges). In moving to a metropolis, they also came in contact with an accepting community and the sense of belonging to the dance community and defining oneself as a dancer became important.

"A safe haven". The participants' narratives suggested that dance served several intimate functions in their lives, for instance as an abstract "safe haven" or "sanctuary". This function was far from peripheral but rather a component that concretely tied feelings of acceptance and comfort in with identifying as a dancer. The importance of a strong community in terms of identity was mentioned in an article by Kirsch (2007). He suggested that communities could function as a strong support system in the face of resistance and stigma and "be sanctuaries for people needing to recover from oppression" and (p. 41). Although the participants did not refer to their experiences to the degree of oppression, many did experience episodes of stigma and alienation. The dance community created a safe perimeter in which there was room for a sense of emotional and abstract freedom. As the following participant disclosed, dance was an existential space in which he could feel free and deal with his emotions:

it has been a way to act out, sort of as an outlet for things that you, things with yourself things with others. That [dance is] a small safe haven or that dance is something that helps me deal with things that have happened during the course of the day, or things I am thinking about, or to forget, just to get to another place and there, that is liberating; dance for me is freedom

For this participant, dancing was an escape from the outside world that allowed him to cope with personal experiences, blow off steam, detach himself from problems, or just process thoughts and feelings. Another participant brought up the idea of dance being an abstract “space” in terms of feeling that there was more “room” in dance:

and I think that has sort of been there all the way this this weird a little absurd world, that I recognized myself there. There was sort of room for me in dance, there was room for me in dance cause [...] it isn't concrete you know, it's easier to be gay there sort of, because people don't make it concrete there isn't an a to z there isn't someone to say that there is something right or wrong

This participant felt that there was room for him because dance was not concrete or tangible. I interpret this to mean that the “a to z”, or categorical and linear nature of society as he knew it, did not sit well with him. In dance there was less “right or wrong” and therefore more “room for me”. Why exactly he felt this way I do not know but one possibility is that he did not want to be defined or forced into categories by the outside world and so the “little absurd world” of dance, as he referred to it, was more in tune with his sense of self.

The role of dance as something safe and contained also tied into a therapeutic aspect for one participant. This was highlighted through contact improvisation in which the dancers worked closely together in a structured form of impulsive creativity:

I can't imagine any other situation than in contact improvisation where you have that sense of focus and tuning-into another person in that way. That I think is really nice. I wonder if if a lot of this also for me is [...] some kind of therapy too..in what way I'm not quite sure but it could also be that it affects me as as a person because I let things easily affect me

He referred to unique situations in dance, for instance in improvisation, where he experienced a sense of satisfactory unity and sensitivity with others. Experiences like this proposed that dancing was a highly personal, intimate, and existential activity in which aspects of safety, comfort, and acknowledgment were central. He even referred to it as therapeutic, but also reflected on aspects of his personality as “easily affected” by things.

In defining the dance space as an implicit and explicit sanctuary for emotional outlet and support, it also defined the participants and how they identified as dancers. I am compelled to suggest that the feeling of being accepted and safe in the dance community

reinforced the dancer identity because it fostered a feeling of acceptance, unity, and confirmation. From the beginning, their pursuit of dance had been dependent on finding places in which they could get the support and training they needed. Once they were a part of a community that facilitated this, they also had more opportunities to explore the meaningfulness of dance. There seemed to be a reciprocal validation in feeling accepted and expressing oneself as a dancer. If the dance community had been experienced as a hostile, unforgiving, and excluding community, I suspect that they would to a lesser degree describe their dancing experiences as fulfilling, free, and satisfying on both a physical and emotional level. The openness and acceptance that the dance community provided was of course reliant on the participants' interaction with other members of the community. Similar to any other social setting, the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships was important, as will be discussed further in the following subtheme.

Relationships: “you find yourself a girlfriend”. The safety provided by the dance community was also influenced by the relationships that were established and maintained there. The forming of friendships, particularly with women, was a recurring topic amongst several participants. These relationships were especially important during significant processes such as entering the dance world and coming out as gay, but also in terms of on-going emotional support and social networking. One participant explained that after he had acknowledged that he was gay he rejected his straight male friends and primarily hung out with girls. In his own words:

For me it was mostly that it felt safer to be with to have girlfriends than straight guy friends when I was young, because the straight guys had a very negative attitude towards gay people. I think primarily it was that [...] I think that it's a little sad

He pointed to a difference in attitudes among wo/men in relationship to gay people, and that he had felt more at ease around women. He also expressed a feeling of sadness in terms of not having more “guy friends”. Several participants mentioned that girlfriends or female family members had been important resources in encouraging them to start dancing and served a supportive role in their choice to pursue it. For instance, two participants talked about how their initial contact with dance was a result of them tagging along with their sisters to class. Two other participants talked about the majority of their friendships being with girls, as exemplified by the following excerpt:

I really early understood that I was gay [...] I may have somewhat repressed somewhat remember that I [...] felt different you know than others, and maybe within that world [...] maybe was looking for where there would be room for me or sort of who I was,

and then I maybe discovered dance a little, and then of course I only had girlfriends often and (laughs) and they were all dancing you know

In trying to explain why it was easier to have girlfriends, another participant said:

Women have a much easier time speaking, talking. They [...] express things better and [are] emotionally better at talking about about yeah about feelings and stuff like that [...] and then you find yourself girlfriends. I think that often happens, and you find yourself a girlfriend in these environments where you grew up that you then sort of get a closer relationship with cause you feel there is something there, you feel that you can relax

The stereotypical notion that women were emotionally easier to communicate with held true for them. They felt safer, more understood, and more at ease around girls; “when I became gay I started seeking out girls because I felt more secure there”.

Forming friendships with straight boys was described as particularly difficult. Among the explanations for this was the absence of boys and overabundance of girls in the dance schools they attended, being more comfortable around females, and feeling alienated from the “masculine” environments at school and in their social communities. Although straight/gay friendships among men were not the norm, a few participants did have some straight male friends. They viewed these friendships as particularly “nice” and encouraging, possibly because they broke barriers with traditional ideas of gender and the formation of platonic friendships. Given the overrepresentation of girls in western dance styles, it was not so strange that bonding with girls was common. However, given the social make-up of the community, it also spoke to how sexual orientation, friendship, and dance interfaced in a dynamic way.

In returning to the topic of friendship and looking at literature, Rumens (2008) conducted a qualitative study in the UK about friendships in the workplace. This research suggested that in some instances gay men established friendships with women because they experienced women as more “gay friendly” and “that they could explore different facets of the self” (p. 87). In the general context of a professional workplace, they were subject to strict gender role expectations of masculinity, whereas in their friendships with women they could be more relaxed. Rumens also found that in occupations where there was a higher women to men ratio, gay men experienced the workplace as more accepting and open in terms of sexual orientation. In these settings there were also more opportunities to form friendships with women. This seemed especially relevant in the context of this study given the

overrepresentation of women in dance, and that several participants confirmed close friendships with women.

As one participant reasoned, friendships with women were platonic and therefore more relaxed. He had felt more comfortable around girls and seemed to have an essentialist explanation for why it was more natural for him to establish friendships with women:

women appreciate having a [...] male gay friend, where it is something that maybe can start platonic and then become a more genuine and real friendship [...] opposites attract, so that applies to friends too [...] we are able to find the things that we have in common and then we compliment each other in all other areas and it becomes a more natural thing when you then have one person that's gay and one person that's straight of different sexes [...] it felt safer to be with..girlfriends than straight guy friends

This idea of platonic friendship being made possible in the absence of sexual attraction was in line with research conducted by Galupo (2009) on cross-category friendship patterns. He suggested that friendships between bisexual or gay men and heterosexual women were possibly more common because there was less sexual tension between them. I interpret this to suggest that because the sexual tension is toned down, it may very well ease the strain of social codes and expectations of male/female interaction and hence facilitate a platonic friendships.

It dawned on me during a re-evaluation of these last few paragraphs, that there were certain assumptions in the conversation between myself and the participants about the nature of girls and women that were taken for granted. These included the idea that girls and women had a more positive attitude towards gay men than men did (I assume this meant “straight” men), that dance was primarily a female activity (indicated by the abundance of women in the community), and that women were easier to talk to and more emotionally open. It was also taken for granted that gay men who danced did indeed form close friendships with women in the community, and that it was legitimate to feel “safer” around girls than other men.

It could be that because I, as the one asking the questions, was a woman (and a dancer) that certain agreed upon assumptions did not require further explanation on their behalf. Because I was a female familiar with their community, they assumed I would understand what they were taking about. Interestingly enough, I did understand what they were talking about. In retrospect, I see that this unspoken but mutual understanding made it possible for us to communicate, but also left certain things unexplained because between us, it did not need explaining. I view this research from a social constructionist perspective, but I realize that I have certain socially and culturally embedded patterns of thought that are essentialist.

I now return to the discussion of the theme “The road to pursuing dance”, and continue to look at aspects that contributed to making dance an attractive career in the eyes of the participants. One factor that intrigued and encouraged the participants to pursue dance was the feeling that they could succeed and do well at something.

Accomplishment: “maybe I can accomplish something”. A common notion among the participants was the feeling of accomplishment and achievement they experienced in dance. Elements of identity transcended this experience through a sense of worthiness that ultimately defined them, not only as dancers, but also as people. One participant shared how the concept of accomplishment was important in terms of finding himself through dance:

I got to express myself through a medium where [...] you started with something and then you had, you realized that you had talent you know, and then you sort of did it some more and you were “good” in quotation marks [...] here maybe I can accomplish something, that that was a part of the whole thing too

Another participant said: “I was encouraged in something, in something that I could accomplish” and “what’s so nice about maybe being [...] the only boy you know is that they support you”. As illustrated here, being the only boy, or one of a few boys, in dance class was not unusual. This was experienced as dichotomous: positive in terms of receiving attention and encouragement from teachers, but negative in terms of feeling anomalous and alienated.

One dancer explained it like this:

I thought it was very challenging you know [...] I felt well that I was good at something after a while, and there was a lot to work with that I maybe felt after a while that I improved on, and then it just continued like that. I was the only boy at the school, so that in itself was maybe a little tough too in terms of school and and friends and stuff [...] I got a lot of attention too though

Being the only boy resulted in him receiving confirmation and positive feedback in the studio, but also meant facing challenges outside the studio. However, this sense of improving and discovering that he was good at something encouraged him to continue. For another participant, the feeling of accomplishment tied into a desire to be seen:

When I all of a sudden understood that this is something I can take with me on stage, cause I have always loved being on stage. I think it has something to do with that I felt like I wasn’t seen but when I got on stage I was seen. So I think that’s why I have become so fond of being on stage

This participant had always enjoyed performing but did not discover the possibility of a dance career until his teenage years. Dance was a venue where he could be seen, which was something he felt he had lacked and which was something that encouraged him to pursue a career on stage.

As illustrated in these subsequent excerpts, one concrete incentive for sticking with dance and wanting to make a career out of it was the experience of achievement and accomplishment. Improving their dance abilities and receiving positive feedback motivated them intrinsically and extrinsically. In dance they were encouraged, and in turn, being encouraged motivated them to achieve. Dance scholar Hanna (1987) supported this notion in her article on gender and dance. Although her research is somewhat outdated and overly concerned with categories of gender, it is an interesting comparison to the issue of achievement. She wrote that the feeling of accomplishment on stage was especially important for an otherwise marginalized group such as gay male dancers. She suggested that receiving appreciation and praise for hard work, training, and dedication in the studio and on stage, was an important motivator and self-esteem boost. Although, as mentioned earlier, none of the participants referred to themselves as an “oppressed” or “marginalized” group, but in a historical, social, and cultural context it had significance.

According to Risner (2009b), the reasons for why young men are attracted to dance have many explanations. He mentioned elements such as: challenging the body through movement, emotional expression, physical satisfaction, creative outlet, playful enjoyment, and sense of achievement (p.141). These were all positive aspects of dance and important components in rationalizing the meaningfulness of being a dancer. On the flip side of the coin, Risner found that when he asked participants to pass on advice to other male dancers they expressed personal struggle and turmoil. In the face of isolation, exclusion, and stigma as boys wanting to dance, they were required to maintain persistent, passionate, and determined in order to reach their goal. As we will see in the following subtheme, pursuing an untraditional career that society had strong associations with and often frowned upon was often difficult, and could leave a person feeling like the “odd man out”.

Being different: “lonely wolf”. Based on the participants’ stories and experiences, the feeling of being “different” from others growing up was commonly identified. The dance community seemed to offer a place in which being different was okay and acceptable. Here it seems relevant to re-cap a section from the literature review in the form of Hanna’s description of the dance community as: “on the fringe of society and receptive to the unconventional” and “an insulation from a rejecting society” (p. 33). Hanna describes the dance world as a place that caters to and embraces the unconventional. Although this description does not sit well with me because it generalizes the dance community and portrays dancers as strange and odd, it is an interesting remark. Looking at how the participants in this

study expressed the idea of feeling “different”, we see that it is a more refined sense of not feeling quite comfortable in certain social and cultural settings. In more specific terms, the feeling of being “different” was emphasized through preferring different interests and hobbies than other boys their age and not identifying with them. Several participants had experience being bullied during their childhood, and amongst them one said:

I was very different than the others from when I was little, and was, and was bullied a lot throughout elementary school and especially during high school. It was pretty bad actually... and then I think dance came as a way to find myself in in a way, even if dance has led me both away from myself and back to myself again

This participant explicitly said that he had felt different growing up and that he had struggled through his years in school. Dance seemed to have offered him some support and encouragement that had helped him better understand who he was. In using expressions like “finding myself” and “dance has led me both away from myself and back to myself again” he touches on the constant negotiation and reinterpretation of identity and self that goes on. This also suggests a dynamic interplay and sharing between experiences in dance and defining identities.

Continuing on the subtheme of difference, one participant said he struggled to be accepted among his peers and wished he hadn’t been a “sheep” for so many years. Once he did break out of this label and went his own way, he relabeled himself as “a lonely wolf”. In looking back on why he was bullied he had come to the conclusion that it was because of his feminine interests, not because he acted feminine. A third participant explained the feeling of being different as a result of not being like the other “normal boys” in his class:

I was pretty different but but at the same time I grew up in a small city where [...] the majority of boys in my class were [...] normal boys that were just as smart as they should be, just as interested in sports as they should be, while I then fell a little outside of all that

The other boys in his class fit into the mold of how a boy should be by being accordingly smart and athletic. With this being the frame for “normal”, he was not left with many other definitions than different. Although the participants had unique experiences of being different or feeling as an outsider, they all found ways to relate it to dance. For instance, that dance had provided a free zone from the definition of “normal” in the outside world

Doug Risner (2009b) also observed a common feeling of being different among American pre-professional male dancers who participated in a research survey. He found that although male dancers are highly appreciated and sought after as a somewhat rarity within the dance community, they face feeling belittled and excluded from the outside world. The

feeling of being different could be experienced as particularly difficult if it had a negative connotation and lead to being excluded from social settings (Goffman, as cited in Risner, 2009b, p. 124). Risner noted that this was especially true for male dancers who not only participated in a traditionally feminine activity but who on top of that were suspected of being gay.

Among the participants in this current study, the feeling of being different was experienced as difficult, sensitive, and even painful in retrospect. On the other hand, I also got the sense that they took pride in having gone their own way although it meant overcoming certain obstacles along the way. They had made a transition from others defining and excluding them as different, to defining *themselves* as different, accepting it, and eventually embracing it. This was to some extent made possible through their participation in the dance community, a community which they perceived as more open to embracing difference and diversity than other parts of society.

This brings us to the next theme in which the participants shared what it was like to be a dancer and what life was like within this identified community. Thus far, the dance community was primarily described as a particularly open and accepting community that facilitated comfort, acceptance, and satisfaction. However, as we will see shortly, the reality was not so cut and dry. The dance world, as any other social structure, was also subject to social, cultural, historical, and political influences, as well as expectations of gender and sexuality.

Life as a Dancer: gay in the wings, straight on stage

Up until this point I have discussed the dynamics of growing up and choosing to dance, and making the moves necessary to pursue a career. I have also discussed how the participants experienced the dance community as an appealing and comforting place. In this theme, the participants shared more details about what life was like as a dancer. In moving into and sustaining a career or education in dance, four sub-themes were identified: defining the dancer, being gay, gendered dance, and art versus show.

Defining the dancer. When discussing dance history in the literature review, I mostly focused on ballet and western dance. There are several reasons for this, one being that the majority of the research in the field is on ballet and in the west, and two being that many forms of dance sprung out of ballet or were developed later. The history of ballet has had an effect on many other dance forms and stage expressions. There are of course many other forms of dance that have very different histories and backgrounds and who treat gender and

sexuality very differently. According to dancer and choreographer Rennie Harris, in the eye of the spectator, being a hip hop dancer did not challenge a man's masculinity the way ballet, jazz or modern dance did (as cited in Fisher and Shay, 2009, p. 115). This was also true in house dance, where mixing feminine and masculine movements was encouraged. However, the history of house was very different than that of ballet because it developed as a social dance in clubs during the early 1980's where people of all backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and life styles came together (Cox, 2005). Ballet had a much longer history, going back to the 17th century and Louis the XIV (Fisher and Shay, 2009; Steingrad, n.d.). Naturally enough, given its history, ballet developed a much different tradition.

In this research study, all participants were engaged in dance as a performing art (as opposed to street dance and social dance). One of the participants identified as a ballet dancer, while the remaining six referred to themselves as freelance dancers who mostly worked within newer forms of modern dance expressions. All participants had tried several dance styles during the course of their education, ranging from folk dance to ballroom to street dance. Several of them had ended up with more contemporary expressions of dance because they found the stricter forms of dance technique to be mundane and unexciting. One participant said:

I was gonna be a real jazz dancer and stuff but then I understood well after a while that this was a little boring, that it was not challenging enough, and that it was too one-sided. So I thought, I thought no. I think I need to be more in that form and style that is a bit more challenging

When asked to elaborate on this he said: "I need to have something more challenging so I can, so I have to work, and from the basis of being myself". Choosing to go into modern/contemporary dance opened up for a wider range of expressions and possibilities. The concept of expressing the self through dance and challenging creativity was important to all participants. Dance was personal and something that reflected who they were. As one participant put it: "not until now [...] have I felt that I am starting to find myself as a dancer, sort of to dare to be myself on stage [...] working with projects and using yourself as the vantage point [...] now maybe you dare to give something of yourself really as the person you are". There was a desire to find those moments in dance where the dancer and the self came together because when this unity reached its pinnacle, they could truly express themselves. This was also a way of negotiating identities as dancers and as people, and making sense of why dance was important.

Another important agenda for several of the participants was freeing the term “dancer” and replacing it with “dance artist”. It seemed that the word “dancer” downplayed and did not sufficiently cover the work and creative processes they went through. They considered themselves artists that used dance as their tool of expression on equal grounds as other artists did. This was consistent with what the participants in Risner’s research said (2009b). It was with pride that they defined themselves as artists of dance rather than just dancers or athletes (p. 143). They were adamant about dance not being a sport, and even claimed that dancing required more physical ability and preciseness than other sports. Risner wrote that his participants rejected the attempt to make dance more masculine by comparing it to sports, because dancing was about “artistic expression, creativity, and self discovery” (p.143).

In relation to defining their occupation, participants were asked how they presented themselves to non-dancers. It had become common practice for several of them to move away from introducing themselves as dancers to introducing themselves as artists. This was because of people’s reactions and ideas of what being a dancer entailed, and to avoid further questions about their occupation. Some of the ideas people had about what the dance profession were that dancers were young and fit, that dancers were all about “show”, that dancing was not a “real” profession, and that one could not live off of it.

People were a little put off because they probably thought I looked a little too old because when they think dancer, they think show dancers and cats [musical] and twenty-two year old you know. So I remember I had problems with that for a long time, for many years where I was like every time I said I am a dancer or performance artist [...] it always became fourteen sentences about what I did, until the term dance artist turned up or I just say I am an artist

This participant presented two dilemmas, one being that people thought he looked too old to be a dancer, and two being what “terminology” to use when presenting himself. Another participant mentioned the “age stigma” as well: “[people would ask] but you don’t dance now? [I would answer] yes I do. I I dance, I’m not, I’m not using crutches. I can still move I say. I just turned [age] now, but I still do it”. People had strong associations about dance being an activity for young energetic people and that it was not something one continued doing later in life. There was some frustration related to having to explain that they could still be dancers and maintain a career within dance despite being grown men.

People’s misguided perceptions about the dance occupation were sometimes frustrating to deal with. One participant said that people did not know enough about the dance profession and needed to be educated:

Not a lot of people dance, so most people are very surprised [...] oh so you can live off of it? and stuff like that..and a lot of people who don't know a lot about it, so you have to explain the beginning, the basics, that you don't stand on pointe and things like that [...] There are many who ask after a while yeah are you gay?

Because dancing was not a common profession, people did not know much about it aside from the stereotypical ideas they already had. It was maybe not so strange then that the question of whether he was gay or not came up when people heard he was a dancer. One participant was frustrated over people thinking that dance was synonymous with “showing off” or “doing tricks”. When he introduced himself as a dancer people would make requests like: “can't you do the splits for us”, whereas when he said that he was as an artist, people would be more interested in his art. He thought it was important to talk about dance in terms of creating art and “not as high legs and jumps”. It was clear that the participants had a great deal of respect for the dance profession and considered themselves artists more so than the traditional idea of a dancer. They experienced dance as much more than just a peripheral occupation, but as a lifestyle and a form of expression. Dealing with people's misconceptions of dance and stereotypes of dancers was an element of frustration, but one they were used to dealing with on a regular basis.

Being gay: “you can be yourself one hundred percent”. I was curious to know what it was like to be gay in the dance community, misconceptions aside, from the perspective of the ones experiencing it first hand. The participants were asked to elaborate on what it was like to be gay in they field of dance. The general consensus was that it was not problematic, because the people and the community were open-minded and because there were a lot of gay male dancers. This was supported by research on sexual orientation and professional dance (Bailey & Oberschneider, 2007) where all the participating gay male dancers said that they experienced the dance community as particularly open and accepting of homosexuality. Risner (2009b) wrote that although men who danced were subject to suspicion about their sexual orientation, for teenage gay and/or bisexual men, dancing was a positive motivator in acknowledging and owning their sexual orientation (p. 119).

One of the participants in the current research study said this about being gay in the dance community:

I won't say that, you know, the optimal thing if you are gay is to seek out the dance community, I won't say that. But, but I never feel that I, I never meet any prejudice within the dance community, that I haven't. No, not ever I think. I can't think of one single time

He did not want to blatantly encourage gay men to join the dance community, but believed and experienced it to be a prejudice-free zone. Another participant concurred with this and said:

That's what's so nice about the dance community, because there are so many, there are so many gay people so you feel very safe, that you can be yourself one hundred percent, so I feel that I like for every year that passes here, I become more, I let go more and more of my inhibitions

In the dance community, because there were a lot of gay men, he could relax and be himself fully (“one hundred percent”). Once again, there was an indication of a mutual reinforcement between being apart of an accepting dance community and feeling like one’s sexual orientation could be expressed freely and openly.

One participant set himself apart from the rest in saying that he had not experienced being discriminated against as a gay man within *or* outside the dance community. For him, being gay had not been experienced as especially problematic. He mentioned two things that set the dance community apart from the outside world, one being that his social circle in dance consisted of more gay male friends, and two, that “in dance there is a sexual tension while in society you are just one in a crowd of many”. He acknowledged some different patterns in social make-up between the communities that were related to sexuality and gender, but not in a negative way.

For the majority of the participants, it was agreed that the dance community was fairly relaxed and forgiving in terms of sexuality. However, there were also occurrences that defied the idea that the dance community was as open as they claimed. Instances that illustrated this were often a result of specific episodes with teachers, peers or choreographers. The following excerpt is one such example; “I have experienced that [...] a few teachers at school who have been exceptionally hetero you know that have just thrown some insults [...] yeah you are gay sort of but you don't need to be gay”. In this case he was referring to teachers at a performing arts institutions who would make comments about him being gay, implying that it was okay to be gay but it was not to show that he was gay. On behalf of the teacher, there was an assumption that it was consciously possible to distinguish and separated sexual orientation and attraction from the expression of sexuality and gender. In his research, Risner (2009a) had also become aware of the heterosexist views some dance teachers had in the dance community. He stressed the importance of teachers recognizing their power within the educational setting and the implications of commenting on and assuming a student’s sexual orientation.

Risner wrote that the importance of social support from family, friends, peers, and teachers was of utmost importance in the lives of gay male dancers during their adolescent years (Risner, 2009b). One participant shared an episode in which a classmate, whom he referred to as a “a fucking homophobe”, had publically labeled his gay peers as “nutcases”. Following this episode he didn’t feel supported by people around him; “everyone was sort of like well well you have to tolerate that, it was almost like it’s your own fault”. He experienced not receiving the support and understanding he needed. It was as if such episodes were inevitable and just something he had to accept and deal with.

Another issue in terms of sexuality and gender in the dance community was how “straight” male dancers fit into the picture. In the excerpt below, one participant shared a description of the social make up of the dance environment:

I think it’s very nice now to be in an environment where there are this many girls and where there also are more gay men, and the straight men that are there are maybe, I don’t know, if they are used to being discriminated against themselves because they dance, or if they then because they are so used to being around girls that they too..and that they have a different relationship to bodies[...] because they dance

Here he supported previous assumptions that the majority of dancers in the field were women and gay men, but also acknowledged that there were straight male dancers there as well. He suggested that the heterosexual men in dance, because they also were faced with stereotypes and assumptions about their sexuality, had a different understanding and appreciation for what it was like to be stigmatized. He also indicated that as dancers, regardless of their gender or sexual identity, shared a common understanding and experience of the body in dance. If the relationship to the body is one thing that dancers have in common, it is one additional thing that brings them together and defines them as a community (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Continuing on the subject of “straight” male dancers, several participants mentioned that they thought it was equally or more difficult for them to be dancers; “I actually think it’s worse for a straight guy in the dance community than for a gay guy [...] because they are always met with questions about their sexuality [...] and given a hard time”. The challenges faced by heterosexual male dancers were also brought upon in Risner’s research (2009b). He found that heterosexual males were more likely to keep their dancing a secret and had a more difficult time dealing with homophobic reactions from outsiders than gay or bisexual male dancers did.

In this subtheme of “being gay”, it was made clear that sexual orientation intercepted with being a dancer and that there were a variety of related challenges for men who danced,

regardless of sexual orientation. This issue foreshadowed the subsequent section in which the physical expression of sexuality and gender in dance became a focal point.

Gendered dance: “they weren’t straight enough”. Among the challenges that the participants encountered in their professional careers was dealing with expectations of how they should or should not express their sexuality, especially on stage. Partnering on stage had historically been an indicator of how dance and gender were intertwined. In ballet for instance, the male would emphasize his masculinity by being reserved in his movement language and staying focused on the ballerina at all times (Dolin, 1950). Burt (2007) suggested that by doing this he identified with the male spectators in the audience and set the standard for gender role expectations in dance. Duets between men and women were indicative of hierarchy, social class, and power relationships.

All participants in this study had a concept of what was considered “masculine” versus “feminine” dance; either through personal experience, episodes with choreographers and other dancers, or because they had strong opinions about what they preferred themselves. Many of them were conscious of choreographers preferring a “masculine” looking dancer. Three participants expressed considerable frustration over this. In some extreme instances they risked losing jobs because they did not look manly enough. The following narrative described this in detail:

P: yeah yeah yeah in relation to a lot of choreographers who want manly-men

R: manly-men?

P: manly-men yeah, often they can be a little, I don’t want to say in shortage, but I am very fascinated when I see a really macho man who dances, like really... I don’t see myself as a really macho man, I see myself as a man but not outrageously manly [...] I think it’s really nice to see a real explicitly masculine man dancing you know, I think it’s just beautiful, it’s really nice. I have experiences, stuff like that, that you shouldn’t be explicitly gay [...] it’s okay that you are gay, but you should be able to play straight on stage, and I have gotten comments before performances [...] “can you get your hair cut? and preferably get a real boyish haircut so you look a little..”

P: what, has someone said that to you?

R: Yeah yeah yeah, and that’s coming from gays themselves [...] a choreographer wants me as a gay person to look much more manly on stage [...] that can provoke me a little cause you cause you are only the person person, you just have to accept the person as is you can’t put on this and that

F: no but do they justify, justify it?

P: no it has something to do with aesthetics and I don’t think they want for it to become some circus show [...] afraid that it won’t be taken seriously enough maybe if you see that the performer is gay

This participant had a spectrum approach to “manliness” in dance, where he placed himself somewhere in the middle, between a so-called “macho-man” and whatever else he thought

was at the other end of the spectrum (a more “feminine” man?). Male dancers who were overtly masculine in their expression fascinated him, as if this was something rare and special. He identified as a man (“I see myself as a man”) but did not have the characteristics or qualities that qualified for the “straight look” (“but not outrageously manly”). At the same time, he was perturbed when choreographers asked him to cut his hair and look “straight”. He reflected on this as a desired aesthetic that choreographers used in order to validate their work, because somehow this contributed to the work being taken more seriously.

I included my own prompts in this paragraph in order to briefly illustrate how my own subjectivity influenced the build up of the interviews (see methods section). As noted by Willig (2001), being aware of ones “personal reflexivity” is an important part of qualitative research because one’s background, experiences, and beliefs undoubtedly color the research process (p. 10). In the case of the excerpt above, I was disturbed by the experience the participant was sharing because it seemed outrageous and inappropriate. My reaction to his story prompted him to tell more and gave him further incentive to go into detail. There were similar examples of this in the other interviews as well, and this was just one brief illustration of the dynamic interaction between the individual participant and myself.

The theme of “the straight look” came up in another interview. The participant was frustrated with choreographers’ attitudes towards gender on stage but on behalf of others; he himself was not perceived as a “feminine” dancer.

it was problematic for some to work [...] especially with certain female choreographers, cause they weren’t man enough in their eyes. So it wasn’t so easy for for many of the female choreographers to use these boys in these productions cause [...] they weren’t straight enough. I was simply lucky [...] I was perceived as, oh my god, a man, as hetero you know, in physical expression and stuff, that I wasn’t feminine so therefore therefore it was okay, it’s actually really disgusting

This participant had witnessed how some choreographers had been hesitant to use men who were not “straight enough” for the purpose of their work. He considered himself lucky to have been considered sufficiently “masculine” in his expression, but was appalled by the treatment his more “effeminate” colleagues had received.

These couple of preceding excerpts suggest a binary attitude towards gay male dancers in the community; it was okay to be gay off-stage but not on-stage. Traditional understandings of gender and sexuality transcended artistic visions, choice of dancers, and structure of choreography (especially in terms of partner work). The patterns of heteronormativity in Norwegian society were reflected and represented in dance, both on stage and in the wings (Anderssen & Hellesund, 2009). This was portrayed through exhibiting

established gender roles in dance productions, casting dancers that fit desired stereotypes, basing choreography off of traditional gender roles, and staying within a limited cultural framework of gender. Heteronormativity was by no means absent as indicated by another participant;

it baffles me that the contemporary dance world is also so very heteronormative. If you go and see a performance [...] it's the man who lifts the woman and the woman becomes a little..you read so easily that the woman is the victim and the man is sort of the one that holds [...] that's in control [...] it's also very conservative [...] just vomit of the rest of society sort of

He was surprised and disappointed that the dance world continued to uphold and perform the male-female stereotype of strong versus weak. His distaste for the heteronormative practice and expectations in dance was clearly expressed in his last words “just vomit of the rest of society”. This excerpt spoke to the intrinsic nature of heterosexual norms in all aspects of society, even the dance world. In looking back at previous themes, this may seem contradicting to previous statements about the dance community being an accepting “safe haven”. The paradox was that, although many of their experiences and stories were conflicting, the participants themselves were not conflicted when sharing them.

Although it was not made overtly clear, a distinction was made between heteronormative preferences within the community and the acceptance of people's sexual orientation. The problem was not that they were gay or that they were “different”, it was that there was still a desire for them to embrace and act in line with heterosexual norms and traditions.

A surprising result was that there was a distinguishable two-fold divide among the participants in terms of their attitudes towards gender in dance. The three participants referred to in the previous paragraphs challenged the existing gender roles in dance, seeing it as an important agenda to shed light on the unfairness that accompanied it. Three of the remaining participants on the other hand, did not challenge these gender roles. On the contrary, they put forth strong opinions about what kind of male dancers they preferred, expressing a dislike for men who danced in seemingly “feminine” and emasculated ways. For instance, one said;

Aesthetically, I prefer male dancers who dance in a masculine way [...] I want men to be men [...] personally I don't like men and boys with a very feminine body language in general, so if they dance and are generally very feminine and have mannerisms.. [the masculine dancer to me] is more real, that it's not a charades show, or that sexuality is not a personality, it's a part of it but it's not, I don't have a need for people to walk around with their sexuality

This idea of sexuality and personality being separate entities was interesting. It was important to distinguish between gender roles and sexual orientation: they were not to be confused with each other. Again, the fear of a performance being viewed as a joke because of “overtly gay” performers was present. An attempt was made to justify this by saying that masculine dance was more “real”. I understand this to mean that the participant viewed masculine dancers as more genuine in their expression, and therefore more in line with the “nature” or “essence” of a man. This is in line with an essentialist perspective of certain qualities being inherent and universal (Beasley, 2006, p. 251). This discussion related well to the previous excerpt about choreographers being afraid of their work being perceived as a “circus show” and not as a serious expression of art (see p 18 here). If being masculine on stage was equivalent to being “authentic”, and performing in a “feminine” or “gay” manner was equivalent to a “charades” or “circus show”, it meant that a gay identity was not to be taken seriously. It was important to not come across as gay when performing, both in the eyes of some choreographers and some of the participants. The way in which this preference was expressed through speech in the interviews, bordered resentment and disapproval towards those who did.

In one case the issue of feminine versus masculine dance was associated with the acting aspect of dance:

boys who are completely flaming gays sort of when they dance [...] it's about that dancers are actors, you have to go into a role [...] dancers have become worse at going into character, and then you often become yourself on stage and just flash with all your tricks without going into the role [...] you have to be conscious of that, okay, now I am in a masculine role, or am I supposed to be myself, am I supposed to be neutral, should I be very feminine; dancers are actors

This participant emphasized how being an actor in dance meant being able to go in and out of different roles. He used this to explain that gay men should be able to leave their “gay” expression and mannerisms behind and take on a more “straight” look, as if it was a mask that could be taken on and off. Again, the role of the dancer interfaced with sexual orientation and gender role portrayal.

Another participant stressed the importance of emphasizing the differences between men and women on stage in order to create the “correct” interaction between them; “there is a difference between male and female roles and especially in performances on stage [...] especially in duets, interaction between boy and girl, it's very important that you have the strong boy and the soft girl, that together it's a nice mix”. Once again, traditional norms of male-female interaction and relationships came up, deeming a specific dynamic as especially desirable. This participant also made a comment about how gay men were often told that they

danced like girls whereas girls were never told that they danced like boys. This was an interesting remark that reflected how some gender role expectations were reversed and even over-looked in dance, while others were enforced and maintained.

The one remaining participant who was not mentioned in the two-fold divide on gendered dance did not express a strong opinion either way. However, he was aware of colleagues discussing dancers and saying “he looks very masculine on stage” and “he is a real prince”. He also discussed how different artistic directors had different preferences and visions in terms of hiring gay versus straight dancers, but he did not take a stance on whether he agreed or disagreed with it. Regardless, the representation of gender in dance was present in the accounts of all participants and translated into a preferred aesthetic, as well as an issue of overt and covert prejudice.

In the book “When Men Dance”, dancer and choreographer John Peddington shared similar experiences as a gay male dancer (In Fisher & Shay, 2009). He was pleased yet puzzled by audience members who commented on his dance performances as exceptionally masculine. This was meant as a compliment that he should embrace, but instead it left him feeling confused. The latent implication was that by looking masculine it meant that he did not look gay, which was considered a positive thing in the eyes of the audience.

I would like to relate this section of gendered dance to Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity. As social beings we perform gender in accordance with our historical, cultural, and social references, with the performing arts being no exception (Butler, 1988). As seen in this subtheme, the explicit expression of sexuality and gender was present in many aspects in the dance community. The biggest conundrum seemed to be how to negotiate being gay without “expressing gay”. As mentioned in the literature review, the gendered body in dance was an expression of an inherited recipe of norms and traditions (Burt, 2007). One such expression was researched by Gere (1994), who wrote about gay men and effeminate gestures. When viewed in light of Butler’s theory of performative gender he wrote: “the effeminate boy or man is one who, metaphorically speaking received his gender assignment in the mail yet refuses to pay the postage due” (p. 375). He stressed that there was a spectrum of effeminacies, and that these expressions were fluid and constantly open for change and transformation. In society, and in the dance community, the concept of a fluid and transitory expression of gender had barely scratched the surface. Performing out of line with the expected expression of gender and sexuality had repercussions (Burt, 2007). In the case of

this study and the participants who had been exposed to such critique, the consequences had been in the form of being criticized, humiliated, stigmatized, and sometimes rejected.

Identifying as a gay man and still fulfilling gender role expectations in the face of audience members, colleagues, and authorities in dance was a challenging balancing act. Assumptions, preferences, and expectations of what was appropriate and desired on and off stage were clear, regardless of if they were clearly voiced or not. It was a complicated mission to satisfy both oneself and others in the creative process. In the following section the aesthetics of dance was elaborated on further, especially in terms of dance as art versus entertainment.

Art versus show: “the icing on the cake can taste like crap”. The aesthetics of dance was a multifaceted topic. One major issue that the participants felt strongly about was that dance was more than just “show”, technical perfection, and a trained body, but rather an expressive form of “art”. This distinction was expressed in different terms such as the physical versus emotional aspect of dance, the technical versus expressive nature of dance, and the artistic versus physical dancer. There seemed to be a latent idea that on either side of “versus” there was one meaningful aspect and one superficial. One participant said;

my joy of dancing has always come from within [...] I struggle with the fact that there is so much focus on the external things, especially now with legs and extensions [...] it’s a foreign world to me and I think it’s important that [...] the icing like on the cake [high legs] can taste like crap if you don’t have a good a good intention underneath [...] I wish to work with expressing my own feelings, and yeah, an expression

Here he referred to technical bravura and physical dance ability as inferior to the expressive aspect of dance. Although technique was integral to being a good dancer, it was only a small portion and could by no means define it. Another participant said; “steps come second for me. I think the motivations for why you do it and why you go there [...] is more important than perfecting dynamics”. The body was instrumental in the process of expressing, but it was the product of this work that was interesting to them: “Everything could be expressed through the body [...] create an illusion, it could look supernatural [...] you could enter another world”. They embodied their profession as something more profound that required nuanced knowledge and intention on a physical, emotional, and mental level. There was more to being a dancer than the superficial image of an athletic entertainer that they were rejecting. It was especially important to convey to non-dancers what “real” dance and artistry entailed. This meant introducing dance as an art form so people would be intrigued by what they were creating rather than what kind of tricks they could do.

Preference of dance style also tied into how they identified as dancers. (There are many stylistic and interpretative approaches to dance, where some are more focused on competition and physicality, and others are focused on stage art and expression.) The majority of participants in this research had gravitated towards contemporary dance styles (not competitive dance), and in most cases this was a conscious choice that allowed more depth and expression. One participant said he enjoyed jazz a lot but that modern dance was more expressive; “I feel I get in touch with myself and get to develop more of myself [...] it is a much more natural choice for me”. He sought to go beyond shallow movement and move towards a deeper expression of self through dance.

For one participant who primarily worked within highly technical dance styles, the physicality of movement was intriguing; “for me it is to sort of get to move to music just primitively [...] to work with with the body with movements”. Besides this, he mentioned how it was an advantage to have the right life experiences in order to execute a role in a believable manner. Identifying with the character could sometimes be difficult and challenging.

In looking at how the participants viewed their profession, they were all concerned with it being more than a commodity of entertainment and as something more meaningful, expressive, and profound. In what way they resonated and chose to express this and to what degree they made a connection between this and issues of sexuality and gender, differed. In all cases the self and the dancer were not isolated bodies floating in separate spheres, but bodies that were in a reciprocal relationship constantly needing to be negotiated and adjusted. Similarly, the dance world could not be considered an entity untouched by outside influences. The dance community too was a part of a greater context of history, tradition, and society.

The Dance Community Versus The “Outside World”

In the two previous themes, I mostly focused on the dynamics within the dance community and themes that reflected life within those frames. As mentioned above, “the self as a gay man” and “the self as a dancer” were not isolated, separate, and distinguishable units. Similarly, the dance world, although at times portrayed as a social vacuum, was of course subject to outside influences and forces of cultural, societal, historical, geographical, and political structures. Expectations and attitudes towards gender roles and sexual orientation in Norwegian culture were present throughout all the interviews. These manifested themselves through the participants’ accounts about typecasting, physical appearance, lifestyle, and relationships. Some participants consciously tried to resist the traditional norms of gender and

sexuality, while others found ways to internalize them in a way that was meaningful and consistent with their own identity. I will get back to this in the last theme, “negotiating identities”. In this theme it made sense to gather what the participants had shared about the larger social framework they were in, how they talked about these constructs, and how they dealt with them. The way the participants talked about their lives as dancers and as gay men was not only reflective of their own attitudes and expectations but also of how they thought others perceived them. In this theme, the following four subthemes were looked at; segregated communities, media, double standards, and ‘status, tradition, and geography’.

Segregated communities: “a man’s world is more closed”. As discussed previously, the dance world was experienced as a safe and contained place where they felt at ease. The participants defined the dance community as a place where they could feel a sense of belonging within a larger social structure. Certain aspects of their lives, such as their sexual orientation, lifestyle and how they expressed themselves, were not congruent with expectations out in the “real world”. From an academic point of view, Kirsch (2007) wrote that communities were the catalysts of social connections and support systems. There was an important bond between identity development, community support, and self-fulfillment that counteracted isolation and facilitated a sense of empowerment. Other qualitative research on identity formation and gay communities has suggested that being apart of a community with a large gay population may be positive in terms of counteracting stress and feelings of being marginalized (Jellison & Lebeau, 2009).

However, defining what a so-called “dance community” or “gay community” was and consisted of, proved to be a highly subjective and difficult task. In terms of the participants in my study, some referred to a more narrow definition of the dance community that primarily consisted of dancers and other supporting members of that community, whereas others referred to a wider definition that also included other “like-minded” artists and creative professionals.

For some participants, the feeling of being accepted and appreciated was experienced in relation to the more encompassing art community, and not necessarily a phenomenon strictly related to the dance community: “The setting around people who are outside the art communities [...] is sometimes not so open [...] so people don’t find out who they are”. This division of the outside world versus the dance world was described in different ways. One participant talked about this segregation in terms of gender hierarchy:

why do so many gays choose dance? why do you feel at home there? [...] I think it’s, it’s that there are mostly ladies in dance [...] it’s easier to be gay around women than

men. A man's world is more closed and the masculine role is much more not hierarchal, but much harder to break down than girls [...] ladies are simply more open with gender don't you think

Here, the concept of segregated worlds was met with the social constructs of sex and gender. The dynamics of the "female" world made it easier to join for a gay man who felt excluded from the "male" world. Given that dance traditionally catered to a majority of girls and women, gravitating towards the dance community as a gay man was not so far-fetched. It was important to note that not all participants experienced the divide between life within and outside the dance community to this extent. One participant for instance, had never experienced feeling unaccepted or ill at ease in either place, as mentioned earlier.

The dance world separated itself from the "outside" world not only in terms of being a more secure and accepting place, but also in terms of gender constructs and a significantly larger girl/woman to boy/man ratio. How and why the image of the dance world as being primarily populated by women and gay men had come about, was partly due to media influences. Motion pictures and TV shows about dance had solidified dancer stereotypes and made them common knowledge in society at large.

Media: "they portray the dancer in a bad way". It was an undisputed fact among all the participants that there was an abundance of gay male dancers in the dance community. But where did this knowledge come from and how did people acquire it? One participant admitted that finding out that the dance community was frequented by gay men, had been a motivational factor in him seeking dance. This was information he had gotten through media sources such as books and movies:

it's sort of well known that there are a lot of gay men in the dance community so maybe that attracts them [...] when I started dancing ballet I thought ooh there there are..then I had read and maybe seen movies about that there were gay men there and I thought that was very..that attracted me as well

The media was one venue in which knowledge of gay men in dance was distributed and acquired. The image portrayed by the media indicated that the dance community had a definable and intrinsic social make-up. For this participant, learning that gay men danced had sparked a curiosity about the community. Other participants also mentioned that motion pictures, music videos, and TV shows had been influential factors in their first interactions with dance.

A recent study on the media and gay identity concluded that the media played a positive role in identity formation among gay, lesbian, and bisexual wo/men (Gomillion &

Giuliano, 2011). This was especially true during pivotal life experiences, such as becoming aware of their sexual orientation and coming out (p. 351). The media was also important in terms of identifying role models and could function as a supportive venue. This may be true for some lesbian, gay, and bisexual wo/men, but may not be equally relevant in relation to male dancers. According to Fisher and Shay (2009) the media's portrayal of male dancers (for instance in Hollywood movies), only contributed to stereotypes of male dancers even when they tried portraying them as "masculine". In movies such as "Dirty Dancing" and "Shall We Dance?" an attempt was made at all cost to portray the male dancer as stereotypically heterosexual and masculine. Although the intention may have been to show a different side of the male dancer, the script was loaded with heterosexual norms and homophobic references (p. 16). We see from the above literature, that the dynamics and influence of the media is complex and not easily deciphered. There are many different messages being distributed simultaneously, in which some are consistent with certain perspectives and contradictory of others. To the individual being exposed to such media influences, certain messages may appeal to different aspect of the self in various and unpredictable ways.

The media's role in gay-straight politics came up several times during the interviews. One participant shared a story in which a straight male dancer he knew had been a victim of discrimination: "it was even in the newspaper there, gay rumors about him in the local newspaper that he has been harassed about gay rumors and stuff, it's just crazy". Although this acquaintance was not gay, he was a victim of people stereotyping him as such because he danced. This participant said: "A straight boy who likes to dance may not dare to start dancing because he is scared of the comments that are going to come. And there are a lot of comments when a straight boy starts to dance". Somewhere along the line the icon of a dancer had been defined as a gay man and become common knowledge. Another participant tried to reason why people often assumed that being a male dancer was synonymous with being gay:

especially ballet dancers, cause the majority of them are straight, that is my impression [...] it has a lot to do with the media cause they sort of portray the male dancer in a bad way in the media [...] they are not so smart in how they portray dance [...] the media sort of prefer a skimpy outfit and something spectacular and then it becomes that you automatically think show and extremities [...] that's how I often feel male dancers are portrayed [...] that's a good reason for why people make that connection

The power of the media to confirm and uphold stereotypes about the male dancer was apparent. The image of a superficial entertainer was one that the participants did not identify with or necessarily conform to, but had to face none-the-less. It was inevitable that these labels and ideas of male dancers as put forth by the media, in combination with other norms

and gender expectations, became generally accepted and practiced discourse in society. This was frustrating because none of them wanted to be pigeonholed.

Double standards: “homophobic homo”. As indicated by the previous section, there was a separation between the world within and outside of the dance community. The first message that came across was that the dance world was more open and accepting than the “outside world”. This held true in instances when the dance community was experienced as a generous and inclusive environment. On the other hand, it did not hold true based on the significant amount of shared experiences that suggested the opposite. This was especially obvious in terms of working with choreographers in stage productions, but also in terms of participants own expectations of gender roles in dance (as discussed in “gendered dance”).

There seemed to be a double standard in the dance community, because the seemingly open-minded and inclusive environment was also equally quick to shoot down deviation. On the one hand, it prided itself on being an inclusive and safe community, but on the other hand it upheld traditional gender roles and heteronormative discourse. This was exemplified in several passages. In response to whether he experienced any discrimination within the community, one participant, as mentioned earlier, said that he had noticed an increase in the amount of gay male dancers that were hired where he danced. He suspected this had something to do with a shift in leadership, but was also weary of it possibly being a coincidence: “I don’t know if it’s just speculations but there were fewer gay men before”.

Another participant brought up the issue of status:

it’s very high status to be a male straight dancer [...] the boys who are good dancers and straight in addition to that are really encouraged [...] I have often thought, oh my god, I should have been straight [...] that would have been the icing on the cake [...] I feel like it came easier for the ones who were straight in terms of responses from teachers and feedback and stuff like that, God you are so wonderful on stage, so masculine

In this passage he expressed a desire to be straight because it would make life easier. In terms of the double standard, it is interesting that he felt that being straight would make life easier as a dancer in the dance community, not *outside* of dance. The concept of a high-status straight male figure was congruent with and reflective of heteronormative discourse and power structures. This idealization of a straight identity came up in another interview as well:

I call myself a homophobic homo because gay men and grand prix [music contest] and drag and stuff I am very yuck [...] I don’t think it’s right but I also used to think that it wasn’t right to be gay [...] I sat on Google at home and just ‘how to turn straight’ [...] how I could fix myself and it was just Jesus Jesus Jesus [...] but I am an

agnostic so I don't believe in God and Jesus so in terms of that it's very yeah. The dance community in [city] is fairly safe. I actually think it's worse for a straight guy in dance

This participant expressed distaste for “explicit” homosexuality and had struggled to accept his own sexual orientation. His attempt to find a solution to his “problem” over the internet, tied into the previous section on media discourse and influences. Being gay was something he and others thought was wrong and deviant. However, it seemed that he eventually had found a way to accept his sexuality and simultaneously stay true to the gender role expressions that he and many others favored. At the same time, he acknowledged the challenges that straight men met in dance. The multifaceted nature of this paragraph indicated the level of complexity that was experienced in identifying as gay. This was made easier to some extent in dance, in terms of feeling safe and accepted, but also made difficult because he was confronted with gay behavior that he otherwise wished to distance himself from.

The phenomenon of internalized homophobic attitudes among young male dancers was not a new concept (Risner, 2009a). In Risner's literature, the dancers he interviewed presented a dichotomous attitude towards the dance community and gay male dancers, even if they identified as such themselves. Whereas they confirmed that they experienced the dance community as very open and accepting of their sexual orientation as gay men, they also displayed strong homophobic attitudes towards other gay dancers. Underlying reasons for this behavior could be feelings of insecurity, self-loathing, and confusion. Risner suggested that *both* gay and straight dancers often try to dissociate themselves from homosexuality and other gay men.

I am however weary of using the term “homophobia” because it has become a controversial and much disputed term (Brown, Browne, Lim, 2007). As opposed to other expressions of directed hate, such as “racism” and “sexism”, “homophobia” is semantically associated and tied to the gay individual (Kulick, 2007, p. 209). Homophobic attitudes are also more often attributed to an “individuals' psyche”, whereas racism and sexism are explained in terms of social structures. Despite this, I think it is reasonable to use Risner's literature on homophobia given the limited amount of research within the field of dance, stigma, and sexuality. I also think it is necessary to acknowledge literature in this area because it provides a framework of understanding.

Status, tradition, and geography: “if you have higher education you see more art”. In the previous section I discussed the double standards of sex and gender within the dance community and the presence of “anti-gay” sentiments. The subject of social status was

touched upon in terms of sexual orientation. Status was also mentioned in respect to other occupations and education, for instance in relationship to peoples tolerance for gay people:

[people react differently] if I am talking to a highly educated person or not [...] if I am gonna go around and generalize a little [...] if you have higher education you see more art [...] there are a bunch of hypotheses about that in our society, and sometimes there can be more resistance against gay people in the not so educated [...] circles [...] I have had a social class journey myself, because none of my parents have higher education [...] while I I have an arts degree sort of, and work with art

He suggested that people with higher education were inclined to be more accepting, and drew a link between this and seeing art. He did not say why he thought higher educated people saw more art, whether this was because they were more interested, had the financial means to see art, or whether they were more exposed to it. Another participant made a similar comment but in relationship to people who exercise: “people who exercise are generally sort of engaged in society and positive people with a lot of energy and stuff and then, then there is a lot of acceptance there, there is room for things that are different”. These segments represented discursive practices that highlighted values and expectations that had become inherent to “western” society. Among these were the importance of higher education and being a active and physically fit citizen. Such discourses had an encouraging connotation, and were associated with positive characteristics such as being a progressive and open-minded person.

The dancers also compared their career choice to other occupations, presenting another layer of social status: “As a gay dancer, I meet more prejudice [...] than I would as a gay computer technician or wood worker or whatever, because now as a gay man studying dance I confirm to a greater extent peoples prejudice when I go outside the dance community”. The discourse and dynamics of gender and career choice came into play here as he suggested that certain occupations were less likely to be associated with being gay. He did not like that because he was a dancer he was more likely to fall into peoples´ stereotypes of what a gay man did for a living.

Status took on a wider scope when several participants compared Norway to other countries with longer or different traditions in dance. The following excerpt about cross-cultural differences in attitudes towards dancers and the status of dance came up during one interview:

that has changed just over the last ten years, cause before it was more like [...] “yeah, but what do you live off of, what is your occupation?” [...] it has something to do with Norway [...] dance has sort of never been, it has never had status, no, in comparison to further down in Europe, like you know Spain,

Germany, France all of these countries where it [...] has had equal status as other art forms. Yeah, but it has never had that here

Norway was described as a country with little appreciation for art and negative attitudes towards dance as an occupation, whereas other countries considered dance an equivalent to other art forms. He could not explain why these geographical borders mattered, but they did.

Another participant said this:

for instance in Russia [...] being a ballet dancer is a big thing [...] they have a long tradition there and they send their children when they are really young to the ballet school both girls and boys and it isn't viewed as something feminine like it is here [...] I guess it's the way they raise their children [...] here it's often that if you're a boy then you are sent to soccer school [...] it depends on how open-minded the parents are

In this excerpt, layers of cultural traditions and child-rearing practices were brought into the picture. What parents considered to be gender-appropriate and “high-status” careers for their children differed between Russia and Norway. This influenced the recreational and occupational choices they made and encouraged. According to Fisher and Shay (2009), Russia was a unique case in terms of its dance history and breeding of legendary male dancers. They explained that in the Soviet Union, during times of poverty and social struggle, talented young people who got accepted into a dance conservatory were considered privileged. Male dancers enjoyed good salaries and proper care, and were on the rise of higher social status (p. 18). This was not the case in the west, where dance was considered low-status and where wearing tights was associated with femininity.

According to Banes (1998), at the time her research was published more than a decade ago, dance had remained a female dominated art form in the west despite Diaghilev and Nijinsky's efforts to put the spotlight on the male ballet dancer. Banes wrote that whereas “young girls flock to ballet classes; boys need to be enticed there with scholarships and break-dancing classes” (p. 169). Although the last part of her statement did not hold true in the case of the participants in this study and despite the fact that her research was somewhat outdated, it was interesting to note that ballet in many places had remained a female-associated activity.

As discussed in the sub-theme “suburb to city”, geographic location within Norway's borders was also connected to different attitudes towards dance. Moving to a metropolis was pivotal in terms of pursuing a dance career because being from a smaller town/city was challenging in terms of getting quality training and pursuing an untraditional occupation. There was also an issue of “before versus now”, both in the previous excerpt and in the subtheme “suburb to city”, which indicated that some changes in the status of dance and the

status of gay men had occurred over the past decade. One last note on geographical differences was also of interest in comparing Norway and Sweden. One participant said: “in Sweden there aren’t so many gay men [who dance] you know...[there] it’s become normal to be straight and to be a dancer for some reason”. He was dumbfounded by the fact that Sweden appeared to have a larger population of straight male dancers, although he did not have an explanation for it. The idea that a neighboring country could have a dance community that differed from the Norwegian one was surprising to me as well given their close proximity and interaction with one and other. Although the participant could not account for this assumption, there seemed to be an assumption that Norway was particularly strict in its attitudes towards gender roles and dance. Andersen, Annfelt and Bolsø (2007) noted that certain trends, such as challenging heteronormativity, seemed to be more advanced and on the forefront in Sweden than in Norway (p. 15). Something as simple as the prevalence and frequency of an expression such as “heteronormativity” could indicate to what degree social issues of sex and gender were being pursued and challenged. This is supported in theories of language analysis, where the frequency of a given expression or word is reflective of societal and cultural the attitudes, norms, traditions, and values (Nafstad, 2005, p. 904). Although this was only a minor comment concerning differences in Norwegian and Swedish social systems, it could be an indicator of why there were perceived differences in the dance community as well.

This entire theme illustrated that geographical borders to a significant extent marked differences in traditions, norms, and attitudes. This in turn influenced how people and society viewed dance as a profession. The men who pursued dance were naturally affected by and forced to come to terms with these views. They experienced their career choice as less valued by society and were often confronted with assumptions about men who dance. The social norms of gender, career choice, child-rearing practices, and lifestyle as defined by geography, history, culture and tradition all came into play in understanding how the participants negotiated their identities.

Negotiating Identities: being a dancer and being gay

The construct and negotiation of identity is one of the research questions in this master thesis. From the very beginning participants in some way or form had to identify with or feel comfortable with being labeled as a dancer and as gay in order to feel compelled to participate. Whether these two labels (“dancer” and “gay”), had anything to do with each other was one of the major research questions and did not have a straightforward answer. The

data analyzed in relation to the theme “negotiating identities” help us understand how the participants approached the question of identity in terms of being a dancer and being gay. It also shed light on how they constructed “the self”, negotiated expectations within and outside the dance community, and how they made sense of, resonated, and finally communicated these experiences in the interview setting. As mentioned before, the goal was not to seek a cause-effect relationship but to understand and learn about the experiences of gay men who dance.

Identity formation, according to Damon (1983), is a psychological process of making sense of and constructing one’s own identity, but also a social process influenced by outside expectations and requirements (p. 307). In order to develop a fulfilling sense of identity, it was important to find a balance between one’s own sense of self and the externally imposed sense of self. This life long process takes place from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood, and is most fulfilling when there are few “serious intrinsic contradictions” (p. . 308). Damon considered the adolescent years to be especially dynamic in terms of identity formation. However, it was none-the-less a never-ending and age-transcending process of re/negotiation, re/organization, reflection, re/evaluation, and experience.

In general, all participants indicated that they identified with being dancers. However, for most of them it was the image of a dancer as an artist they identified with. Dancing was a form of emotional and psychological outlet, a place to be artistically creative, a means of expressing oneself, and a physically challenging occupation. They did not trivialize it in any way and they expressed a continuing personal relationship with their art form. The participants also identified with being gay, at least in the sense that they confirmed their sexual orientation when agreeing to participate. This did not mean that they identified with being gay in the same *way*. Given the unique nature, background, and experiences of each participant, each would arrive at a unique concept of self and identity.

There were many issues mentioned in the foregoing themes that could be seen in light of identity. The choice to break with gender role expectations and start dancing was not easy, and for many of them was a result of serious reflection and bravery. The sense of accomplishment that came with pursuing dance made them feel connected with and accepted by the community and dance as an abstract entity. The feeling of being safe and accepted provided a space where they could grow and be themselves. Relationships were formed, and especially friendships with girls were valuable. Several participants expressed a stronger identification with girls than with boys their own age. All of these experiences were integral

to who they were, and in some way contributed to how they identified and defined themselves. In this final theme of negotiating identities, three subthemes were explored: gendered speech, describing and defining oneself, and lastly, exploring a connection.

Gendered speech: “pussy pussy, tits tits”. Based on the results already discussed, the dynamics of being gay and choosing to dance were complex. Several of the participants did not identify with the male communities they grew up in and felt out of place there. There was no recipe for what came first or what was the primary reason for why they felt different and alienated. For some it was knowing that they were attracted to men and feeling that they could not express this, for others it was a tendency to gravitate towards other activities and interests than their peers. For two of the participants, the way in which other boys and men talked and expressed themselves verbally contributed to the experience of feeling out of place. Before coming out, one participant was reluctantly forced to play along with his peers:

I had to have a cover, had to all the time watch what I said and where I went [...] and when I was with my buddies then it was like pussy pussy and yeah, tits tits sort of, and yeah, it was terrible to sit there and have to say that “yeah, she’s hot. I would do her easily”, when you’re really thinking inside yourself “oh my God, I want to get away from here”

A part of the ritual of being a teenage boy was participating in such casual yet sexually explicit slang. This did not sit well with him because he did not identify with their expression of sexuality. This masculine, heterosexual discourse relied on identifying with the male gender as powerful and (hetero)sexually motivated. Even though such expressions may have had humorous undertones, they were perceived as uncomfortable within the given context. Another participant also spoke about the “male jargon” in terms of feeling alienated and different:

it has something to do with that you as a young person [...] notice that you are attracted to other men..you grow up then feeling different, you grow up in these really masculine tough hard environments [...] and you don’t feel quite at home [...] it has something to do with the jargon, that boy jargon and that male jargon, and that way of speaking that you don’t feel at home in [...] because you try to and they don’t know about you. You are carrying this big secret [...] and those people you are spending time with, these boys, they are, you are really more interested in physically or as emotionally than you are really interested in [...] I want to say to my friend “you know, oh, I like you a lot and I..” and then you can’t [...] there is something here you know, but I am going to try to find the thread, because then you always have to compromise [...] because you sort of don’t get to do what you are supposed to do, like everyone else around you are getting to do

In this passage he described what it was like growing up and feeling different. He drew upon concepts of gender roles and gendered speech, the challenges of being gay and coming out, and lastly, his sexuality and the need for emotional and physical outlet. He did not identify with the harsh male community he grew up in, and felt distanced from the way his male friends spoke and expressed themselves. The desire to express his own emotional and physical needs was suppressed and silenced. He had to make a compromise between acknowledging his own feelings and desires and being aware of other people's expectations and opinions.

Eng (2008) conducted research on heteronormativity in the context of Norwegian athletes, and found a similar theme of having to compromise. She found that gay male athletes had to be cautious of how they expressed intimacy with other heterosexual male athletes. The practice of male bonding in the locker rooms was an integral part of competitive sports and included joking around, verbally teasing one and other, and responding to playful physical contact. All these acts had fine-tuned subliminal codes and rules that determined the extent to which intimacy took place (p. 107). Stepping outside of the accepted perimeters of the male bonding ritual meant challenging heteronormative practices and was deemed inappropriate. For some of the gay athletes, the balancing act of participating in the bonding rituals but not crossing the heterosexual norms of intimacy was difficult. Additionally, the participants in Eng's study expressed a "need for tenderness and affectionate body contact without sexual motives", which was not fulfilled in the setting they were in. There was an absence of so-called "feminine" qualities in the male bonding ritual, which was something they longed for, but that was deemed inappropriate in the given context.

Returning to the participant's own words (see previous excerpt on previous page), the balancing act of wanting to express intimacy but not breaking social norms and expectations, was an emotionally draining and frustrating compromise. He continued to explain why he, and possibly others, chose to dance:

it had something to do with the feminine [...] with the physical aspect, the softness [...] cause you don't have an outlet for your inner emotions through being with boys. So I think [...] you then maybe can experience this through dance [...] you get to do something soft, you get to do something that feels good

Dance became a way to vent and release tension, and a place to explore physical and emotional qualities. The intimacy and closeness that his heterosexual peers were experiencing was something he longed for but did not have an equal opportunity to experience. The soft and soothing qualities in dance were something he enjoyed and felt comfortable with. For this

participant, choosing to dance appeared to be important in terms of his identity and understanding of self as a gay man.

Describing and defining oneself: “sexuality is not an identity”. It was important for me to give the participants an opportunity to share their own thoughts and associations on identity. The term identity was not defined during the interview and was therefore open to interpretation on behalf of the participants. Several interpreted this in terms of personality and characteristics such as “extrovert and social”, “loyal and open-minded” or “patient and introvert”. They mentioned other hobbies and interests they had, political affiliations, family values, future plans, and things they were passionate about. This spoke to the complexity of identity, because it was not only subject to the individual’s definition and interpretation of it, but also how the outside world defined and interpreted it for/with them.

There were many features to the participants’ descriptions of identity and who they were. Being a dancer was one of them and for some, but not all, being gay was too. One participant made an interesting remark about personality and sexuality:

sexuality is not an identity or not a personality. It is just a small part of it, and it is up to each and every one to what degree they are open or whether they choose to present it to others. And to me it is not the most important thing

He made a distinction between sexuality and identity/personality as separate entities. His (or others) sexual orientation was not something he placed a lot of emphasis on, it was almost an irrelevant aspect of a person that did not need much attention. Although he identified as openly gay, he did not seem to consider it an essential part of his identity. In this example, the participant communicated a desire to delineate aspects of him self according to his own concept of identity and personality, and choose to what degree he embodied and projected his sexual orientation. This fits well with Horowitz and Newcomb’s multidimensional model of homosexual identity (2002), in which they rejected traditional identity models and suggested that sexual desire did not necessarily determine sexual identity. From a social constructionist viewpoint, they encouraged the idea that each person has individual and distinct life experiences that shape how they make sense of the world they live in and construct the self.

Another participant characterized himself with three words, one of which was “dancer”. When asked to elaborate he said: “I know that to some extent I will always have dance as a part of my life from now and until I die”. In this statement dance was expressed as closely connected and intertwined with his life in an existential way. Dance was something that he would not abandon but stick with for the rest of his life. Another participant also had an existential response in describing his identity:

I would say that I am an artist and that I am gay [...] I am the type of person who has always lived and wishes to, it has been a choice I have made, to live a little on the side of the rest. I don't know why, but I think [...] ever since I understood that I was gay and just was different [...] I just understood that this is my place [...] I became unwilling to compromise [...] not because I am gay really, without sitting and saying "yeah, but I am, you are not gonna get me to dance like that because I am gay", it's not like that, but I am maybe sort of a little weird in my expression

Without hesitating, this participant mentioned being an artist and being gay as aspects of his identity. He had experienced feeling out of place growing up and had chosen to go his own way. In doing so he had found dance; a place where there was room for him. He had also made commitments to himself about being unwilling to compromise. To the extent it was possible, he wanted to maintain his integrity and values in terms of what type of work he did as an artist. This determined choices he had made in his career and how he wanted to express and portray himself as an artist and/or choreographer. Based on this and other statements he had made during the interview, I understood this decision to be largely related to his distaste for the heteronormative discourse in Norwegian contemporary dance.

Exploring a connection: "there are straight dancers too". At the end of the interview, participants were asked whether they thought there was a connection between being gay and being a dancer. The answers were in no way clear-cut and in most cases ambiguous. Several participants distinguished between whether there was a connection in their own personal lives and whether there was a connection in general. To begin with one participant said that he did not see the connection;

if I look at myself [...] then I don't see that connection [...] I have always been very comfortable around girls and have a lot of girlfriends [...] I can see that there is a connection there to me being gay, cause already from when I was pretty young I started seeking to, and when I became gay I started seeking comfort with the girls cause I felt a great safety there [...] but dance you know it came, it came later. That I have also thought about sometimes [...] it makes me more stereotypical, the gay, to be dancing, and I don't want to be a stereotype. It's something that probably concerns me to an overly excessive degree, that I am not going to fulfill people's expectations and stereotypes

The participant moved from saying that he did not see the connection, to acknowledging that there could be a connection in terms of his relationships with girls. It seemed that he was hesitant to confirm a connection because then he would fulfill the expectations and stereotypes that people had about men who danced. He had made it his agenda to not become the "stereotypical gay male dancer" and was proud of the fact that he had other very different interests that gave him "more depth". His thoughts and reflections on the relationship between

dance and sexual orientation had many dimensions. It illustrated how he was trying to negotiate and make sense of his own concept of identity, while keeping in mind what other people saw and expected.

The intricacy of explaining and conveying to what extent the participants identified with being gay and being a dancer was apparent. It was an on-going act of going back and forth between thoughts, feelings, experiences and expectations, and continually reflecting, re-visiting, justifying, and making verbally sense of it all in an interview setting. One participant said the following in terms of how being gay and dancing interfaced:

we are gonna talk about being gay and stuff later and, cause that's a little important. I don't think dance sort of got...I think dance had a part in getting me to realize I was gay, I probably knew deep down inside ever since ever since I was little

This statement was not in response to whether he thought there was a connection between being gay and being a dancer, but in response to what made him start dancing in the first place. Later, when responding to whether there was a connection between being gay and being a dancer he said: "I am a gay man who dances [...] No, I don't feel that they have so much to do with each other except for that dance made me realize more who I was. That probably would have happened anyways too, but no I don't think so". In both of these paragraphs there was a twofold answer. Although he did not consider there to be a direct connection being gay and being a dancer, he did say that dance had played a part in him realizing he was gay. He did not trivialize this fact, but did not give it further weight to where it was pivotal in terms of his identity. The realization of being gay was something he would have arrived at regardless of if he was a dancer or not, although it may have happened in a different way or at a later time. This was another instance where there seemed to be a mutual reinforcement between being a dancer and being gay. This did not by any means signify that one was a result of the other or that there was a cause-effect relationship, but rather that there was some level of dynamic interaction.

Two other participants answered quite differently when reflecting on the question about whether they thought there was a connection between dancing and being gay or not. They said that yes, there was a connection in their own lives, but that it did not necessarily hold true for other people. One response was as follows:

yes for me it is, yeah [...] but if you think sort of in general then it's not [...] Gay people are carpenters, and regular people, and weird artists [...] I think that dance and the fact that I am gay are closely related. Even from the very beginning when I started at [school name] yeah, I think so, but why [...] maybe because dance [...] it is undefined therefore there is room for me there maybe [...] even though I didn't sit there and think

about this when I was twelve years old, and I don't sit and think like that now either but but there is a connection there yeah, absolutely

The participant distinguished between his own experiences as a gay man and that of others. Gay men chose a variety of career paths, not just artistic ones, and so obviously they did not relate to dance the way he did. Based on his experiences however, being a dancer and being gay was not a mere coincidence. Dance was an undefined venue that did not judge, and therefore the participant felt that he could be himself. This was not something he had, or presently did, dwell upon but when asked specifically he was sure there was a connection. As with the other participants, he was careful to only speak for himself because for others this connection was irrelevant. Another participant made a similar point but via a different route. "Yeah for me I guess it has been like that, but in general I wouldn't say that there is [a connection]". When asked what the difference was between him and others he said: "yeah well or for those who are not gay then". For male dancers that were straight there was, in logical terms, not a connection between being gay and choosing dance. The previous participant (see previous page) had used "the gay man" as the point of reference (gay men= different occupations), whereas this participant had used "the dancer" as the reference point (dancer= different orientations). Their point of reference could have been indicative of which aspect, being gay or being a dancer, they identified more strongly with. It also indicated how they identified other men, as non-dancers/dancers who were gay/straight, or as gay/straight men who were dancers/non-dancers.

A third participant thought there could be a connection between being gay and being a dancer in terms of attraction towards other male dancers and being drawn towards an aesthetically beautiful art form:

I haven't thought of that before [...] no a connection would be, or for me it's more that you get to see a lot..[laughs]. Dance is, it's aesthetics, and I am very that sort of person that if something moves me, if I see a piece [performance] that moves me [...] I have a tendency to spontaneously fall in love with someone on stage [...] often that is a male dancer that I am attracted to so it's, you can enjoy a mans physicality, that could be a connection, that it it has become a little bit of a dating market too [laughs] Many gay dancers are in partnerships or are with other gay dancers too, but if there is a connection between being gay and choosing dance, maybe [...] as personality, that you are into aesthetics or that things should look nice, and then dance is very pretty to watch and very stimulating for the eye, so that could be something but I won't say that it is connected to being gay [...] for me it would have been just as natural to choose dance if I had been straight [...] there are gay lawyers too and they aren't dancers [...] and there are straight dancers too

Given the representation of gay men in the dance community, opportunities for dating were optimistic. He also considered that, by personality, some people were more attracted to visually stimulating things such as dance. Similar to other participants, he referred to the variety of occupations that gay men pursued (not only dance) and that there were straight dancers as (not just gay). When reflecting upon his own choices, he would have pursued dance regardless of his sexual orientation. Another participant made the same argument; dance was something he would have chosen to do regardless of his sexuality:

I have always done what I wanted to do so dance for me has no relation to my sexuality [...] we don't know yet one hundred percent what it is that determines ones sexual orientation but given that I had that joy for dance ever since since I was an infant [...] my mom sat and cradled me in a chair in front of [music show] I think sort of that I would have done it [danced] regardless of if I was gay bi or straight or asexual

This participant implied that being gay and being a dancer were not related to one another. He recollected having a joy for dance for as long as he could remember, whereas his awareness of his sexual orientation had come later on in life. He believed that dance was something he would have pursued regardless of his sexual identity. This was another approach to making sense of different aspects of life, the self, and identity, and was one that he seemed satisfied with.

Based on the shared experiences and detailed accounts of the participants, it was clear that there was no set recipe in terms of how they constructed their identity or made sense of their experiences as gay male dancers. It would not be fair to conclude or generalize that there was or was not a connection between being gay and choosing dance, or for that matter, between being a dancer and coming out as gay. There did however seem to be a sense of reciprocal validation between being gay and being a dancer that transcended the participants' experiences. The degree to which this was significant or made obvious, varied. Some participants explicitly made a link between their identity as a dancer and their identity as gay and some did not. One participant viewed his sexual orientation as merely a clinical definition and did not give it deeper meaning:

I don't see a connection. For me being gay, it's a clinical term that only signifies that you feel attracted to someone of the same sex [...] Many feel that it's a very loaded word that represents a lot and say "no [...] I am a man, I like other men, I don't call myself gay, I call myself queer" [...] For me it's not like that. For me it's yeah, I am gay, I like men, but aside from that I'm just me and the person I am, and that I dance has no connection

Again, this was another approach to negotiating identities and making sense of life experiences. It is possible to interpret this excerpt to mean that the participant took an essentialist perspective in saying that “gay” was just a term to describe patterns of attraction. In saying “I’m just me”, he seemed to indicate that his sexual orientation was an inherent or natural part of who he was and not something that was up for debate. He did not seem to identify with other gay men who referred to themselves as queer because he had taken an entirely different stance.

No approach to the question of identity and a connection between dance and sexuality was right or wrong, but merely different ways of understanding and interpreting the concepts in relation to the self. The participants were by no means a homogeneous group with similar opinions and attitudes towards their profession or their sexual orientation, despite the fact that they had certain experiences in common. I do think it is fair to say, based on the data and the subjective results presented here, that for all the participants, the formation of identities was to various degrees influenced by their sexual orientation and their choice to devote the majority of their time to dance. As Horowitz and Newcomb wrote, defining sexuality in terms of identity is not a straightforward matter that can be determined based on observations or experience (2002). The variety within sexuality and gender cannot be accounted for by narrow categories and fixed models. The multidimensional model opens up for a more inclusive and fleeting interpretation of identity that allows change to occur when needed or wanted.

Kristiansen (2004) wrote his doctoral dissertation on the lives of gay men in Norway. He experienced that his participants often expressed and shared paradoxical experiences and attitudes towards sexual orientation and identity. Kristiansen wrote that if the social and cultural understanding of a sexual orientation in a given place, was based on exclusive categories and fixed concepts, then it was reasonable that a person experienced and expressed incongruent thoughts on their own sexual identity (p. 98). Additionally, Kristiansen proposed viewing “sexual culture” as a repertoire of possible approaches that the individual could apply, even if they were perceived as conflicting and confusing.

At first, this seemed like a paradox to me. As I began to see how complex the sense-making process was in terms of identity and defining the self, it resonated more soundly. A person is often required to find ways of expressing who they are to other people, and if the rhetorical or linguistic means to do so are too limited, then one must find another way to communicate this meaningfully to oneself and to others (Damon, 1983). It is not so strange

then that the process of negotiation and construct of self takes on a versatile approach that transcends categorical expectations and assumed definitions. The participants in this study where indeed dancers and gay men, and did to some extent accept these labels, but they were also many other things. As Kristiansen (2004) put it:

All individuals have several identities at once, and these can completely or partially be experienced as conflicting. A man's identity as gay will be just one part of a whole sequence of identities that the individual has, and may not necessarily be the one that is the most closely tied to the self (p. 84).

This fits well with the results and discussion of this research study. It opens up for a broad understanding of the individual and how we view identities and the concept of self. In the four themes presented here I have tried to capture the dynamic richness, texture, fluidity, and negotiation processes that influence, motivate, and challenge interpretations and definitions of self. So when I refer to "dancing identities" in the title of this thesis, I refer to an open, transitory, and inclusive interpretation of identities. By using "*identities*" as opposed to "*identity*", I wish to indicate, based on the interview data that the self cannot be defined by one single unit or label, but is a collection of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and reflections in a social and psychological context.

During the course of the interviews, the participants went back and forth, around and about, and in-between their negotiation of self and how they could make sense of it to an outside person (me). This is not to say that they were whimsical in their communication with me, but rather that they were open and willing to re/consider their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. None of the participants neglected the fact that they had identified as gay male dancers in the process of entering the research project, but this did not mean that they were committed to one definition of self. The experiences of being a dancer and the experiences of being gay crossed paths and overlapped at some points, opening up for a possibility of interplay and reciprocal validation, but also moved out of focus and retrieved at others. As with dance at its best, there is no set of rules for how movement should occur, what it should express, in what order it should appear, or in what way it should be executed. This is where I use the metaphor of dancing identities, because similar to being on stage and dancing through time and space, in the interview setting, the participants navigated and moved through their own definitions, meanings, and understandings of self. The construct of self and identity was a wide and dynamic landscape of endless possibilities that was constantly in motion.

Conclusion

This research study sought to understand the differential experiences of being a gay male dancer in Norway. The research questions formulated in the introduction have been explored in the results/discussion section, and the conclusion is a synthesis of these results. Choosing to pursue dance was not the easiest career path for a young man, especially when growing up in a small town or suburb. Moving to urban centers was pivotal both in terms of receiving the necessary training to become a dancer and in terms of joining a more accepting and open community. For most participants, being gay within the dance community was experienced as positive. Compared to the “outside world”, dancers and others within the community were perceived as open-minded in terms of “difference” and sexual orientation. For some, dance was described as a “safe haven” where they could freely express themselves artistically and be themselves. The formation of friendships, especially with girls/women, was particularly important during pre-teen and teen years when coming to terms with their sexual orientation. Several participants felt safer and more accepted by girls/women than with other boys/men their age and gravitated towards them. The (hetero)sexually motivated speech and social codes among their male peers was experienced as difficult to relate to.

Accomplishment and achievement were key aspects of pursuing dance professionally; the feeling of being good at something was a catalyst for further dedication. Outside of their dancing endeavors, the majority of the participants experienced feeling “different” and alienated at some point. For some this was a result of participating in an otherwise female dominated and associated activity, for others it was a lack of identification with other peers and friends their age. Growing up in small heteronormative communities outside of city centers in Norway was particularly challenging as gay young man pursuing dance. Men who danced were subject to a host of different stereotypes consistent with traditional gender roles and norms that deemed it inappropriate and suspect. Being “different” was also associated with “going one’s own way”, which indicated a sense of pride and resourcefulness.

The participants were concerned with the dance profession being more than a commodity of entertainment, but rather an expressive art form that required a range of different emotional, expressive, creative, and physical abilities. Dance served various functions in their lives: as an emotional outlet, as having a therapeutic role, as an expression of self, as a creative outlet/expression, as being a free space to escape from concerns/worries, and lastly as a physically, emotionally, and/or psychologically stimulating activity.

Although the participants described the dance community as open and accepting, there were also plenty of episodes and experiences that claimed the opposite. This was especially true in terms of expectations of gender-appropriate expressions of gender and sexuality on stage. There was a double standard in the dance community suggesting that it was okay to be gay *off* stage but not *on* stage. These expectations were considered acceptable and appropriate by some participants, while others experienced them as frustrating and disappointing.

Status and tradition was brought up in relationship to being a dancer, both in terms of comparing the dance community in Norway to other countries, and in terms of understanding peoples prejudice against gay people. Other artists and people with higher education and/or social status were thought to be more open and accepting of gay people. In term of being dancers in Norway, they experienced that their occupation was less valued and had lower status than in other countries. The framework of Norwegian social, historical, cultural, political, geographical, and traditional influences had bearings on the perception of dance, status, sexuality and gender.

For the participants, constructing and negotiating identities was an ongoing process of re/evaluating, re/interpreting, and re/defining experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Being gay and being a dancer were integral parts of their lives but not steady entities of self that could be defined as separate and exclusive. In terms of defining their own concept of identity and sense of self as dancers and as gay men the participants offered very different and approaches. In exploring a connection between being gay and being a dancer, their answers were complex, contradictory, and disorganized. This did not mean that they were confused, but rather that the complexity involved in negotiating and constructing identities was multidimensional. What they all had in common was a willingness to explore and communicate their experiences, put them into context, make-sense of them, and construct a meaningful description of self. In wanting to better understand the dynamics of sexuality and gender in the lives of men who dance, I found that identities, much like bodies on stage, had momentum and endless movement vocabulary.

As with any research project, there were limitations to this study that should be made explicit. The inadequate and scarce research on dance as it relates to sexuality, gender, and identity presented a challenge in terms of generating a thorough literature review. Another drawback was the sample size, which ended up being smaller than planned given the challenges in the recruitment process. Furthermore, in terms of collecting data, a mixed-method approach and follow-up interviews would have been better than only conducting in-

depth interviews. Similarly, only making use of one analysis method (thematic analysis), had its drawbacks. Complementing thematic analysis with discourse analysis could have been one viable option. Also, as mentioned in the methods section and in the results/discussion section, my own subjective position as a researcher and dancer had bearings on the entire research process. Restraints, in terms of time and resources, influenced the development of this master thesis and narrowed down the possibilities.

In terms of future research in the field of dance, sexuality, gender, and identity, I would encourage researchers to consider conducting a mixed-methods cross-cultural study. I would recommend recruiting fe/male dancers from a variety of social, cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds who pursue careers in a range of different dance styles. This would provide future researchers with a diverse sample and, hopefully, an even richer set of data to further explore the dynamics of dance and sexuality.

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Appendix 1-NSD approval

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0317 OSLO

Vår dato: 30.08.2010

Vår ref: 24703 / 3 / LMR

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 20.07.2010. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

24703
Behandlingsansvarlig
Daglig ansvarlig
Student

Et kvalitativt forskningsprosjekt: Homoseksualitet og dans
Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Katrina Roen
Caroline Skjørshammer

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.


Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, vedlagte prosjektvurdering - kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 15.07.2011, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen


Bjørn Henriksen


Linn-Merethe Rød

Kontaktperson: Linn-Merethe Rød tlf: 55 58 89 11

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

✓ Kopi: Caroline Skjørshammer, Tåsenveien 50 B, 0870 OSLO

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no

TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no

TROMSØ: NSD, SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@sv.uit.no

Appendix 2 – Recruitment Add

Deltakere søkes til forskningsprosjekt:

Mastergradsstudent ved psykologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo, søker deltakere til forskningsprosjekt om dynamikken rundt dans og seksualitet. 7-10 homofile mannlige dansere i alle aldre og karrierefaser søkes til å delta i individuelle intervjuer i løpet av høsten 2010. Deltakelse er frivillig og konfidensielt. Å delta i forskningsprosjektet kan være en unik anledning til å dele egne erfaringer og opplevelser. Det kan bidra til økt forståelse av dansemiljøet utad og være med på å utvikle et spennende forskningsfelt. Prosjektet er tilrådd av Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS. Er du interessert i å delta? Ta kontakt med Caroline Skjørshammer på e-post: carolisk@student.uio.no eller tlf: 938 64 167.

Appendix 3 – Information Sheet

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjekt

Informasjonsskriv

Tusen takk for din interesse! Dette forskningsprosjektet handler om dynamikken rundt dans og seksualitet. Jeg er interessert i å høre hvilke opplevelser, erfaringer, tanker og følelser du har rundt dette. Her finner du ytterligere informasjon om prosjektets innhold og hva det vil innebære å delta:

Hvem kan delta?

- Dersom du er en homofil mannlig danser i alderen 18-60 år er du hjertelig velkommen til å delta.
- Dansere i alle stadier av utdanning/karriere er ønsket. Dvs. at du enten kan være i gang med danse utdannelsen din, jobbe aktivt som profesjonell danser, være pensjonert danser, eller være en person som driver aktivt med dans/anser det som din livsstil.
- Dansere innenfor alle stilsjangre er velkomne; jazz, moderne, klassisk, hip hop, ballroom etc.

Hva vil det innebære å delta?

- Delta i et individuelt intervju m/ meg; her vil jeg presentere noen åpne spørsmål rundt det å være homofil danser og hvilke erfaringer og tanker du har (ca 1 time).
- Å delta vil innebære at du svarer på en del spørsmål. Du kan velge å svare slik du selv ønsker på disse spørsmålene. Det vil hovedsaklig bli stilt åpne spørsmål, dvs. at du har mulighet til å svare mer enn ja og nei og kan utdype hva du tenker/føler.
- Det vil bli tatt lydopptak under intervjuet. Lydopptak og andre opplysninger anonymiseres innen 15. Juli 2011.

Frivillighet og mulighet til å trekke seg?

- Det er frivillig å delta i dette prosjektet. Dersom du underveis i prosessen (før, under eller etter intervjuet) ønsker å trekke deg, er det helt greit. Du trenger ikke å begrunne hvorfor.
- Dersom du trekker deg fra prosjektet vil alle innsamlede data og informasjon om deg bli anonymisert.

Anonymitet?

- Det du sier i det individuelle intervjuet vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. De tanker, erfaringer, opplevelser osv som du deler med meg vil bli brukt i den videre forskningen, men ditt navn og du som person vil forbli konfidensiell gjennom hele prosessen.

- Ditt navn vil bli erstattet med et pseudonym så du ikke kan bli gjenkjent.

Hva skjer etterpå?

- Etter intervjuet er din deltakelse i prosjektet fullført. Da vil intervjuet bli transkribert, analysert og brukt videre i en skriftlig kvalitativ forskningsoppgave som skal leveres til Universitetet i Oslo våren 2011. Dersom du ønsker å få en oppsummering av oppgaven eller stille noen spørsmål om utfallet av forskningen kan du kontakte meg på carolisk@student.uio.no

Hva får du ut av å delta?

- Ved å delta i dette prosjektet får du først og fremst en unik mulighet til å dele dine egne opplevelser, tanker, følelser og meninger rundt det å være homofil danser. Du får mulighet til å bli hørt og å bidra til økt forståelse blant andre. Deltagelse i prosjekter som dette kan være av personlig verdi samtidig som det er med på å rette fokus mot et interessant forskningsområde.

Hvem er jeg?

- Jeg heter Caroline Skjørshammer og er mastergradsstudent i kultur og samfunnspsykologi ved Universitetet i Oslo. Jeg er også utdannet danser v/Den norske Opera's Ballettskole og Point Park University Dance Conservatory i USA. Det er gjennom bakgrunnen min i psykologi og dans at jeg har blitt interessert i dynamikken rundt dans og seksualitet.

Annet

- Prosjektet er tilrådd av Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.
- Kontaktinformasjon til prosjektets veileder ved Universitetet i Oslo: Katrina Røn, katrina.roen@psykologi.uio.no

Interessert i å delta?

- Intervjuene vil foregå i videoteket til Danseinformasjonen som ligger ved siden av Dansens Hus. Tidspunkt for intervjuet vil bli avtalt i samsvar med hver enkelt deltaker.
- Kunne du tenkt deg å være med på dette prosjektet? Har du flere spørsmål? Kontakt meg via e-post carolisk@student.uio.no eller tlf 938 64 167.

Med Vennlig Hilsen,

Caroline Skjørshammer

Request for participation in research project

Information letter

Thank you for your interest! This research project is about the dynamics of dance and sexuality. I am interested in hearing your experiences, thoughts and feelings around this subject. In this letter you will find additional information about the project and what is involved in participating:

Who can participate?

- If you are a gay male dancer between the age of 18 and 60 you are welcome to participate.
- Dancers in all career stages are encouraged to participate. This means you can be a dancer who is still completing your education, a dancer working professionally, a retired dancer, or a person who actively pursues dance semi-professionally.
- Dancers in all genres are invited to participate; jazz, modern, ballet, hip hop, ballroom dancers etc

What does participating entail?

- Participating involves one in-depth interview with me. In this interview I will present some open-ended questions about sexuality and dance and ask you about your experiences (interview length; approximately 1 hour).
- Participating involves answering several questions. You can choose how you wish to answer these questions. The questions will primarily be open-ended which means that you will have the opportunity to answer more than just yes and no and explain more in-depth what you think.
- The interview will be recorded (voice, not video). Voice recordings and other information will be made anonymous by July 15th 2011.

Volunteering and the possibility of withdrawing?

- Participating in this project is entirely voluntary. If at any time during the process (before, during, or after the interview) you decide to withdraw from the project, that is completely fine. You do not have to explain why you wish to withdraw.
- If you withdraw from the project, all collected data and information about you will be made anonymous.

Anonymity?

- Everything you say in the individual interview will remain confidential. The thoughts, experiences etc. that you share with me will be used in the later stages of the project, but your name and you as a participant will remain confidential throughout the whole process.
- In the final paper your name will be replaced with a pseudonym so you cannot be identified.

What happens afterwards?

- After the interview your participation in the project is complete. Your interview will be recorded, transcribed, analyzed and used in a written qualitative research paper that will be turned in to the University of Oslo spring of 2011. If you want a summary of the research or wish to ask some questions about the results, you are welcome to contact me at carolisk@student.uio.no.

What do you gain from participating?

- By participating in this project you get a unique opportunity to share your own experience, thoughts, feelings, and opinions about how it is to be a gay dancer. You get the opportunity to be heard and to contribute to increased awareness and understanding among others. Participating in projects like these can be of personal value as well as contribute to an area of research that deserves attention.

Who am I?

- My name is Caroline Skjørshammer and I am a master's degree student in cultural and societal psychology at the University of Oslo. I am also a trained dancer from The Norwegian Opera ballet school and Point Park University Dance Conservatory, USA. It is through my background in dance and psychology that I have become interested in the dynamics around dance and sexuality.

Other

- The project is approved by the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD).
- The project is supervised through the University of Oslo:
Katrina Røn katrina.roen@psykologi.uio.no

Are you interested in participating?

- Would you consider participating in this project? Do you have additional questions? Contact me via e-mail at carolisk@student.uio.no or by phone 938 64 167.

Best Wishes,

Caroline Skjørshammer

Appendix 4 - Consent Form

Forskningsprosjekt 2010/2011-Universitetet i Oslo

Samtykkeerklæring**Individuelt intervju**

Jeg har lest informasjonsskrivet for dette forskningsprosjektet, og ønsker å stille til intervju.

Dato:

Signatur:

Kontaktopplysninger

Navn:

Adresse:

E-post:

Tlf:

Appendix 5 - Interview Guide

Intervju Guide:

- Gjøre klart lokale og sette frem drikke
- Ta imot deltaker og introdusere meg selv
- Små prate for å løsne stemningen, "ice-breaking"
- Forhøre om info skriv har blitt lest
- Underskrive samtykke
- Informere ytterligere og svare på evt. spørsmål
- Forbered lydopptak
- Starte intervju

Spørsmål til deltakeren:

Har du noen spørsmål før vi begynner?

Hvilke ord foretrekker du at jeg bruker i forhold til det å være homofil? (skeiv, homo, homse etc....)

Kan du begynne med å fortelle meg litt om deg selv og din bakgrunn?

(hvor gammel du er, litt om utdannelsen din, på hvilken måte du driver med dans?)

Hva slags danser vil du si at du er? Hvordan vil du beskrive deg selv som danser?

Hva var det som fikk deg til å begynne med dans?

Hva betyr det for deg å være en danser

Hvordan er det å være homofil i dansemiljøet?

Hvis du skulle beskrive den du er (eller din identitet) til en som ikke kjenner deg, hva ville du sagt?

Hvorfor har du valgt å drive med dans?

Hvordan opplever du folks holdninger mot mannlige dansere utad i samfunnet?

Hvordan opplever du folks holdninger i forhold til det å være homofil utad i samfunnet? Og i dansemiljøet?

Hvordan opplever du dansemiljøets holdninger til homofile?

Opplever du selv at det er en sammenheng mellom det å være danser og homofil?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål underveis:

Kan du si litt mer om det..?

Hva mente du da du sa...?

På hvilken måte tenkte du...?

Hvordan opplevde du det...?

