

University of Nebraska - Lincoln  
**DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln**

---

Sociology Department, Faculty Publications

Sociology, Department of

---

11-2014

# Male Ballet Dancers and Their Performances of Heteromascularity


Trenton M. Haltom

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, [thaltom2@unl.edu](mailto:thaltom2@unl.edu)

Meredith G. F. Worthen

*University of Oklahoma*, [mgfworthen@ou.edu](mailto:mgfworthen@ou.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub>

 Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), [Dance Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

---

Haltom, Trenton M. and Worthen, Meredith G. F., "Male Ballet Dancers and Their Performances of Heteromascularity" (2014).

*Sociology Department, Faculty Publications*. 581.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub/581>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology Department, Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Published in *Journal of College Student Development* 55:8 (November 2014), pp 757-778.

doi 10.1353/csd.2014.0084

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

---

## Male Ballet Dancers and Their Performances of Heteromascularity

Trenton M. Haltom<sup>1</sup> and Meredith G. F. Worthen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Houston

<sup>2</sup> University of Oklahoma

### Abstract

Although previous research has investigated men in feminized sports, we took a different approach in this study and examined men in ballet. Because ballet is one of the most highly gender-codified sports, male ballet dancers must negotiate their identities as men while performing a dance form that is highly stigmatized as effeminate. We investigated how five self-identified heterosexual male college dance majors perceive and perform heteromascularity within male ballet culture using qualitative data gathered from structured interviews. Results provide three unique contributions to the literature. First, we found that these men develop and contextualize their heteromascularity in the context of a male ballet culture. Second, the results demonstrate three unique stigma-management techniques within male ballet culture. Third, men described a hegemonic heteromascularity and the roles of masculinity and emotionality in male ballet performance as parts of male ballet culture. We hope this study will stimulate future research that can help personnel and faculty to better understand how college ballet programs can be informed by the ways masculinity may be institutionalized and reproduced within the context of dance programs, as well as the ways male ballet dancers can challenge heteromascularity hegemony in the sports world.

◇ ◇ ◇

Boys and men who do ballet must be either exceptionally brave or foolhardy, or both . . . because of the art form's strong associations with a super-feminized world of women and the consequent amount of abuse men often take for not choosing a more conventional occupation. (Fisher, 2007, p. 45)

Dance can be examined in many ways: from fantasy to a reflection of current reality, to religious expression, or even as simple abstract movement. Because dance was created as an outlet and expression of human life, the performance of dance can also be a form of self-expression. While dancers use dance to convey messages to their audiences without the use of spoken word, dancers must also negotiate their identities in and out of the ballet world. Studies of male dancers show that these men are in a “female world” and these experiences affect their gender identities (Menesson, 2009, p. 174). For example, ballet is one form of dance that is often viewed as a highly feminized activity; indeed, the figure of the female ballerina has been described as the ideal symbol of the ballet world (Menesson, 2009). As a result, male ballet dancers must negotiate their identities as men while performing a dance form highly stigmatized as effeminate.

While much research has investigated female athletes and the ways these women negotiate their femininity within male-dominated sports (e.g., Blinde & Taub, 1992; Krane, 2001; Lenskyj, 1986, 1990; Willis, 1982), little research has investigated men and their performances of masculinity within feminized sports. Such studies typically examine male cheerleaders (e.g., Anderson, 2005, 2008; Davis, 1990; Grindstaff & West, 2006; Hanson, 1995), men in rhythmic gymnastics (Chimot & Louveau, 2010), and men who figure skate (Adams, 1993, 2011; Kestnbaum, 2003). Other work specifically investigating male dancers utilizes data from working professional dancers (e.g., Mennesson, 2009) who have arguably spent a great deal of time reflecting about their masculine identities; thus it is unclear how male ballet dancers’ experiences in emerging adulthood contribute to their conceptualizations of heterosexual masculinity (herein *heteromascularity*).

We investigated self-identified heterosexual male college student ballet dancers and their performances of heteromascularity using qualitative data gathered from structured interviews. Specifically, we investigated how men develop and contextualize their heteromascularity in the ballet world. Past studies have neglected to fully investigate college male ballet dancers’ experiences with heteromascularity; thus, it may be especially important to examine these experiences so that masculinities in feminized contexts can be best understood. Furthermore, college ballet programs can be informed by the ways masculinity may be institutionalized and reproduced within the context of dance programs as well as the ways male ballet dancers may challenge heteromascularity hegemony in the sporting world.

## Hegemonic Masculinity and Heteromascularity

Debates about the constructions and definitions of masculinity are plentiful. In 1976, David and Brannon outlined four facets to masculinity: (a) no sissy stuff, (b) be a big wheel, (c) be a sturdy oak, and (d) give 'em hell. However, much of their research pertains to the “no sissy stuff” component of masculinity and the construction of masculinity in opposition to femininity (Anderson, 2005). In contrast, Connell (1992) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest that there are multiple masculinities that vary by cultural contexts: “Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished through social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). As a result, competing masculinities may be present and a predominant form of masculinity often emerges, subordinating other varying forms of masculinity. This hegemonic version of masculinity becomes the “ideal masculinity” to which all others are compared (Connell, 1987, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gramsci, 1971). While many characteristics associated with masculinity may be fluid, the antifeminine aspect of masculinity remains a fundamental and universal component to hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel, 2004). Many men actively position themselves in accordance with this ideal hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The maintenance of hegemonic masculinity can be a constant process. Indeed, Anderson (2005) outlines four coping mechanisms used to maintain a positive position within hegemonic masculinity: (a) homophobia, (b) the devaluing of femininity, (c) emphasizing masculine bravado, and (d) establishing a masculine space within the larger feminized arena. However, Anderson (2008) revealed that many men may circumvent feminized terrains (e.g., ballet) to assert they are not feminine thereby reinforcing their hegemonic masculinity.

In many contexts, hegemonic masculinity is heterosexualized. Put another way, the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity may also be the embodiment of *heterosexual* masculinity. In this way, hegemonic masculinity *becomes* heteromascularity (Anderson, 2002; Messner, 1992). In order to adopt and maintain idealized heteromascularity, men must manage their sexual and gender identities at the same time (Anderson, 2005). Any movement away from heteromascularity may be defined as taboo. We have seen that the involvement of men in ballet can serve as a departure from heteromascularity due to the

feminized context of ballet (Mennesson, 2009) and the association of male ballet dancers with homosexuality (Fisher, 2007). As a result, male ballet dancers may develop and negotiate their heteromascu- line identities within the ballet world (which may be outside the tra- ditional arena of heteromascularity), while also developing and ne- gotiating their heteromascularity identities outside of ballet culture.

### ***Heteromascularity in Competitive Team Sports***

Competitive team sports (e.g., football, soccer, basketball, baseball) are an important part of many men's lives (Bryson, 1987, 1990; Grif- fin, 1992; Whitson, 1990). From a young age, many boys idolize com- petitive team sport male athletes and often view sports and athletic performance as a way to gain popularity among peers (Griffin, 1992). Furthermore, competitive team sports may be a space where young boys learn what it means to be masculine, and in return, males "do gender" through competitive sports (Griffin, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Anderson (2008) suggests that ste- reotypes associated with the male competitive athlete (i.e., strong, masculine, good-looking, and hyperheterosexual) reinforce hege- monic heteromascularity among male athletes (see also Anderson, 2002; Messner, 1988, 1992, 2002). In addition, studies suggest that young men involved in sports are often in highly gender-segregated situations which socialize them to devalue women and femininity (An- derson, 2008; Messner, 2002). Further research has shown that for men competitive sports enforce heteromascularity and competitive- ness (Anderson, 2008). Indeed, the male athlete may symbolize ideal- ized heteromascularity. As a result, competitive team sports for men can be a limited space for men where only stereotypical heteromas- cularity is deemed to be acceptable. As Mennesson (2009) notes, "The sports world is one of the most effective of these institutions for con- trolling and inculcating male and female ways of using one's body. In this sense, organized sports are not only a 'gendered institution' but a 'gendering' one as well" (p. 176; see also Yiannakis & Melnick, 2001).

### ***Heteromascularity in Feminized Sports***

Men in cheerleading, rhythmic gymnastics, and figure skating have also been examined in previous studies (e.g., Adams, 1993, 2011; An- derson, 2005, 2008; Chimot & Louveau, 2010). Often, researchers

examine how these men, who are participating in highly feminized arenas, negotiate their performances of heteromascularity. In qualitative research with 21 male cheerleaders at 3 U.S. universities, Grindstaff and West (2006) found that even though cheerleading has sometimes been reconceptualized as a more athletic, competitive activity that is “no longer just for girls,” these men distance themselves from the feminine elements of cheerleading because they want to avoid being perceived as gay and/or feminine. The researchers found that male cheerleaders are resistant to the more feminized elements of cheerleading (e.g., dancing, spirit fingers, etc.) and they are more likely to engage in more athletic elements of cheerleading (e.g., stunts, lifting, pyramids). Indeed, some of the male cheerleaders in Grindstaff and West’s study mentioned the importance of engaging in impressive stunts as a way to demonstrate they weren’t gay as part of a process they describe as “compensatory hypermasculinity”—the explicit assertion of heterosexuality in the face of the perceived discrediting fact of being a male cheerleader (p. 511). In other words, the male cheerleaders felt the need to prove that they were “real men” *despite* the fact that they are cheerleaders; thus, male cheerleaders actively participated in a gendered performance that reinforced heteromascularity. However, Anderson’s (2005) investigation of heterosexual men in collegiate cheerleading found evidence of two forms of masculinity: one that reifies traditional heteromascularity stereotypes and one that is more inclusive. Thus, male cheerleaders may both reify and challenge traditional stereotypes associated with heteromascularity.

Unlike cheerleading, which is usually associated with competitive team sporting events (e.g., cheerleading at football games), other feminized sports may be less connected to competitive team sports. Rhythmic gymnastics, although competitive, is less often associated with competitive team sporting events, and thus, may be more feminized than cheerleading. In their 2010 French study, Chimot and Louveau analyzed how five males (aged 10 to 23) performing rhythmic gymnastics constructed their masculinity. They found that since a feminine or homosexual identity is often attributed to males who perform rhythmic gymnastics, the males in their study worked against these stereotypes by describing the strengths in their performance abilities (i.e., jumping higher and performing more complex tricks). In addition, they chose more dynamic music that allowed them to express their masculinity and to differentiate themselves from female gymnasts (p. 452). Although these young men engaged in masculine

identity construction through their performance choices, most anticipated having to stop performing rhythmic gymnastics at a certain age in order to “assert themselves as men and conform to a traditional masculine identity” (p. 451). Thus, the work these rhythmic gymnasts engaged in to assert their masculinity in a feminized context was perceived as having an age limit, another very real challenge in identity development to asserting and maintaining heteromascularity in feminized sports.

### ***Heteromascularity in Dance***

While studies of male dancers are sparse, the limited research suggests that men who dance have experiences that both reinforce and challenge their heteromascularity. Risner’s (2002) qualitative research with 6 male college dance majors in the US (average age 19) revealed five themes among the experiences of men who dance: (a) homophobic stereotypes, (b) narrow definitions of masculinity, (c) heterosexist justifications for male participation, (d) the absence of positive male role models (straight and gay), and (e) internalized homophobia among male dance students; each of which demonstrates a negative environment for male dancers. Further research shows that adolescent male dancers also have negative and stigmatizing experiences. In Williams’s (2003) study of 33 boys (12 to 18 years of age) enrolled in three summer intensive dance training programs, the dancers felt socially isolated and lacking in social support (p. iii). Furthermore, these young men experienced negativity when engaging in perceived feminine behaviors while simultaneously experiencing the reinforcement of heteromascularity from their superiors. For example, a male teacher coaching a male dancer stated, “You’re a beautiful dancer, but you dance like a [derogatory term for a homosexual]. We’ll need to show you how to dance like a man” (p. 71). Risner’s (2007) research on male youth in dance continues to show a prevailing social stigma, heteronormative assumptions, narrow definitions of masculinity, and internalized homophobia among males who dance. Thus, heteromascularity may be both challenged and reinforced by male dancers, their peers, and their coaches and teachers, much like it is in competitive team sports.

### ***Heteromascularity in Ballet***

Studies specifically investigating male ballet dancers also reveal important experiences with heteromascularity. Male ballet dancers may be especially keen to the use of their bodies since the technical and symbolic features of ballet have made it the most prestigious type of dancing and the most highly codified as far as gender is concerned (Mennesson, 2009, p. 177; see also Novak, 1993). Indeed, Fisher (2007) found that in order to reinforce their heteromasculine identities, male ballet dancers engage in a “making it macho” strategy (p. 46). This strategy plays up the heteromasculine characteristics of ballet (i.e., making it seem athletically masculine and resolutely heterosexual) and downplays the feminine characteristics (i.e., frilly costumes and classical music) as part of an attempt to make ballet acceptable for men in the Western world (Fisher, 2007), since “America demands masculinity more than art” (Foulkes, 2001, p. 113). In critique, Fisher (2007) suggests a language change to “make it maverick” so that the connotation lies more with risk taking and bravery evoking imagery of a “rebel” rather than sheer athleticism (p. 65). Strategies to avoid a strong relationship between “he’s a ballet dancer” and stereotypes such as “he’s gay” or “he’s weak” (Fisher, 2007, p. 52), can actually have some visible effects. For example, within 2 years of the release of *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000), a film which describes the story of a working-class boy who works against the negative stereotypes of men in ballet, Great Britain’s Royal Ballet School had so many male applicants that for the first time in its history, it admitted more boys than girls (Fisher, 2007, p. 52). Describing “the Billy Elliot effect,” the director of the Royal Ballet School stated, “The film has certainly had some effect on the younger boys. A number of the boys at the school have said Billy Elliot made them feel more comfortable about telling people they are ballet dancers” (Milner, 2002, p.1). Thus, stereotypes about men in ballet can certainly affect their experiences as ballet dancers.

In 2009, Mennesson examined qualitative interviews with 14 professional male jazz and ballet dancers in France revealing several important findings. First, Mennesson found that professional male jazz and ballet dancers negotiated stigmatized identities and the “effeminate, homosexual male-dancer stereotype” (p. 190). The dancers



recognized the use of gendered dance techniques to reify their own masculinity. Mennesson found that male dancers must fight against being feminized and labeled as gay, and to do so they engage in highly gendered and heterosexualized behaviors that include self-enforced heteromascularity in both their body movement and social patterns. Specifically, Mennesson found that male dancers engaged in two forms of gender identity: one that reified norms traditionally associated with heteromascularity and one that questioned the dominant gender norms in a more radical way than those in the first group. Interestingly, Mennesson's findings mirror Anderson's (2005) investigation of heterosexual men in collegiate cheerleading. The second finding Mennesson reports describes dance as a space that provides a protected environment that facilitates the expression of gender nonconforming behavior and an artistically oriented socialization. Overall, these men described how their heteromascularity and gender identities were overwhelmingly affected by their experiences with dance.

### **Current Study**

In this study, we investigated how 5 self-identified heterosexual male college dance majors perceive and perform heteromascularity within male ballet culture. Although previous research has investigated men in feminized sports (e.g., cheerleading, rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating, as cited above), we took a different approach and examined men in ballet. Furthermore, our study includes college students who are likely at the forefront of negotiating their experiences with heteromascularity both in and out of ballet culture. As Mennesson (2009) suggests, ballet may be one of the most highly gender-codified sports; as a result, an investigation of college men and their experiences in ballet may be especially informative. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to our understandings of how college ballet programs can be informed by the ways masculinity may be institutionalized and reproduced within the context of dance programs as well as the ways male ballet dancers may challenge heteromascularity hegemony in the sporting world.

## **Methods**

### ***The University***

The university from which the sample was drawn is a large public university in the Southern United States that serves as the flagship university for all the students in the state. Flagship universities receive the largest share of higher education funding in their states and have been identified as highly influential toward the intellectual climate of the cities where they are situated (Gumprecht, 2003). The university is located in what has been identified as a “typical college town” in Gumprecht’s (2007) research. College students make up 27% of the population of the city (29,931 of 110,478 residents were students at the time of data collection), which suggests a potentially high level of college influence on the city’s culture (Gumprecht, 2003). Housed within the College of Fine Arts, the School of Dance at this university had a total of 83 dance majors at the time of data collection, only 13 of whom were men. In the School of Dance, three undergraduate majors are available: Ballet Performance, Ballet Pedagogy, and Modern Dance Performance.

### ***Sample Population***

Although there were a total of 13 male dance majors, the director of the School of Dance requested that only upperclassmen participate in this study. Of the 6 upper-class male dance majors, 5 agreed to participate. Our final sample population consisted of 5 self-identified heterosexual college student male dancers. We recognize the sample size is quite small; however, we hope that this project will inspire future research with larger sample sizes to best understand male college dancers and their experiences with heteromascularity in the ballet world. The men in this study were all upperclassmen (2 juniors and 3 seniors) and their ages ranged from 20 to 23 (average age 21). All respondents were born in the Southern United States (2 from Texas, 2 from Arkansas, and 1 from Oklahoma), while their racial/ethnic identities varied (2 Black, 2 White, and 1 White/Hispanic). All respondents participated in ballet and 4 of the 5 were majoring in Ballet Performance; the 1 Modern Dance Performance major was included in the

current study due to his active participation in the men's ballet class at the time of recruitment. The men had varying years of dance experience (ranging from 5 to 19 years). More respondent details can be found in Table 1.

### ***Prolonged Engagement***

Because we used a naturalistic approach to seek to qualitatively understand male ballet dancers in a specific setting at a university (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 47), it was important for us to ensure that our data would be credible. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 301) offer several techniques for establishing credibility: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member-checking. Lincoln and Guba define *prolonged engagement* as "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or the respondents, and building trust" (p. 301). The lead author utilized prolonged engagement to establish the credibility of the data for the current project, specifically, participating in three methods of prolonged engagement. First, as an undergraduate student minoring in Dance History, the lead author spent time learning about dance, interacting with Dance History professors, and developing relationships with other Dance History undergraduate students. Second, as an award-winning baton twirler, the lead author developed a rapport with other dancers at the university. Through these two experiences, the lead author established an understanding of the male ballet culture and was able to build trust with the respondents. Third, reflexive conversations between both authors fleshed out personal preconceptions and stereotypes that allowed the lead author to take care in designing the interview guide.

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristics

<i>Name<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Race/ Ethnicity</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Years Dancing</i>	<i>Year in School</i>	<i>Major</i>
Adam	White	20	Little Rock, AR	6	Jr.	Ballet Performance
Blake	Black	23	Oklahoma City, OK	5	Sr.	Modern Dance Performance
Charlie	Black	22	Ft. Smith, AR	19	Sr.	Ballet Performance
David	White/Hispanic	21	Houston, TX	15	Sr.	Ballet Performance
Eric	White	21	Richardson, TX	18	Jr.	Ballet Performance

a. Pseudonyms were given to respondents.

### ***Method of Analysis***

Qualitative interviews ranged from 30 minutes to over one hour. The length of the interviews varied due to the personalities of the respondents; some were quite talkative and expressive while others provided brief, concise answers. An interview guide included questions about background, experiences with ballet, masculinity, and ballet performance (see Appendix A). Very few topics outside the interview guide were mentioned during the interviews; however, in order to provide a comfortable atmosphere throughout the interviews, some casual conversation was included (e.g., about upcoming dance performances). Surprisingly, there were very few differences across the interviews. As a result, no follow-up interviews were conducted. As the university Institutional Review Board required, signed informed consent forms were obtained from all respondents and all audio-recorded interviews were kept in a locked cabinet. Following analysis, the data were deleted and the links between the respondents' names and pseudonyms were also destroyed in order to protect the identities of the respondents.

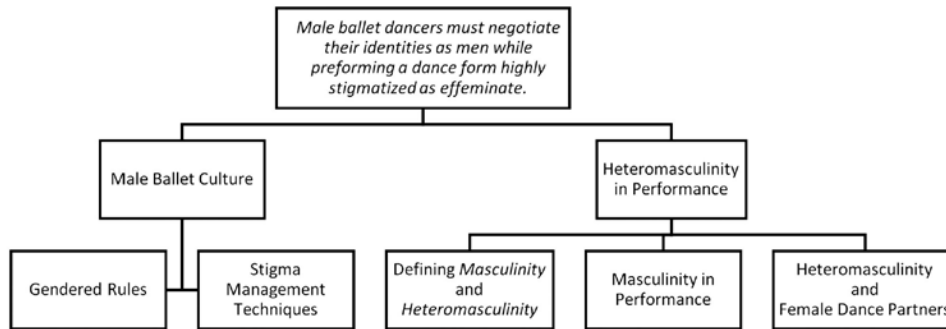
Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the lead author. Both authors participated in analysis of the transcribed data from the interviews. Interviews were analyzed by the authors using Charmaz's (2006) conceptualization of grounded theory which we view as (a) a process that begins with a research problem that informs the initial methodological choices for data collection (in our case, qualitative in-depth interviews), (b) recognition that "all is data," (c) an interactive process that involves building and learning from each stage of analysis through constant comparative methods during data collection, coding, and theory construction, and (d) theory construction that emerges from how researchers interpret and interact with comparisons in the data. Specifically, we engaged in three steps of analysis. First, simple and concise line-by-line coding of the data was conducted by both authors separately. Second, we further examined each of our line-by-line codes and engaged in focused coding together, in which codes were more directed, selective, and conceptual than in the first step. Third, ideas that emerged in the previous steps of analysis were used to engage in theoretical coding, which allows for an integrative approach that generates an analysis of patterns within the data. Our theory emerged following this final step of analysis which we developed together.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

The authors of this study were both members of the university from which the sample population was drawn. As Merriam et al. (2001) note: "Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'" (p. 411). The lead author (and interviewer) is a White male who was an undergraduate sociology major, thus he was both an insider and outsider researcher at the time of data collection: like the study population, he is male and was also an undergraduate student at the time; however, he was not a dance performance major and did not share the same background characteristics as all of the interviewees, making him an outsider in some ways. Because he was quite similar to the interviewees, this allowed for an easier negotiation of balance of power that could not have been obtained if the second author, a White female professor of sociology, had conducted the interviews. As Charmaz (2006) suggests, an analysis using grounded theory "*depends on the researcher's view*" (p. 130, original emphasis). As a result, since both authors have sociological backgrounds and an interest in gender/ masculinities studies, the current study may be biased by this framework: in particular, the questions we asked and the findings are focused on sociological conceptualizations of gender and masculinities.

### **Findings**

By examining college male ballet dancers' statements through an interpretative and interactive process, our analysis revealed the following theory (see Figure 1): male ballet dancers must negotiate their identities as men while performing a dance form that is highly stigmatized as effeminate. These men do so by actively participating in male ballet culture and engaging in heteromascularity in performance. First, men described their experiences in the context of male ballet culture in terms of gendered rules within ballet technique as well as stigma management techniques within male ballet culture. Second, men described hegemonic heteromascularity and the roles of masculinity and emotionality in ballet performance. In the following analyses, participants are quoted to illustrate these findings.



**Figure 1.** Male Ballet Dancer Identity Theory

### ***Male Ballet Culture***

All of the men described a male ballet culture within which heteromascu-  
line behaviors were emphasized, challenged, and managed among  
male ballet dancers. Through gendered rules, gendered ballet tech-  
niques reinforced the ways male ballet dancers viewed masculine and  
feminine male ballet dancers. Furthermore, to combat perceived neg-  
ative stereotypes about male ballet dancers, the majority of the men  
described at least some form of stigma management embedded in  
male ballet culture.

#### *Gendered Rules: Technique Among Masculine and Feminine Male Bal- let Dancers*

The men described gendered rules within ballet culture. They dis-  
cussed how male ballet dancers who followed these gendered rules  
appeared as masculine and those who did not follow these gendered  
rules appeared as feminine. Specifically, male ballet dancers identi-  
fied gendered movements and techniques; for example, male ballet  
dancers were described as “good bases” who have the strength to lift  
others. Furthermore, male ballet dancers were described as having  
the abilities to jump higher and to have more elevation and strength  
when compared to female ballet dancers.

Less specific to their individual movements, male ballet dancers  
also discussed how they are frequently “asked to do the movement in  
a more masculine way” (Charlie, 22), that was also described as “more  
intense” than female dancers’ movements (Blake, 23). Interestingly,

in their discussion of gendered techniques, several male ballet dancers described female dance technique in opposition to male technique, propagating the antifeminine aspect of masculinity. Female dancers were described as “light,” “timid,” “vulnerable,” and “modest,” while male dancers were described as “proud,” “strong,” “purposeful,” “restrained,” and “in command.” Among the words the male ballet dancers used to describe both male and female dancers, only the word *effortless* was used to describe both groups. Furthermore, the characteristics of the so-called ideal male dancer were emphasized by several men; for example, Eric, 21, stated: “When I think of *the* male dancer, I don’t think of like a big weight lifter: I think of someone who is very strong, but not like overpowering.” Thus, the ideal male dancer has a specific kind of strength. Furthermore, Eric used a metaphor to contextualize his response to what an ideal male dancer should look like: “Not necessarily delicate, but as someone would need to be eloquent with their speaking, they need to give that same kind of feeling with their dancing . . . still be able to be graceful and like flowing.” In this way, Eric described the ideal male dancer as having a graceful, eloquent strength.

Some of the dancers themselves described how “dancing like a man” is important to them; for example, David, 21, stated: “That’s one of my biggest pet peeves when I watch other men in dance—no matter what their sexual orientation might be—[you need to] dance like a man.” Dancing like a man was described by David as what you shouldn’t do rather than what you should do in order to dance like a man: “For guys . . . they can’t be too meager, they can’t be too soft; it looks easy, but it can’t look too wishy-washy.” Furthermore, Blake discussed how male and female dancers should be inherently different: “I think in the aesthetic of dance there’s a masculine role and there’s a feminine role, and you have to be the masculine part.” In addition, Blake likens the male ballet dancer to the breadwinner role: “I feel like as a man you have to be that breadwinner: you have to be that person that people seek help [from], and when something is going down, you’d be able to come to someone’s aid.” Thus, according to these male ballet dancers, men need to fill the masculine role in the space of effeminately stigmatized ballet culture.

The male ballet dancers also described feminine male ballet dancers. Overall, these dancers were described negatively with words such as “weak,” “fragile,” and “soft.” Feminine male ballet dancers were also

typified as “out of place.” For example, Adam, 20, stated that feminine male ballet dancers “skew what the male’s purpose is, and if a man dances like a woman, there’s just this entire element that’s lost. I’d say the entire chemistry isn’t proper, it doesn’t really make sense that they would be a couple.” Blake echoed this sentiment and believes that overall, “the audience is turned off by feminine behavior” from male ballet dancers; however, some men described a specific time and place where femininity among male ballet dancers may be appropriate. For example, Blake described the stage production *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Scott, 2006) as one such occasion, but further stated that a male ballet dancer needs to know when such femininity is appropriate:

If you want to be in this industry and you want to survive and make a name for yourself, you need to be able to turn [femininity] on and turn it off. . . . You have to treat it as a glove, like, this is my glove to be a prince today! And I take it off and I’m a princess, or whatever. You have to think, like I’m going to have my modern [dance] glove, I have my [musical] theater glove. Your hand is still you, but you have different gloves.

Using the metaphor of different gloves, Blake suggested that feminine techniques for male ballet dancers may be useful, but only as another tool in the arsenal in the appropriate time and place.

Interestingly, Charlie noted that these gendered techniques may be reinforced in this particular dance program:

Here [at this university] I know that they really push the male dancers to be masculine and the female dancers to be feminine. . . . There are some male teachers who just will not put up with any kind of flamboyance or anything.

Thus, there may be something particular about this university’s dance program that reinforces gendered dance technique. The location of this Southern university may also be a factor in this relationship. Adam described the regional culture as a particularly negative influence on men and dance: “There’s probably [more stigma] in the South, than in the North, I’d say, just ’cause [men in dance] is more socially accepted . . . in Los Angeles or New York City.” As a result, the patterns shown here may be reflective of larger social attitudes in the Southern United States that may be less supportive of men in dance.



The male ballet dancers described varying flexibility in gendered technique depending on the type of dance in which the dancers were involved. For example, classical ballet may be the most gendered and restrictive, while contemporary dance may allow more flexibility. Charlie described this:

In contemporary work, the times are changing, like the girls have to be able to lift each other and, you know, do the same amount of turns and same height of jumps. . . . There are ways to make most things look masculine or feminine, in my opinion.

In this way, Charlie suggested that there may be some clear gendered techniques in classical ballet, however, in contemporary dance, these techniques may be less restrictive. Indeed, Eric noted that in contemporary dance both men and women “need to be able to have the same abilities.”

#### *Male Ballet Dancers: Stigma Management Techniques*

The majority of the men acknowledged negative stereotypes associated with male ballet dancers. To combat this negativity, these men engaged in several stigma management techniques which were also a part of male ballet culture. In the first stigma management technique, some male ballet dancers emphasized heterosexual privilege. Because ballet has been stereotyped as an activity that only gay men are involved in (see Fisher, 2007; Mennesson, 2009), some heterosexual male ballet dancers may feel the need to demonstrate their heterosexual privileges in the context of male ballet culture; however, these techniques may be youthful practices which may not be present among more mature men. For example, Adam specifically discussed his experience emphasizing heterosexual privilege as a young male ballet dancer:

When I was younger, [being a ballet dancer] was a little harder, . . . but my mindset when I was younger was, look, I get to touch these women, probably more women than these guys that were making fun of me or whatever get to touch in their life. So that kind of helped me in high school.

As Adam noted, his ability to be in close proximity with women was a management technique he used to deflect the gay stigma associated

with male ballet dancers while in high school. But he went on further to describe how his experiences in college differed:

These days it's just such an immense amount of dedication that . . . the biases just don't bother me, because I've actually seen an increase in straight men in ballet recently, . . . not that that matters to me, but . . . I think at a certain level of dedication you have to realize that those things don't matter and that you have a bigger picture to worry about and not what other people think. And it's the same with portraying certain roles on stage. . . . Once you let go it kind of like gets fun, and once you stop caring is really when your doors open.

In this way, Adam described how he has moved beyond the need to assert he is straight (as he did as a high school male ballet dancer by emphasizing his privileges with women). He further described how letting go of this desire to defend his heteromascularity allowed him to have fun and even opened doors to more opportunities. For Adam, ballet opens the doors to a new kind of masculinity that allows him to let go of stereotypes associated with heteromascularity. Furthermore, although he explicitly stated that the involvement of more straight men in ballet doesn't matter to him, he may be implicitly recognizing the ways the involvement of more straight men in ballet *does* matter in deflecting negative stereotypes about men in ballet.

In the second stigma management technique, our respondents compared ballet to sports. Because ballet is typified as a feminine activity and sports are typified as masculine activities, male ballet dancers may make comparisons of ballet to sports in order to masculinize ballet, similar to the strategy Fisher (2007) refers to as "making it macho." Put another way, male ballet dancers can emphasize their masculinity through their participation in the sport of ballet. Blake described a reciprocal relationship between his athletic behavior and the behavior of the audience, similar to the ways athletes respond to the energy of the crowd: "I feel like in the audience, [they're] giving energy back as you're giving them energy." In this way, sports and ballet may be seen as similar performances.

The male ballet dancers in our study did more than a simple comparison of sports to ballet: specifically, they discussed how ballet is a sport, but it is also a combination of sport and art. Adam stated:

[Ballet] is a sport, I just think it's got so many more added elements than football or soccer, because you have to bring so much to the table, emotionally as well. So it's one of those that's like half art, half sport, more so art. I think physically it's one of the hardest sports and artistically probably one of the hardest art forms, so to be successful you really have to have a really good balance of the two of them.

Adam emphasized both the athletic and artistic qualities of ballet as “half art, half sport,” demonstrating his abilities to code ballet both similarly and differently than traditional competitive sports like football or soccer. He further stated that ballet requires a balance of physical, artistic, and emotional strength, suggesting that ballet is more difficult than traditional athletics and other art forms. In this way, Adam may be deflecting negative stigmas associated with male ballet dancers by emphasizing the diverse talents that being a male ballet dancer requires.

David discussed how a comparison between sports and ballet may not be fully accurate:

I guess I can understand where people draw the comparison through the athleticism, but dance goes way past athleticism. You have to add so much more texture to it. You know sports is just about getting it done . . . beating the other team, and that's one of the reasons that I don't like competition in dance, because then at what point does it cease to exist as an art form and become a sport? . . . For me, sports is just getting it done, just doing the damn thing; and dance goes way past just doing it, so *how* you do it and *why* you do it become important.

Similar to Adam, David believes that dance is athletic, but it also goes beyond athleticism since dance involves an artistic element. In this way, David may also deflect negative stigmas associated with ballet by describing how “dance goes way past athleticism.”

Eric described some inaccuracies between the comparison of sports to dance:

I think it's a bad comparison. . . . Dance is athletic and requires a lot of the same physical cardio and strength that sports do, but . . . I know that people think that sports is like an art, but it's not. I mean . . . while someone throwing a football may be a beautiful thing, it's not aesthetically beautiful and that's where the difference is. . . . It's entertainment, but it's not a performance. . . . There's just more to [dance] than sports. In sports you go up to the [plate] and you try and hit a ball. I mean you have to be strong to hit that ball and you have to be very coordinated to

do that, . . . but [in dance] people aren't just looking to see if you do the steps right, they're looking to see if you perform and capture their interest. . . . it goes beyond just [keeping them] entertained . . . [you need] to keep them captivated.

Eric emphasized both the similarities and differences between sports and dance. Eric specifically described how sports like football are entertainment, while dance is beyond entertainment because it involves captivating the audience. In doing so, Eric echoed Adam's and David's sentiments of dance going beyond sports, perhaps to deflect any negative stigmas associated with men in ballet. Overall, the majority of men described dance and sports as similar in their athletic requirements, differentiating dance as an art form that requires a balance of physical, artistic, and emotional strength that can captivate an audience.

In the third stigma management technique, male ballet dancers classified ballet as an elite art form. Similar to the ways they described ballet as a combination of sport and art beyond athletic performance, some men further described ballet as "elite." Since ballet may have a stereotype as a sissy activity (see Fisher, 2007), reclassifying it as elite may deflect this stigma and further reinforce it as a legitimate activity for men to engage in. Male ballet dancers themselves may become elite due to their participation in ballet, and as a result they may no longer feel the need to prove their masculinity to others. For example, when asked about how he combats the effeminate stigma associated with male ballet dancers, Charlie responded:

At this point, I don't. I just don't. I mean I figure if people want to come and see us perform and see how masculine the art form really is, then that's great. . . . I'm not focused on creating this super macho [persona] and battling that [effeminate] stigma—and I know guys who really try hard to combat that—because I think that sometimes . . . it comes off as like trying too hard.

After dancing for 19 years, as a seasoned male dancer Charlie believes that it is unnecessary to try to show others why ballet is a masculine art form, further demonstrating ballet's eliteness. Charlie's stigma management technique may be to rise above the negative stigmas by being elite; however, Charlie also described how there may be some importance in showing how ballet can be macho in order to recruit young men into ballet:

I definitely think that it's fun to try to get kids interested, and you do school shows, and you do the big jumps for them, and you lift the girls for them, and you say, "Look, you have to be just as strong as, say, a football player to do this." You relate it to the kids so that they get interested. . . . I just think that people are always going to shy away from things that they don't fully understand. . . . Other than that, I just don't really see a point in battling the stigma.

Charlie understands how the need to demonstrate masculinity in ballet performance may be necessary in some instances (e.g., to recruit young men in to ballet); however, he does not see this as entirely helpful. As Charlie implied, the "making it macho" technique (as described by Fisher, 2007) may be more important for recruitment of young boys into ballet (as seen in the *Billy Elliot* effect, Milner, 2002, p. 1), and less important to the actual lived experiences of male ballet dancers. Indeed, Charlie seemed to also imply that the "making it maverick" technique (Fisher, 2007) may have more meaning for college male ballet dancers since they may want to distinguish themselves from other athletes (especially at universities that emphasize highly masculine competitive team sports such as football). In this way, Charlie suggested that male ballet dancers may be more akin to mavericks than macho men, since mavericks are independent and sophisticated who often behave differently from what is expected, similar to the performances of male ballet dancers (see Fisher, 2007, pp. 64-65).

Some male ballet dancers suggested that because ballet is an elite art form, the general public needs to be educated about this type of performance. Blake stated: "I just feel like we need to really educate people on what they're coming to see, and that's the major problem with people . . . who aren't educated [about dance] . . . they just think, 'Oh, that's a girlie thing.'" In this way, Blake resisted the association of dance as something "girlie" and suggested that education might be a way to allow people to understand ballet for the art form it really is. David echoed these sentiments and demonstrated his frustration with the lack of education about men in ballet: "A lot of guys don't even know men dance. I find that hard to believe, . . . and this may be bigoted of me, but like that makes me feel that they are uneducated." Such frustration suggests that often male ballet dancers feel misunderstood, and to compensate they may reinforce their identity as members of an elite group while simultaneously deflecting the negative stereotypes associated with male ballet dancers.

In sum, all of the male ballet dancers described a male ballet culture in which heteromascuine behaviors were emphasized, challenged, and managed. Using gendered rules, techniques reinforced the ways male ballet dancers viewed masculine and feminine male ballet dancers. In addition, the majority of the men described at least some form of stigma management to combat perceived negative stereotypes about male ballet dancers within male ballet culture. These included (a) emphasizing heterosexual privilege, (b) comparing ballet to sports, and (c) classifying ballet as an elite art form.

### ***Hegemonic Heteromascularity in Performance***

While the men in our study discussed male ballet culture, they also described how their performances of ballet both reflected and challenged hegemonic heteromascularity. So much of dance is a performance, from appearing on stage in tights to the daily classroom exercise; with this comes a certain level of separation between masculine attitudes in everyday social life and the masculine roles taught in the ballet classroom. While it is clear that these men were involved in daily performances within male ballet culture, most struggled to define how their own idea of heteromascularity informed their experiences in male ballet culture. Overall, the men in our study discussed hegemonic heteromascularity in performance through (a) definitions of *masculinity* and *heteromascularity*, (b) masculinity in performance, and (c) heteromascularity and female partners in performance.

#### ***Defining Masculinity and Heteromascularity.***

All five of our respondents were asked to define *masculinity* in their own terms. Many men used words like *confidence* and *strength* to describe masculinity. David stated that to be a man, one has to be “the staple of the home or the relationship, . . . the rock, the anchor, you know, the base basically.” Adam believed, “I think it just goes back to the confidence inside and . . . [knowing] what your role as a man is in society.” Being a man in society was a part of the way these men described masculinity; however, Adam suggested, “You don’t have to exude masculinity . . . you don’t have to be butch and like huge and buff. I just think it has to do with your mannerisms.” These mannerisms are less about being butch and more about being comfortable with your manhood, as Blake stated:

It's someone who's comfortable with [himself]. You have to be comfortable enough to laugh, to make a fool of yourself, to cry, just to be strong and know who you are and not worry about the next person and what [or] how they think of you.

Blake acknowledged the fluidity of masculinity by noting how feminine qualities may sometimes be a part of what it means to be masculine. David took defining *masculinity* a step further, and moves toward a definition of *heteromascularity*:

But you know, masculinity . . . goes several different ways, because . . . men can have flamboyant tendencies and still be straight. I mean . . . I have like flamboyant tendencies, the way I dress . . . I don't know, I sing a lot, obnoxious and loud, but . . . Masculinity to me is a way a man asserts himself—just himself, I would say.

David acknowledged that masculine men can have flamboyant tendencies and still be straight. Without being prompted to do so, David brought up how he believes sexual orientation relates to masculinity. In essence, he describes masculinity as heteromascularity. David goes on to admit he has his own flamboyant tendencies in the way he dresses and his “obnoxious and loud” singing, but then goes on to say that to be masculine, one must “assert” himself: this word stands out because of its declamatory context, that in order to be masculine, masculinity must be thrust upon someone. David has inadvertently emphasized his masculine bravado by creating a dividing line between his perceived feminine tendencies and his masculine assertion.

### *Masculinity in Performance*

The men in our study differentiated between the performance of masculinity in everyday life and the performance of masculinity on stage. The latter is more of a physical embodiment of a character and that character's performance. To be a masculine ballet dancer having a strong, sculpted body is a must:

The first time that I saw men dance masculinely is when I saw Alvin Ailey [American Dance Theater], and their bodies are like, ripped, and they're like sculptures on stage, so I was like . . . this is what I need to be doing. (Blake)

Here, Blake did not describe the movement or the character of the dancer, he described the dancer's "ripped" bodies. Blake talked about his own body becoming sculpted and, as a result, the constant stress of being watched. David put it simply: "I just think a man on stage needs to look like a man." Charlie, however, elaborated on the physical fitness of the dancer and referred to the grace of a male dancer: "I think that just because there's strength in his image that doesn't take away from his grace." Thus, there may be a balance between masculine and feminine qualities that comprise the aesthetic of the ideal male ballet dancer.

The men in our study described the ways a masculine male ballet dancer performs on stage. Blake believed that "masculinity as a role [on stage] . . . it's about being dominant and . . . being in charge, and it's being strong—all of these words go into that." Eric elaborated, "It's like the combination of being that strong man, but being smooth." Again, the performances of male ballet dancers require a balancing act.

#### *Heteromascularity and Female Partners in Performance*

Thanks in part to ballet master Marius Petipa, many of the popular ballets of today (e.g., *The Nutcracker*, 1892; *Don Quixote*, 1869) utilize male-female couplings in traditional *pas de deux* (literally "step of two"). In doing so, not only is the ballerina showcased with the male dancer lifting her into the air, but these *pas de deux* are also in keeping with the heteronormativity of a male and female dancing together. For the men in our study, dancing with a female partner emphasizes a heteromascularity perspective in which the masculine and feminine roles are idealized and defined. Blake stated, "I feel on stage you have to create this fantasyland of the prince and the princess, and you have to be that prince for the story to work." Being a prince on stage requires masculine characteristics while still playing towards a fantasy theme: the love story between the characters is also important. Blake suggested that this type of interaction becomes an onstage relationship involving trust:

As you become partners, it becomes a relationship. You have to know the ins and outs and how your personalities mesh, 'cause you're going to be partnering with them and . . . if it's a love story, then y'all have to be in love for that moment—you can't [come across as] fake.



Blake compared the pas de deux to a relationship, directly implying a heterosexual one. In pas de deux performances, these men felt as if they were required to perform in such a way that audiences do not question their legitimacy as ballet's iconic prince and the princess's heterosexual partner.

Filling this heteromascuine role accentuates the dancer's strength and masculinity: "I mean I do feel masculine when I'm dancing with a girl," Eric stated. Blake asserted that when partnered with a female dancer, the male dancer is in control: "You have to lift, you have to partner, and . . . if you're not getting it . . . you're going to be blamed most of the time. So . . . if she falls, it's on you." In this way, partner work between male and female dancers reinforces heteromascuinity within male ballet culture.

However, the pas de deux involves more than just the male anchoring his female dance partner. The balance between the two dancers is much more nuanced and complementary. In this way, David and Brannon's (1976) "be a big wheel" element of masculinity does not apply. On the contrary, Charlie explained the male dancer has to have "the ability to drive the movement without overpowering his partner, especially with partnering work." In other words, no outlandish showing off: the female has the stage and the male dancer is there as a muscular buttress on stage (i.e., more akin to David and Brannon's "be a study oak" element of masculinity). In our interview, David echoed this sentiment:

Partnering—that's kind of when the guy is . . . there to make sure the girl . . . generally speaking in most [pas de deux] work, especially in classical work . . . he makes sure the girl is on her leg, he makes sure he watches her, he tends to her while she does everything she needs to do, he supports her, and stuff like that.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the men in this study described experiences as male ballet dancers that both reinforced and challenged heteromascuinity in the context of a male ballet culture that they emphasized as unique from other environments in which they were involved. The majority of the men described at least some form of stigma management. Piecing together college male ballet dancers' statements through an

interpretative and interactive process revealed an important theory: By actively participating in a male ballet culture and engaging in heteromascularity in performance, male ballet dancers negotiate their identities as men while performing a dance form that is highly stigmatized as effeminate. These findings reflect past research (Fisher, 2007), but also suggest the importance of examining college male ballet dancers using a grounded theory approach.

Similar to past research, the men in our study described their experiences in ballet as highly codified as far as gender is concerned (Mennesson, 2009, p. 177; see also Novak, 1993). They indicated how to “dance like a man” and how feminine male ballet dancers worked against their definitions of the ideal male ballet dancer. They also described a system of gendered rules in both technique and performance of ballet. Similar to boys participating in rhythmic gymnastics who distinguished themselves from girls by describing their abilities to jump higher (Chimot & Louveau, 2010), the men in our study also used this technique to differentiate themselves from female ballet dancers. The prince’s role expected in the traditional pas de deux also reinforced for them the idealized heteromasculine roles within the ballet world.

While the men in our study did partake in activities that reinforced their heteromascularity, they did not fully participate in what Fisher (2007) described as a “making it macho” strategy; rather, they engaged in three unique stigma management strategies. First, some emphasized their heterosexual privilege through describing how their experiences in ballet allowed them to have access to women. Other research has shown that access to women (i.e., *compensatory hypermasculinity*, the explicit assertion of heterosexuality in the face of a “discrediting” fact; Grindstaff & West, 2006, p. 511) may be a strategy that men use to destigmatize their involvement in feminized sports. For example, a male cheerleader in Grindstaff and West’s (2006) study stated, “I’m hanging around with some of the hottest, in-shape young ladies that the school has to offer. I’m touching them and holding them in places you can only dream about” (p. 511). However, contrary to past research, we found that male ballet dancers may only use this technique when they are quite young, and as they get older they no longer see this “making it macho” strategy of emphasizing access to women as a necessary tactic. Instead, ballet can open doors to a new kind of masculinity in which traditional stigma management

techniques (e.g., access to women) may not be emphasized. Furthermore, rather than engaging in hegemonic heteromascularity, male ballet dancers may understand a more inclusive masculinity in which they can “put on different gloves” to practice feminine and masculine techniques when appropriate.

Similarly, in their second stigma management technique, male ballet dancers made comparisons of ballet to sports in order to masculinize ballet, emphasizing ballet’s combination of athletics and art. Both of these stigma management strategies may at first appear as if they are “making it macho” strategies as Fisher (2007) describes; however, these strategies may be more akin to Fisher’s “making it maverick” technique. Fisher suggests that male ballet dancers are more “mavericks” than “macho men,” since mavericks are independent and sophisticated who often behave differently from what is expected, similar to the performances of male ballet dancers (pp. 64-65). When the men in our study described ballet as an elite art form, they continued to show how their performance is unique and desirable. Emphasizing a new form of masculinity and comparing sports and art as well as asserting ballet as an elite art form may reflect Fisher’s “making it maverick” strategy among college male ballet dancers. Furthermore, the men in our study are members of a university environment which emphasizes male competitive team sports, thus, the need to distinguish ballet from these other competitive team sports may be related to the “making it maverick” strategy.

### **Implications**

Student affairs practitioners and administrators might benefit from the findings of this study through an enhanced understanding of male ballet dancers and their experiences negotiating their identities as men. While past researchers have recognized the importance of having college counseling professionals who are sensitive to the unique problems of student-athletes (Chartrand & Lent, 1987), our findings suggest that male ballet dancers may also have a unique set of needs as they negotiate their roles as men, ballet dancers, and college students. While many male students negotiate their masculine selves during their time as college students by entering social clubs or fraternities, male college dance majors must do so in a way that develops

themselves both as artists and individuals within an effeminately stigmatized arena. To encourage these men to develop in a healthy way, student affairs practitioners and administrators might encourage a dialogue among college male ballet dancers and counselors who are sensitive to the stigma management techniques that these men sometimes engage in, as evidenced in the current study.

In addition, these results might challenge faculty who teach in the areas of dance and performance to adjust their styles of teaching and approaching the subject of masculine dance in ways that are sensitive to the experiences of college male ballet dancers. As Risner (2002) suggests, dance educators can greatly benefit from understanding and confronting the stigmas among male dancers.

Finally, these results show that the talents of college male ballet dancers may be overshadowed by the male athletes who participate in traditionally masculine sports such as football and basketball, especially at larger universities. As a result, institutional administrators might showcase college male dancers as prominent talent at their institutions through promotional materials (e.g., Burr, 2012).

### ***Transferability of the Data***

While the findings of this study are informative, it is important to discuss the transferability of the data. This study offers a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) of five college male ballet dancers’ experiences at one large public Southern US university. *Thick description* involves interpretation of social actions within the appropriate context in which the social action took place (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 542). As a result, the transferability of these findings should be carefully evaluated in the light of the biographical and cultural characteristics of the sample (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002, p. 54). The findings presented here could inform future work investigating college male ballet dancers’ experiences; although Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that qualitative findings are “impossible to generalize” (p. 124) and that other researchers determine the extent that the data are transferable to their settings. Even so, these findings allow for a rich understanding of male ballet culture and heteromascularity in the context of ballet performance.

### ***Future Research***

This study could be extended in several ways. First, future studies of masculinity and ballet might examine samples of both male and female ballet dancers to offer relational analyses as seen in Grindstaff and West's (2006) work with coed cheerleaders. Secondly, racially and ethnically diverse samples are needed to best understand the relationships between masculinity, race/ethnicity, and ballet performance. Third, future research might compare large public universities (which traditionally emphasize male competitive team sports) to small liberal arts colleges to best understand how the university campus culture might influence the ways male ballet dancers construct their masculinities. Fourth, in her study of professional male ballet dancers, Mennesson (2009) found that many male ballet dancers emphasized equality between the sexes and feminist ideologies. To complement her study, future research might investigate how college male ballet dancers construct their political and feminist (or antifeminist) ideologies. Fifth, since cultures outside the US may be more supportive of male dance, future research might utilize international comparative samples as Mennesson (2009) suggests. Sixth, Risner (2002) calls for dance educators to fight the stigmas applied to male dancers in hopes of gaining wider social acceptance for men in dance. Thus future investigations might include college professors who teach dance courses to speak to this important area of research. Seventh, a study comparing those dancers who began their studies at an early age to those who started dancing later in life may yield valuable findings, as would a longitudinal study of men's attitudes towards men in ballet from entrance into college to graduation. Finally, while homophobia and anti-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) attitudes have been found to be common among male athletes (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Krane, 2001; Roper & Halloran, 2007; Southall, Nagel, Anderson, Polite, & Southall, 2009; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001; Worthen 2014), limited research has investigated how college male ballet dancers fit into this discussion (Risner 2002, 2007).



## References

- Adams, M. L. (1993). To be an ordinary hero: Male figure skaters and the ideology of gender. In T. Haddad (Ed.) *Men and masculinities* (pp. 163-181). Toronto, ON, Canada: Canadian Scholars.
- Adams, M. L. (2011). *Artistic impressions: Figure skating, masculinity, and the limits of sport*. Toronto, ON, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Anderson, E. (2002). Gays in sport: Contesting hegemonic masculinity in a homophobic environment. *Gender & Society, 16*, 860-877.
- Anderson, E. (2005). Orthodox and inclusive masculinity: Competing masculinities among heterosexual men in a feminized terrain. *Sociological Perspectives, 48*, 337-355.
- Anderson, E. (2008). "Being masculine is not about who you sleep with . . .": Heterosexual athletes contesting masculinity and the one-time rule of homosexuality. *Sex Roles, 58*, 104-115.
- Blinde, E., & Taub, D. (1992). Women athletes as falsely accused deviants: Managing the lesbian stigma. *Sociological Quarterly, 33*, 521-533.
- Burr, C. J. (2012). Opportunity knocked, and there stood a famous ballet couple just waiting to come in. *Sooner Magazine, 32*(2), 1. Retrieved from <https://www.oufoundation.org/SM2/Winter2012/Prologue>
- Bryson, L. (1987). Sport and the maintenance of masculine hegemony. *Women's Studies International Forum, 10*, 349-360.
- Bryson, L. (1990). Challenges to male hegemony in sport. In M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), *Sport, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives* (pp. 173-184). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Chartrand, J., & Lent, R. (1987). Sports counseling: Enhancing the development of the student-athlete. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 66*(4), 164-167.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, England: SAGE.
- Chimot, C., & Louveau, C. (2010). Becoming a man while playing a female sport: The construction of masculine identity in boys doing rhythmic gymnastics. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 45*, 436-456.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender & power: Society, the person, and sexual politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1992). A very straight gay: Masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender. *American Sociological Review, 57*, 735-751.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities: Second Edition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*, 829-859.
- Daldry, S. (Director). (2000). *Billy Elliot* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Universal Studios.
- David, D., & Brannon, R. (1976). *The forty-nine percent majority: The male sex role*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Davis, L. (1990). Male cheerleaders and the naturalization of gender. In M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), *Sport, men, and the gender order* (pp. 153-161). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Davis, T. (2002). Voices of gender role conflict: The social construction of college men's identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43, 508-521.
- Edwards, K., & Jones, S. (2009). "Putting my man face on": A grounded theory of college men's gender identity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50, 210-228.
- Fisher, J. (2007). Make it maverick: Rethinking the "make it macho" strategy for men in ballet. *Dance Chronicle*, 30, 45-66.
- Foulkes, J. L. (2001). Dance is for American men: Ted Shawn and the intersection of gender, sexuality, and nationalism in the 1930s. In J. Desmond (Ed.), *Dancing desires: Choreographing sexualities on and off the stage* (pp. 113-146). University of Wisconsin Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Griffin, P. (1992). Changing the game: Homophobia, sexism, and lesbians in sport. *Quest*, 44, 251-265.
- Grindstaff, L., & West, E. (2006). Cheerleading and the gendered politics of sport. *Social Problems*, 53, 500-518.
- Gumprecht, B. (2003). The American college town. *Geographical Review*, 93(1), 51-80.
- Gumprecht, B. (2007). The campus as a public space in the American college town. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 33, 72-103.
- Hanson, M. (1995). *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American culture*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Harris, F. (2010). College men's meanings of masculinities and contextual influences: Toward a conceptual model. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51, 297-318.
- Hoepfl, M. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 47-63.
- Kimmel, M. (2004). Masculinities. In M. Kimmel and A. Aronson (eds.), *Men & masculinities: A social, cultural, and historical encyclopedia* (pp. 503-507). Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
- Kapborg, I., & Berterö, C. (2002). Using an interpreter in qualitative interviews: Does it threaten validity? *Nursing Inquiry*, 9(1), 52-56.
- Kestnbaum, E. (2003). *Culture on ice: Figure skating & cultural meaning*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan.
- Krane, V. (2001). We can be athletic and feminine, but do we want to? Challenging hegemonic femininity in women's sport. *Quest*, 53, 115-133.
- Lenskyj, H. (1986). *Out of bounds: Women, sport and sexuality*. Toronto, ON, Canada: Women's Press.

- Lenskyj, H. (1990). Power and play: Gender and sexuality issues in sport and physical activity. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 25, 235-245.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
- Mennesson, C. (2009). Being a man in dance: Socialization modes and gender identities. *Sport in Society*, 12, 175-195.
- Merriam, S., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G., & Muhamad, M. (2001). Power and positionality: Negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20, 405-416.
- Messner, M. A. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 197-211.
- Messner, M. A. (1992). *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Messner, M. A. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men, and sports*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Messner, M. A., & Sabo, D. F. (1990). *Sport, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives*. Champaign IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Milner, C. (2002, April 14). More boys than girls join the Royal Ballet. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from [http://www .telegraph.co.uk/news/1390792/More-boys-than-girls-join-the-Royal-Ballet.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1390792/More-boys-than-girls-join-the-Royal-Ballet.html)
- Petipa, M. (Choreographer). (1869). *Don Quixote*.
- Petipa, M. (Choreographer). (1892). *The nutcracker*.
- Ponterotto, J. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept "thick description." *Qualitative Report*, 11, 538-549.
- Novak, C. (1993). Ballet, gender, and cultural power. In H. Thomas (Ed.), *Dance, gender and culture*, (pp. 34-48). London, England: MacMillan.
- Risner, D. (2002). Sexual orientation and male participation in dance education: Revisiting the open secret. *Journal of Dance Education*, 2(3), 84-92.
- Risner, D. (2007). Rehearsing masculinity: Challenging the 'boy code' in dance education. *Research in Dance Education*, 8, 139-153,
- Roper, E., & Halloran, E. (2007). Attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among heterosexual male and female student athletes. *Sex Roles*, 57, 919-928.
- Scott, A. (Producer). (2006). *Priscilla, queen of the desert: The musical*. Sydney, Australia: Back Row Productions.
- Southall, R., Nagel, M., Anderson, E., Polite, F., & Southall, C. (2009). An Investigation of male college athletes' attitudes toward sexual-orientation. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2009 Special Issue, 62-77.
- Whitson, D. (1990). Sport in the social construction of masculinity. In M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), *Sports, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives* (pp. 23- 28). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 1, 125-151.
- Williams, D. (2003) *Examining psychosocial issues of adolescent male dancers*(Doctoral dissertation). Marywood University, Scranton, PA. (UMI 2090242)



- Willis, P. (1982). Women in sport in ideology. In J. Hargreaves (Ed.), *Sport, culture and ideology* (pp. 117-135). London, England: Routledge.
- Wolf-Wendel, L., Toma, D., & Morpew, C. (2001). How much difference is too much difference? Perceptions of gay men and lesbians in intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42, 465-479.
- Worthen, Meredith G. F. 2014. "Blaming the Jocks and the Greeks? Identifying the Underlying Constructs of Collegiate Athletes' and Fraternity/Sorority Members' Attitudes toward LGBT Individuals." *Journal of College Student Development* 55(2):168-195.
- Yiannakis, A., & Melnick, M. J. (2001). *Contemporary issues in sociology of sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.

## Appendix A

### *Interview Guide*

Demographics: Race, age, place of birth, relationship status, years dancing.

How would you describe your sexual identity?

How did you begin dancing ballet?

Have you always danced ballet?

What made you start dancing?

Was your family supportive?

How did your father specifically feel?

How did your mother specifically feel?

When did you start dancing professionally/become a ballet major?

How did you become a professional ballet dancer? (if applicable)

Is there a difference between male and female ballet technique?

What do you think the differences are? Why are those movements specific to males/females?

How would you describe a "masculine" male ballet dancer?

On stage?

In real life?

How would you describe an "effeminate" male ballet dancer?

On stage?

In real life?

How would you describe the posture of a male dancer?

Is there a difference between the posture of masculine or a feminine male dancer?

Would you say you hang out with more men or more women outside of ballet?

(probe: sexual orientation of friends)

Why do you think that is?

Do you encounter any stigma for being a male ballet dancer?  
A gay male ballet dancer?  
A straight male ballet dancer?  
What are your opinions on this stigma?  
Why do you think this stigma came to be?  
Are you comfortable with your sexuality within the dance world?  
Are you comfortable dancing with gay men?  
In a partnership?  
Are you comfortable dancing with straight men?  
In a partnership?  
Are you comfortable dancing with women?  
In a partnership?  
Do you find differences when you dance with different partners?  
Define masculinity in your own terms.  
Do you think about masculine, “manly” mannerisms and behaviors when you perform?  
Do you watch other male dancers to gain insight on their mannerisms and behaviors?  
Why do you watch them in particular?  
Do you think other male dancers watch you?  
Why do you think they watch you?  
Do you receive critiques from teachers/directors about masculine movement?  
What is the most masculine role in a ballet you can think of?  
Why would you categorize that role as the epitome of masculinity?  
Who do you see as a “masculine” ballet icon?



**Trenton M. Haltom** is a Masters student in Sociology at the University of Houston.

**Meredith G. F. Worthen** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma. Partial funding was received from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at the University of Oklahoma.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Trenton M. Haltom, *email* thaltom2@unl.edu