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BALLROOM IN THE BIG PEACH: THE HISTORY OF ORGANIZED BALLROOM DANCE
IN ATLANTA, 1950-1984

by

ROGER WIBLIN

Under the Direction of Michelle Brattain, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that in the years 1950 to 1984, ballroom dance studios in Atlanta were spaces where participants forged identities. Atlanta is used as a case study to interrogate how ballroom dance studios functioned, and to demonstrate the lived experience of those who worked in the industry. Mirroring the rise of consumerism, and conspicuous consumption, in post-World War II United States, ballroom dance studios in the fifties through eighties saw themselves as, first and foremost, business entities. Ballroom studios were spaces where wealthy clients could reinforce their elite status in society, by spending large amounts of money on dancing, and receiving personal attention from qualified instructors, and personnel. Simultaneously, clients and teachers forged close personal bonds which created a welcoming

environment that encouraged clients to spend more time, and money, in the studio. The familiness that developed within studios created a client/teacher relationship that was intimate, but based on a monetary exchange. The familial relationships cultivated within the studio setting were not limited to teacher-client relationships, but also grew between teachers within the studio. Using the words of teachers in Atlanta who taught in the period under investigation, this project shines a spotlight on a group of individuals who have been a presence in the economy, and society, but have remained under-examined by academics. Contrary to the image of men being dominant on the dance floor, the experience of Atlanta teachers shows that women were powerful actors in the business, and that women ironically taught men how to be masculine on the dance floor. “Ballroom in the Big Peach” also reveals that, despite the dominance of white clients in ballroom studios in the twenty-first century, there were black ballroom studios in Atlanta in the 1950s and 1960s, and they appear to have functioned much like white studios, catering to black elites. They were also spaces where black women asserted their expertise and business knowledge. By 1984 the ballroom dance industry had become dominated by competitive dancing, leading to a renaming of the national body, and a change in focus of most studios to competitive dancing, rather than social dancing.

INDEX WORDS: Ballroom Dancing; Ballroom dance Studios; Ballroom teachers; Atlanta dance industry; Women in business; Consumerism

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by

ROGER WIBLIN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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Roger Wiblin
2017

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ROGER WIBLIN

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December 2017

DEDICATION

To the one who saw me through it all, good and bad. Heather Ann, you are my world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been a long journey. I owe many debts to many people. Two men inspired my intellectual pursuit of the story of ballroom dancing. When I spent time at the University of Florida, I wrote a paper for a graduate course on the US South on the history of ballroom dance in Florida. Jack Davis was incredibly supportive and encouraging. He pushed me to more-closely look at what the sources said, and to trust less-traditional sources, something that I was tentative about. He went further in inviting me to express my thoughts about his own scholarship, and took my contributions seriously. He is a generous man to whom I am grateful for keeping my faith in academia alive during the difficult years that followed my time with him.

The second major influence is Cliff Kuhn. My first semester in the program at Georgia State I took his oral history course, and my love for this field grew exponentially. He taught me how to interview, analyze, and effectively use the material to build an argument. Cliff was a great cheerleader for my work, and generously talked with other faculty about my project, so that when I met other professors they knew my work because Cliff had talked about it with them. When I asked him to chair my committee he told me that he had thought he was already chairing it, and was excited to get moving with the work. Dr. Kuhn's death was shocking, and left me adrift for a time. I hope that this finished project is something he would approve of.

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TA for a number of his courses. Jeff's generosity is boundless. I am indebted to him for having faith in my abilities, and for pushing me to stay the course. He wrote letters for the many, many jobs I applied for, always happy to help. His generosity inspires me to want to be like that in my own career. Marni Davis is the only original member of my committee who made it to the end. I am grateful for her willingness to work with my schedule. I also learned much from watching her respond with grace and academic strength as she responded to criticism of her work at a conference where she presented. Again, these are traits that I hope to develop.

Other Georgia State peers, faculty and staff have blessed my life at GSU, including Chuck Steffen, Mohammed Ali, Kate Wilson, Harcourt Fuller, Ian Fletcher, Robin Conner, Rob Baker, and Glenn Eskew. I must also mention Joe Perry. When I first received the call that I had been accepted into the GSU PhD program, Dr Perry talked with me, and made the effort to find the funding that I needed in order to be able to make my participation a reality. He is an advocate for grad students, and his kindness has changed my life, and the life of my family. I am also grateful for my fellow grad students. While I did not spend large amounts of time on campus, Cory Hand and John Sullivan have been stalwarts in helping me stay linked to other students. I am also grateful for Ryan, Lindsay, Ruth, and Cheryl for being sounding boards, and offering me kind words along the way. I must also recognize Mark Grandstaff, now-retired from BYU, who got me through my MA program, years ago. He has been a great advocate for me over the years, which I greatly appreciate.

I have also been blessed to associate with incredible scholars of dance over the past ten years. When I first met Julie Malnig at a conference, I was star-struck. Her book was foundational in inspiring me to use the tools of the historian to understand the ballroom world in the US. Her scholastic rigor, personal kindness, and active participation in forwarding the field

has left a lasting impact on me. I am fortunate to have been part of PoP Moves, a dance organization focusing on popular dance. Special thanks go to Claire Parfitt Brown for her encouragement of my work, and Sherrill Dodds for taking my work seriously. It has also been great to have a fellow grad student focused on ballroom dance. While we are on opposite coasts, and take different approaches to our work, I am grateful for Denise Machin's interest in my findings.

I was fortunate to have unfettered cooperation from a number of organizations as I worked on the project. Arthur Murray, Inc. generously opened their archives to me on two research trips. I appreciate John Kimmins, Tom Murdock, and Tara Christensen for coordinating this, and talking with me about their experiences in the ballroom world. The National Dance Council of America helped to fund my research trips, and opened their archive to me as well. Thank you to Casandra Schneider for her finding me a space to work, and for being a gracious host, and to Dennis Rogers for his assistance and for sharing his incredible knowledge of ballroom history. I am grateful that Didio Barrera and Keith Todd decided, more than twenty years ago, to publish a national ballroom publication. They invited me into their home in Miami to look at *DanceBeat*'s archive. Locally, I received exceptional service at the Woodruff archive at Clark Atlanta University, and the Atlanta History Center.

Ballroom dance has been a vital part of my life for thirty years. My love of dance owes much to Betty Martin, my first teacher. She embodied a true love of dance, and of technique. She spent her Saturdays teaching young kids good dancing, and earned very little doing so. I am indebted to her for helping me gain the skills that enabled me to come to the US. In the US I have been blessed to have supportive, encouraging dance mentors who continue to show sincere interest in my welfare. Curt Holman, Marci Edgington, and Elaine Grenko are a

triumvirate who represent excellence as individuals, dancers, and friends. They have helped to make me the man I am through their honesty, coaching, and love of Christ. Others at BYU, notably Claudia Hill, Sharon Holman, and others, have made my journey easier to make. I am also grateful to Lee Wakefield for seeing something in me as a teenage boy from South Africa, and inviting me to participate in the amazing program that has helped to shape my life.

My grandparents, Nelson and Iona Girdlestone, danced nearly every night of my mom's childhood. They introduced my mother, Eleanor, to ballroom dancing, and she has loved it ever since. My dad, Lindsay, started dancing to meet girls. He met and married my mom, and the rest is history. I am indebted to them for supporting my dancing for twenty years, paying for training, costumes, and travel, on two continents. When I started my program at GSU, they were supportive, and always told their friends about what I was up to. My dad was diagnosed with cancer as I took my qualifying exams. I wish he were here to see the completion of a journey he believed I could complete. I also owe more than is ever possible to repay to my kind, generous parents-in-law, Berne and Elizabeth Gebbs. For five years they have patiently allowed us to take over their home, litter their yard with toys, and watch kids when we had to be in three places at once. Their kindness has made this all possible.

We came to Georgia with four children, and we leave with five. Charlotte, Ella, Bryant, Hyrum, and Bennett have been troopers. They have learned to deal with their dad being away to do work, rather than hanging with the family. They have prayed for my success, and their faith has blessed me. I love them and am excited for the adventure that awaits us now.

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meaningful suggestions. She has earned this degree along with me. Heather Ann, I still hope to make your dreams come true.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	XI
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: US SOCIAL DANCING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY	20
CHAPTER 2: DANCING CLASSES: ELITES IN THE FAMILY.....	50
CHAPTER 3: KEEPING THE FAMILY CONNECTED: FAMILYNESS IN STUDIOS .	92
CHAPTER 4: TEACHING CLASS: BALLROOM DANCE TEACHERS IN ATLANTA STUDIOS, 1950-1984.....	127
CHAPTER 5: “THEY WERE THE STRAIGHT STUDIO:” GENDER IN ATLANTA BALLROOM DANCE STUDIOS, 1950-1984.....	159
EPILOGUE: INDEPENDENTS, AND AMATEURS, AND RUSSIANS, OH MY! 1985 TO THE PRESENT.....	214
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	232
APPENDICES	241
Appendix A	241

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABDC	Atlanta Ballroom Dance Center
ABDC	Atlanta Ballroom Dance Club
AJC	Atlanta Journal Constitution
AMI	Arthur Murray, Incorporated
AMIA	Arthur Murray International Archive
FADS	Fred Astaire Dance Studios
NCDTO	National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations
NDCA	National Dance Council of America
USABDA	United States Amateur Ballroom Dance Association

INTRODUCTION

“[The group of dancers who frequent a studio] is a whole little life-form. Yeah, the dance studio is a community.”

Cindy Johnson, Atlanta ballroom dance teacher

“It’s not like it is today. We were family [in the 1970s and 1980s]. We didn’t have the drama ... We were family and we relied on each other.”

Ethylann Bonder Berse, former Atlanta ballroom dance teacher talking about working in the studio system in Atlanta.

“I missed all that, you know, the familiness of it, I guess.”

Tommy Baity, Atlanta ballroom dance teacher, and former Atlanta studio owner, talking about why he decided to return to the studio system, rather than remain an independent teacher.

“Atlanta Dance Studios [in the 1970s and 1980s] were like a factory... There were lessons, competitions, showcases, team matches, and trips ... [The 2000s onward] is a totally different ballgame. In the seventies, eighties and nineties it was all about money, but today it is all about the dancing. It went from selling, to dance itself.”

Jim Day, Atlanta Ballroom Dance Studio Owner

“[As a female studio owner] you have to have the right staff. Some male teachers don’t like taking instruction from a woman. It’s been hard for a woman to have a family

and to be married in this industry. I know very few women in this industry who are married. They've given that up to be in the business. [They] don't have children."

Phyllis DeNeve, Atlanta Ballroom Dance Studio Owner

"A lot of the ladies that were die-hard loyal students to many of these [gay ballroom teachers in Atlanta who contracted AIDS], took care of them when they got sick... A lot of these women were just crazy wealthy... But, these [teachers] were like their sons."

Cindy Johnson, Atlanta Ballroom Dance Teacher

"There were none. There was no such thing."

Roy Porter, Atlanta Ballroom dance teacher responding to a question about the role of blacks in the Atlanta ballroom dance industry in the 1950s through 1980s.

Thousands of men and women in Atlanta worked as ballroom dance teachers in the second half of the twentieth century. Collectively, these teachers taught tens of thousands of clients who walked into ballroom dance studios with varying motivations, and differing expectations. Ballroom dance studios became spaces where Atlantans built, reinforced, or defied socially accepted identities. As the above quotes, taken from interviews with teaches who taught in Atlanta studios between 1950 and 1984, show, the ballroom dance industry in Atlanta provided a space where issues of class, gender, and race played out as Atlantans participated in a leisure activity.

This project explores the development of organized ballroom dance in Atlanta, Georgia between 1950 and 1984. Ballroom dance studios became spaces where Americans forged identities, and where people of varying socio-economic classes, sexual preference, and taste spent time physically and intellectually interacting. All participants in this dancing community had the opportunity to not only develop their identity, but also display that identity within the context of the studio. Wealthy clients conspicuously demonstrated their wealth through the number of lessons they purchased. Men and women acted out codified, explicit gender roles prescribed by official technique manuals, and modeled by studio teachers. The figures black Atlantans danced on Atlanta's segregated dance floors were the same as their white counterparts', even if they did not occupy the same physical spaces. At the same time, ballroom dance studios also provided women of both races a means to manipulate the gender binary, and to exercise power and influence within the ballroom industry, and by extension the US economy. Gay teachers used their positions within studios to establish themselves as permanent participants in the service-industry economy. Working and middle-class clients could "acquire the skills or adopt the values required to circulate properly within" a higher socio-economic class-level, and thus attempt to better their social standing.¹ Importantly, this all occurred within the context of a consumer/service-provider economy. Customers paid for a service that was provided by employees who were paid by a corporation or owner. The lines between commercial product and intimacy, elite and working classes, and ethical and predatory business practices were blurred within the studio. Overlapping conceptions of how to define individual and group identity meant that defining lines were messy, rather than clear cut. Precisely because of this

¹ Julie Malnig's "Two-Stepping to Glory: Social Dance and the Rhetoric of Social Mobility" (*Etnofoor*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1997), 128-150, focuses on the class dimensions of social dancing in the first three decades of the twentieth century, but many of the same patterns relating to social class she sees in this era are evident in the fifties through eighties.

messiness, ballroom studios were important spaces of identity-making for all participants in the industry, whether teachers, clients, or owners.

A major principle this dissertation demonstrates is that participants in organized ballroom dance in Atlanta created relationships that went beyond the typical service-provider/client relationship. Studios actively attempted to create an atmosphere that would encourage clients to spend time in the studio space, with studio employees, and thereby generate greater profits for the studios. “Ballroom in the Big Peach” reveals the effectiveness of this approach. As the opening three quotes show, studios created relationships and connections between teachers and customers that were family-like. This familiness, to use the term Atlanta ballroom dance teacher Tommy Baity coined, was based on an economic relationship, but was comprised of sincere concern, interest, and even love between teachers and students, and within the community of teachers. The creation of familiness is what sets the 1950 to 1984 era of the US ballroom dance industry apart from the previous era of independent teachers, and the 1984-2010 era of independent DanceSport studios that followed. This study periodizes the development of the US ballroom dance industry in the twentieth century, and explores the era that has received scant attention from scholars.

As the subtitle of “Ballroom in the Big Peach” implies, this study focuses on organized ballroom dance. For the purpose of this dissertation, organized ballroom dance is dancing occurring in structured, most-often business, settings. As a result, this work will not focus on dancing in nightclubs or at parties in the homes of Atlantans. Nor is it concerned with how the dances themselves changed, adapted, or were performed by dancers. In a similar fashion to Danielle Robinson’s study of ballroom dancing in the early twentieth century, “I do not trace dance lineages or racially organize dance steps. Instead, I pursue how these dance forms help us

to better understand” an area of US history that has received little attention from historians.²

With increasing organization among teacher associations, and especially with the creation of the National Council of Dance Teachers Organizations in 1950, the ballroom dance industry took on an organized, national flavor. Over the next thirty years, the business of ballroom became codified, and relatively uniform across the US.

Although hundreds of thousands of Americans participated in organized ballroom dance in the thirty-plus years under discussion, academic work on dance has been dominated by studies of ballet and modern dance. “Ballroom in the Big Peach” places the ballroom dance industry center stage and seeks to understand the lived experience of those who participated in the business in Atlanta. Atlanta serves as a case-study to examine the developments within the US ballroom dance industry. Understanding the historical development of ballroom dance in Atlanta in these decades uncovers the context out of which the US ballroom industry of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century arose. It uncovers how the growth of the business of ballroom dance impacted individuals, social groups, and business entities.

As a major, growing metropolitan area in the US, Atlanta’s experience exemplifies that of other large cities of the period. Post-World War II Atlanta was transforming from a manufacturing-based economy, to a service-based economy, just as the rest of the country was.³ Ballroom studios were part of that service industry growth. As a growing urban center, Atlanta experienced similar changes and growth to other regional capitals in the US. The teachers interviewed for this project talk about similarities in their experiences working in Atlanta studios

² Danielle Robinson, *Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

³ From 1939 onward, the service sector grew, while the manufacturing sector plateaued from about 1955 onward. See Doug Short, “Charting The Incredible Shift From Manufacturing to Services In America,” *Business Insider*, <http://www.businessinsider.com/charting-the-incredible-shift-from-manufacturing-to-services-in-america-2011-9>, accessed February 2017.

and studios in other regions of the US. Additionally, articles in the national industry publication *Ballroom Dance Magazine* corroborate similarities between Atlanta and the rest of the US. The experience of Atlanta teachers and studios is comparable to counterparts in other parts of the nation.

An interrogation of the ballroom dance industry allows access to “a cultural practice through which participants have ... constructed social, political, and gendered identities and ways of being in the world.”⁴ Julie Malnig concurs when she argues that by interrogating “the spectrum of performance in any culture,” scholars can unlock clues about the fundamental concerns of that culture.⁵ Dancing, as Daniel J. Walkowitz has suggested, is a way for participants to “express their class and gender in the body,” and is a “recreational adjunct of their life.”⁶ The choice to participate in ballroom dance, with its attendant messages of class, gender, and race, communicates messages about the participants’ lives. Ballroom dancing has been, and continues to be, part of the daily lives of millions of Americans. Understanding why people dance, and the impact ballroom dance has on participants and society in general, helps us to become not only more informed, but also more empathetic to those around us, and those who have gone before us.⁷

Sources

⁴ Linda J. Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xiii.

⁵ Julie Malnig, “Introduction,” *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2, Social and Popular Dance (Winter, 2001), 7. In this particular passage Malnig uses ideas and quotes from performance studies scholar Brooks McNamara.

⁶ Daniel J. Walkowitz, “The Cultural Turn, and a New Social History: Folk Dance and the Renovation of Class in Social History,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Spring, 2006), 786, 787.

⁷ An important part of what we do as historians is to help “develop empathy toward people in the context of their distinctive historical moments.” See American Historical Association, “AHA Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core,” <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core>.

Dancers, in all genres, tend to be focused on producing a performance that is of the highest technical and entertainment value. In ballroom dance especially, there is little written material besides technical books about how to dance core steps. Business records are often guarded by studios because studios are in competition with each other, and corporations prefer to not make their methods and financial practices public knowledge, lest they are appropriated by other dance organizations. As a result, there are limited traditional historical documents relating to the ballroom industry. Oral history is central to this project because it is a means for “gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events” within the ballroom dance industry.⁸ More than thirty oral history interviews were conducted for this project. Those interviewed are individuals that have participated in the Atlanta industry during the period 1950-1984, but for most, from the 1970s to the present. “Ballroom in the Big Peach” attempts to use the words of these narrators as much as possible, to demonstrate the lived experiences of actors in the industry, and to demonstrate change over time. The experience and thoughts of those interviewed form the core of this study, giving insight into events and people from the past, but also helping to access the emotional depth of meaning ballroom dance had for those who participated in the pastime between 1950 and 1984.⁹ Unlike anthropological and sociological use of interviews, oral history interviews aim specifically to have narrators tell their stories to create a historical document, and to tease out

⁸ “Oral History Defined,” Oral History Association website, <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>, accessed March 5, 2014.

⁹ As Cliff Kuhn and Marjorie L. McLellan have written, “by its very nature, [oral history] is deeply personal, deeply emotional, deeply individualistic, deeply qualitative, and deeply human.” These are the characteristics the ballroom interviews bring to this study. See “Oral History,” OAH Magazine of History, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Spring, 1997), 4. For further discussions on the insights oral history brings to the discipline, see Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Second edition* (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2005) and Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

change over time. This dissertation thus employs oral interviews differently than previous academic studies about ballroom dance in the US.

Two major dance organizations were generous in granting me access to their archives. Arthur Murray, Inc. (AMI) is the largest franchised ballroom dance corporation in the world. AMI will celebrate its seventieth anniversary in 2018. The AMI Archive in Coral Gables, Florida houses seventy years' worth of material, mostly in filing cabinets. The author was given access to any non-financial material in the archive, and given permission to copy and use all of that material for this dissertation. Publicity materials and resources sent to franchisees by the corporate office give insight into how ballroom dance was marketed to the public, which in turn helped to frame the public perception of ballroom dance in the US. Materials used from this collection include the abbreviation AMIA, Arthur Murray, Inc. Archives, in the footnotes.

The National Dance Council of America (NDCA), the governing body for ballroom dance in the US, granted access to their archive, located in Margate, Florida. The most pertinent source for this project is the minutes of the meetings of the NDCA, and the National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations (NCDTO), the predecessor to the NDCA. These documents help to link the local Atlanta ballroom industry with what is occurring at the national level. NCDTO documents demonstrate that Atlanta studios' concerns with finding teachers, training teachers, fighting for legal protection, and relationships with clients were all national issues faced by studios around the country.

Historiographical Context

The academic study of ballroom dance is an emerging field. Whereas other dance genres have a vast academic literature, scholars have only begun to interrogate ballroom dance relatively recently. No historical study of ballroom dance in the last half of the twentieth century

US has been written. This project aims to bridge the gap in existing ballroom history literature, which focuses on the 1900-1930 era, and the post-1990 period.

The two works that might be considered founding historical studies in the field of US ballroom dance history focus on the Northeast, and deal with ballroom dance as a form of exhibition entertainment in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Lewis Erenberg's work on nightlife in New York City from 1890-1930 looks at how New York nightclubs became venues for transformation in what was morally and socially acceptable, in terms of class, gender, and race.¹⁰ Julie Malnig's *Dancing 'Til Dawn: A Century of Exhibition Ballroom Dancing* focuses on exhibition teams in the early twentieth century.¹¹ Malnig argues that changes in ballroom dancing were impacted by broader social revolutions taking place at the time, including urbanization, immigration, technological developments, and the rise of consumer culture. Malnig's use of non-traditional sources (particularly for the early-1990s) lay the groundwork for ballroom dance scholars to more-freely rely on sources such as event programs, restaurant menus, and oral histories to recreate developments within the ballroom dance industry.

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a marked increase in scholarship with ballroom at its center, mostly from a sociological and anthropological perspective.¹² The majority of academic studies of ballroom focus on the post-1990 period, most often identifying sociological or anthropological traits of ballroom culture. Caroline Picart's *From Ballroom To DanceSport: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Body Culture* is both a sociological and an auto-ethnographic

¹⁰ Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

¹¹ Julie Malnig, *Dancing Till Dawn: A Century of Exhibition Ballroom Dancing* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

¹² See for example Carolina San Juan. "Ballroom Dance as an Indicator of Immigrant Identity in the Filipino Community," *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*. Vol. 24, No. 3-4 (Fall/Winter, 2001), 177-181; Lisa Doolittle, "The Trianon and On: Reading Mass Social Dancing in the 1930s and 1940s in Alberta Canada," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 2001), 11-28; and Pipsa Nieminen,

examination of what ballroom dance means in the context of the 1990s onward. As the first ballroom study published in a new wave of books, Picart addresses issues that had not been pertinent to previous studies, including the move toward ballroom DanceSport¹³ being accepted as an Olympic sport, the importance of including Latin ethnic issues in the discussion rather than retaining a black/white racial binary, and interrogating the popularity of ballroom on television and film in the US in the late-twentieth century. Picart incorporates “sociological, ethnographic, rhetorical, feminist, and critical and cultural studies frameworks,” in her analysis.¹⁴

Published in the same year as Picart, Juliet McMains’s *Glamour Addiction: Inside the American Ballroom Dance Industry* argues that the industry is driven by selling women on the idea that they can be glamorous by competing in ballroom competitions.¹⁵ Further, McMains paints a picture of ballroom dance studios in the 1990s and 2000s as corrupt, sleazy institutions whose goal of financial success is the only goal, to the detriment of bringing anything positive to their clients’ lives. While claiming to be an academic history, McMains spends little time examining change over time. Further, her use of hybridized characters – fictional representations of archetypes, based on multiple people she has met in the industry – leads to stereotyping, and lack of differentiation. Her work, however, sets the themes around which current scholars of ballroom dance are working, and especially pertinent for this project, the idea that money spent in a studio buys more than dance steps.

Complementing McMains’s focus on the competitive side of the industry, are Jonathon Marion’s two anthropological studies of DanceSport, *Ballroom: Culture and Costume in*

¹³ DanceSport is the term that was coined in the 1990s to refer to competitive ballroom dancing.

¹⁴ Caroline Jean S. Picart, *From Ballroom to Dancesport: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Body Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁵ Juliet McMains, *Glamour Addiction: Inside the American Ballroom Dance Industry* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

Competitive Dance and Ballroom: Dance and Glamour.¹⁶ The former focuses on how ballroom dancing in the US shapes personal and community identity, and is an expression of a person's self. In the context of the twenty-first century, Marion argues that there is little social prestige associated with ballroom dance because few dancers become wealthy from their dance pursuits, although his work goes on to recognize that there is an inherent hierarchy within the ballroom dance world in which those who do well competitively sit at the top of the heap. Marion's second book, is an introduction to the competitive ballroom world through photographs (Marion is a well-known photographer at ballroom competitions), with brief, insightful analyses and explanations of how costuming helps create an image that is exactly that, an image, rather than a reality that dancers live. Dancers use their skills within a specific, manufactured context when they perform on the competition floor.

Taking aim at McMains's highly critical portrayal of competitive dancing and ballroom studios, Julia A. Ericksen agrees that women who compete in Pro-Am¹⁷ sections with professional partners, are purchasing false intimacy. She diverges from McMains, however, in *Dance With Me: Ballroom Dancing and the Promise of Instant Intimacy*, when she argues that women are fully aware of the fantastical setting the competitive dance floor provides, and are not dupes when it comes to spending money on their dancing.¹⁸ Ericksen assigns women agency in constructing and maintaining partnerships, rather than being taken advantage of by insincere males seeking to maintain the patriarchy. Female clients recognize a benefit they can get from participation in ballroom dance, and they actively seek it. Similarly, Joanna Bosse's *Becoming*

¹⁶ Jonathan S. Marion, *Ballroom: Culture and Costume in Competitive Dance* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), and *Ballroom: Dance and Glamour* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Pro-Am is short for Professional-Amateur. In these partnerships, one partner is a professional ballroom dance teacher, and the other (the amateur) is the student.

¹⁸ Julia Ericksen, *Dance with Me: Ballroom Dancing and the Promise of Instant Intimacy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Beautiful: Ballroom Dance in the American Heartland sees ballroom dance as a means to “positive personal transformation, of becoming beautiful,” as people participate in a “rich and moving experience.”¹⁹

The most recent book on the US ballroom industry focuses on the first three decades of the twentieth century. Danielle Robinson’s *Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras* argues that the rise of partner dancing in the early twentieth-century created a space for dance teachers to establish themselves as experts, and sell their knowledge to clients who were willing to pay to learn to dance effectively in an elite social setting, and thereby demonstrate that they belonged within that social class. Robinson’s work sets the stage for the current study, by examining the impact of differences in race, class, and gender among dancers in early twentieth-century America.

This dissertation argues that class, gender, and race continued to impact the industry in the decades after Robinson’s study, but within the context of studios, rather than the independent teachers that are the focus of her study. The year 1950 marks the start of an era where studios, especially the chain studios, come to dominate the ballroom industry. The chains played a vital role in how teachers and clients came to view ballroom dance in the period, and into the twenty-first century. The current study therefore builds on the work of each of these scholars by emphasizing the same themes of gender, class, and race, but adding the element missing from many, change over time.²⁰ Further, there are no studies of ballroom dance located in the South. Most research has been based in one of the two traditional capitals of US ballroom dancing, New

¹⁹ Joanna Bosse, *Becoming Beautiful: Ballroom Dance in the American Heartland* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 4.

²⁰ Robinson’s book is the only historical study of ballroom dance – rather than sociological or anthropological – to come out in the new generation of ballroom dance studies, that is, since Malnig’s 1992 book.

York and Los Angeles.²¹ The current work situates ballroom dance as an established, significant, pastime in the urban South.

On a broader level, “Ballroom in the Big Peach” suggests that the ballroom dance industry in the US demonstrates the rise of consumerism in the post-WWII US economy. In the initial post-war boom of the 1950s, unemployment was low, median purchasing power increased, and the wealthy had increasing expendable income. Having amassed possessions, dancing was a way for wealthy Americans to amass knowledge, and perhaps even more importantly, knowledge that could be conspicuously demonstrated on the dance floor. Those seeking to join the upper economic echelons spent money on dancing in order to fit in culturally with the elite. Atlanta studios, like those around the country, were spaces where consumers came to spend money on leisure. As incomes and education levels continued to rise in the 1960s, elites retained the economic means to dance. The emergence of chains studios, and their relocating ever further outside of the downtown area, supports the idea of market segmentation, where consumers are increasingly separated according to spending power, which has racial and geographical implications.²² Some customers spent tens, and even hundreds, of thousands of dollars on ballroom dance in the era under review. The power of the consumer is also evidenced through the ballroom industry in the lawsuits levied by unhappy clients who spent these vast sums of money in studios.²³ Ballroom studios are thus enmeshed in the economic patterns of consumer spending in the US.

²¹ Both historical works are New York-based, as is McMains’s. Bosse’s work is located in the mid-West. Marion’s work is more broad, focusing on the intra-national competitive circuit.

²² See for example Lizbeth Cohen’s discussion of this in *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York City: Vintage Books, 2003), especially p. 331.

²³ See, for example, Patricia Pattison and Donald E. Sanders, “Looking for Love in All Kinds of Places: Fraud in Dancing and Dating,” *Southern Law Journal*, Vol. 16, Fall 2006.
<http://www.southernlawjournal.com/2006/02%20Looking%20for%20Love.pdf>, Accessed May 2017.

Some historians have argued that the rise of consumerism in the post-WWII economy was a way for the federal government to reinforce traditional gender roles. Women, they argue, became the primary shoppers as they spent their husbands' money running the home. Elaine Tyler May argues that this was a way for women to be contained in the home, mirroring the US government's Cold War policies toward communism.²⁴ At the same time, however, the lived reality of many women was the need to work in order to survive. Despite the social ideal of being married and having children, more than thirty percent of women worked outside the home in 1950.²⁵ By 1980, that had increased to over fifty percent.²⁶ Women were important actors in the ballroom dance industry in the second half of the twentieth century. Because ballroom was defined by the heteronormative standards of US society at the time, Atlanta studios needed female teachers to dance with male clients. The gender binary of ballroom meant that the ballroom dance industry encouraged women to ignore the socially-accepted ideal of being a housewife, and instead enter the job market. "Ballroom in the Big Peach" demonstrates that women in the Atlanta industry were part of the growing trend of women in the service economy, and played important roles within the industry, although their status declined over time.²⁷ Importantly, male and female teachers were paid the same hourly rate in the ballroom industry, despite the overall gender-gap in pay nationally.²⁸ This project shows, however, that because

²⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

²⁵ "Changes in women's labor force participation in the 20th century," Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 16, 2000. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2000/feb/wk3/art03.htm>. Accessed June 2017.

²⁶ Linda J. Waite, *US Women at Work* (Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1981), 1-2.

²⁷ Women were "the largest proportion of new service workers in every sector" between 1950 and 1990. See Angel Kwolek-Folland, "Gender, the Service Sector, and U.S. Business History," *The Business History Review*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (2007), 43.

²⁸ During the decades under discussion, annual earnings for males in the US were \$10,000 to \$15,000 more than female earnings. See "Median Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Sex: 1960 to 2009," in "Women in the Workforce," United States Census Bureau, 4. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/women_workforce_slides.pdf. Accessed November 1, 2017.

clients were overwhelmingly women, female teachers routinely taught less hours than their male counterparts, and therefore, despite equal hourly pay, they still earned less than male teachers. This study also demonstrates that in the fifties through early eighties, women were highly influential players in the Atlanta industry, owning and managing studios, and thereby acting in positions of power over men.

Wesley Chenault and Stacy Braukman's *Gay and Lesbian Atlanta* deftly lays out the history of the gay community in Atlanta in the twentieth century.²⁹ Their periodization of when and how gay men remained hidden to the public (1950s and 1960s) and then became more open (1970s), is supported by the teachers interviewed for this dissertation. Atlanta was a leader in the South in adopting non-discrimination policies that were designed to protect gay men.

Fleischmann and Hardman have argued that Atlanta was an important site for gay identity formation precisely because it was progressive, especially in comparison to other southern urban centers.³⁰ John Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* demonstrates the value of oral history in uncovering hidden pasts.³¹ Oral histories in the current project give insight into the lived experience of gay ballroom teachers in the fifties through eighties, a group who have been overlooked in most ballroom scholarship.

No history of Atlanta would be complete without some attention to race. Hundreds of works have addressed race relations in Atlanta in the last half of the twentieth century.³²

²⁹ Wesley Chanault and Stacy Braukman, *Images of America: Gay and Lesbian Atlanta* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

³⁰ Arnold Fleischmann and Jason Hardman, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt: The Development of the Gay Rights Movement in Atlanta," *Journal of Urban Affairs* Vol. 26, No. 4, 407-426.

³¹ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

³² See, for example, Kevin Kruse, *White Flight and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007); Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996); and Ronald H. Baylor *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Numerous studies focus on black culture in the city.³³ Sources on organized ballroom dance in general are scarce, but sources on black organized ballroom are even rarer. No black ballroom teachers from the era 1950 to 1984 were located, and thus there are no oral histories to enlarge the material on black studios. This project of necessity therefore focuses on white studios, and points to what the limited sources tell us about black ballroom dance in Atlanta. Despite these limitations, it is important that black studios are part of this study. There is a broad misconception in the US ballroom dance industry today that black Americans have never had an interest in organized ballroom dance. The teachers interviewed, and the dancers I have been associated with in the US ballroom community over the past twenty five years have often expressed the belief that there has never been participation by blacks in ballroom dance studios and competitions, and thus they believe it should come as no surprise that few black dancers participate today. The Atlanta sources show – at a minimum – that black ballroom dance studios practiced business in the 1950s and 1960s, and declined in the two decades that followed. “Ballroom in the Big Peach” confirms cultural segregation in the South, and in the US as a whole; teachers who taught in other regions of the US saw no black participation in those regions either. Black studios were either ignored, or were invisible to those outside of the black community in Atlanta.

The lack of sources relating to organized black ballroom dance stems partially from black studios being independently owned operations in the 1950s and 1960s, whereas white studios were often part of large corporate entities. US ballroom dance corporations have historically had a large national media presence, allowing scholars easier access to their workings. Most evidence for black studios in Atlanta comes from the *Atlanta Daily World*, the newspaper that catered to

³³ See for example Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: The Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1996).

Atlanta's black community. While there is much work to be done to more fully understand black studios in Atlanta, this project nonetheless attempts to reinsert black dancing into the Atlanta ballroom dance narrative, and by extension the national narrative. While I recognize that I cannot write about black studios with the same depth as white studios, I hope this work provides a jumping-off point for further research and debate.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one sets the scene for the rest of the project by giving readers an overview of ballroom dance in the US in the twentieth century. This background shows that ballroom dance teaching as a profession was established early in the twentieth century, and that regional dance teacher organizations, made up mostly of independent teachers, attempted to bring respectability to the vocation. This chapter ends with the founding of the NCDTO, signifying, this project argues, the start of a national ballroom dance culture as teacher organizations and ballroom dance corporations worked together to create standards and standardization within the industry.

Chapter two, *Dancing Classes: Elites in the Family*, argues that ballroom studios were spaces where clients could demonstrate their economic status, or their desired economic status. Studios actively encouraged the image of ballroom as the pastime of the monied, in order to entice elites to spend significant amounts of money in studios. This chapter explicates how studios functioned at a business level, but also speaks to the complexity of a commercial relationship that is simultaneously a physically intimate one. Part of maintaining a professional relationship with a client was putting one's body in close contact with the customer's. The physical closeness often led to emotional connections. Those emotional connections were sincere but, as it is shown, were also a way to sell more dance lessons.

In order to keep clients coming back to the studio for more, chapter three argues that studios attempted to create strong ties between the studio – including teachers, owners, and the literal geographic space – and clients. This web of ties is encapsulated in the term ‘familyness.’ Teachers were trained to meet the needs and desires of clients on the dance floor, as well as at studio activities, competitions, and at any time a client was physically present in the studio. By doing this, the studio became a family to their clients, a community that clients could turn to for support and attention. Teachers and clients were enmeshed in this community, again complicating – and enriching – the customer/service-provider connection. This chapter also demonstrates that studios became increasingly competition-focused as the decades went by, that is, studios encouraged clients to dance in organized ballroom competitions. By 1984, the industry had become so competition focused that the national body changed its name and mission to acknowledge this focus.

Central to the success of studios were the teachers who staffed them. Chapter 4 focuses on the lived experience of teachers in studios. Teachers in Atlanta entered the profession in similar ways, but for a multitude of reasons. The training they received was somewhat similar, but had variations according to personal circumstances. Atlanta teachers interviewed for this project often referred to their co-workers as family. Thus familyness extended beyond the teacher-client bond, to teacher-teacher relationships. This section also looks at the complexity of working-class teachers servicing elite clientele, but never being able to move into the upper socio-economic levels themselves. While the complete dissertation relies on the testimony of teachers, the experiences and self-analysis offered by teachers in this chapter exemplify what the industry meant in their lives.

Chapter five interrogates gender in the Atlanta industry. Upon closer examination, the image sold by the ballroom industry of a dominant male partner leading a willing, compliant female partner around the floor dissipates. Women were powerful actors in Atlanta in this era, as teachers, managers, and owners. They defied the socially expected role of women in this period. Ballroom studios were spaces that made this transformation possible. Studios were also spaces where gay teachers could be themselves. This chapter addresses the experience of gay teachers in Atlanta, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. This section argues that unlike the general attitude of the US public toward gay men in the seventies and eighties, gay teachers in Atlanta found acceptance, and familiness. Clients cared for homosexual teachers as much as they cared for straight teachers. The testimony of teachers also makes clear the devastating impact that AIDS had in the Atlanta ballroom community.

The epilogue gives an overview of ballroom dance in Atlanta and the US since 1984. Three major groups impacted the three decades following the era of chain studios. The epilogue shows how the rise of independent teachers and independent studios changed relationships, and greatly diminished familiness. The growth of amateur organizations – a direct outgrowth of the desired elite status studios sought – led to clients seeking dance experiences outside of the studio system. Amateur organizations came to challenge the dominance of the NDCA over competitive dance in the US. Finally, the influx of Eastern Europeans from the 1990s onward changed the landscape of studios, and competitive dancing in the US. Issues of class, gender, and race have continued to be prevalent issues within the ballroom industry, especially as wealthy competitors have come to dominate pro-am dancing, and as clients and competitors become increasingly ethnically diverse. The 2010s have seen a resurgence in interest in creating studios that are environments where relationships are focal, which in turn lead to greater financial rewards.

Ballroom in the US is returning to the familyness modelled in studios of the 1950s through early 1980s.

CHAPTER 1: US SOCIAL DANCING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Ballroom dance studios in the US from the 1950s to 1980s were a product of the previous half century, and existed within the larger context of popular social dance in the twentieth century. This chapter offers an overview of social dance in the twentieth-century US, in order to contextualize the changes in the industry in the chapters that follow. Ballroom dance has persisted as an industry over the century, and as a dance genre embedded in the minds of Americans. The ballroom industry grew and adapted as tastes in music and acceptable bodily, physical expression changed within US society. Where it was viewed as a revolutionary, sometimes scandalous, form at the start of the century, by the last three decades it was considered conservative and old-fashioned. The industry intentionally, and unintentionally, created and disseminated messages about class, gender, and race. In the first fifty years of the 1900s, teachers created a space for themselves as dance experts, and touted their expertise in order to validate the genre. In the second half of the century ballroom teachers built on this foundation by creating a culture based within, and around, ballroom dance studios.

Dance in Society

Dance has been a part of human existence since early man. Historically, ordinary people and those of the highest social status have moved their bodies to music. Dancing has been used for myriad purposes. Various civilizations have used dance as part of religious ceremonies, with carefully choreographed, ritualized movements performed to express something to the Gods, or nature, or Earth. Some societies have used dance as a form of exercise, from the high-energy bouncing of the Maasai, to the deliberate, flowing movements of Tai Chi. In multiple

historical and geographical settings, dance has been theatricalized and used a means of teaching messages about history, emotion, and social mores.

For all civilizations, perhaps the most pervasive purpose for dancing is recreation. Dancing gives pleasure to those who participate. In the twentieth century, what people who dance have known for millennia was scientifically confirmed: dancing makes a person feel good, during and after participating. Dancing activates endorphins, and thus gives a physical high to participants. Dancing serves as entertainment. In many circumstances, it has not mattered how good a person was at dancing; their participation in dance allowed them to be part of a community, and to participate with others to reaffirm sociality. The term social dancing is one that is highly debated in dance circles.³⁴ For the purpose of this project, social dance will refer to dancing performed with other people, as a means to aid social relationships. Ballroom dance fits this category, but so do other genres that allow participants to interact socially, and make human connections.

As a physical act, dancing is an embodiment of thoughts, feelings, and messages. How dancers interact with one another says something about those people, the specific circumstances in which they dance, and the society that allows or disapproves of the performance of dance. From early times, dance has been a way for men and women to interact physically. The level of physicality has varied by culture, geographic region, and historical time period. Central to partner dancing is the physical relationship between the two people dancing together. Partners interact through bodily spatial relationship, eye contact, and facial expressions. European (and later American) partner dancing has historically been structured as a heterosexual pastime. One

³⁴ See for example McMains' definition compared to Ericksen's. For McMains, any time a dancer dances a routine, it is not social, no matter the setting. This narrow interpretation of social dancing being figures put into a pattern on the spot, and then danced in different orders ignores the fact that McMains's social dancers repeat amalgamations of figures. That figures exist in themselves implies the repetition of material.

partner is male, and the other female. Thus a story about the relationship between the sexes, and of the act of sex, has been inherent in the genre. The initial rejection of the waltz by high society in Europe was because hands touching, and the man holding the lady's waist, were seen as indecent. The front of the bodies touching in dances of the early twentieth century were further proof, for the religious-minded, and the elites, who were arbiters of taste, that partner dancing was sinful. If bodies touched through clothes, what was to stop bodies from touching without clothes? A vast literature of anti-dance rhetoric, written over two centuries of dancing in the US, voiced the concern that dancing led to sexual impropriety.³⁵ Nonetheless, US society also viewed dancing as an acceptable part of courtship during much of its history – if the dancing was proper. It was the elites who determined what dancing was proper, and what was mere filth. They set the standard by which they judged the rest of US society, a standard that was often not upheld by those who created it. The connection between dance and sexuality is seen throughout the twentieth century.

Given the links between dance, sex, courtship, and ideas about social propriety, the history of dance has also been intimately shaped by race. The ideology of white supremacy had long linked blackness with unbridled sexuality. Myths about black men as sexually aggressive, and black women as sexually loose, were used as justifications for keeping black Americans segregated and socially controlled. In the realm of dance, the sex/race connection further encouraged white, middle and elite classes to deem dances associated with black Americans as being in poor taste and/or inherently sexual. White America historically used these labels and attitudes to assert the superiority of their culture. Scholars have debunked the myths of the purity

³⁵ See, for example, Jacob Ide's 1818 sermon entitled "The Nature and Tendency of Balls," in which he warns of dance leading to participants wanting to spend increasing amounts of times with members of the opposite sex; and T.A. Faulkner's 1892 pamphlet "From the Ball-room to Hell," which tells of the fall of girls who spent time in dance venues.

of any culture, but it was in the milieu of this racist thinking that the US dance industry was created in the early twentieth century.

Class is clearly a historical factor in dancing. While anyone, of any class or ethnicity, may dance, it is the ruling elites who have historically determined what is acceptable, or not, on the dance floor. In both Africa and Europe, royalty have used dancing as a means to demonstrate their social position.³⁶ Restrictions have been placed on who can dance, and what figures they can dance. Clergy have at various times outlawed dancing as evil and lewd, thus enforcing a moral code of their determination. Dance has also been used as a means of political control, and a means of political subversion.³⁷ The elites in society have generally controlled dance, and used it as a means of creating, or reinforcing, their social position. The attempt to control dance as a means to retain social standing is a theme within the history of ballroom dance in the US.

US Ballroom Dance in the Twentieth Century

For much of the nineteenth century, the upper classes of the US had a rich tradition of ballroom dancing. Itinerant teachers traveled the country teaching ballroom dances and etiquette. These dances were learned by rote practice. Choreography was memorized, both intellectually and bodily, as the mind and the muscles had the order of the steps engraved into their memories. Generally only the wealthy had leisure time to take, and disposable income to pay for, lessons. These elites also had the money to pay for dance manuals, and to attend theatrical performances

³⁶ In seventeenth-century France, Louis XVI controlled his court by rewarding those who were good dancers with politically powerful positions. Louis was himself an excellent dancer, and thus he pressured the nobles to follow his example, or face a fall from grace. In Ghana, kings (technically chiefs who have been given the golden stool, symbolizing the right to rule) are preceded in long processions by dancers who ritually demonstrate the advanced rank of the king. Kings are expected to be good dancers as this demonstrates an ability to use the body effectively, and in turn, the mind.

³⁷ Terrence Ranger's work on Beni dancing in British East Africa demonstrates how the British used dance as a means to keep black African workers busy in their leisure hours, and in turn how those same workers used that dancing as a means of resistance to the colonial structure. See Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 1975).

in urban areas that performed new, and traditional, ballroom dances. Dancing was viewed as a social skill that set one apart from less-cultured citizens, who were also lower on the socio-economic scale.

The working classes danced what are today called country or folk dances. The dances from Appalachia continue to have particular resonance with some white Americans today, notably reels and square dances where callers prompt the dancers as to what choreography comes next. While all classes danced, for recreation and as a release from daily pressures, the wealthy had more time, and more money, to commit to the pastime. Ballroom dancing was tied to socio-economic levels and opportunities for most of the history of the nation.

Black Americans had a separate, yet connected, dance tradition. Slaves brought to the US from disparate areas of Africa found commonalities and differences within the dance practices of their former homes. Combining and adapting various forms led to a syncretic dance styling that laid the basis for what would come to be called the black American dance aesthetic. Contrasting with the set choreography and positioning seen in the traditional European round and square dances, black dancing highlighted variation and personal styling.

The turn of the twentieth century brought with it major challenges to the accepted traditions of US ballroom dances and dance venues. Through the 1890s, the ballrooms of major metropolitan areas in the US held the classical dances of the nineteenth century as indicative of respectability and upper-class culture. The popularity of the formalized patterns of the quadrille or the lancer, danced with a set number of couples in a routinized order, remained high at society balls. The elite class had historically had leisure time to spend pursuing activities that set them apart socially and culturally from those of lesser social classes. Dancing ‘correctly’ was a means of bodily expressing one’s refinement and cultural superiority. Where the waltz had been

scorned as indecent in the mid-nineteenth century because partners touched each other and stood intimately close, by the turn of the twentieth century the waltz dominated the programs of balls. This change in attitude demonstrates that attitudes toward the body, and sexuality, were perhaps loosening. Square dances, including the quadrille, kept dancers at least an arms' length apart. It is worth noting that in US society at the turn-of-the-century, holding a partner in your arms, with rib cages (and perhaps more) touching, was acceptable in elite society.

In the first two decades of the century, ragtime music exploded onto the music scene. The increase in the popularity of ragtime music led to the adaptation of old dances, including the speeding up of the Two Step, as well as the creation of new dances that were faster and more energetic, just like the music genre itself. These dances allowed for much invention and freedom, with little codification of figures.³⁸ The dances were heavily influenced by black American dance aesthetics, which caused some consternation among white elites who were attracted to the dances, but were also concerned with the racial implications of performing what were seen as black movements. Nonetheless, around 1910, professional dance teachers took both traditional round and square dances, and Ragtime dances, and crafted them into what is today called modern social dance. These professionals taught wealthy white clients who wanted to be at the forefront of popular dance, just as they had been in the late-nineteenth century.

The US working and middle-class, both black and white, found release in dancing throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With increasing industrialization in the Gilded Age, came increasing urbanization as people flocked to cities to find work. Urban populations used a significant portion of their limited time away from work to participate in

³⁸ Danielle Robinson, "The Ugly Duckling: The Refinement of Ragtime Dancing and the Mass Production and Marketing of Modern Social Dance," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter 2010), 180.

leisure activities. The early twentieth century saw the growth in popularity of commercial amusements, such as cinemas and amusement parks that catered to the white working class. Significantly, dance halls and bars with dance floors were also established, and were well patronized. Dance halls were venues where workers could spend leisure time, and use their disposable income. Kathy Peiss has argued that these commercial forms of leisure changed social attitudes and expectations about leisure more generally. Where leisure in rural areas of the US had most often been homosocial, dance halls intentionally brought the sexes together to mingle in an intimate pastime. Women asserted their agency by determining who they would, and would not, dance with. They used their femininity and sexuality to garner attention and favors from male clientele in dance halls. Some women allowed themselves to be “treated” to food, drinks, attention, and gifts, and in return gave sexual and/or intimate favors to the men who spent money on them. This sort of intermingling of the sexes was a new and increasingly common phenomenon within the twentieth century US urban setting.³⁹ Further, working-class women often imitated the dress and dancing of elites, hoping to attract the attention of men from higher income brackets, and perhaps move out of the work-a-day grind that was their existence. Dance was clearly intertwined with issues of class and gender.

Black Americans, excluded from most white leisure spots in major cities, opened their own dance venues. Sometimes called juke joints, black dance establishments were often spaces where black musicians could experiment and hone styles. Ragtime music was popular in the early decades of the century, and black urban workers adapted their dancing to the genre. Black workers came to urban centers from all over the country, bringing with them regional stylings, and creating a syncretic black dance style. Historically, the black dance aesthetic has included

³⁹ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

the use of swaying hips, torso actions, and shuffling feet. These elements were evident in Ragtime dancing, as was dancing close to one's partner. When contrasted with the 'proper' ballroom dances of the nineteenth century, black dancing was considered scandalous, and dangerous to the moral health of participants.⁴⁰ The racialized image of popular social dancing was further complicated by gendered images within black dancing: black critics argued that women should not be out dancing, but should rather be resting in order to effectively perform their duties as household servants to whites. White critics believed that social dancing in dance halls "encouraged sexual promiscuity among black women, who would then taint the white households through their illicit activity."⁴¹ Gender issues relating to dance thus crossed race lines. Women who danced vernacular styles were deemed sexually and socially deficient.

Black dances in the era continued to highlight solo material and improvisation. In 1913, an all-black cast starred in the musical *Darktown Follies*. This Harlem-based show introduced the Texas Tommy, which was "two basic steps – a kick and hop three times on each foot, and then add whatever you want, turning, pulling, sliding."⁴² This freedom of movement worried white patricians who wanted order in society, and on the dance floor. Despite the outcry, white dancers mimicked what they saw, dancing these black-inspired figures on the dance floors of white establishments.

⁴⁰ In Atlanta, the city council tried to shut down black dance halls on Decatur Street, in the first decade of the twentieth century, by imposing an exorbitant tax. The dance halls moved into remote locations on the outskirts of the city to evade detection, and continued to meet the needs of their clientele. See Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 170-172.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 179. Hunter argues further that the black middle class wanted to control dance in order to direct and define the image of the black race in the US. (186)

⁴² Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 140.

The tango caused a similar stir in US nightclubs in the 1910s. The tango has roots in the barrios of Buenos Aires, some historians locating its foundation in brothels.⁴³ The dance is done with flexed knees, fast foot actions, and bodies pressed together, indicating that the dance has possible connections to black dances brought to Argentina by African slaves, and African dock workers. The intimate hold, and the intertwining of legs, also highlight the sexual nature of the dance. Men and women were dancing sexual desire on the dance floor, at least according to some dancers, and spectators. The tango's initial appearance in Europe met with both outrage and enthusiasm. Germany banned the dance, the pope condemned it, Queen Mary of England approved of it, and the French adopted it with zeal.⁴⁴ In the US, the tango was 'cleaned up' for elite consumption, and became highly stylized, notably on film by Rudolph Valentino in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Similarly, the Maxixe started as a sultry Latin dance, but was toned down for general consumption, and later transformed into the Samba. The perceived need to sanitize dances of black and 'other' influences is indicative of racial thinking in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, nightclub dancing saw significant transformation. Nightclubs in the 1900s through 1920s were not only venues for evening entertainment, but were also venues for the relaxation of "boundaries between the sexes, between the audiences and performers, between ethnic groups and Protestants, between black culture and

⁴³ Tango is a well-covered genre in academic writing. For an excellent overview, see Simon Collier, Artemis Cooper, Maria Susana Azzi, and Richard Martin, *Tango! The Dance, the Song, the Story* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1995).

⁴⁴ In the 1910s, tango was the generic name for the dancing accompanying tango music. As the century progressed, tango became complicated by the multiple styles, and names of styles, danced around the world. In the twenty first century, there are distinct Argentine, International, and American styles danced in the US, and perhaps a dozen other styles of tango around the world. Tango has a culture of its own. Participants have recently started publishing books about their personal experiences within the culture. See, for example, Veronica Toumanova, *Why Tango: Essays on Learning, Dancing and Living Tango Argentine (Volume 1)* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015); and Christine Denniston, *The Meaning of Tango: The Story of the Argentinian Dance* (London: Anova Books, 2008).

whites.”⁴⁵ The sexual overtones of some dances, and the African genealogy of some steps, both intrigued and concerned those who saw themselves as the defenders of elite culture.

Ballroom dancing in this period “moved out of the rarefied atmosphere of exclusive clubs and private homes into more public establishments, such as restaurants and hotels, where people of all classes and backgrounds could perform.”⁴⁶ The rise of the cabaret provided another arena where people of all classes could demonstrate their actual, or desired, place in society, through dance. If one dressed like the ballroom dancer professional performers seen in the movies, or in the shows at the cabarets, who was to say you were not wealthy? If a person had the posture of a good dancer, and knew how to perform the latest dances, how was anyone to know if that person was working-class, middle-class, or of the economic elite? Ballroom dancing was a way to perform social class.⁴⁷ Anyone who could pay the entrance fee could dance, the wealthy shoulder-to-shoulder with the wage earner. This connection between dancing well and class, was retained into the late twentieth century.

These dance clubs changed social norms as men and women were able to choose to keep the same partner all night if they chose. This was the opposite of the set dances of the nineteenth century that required changing partners not only for each dance, but also had partner

⁴⁵ Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), xiii.

⁴⁶ Julie Malnig, *Dancing Till Dawn: A Century of Exhibition Ballroom Dance* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 2.

⁴⁷ For an extended examination of how concepts of social mobility mixed with ballroom dance practice in the 1910s, see Julie Malnig, “Two-Stepping to Glory: Social Dance and the Rhetoric of Social Mobility,” *Entnofoor* (Vol. 10, No. 1, 1997), 128-150.

changes choreographed into the dances themselves.⁴⁸ Boundaries between sexes and social classes were becoming relaxed.⁴⁹

Dance masters – the men who had taught the elites how to dance in the eighteenth century, usually in the homes of the wealthy – recognized this desire of the growing middle class to acquire the cultural accouterments of the elites, including knowledge of elite styles of dancing. To those members of the middle class with time and money to pursue leisure, dance teachers marketed ballroom dancing as a means to accessing elite culture. If you could dance like the wealthy, you could fit in, and thus you were part-way to being a member of elite society. Dance teachers taught people how to stand, walk, dress, and dance in a way that would mark a person as having class. In addition, as restaurants, night clubs, and cabarets grew in number and size, anyone who could afford the price of admission was welcome to dance on the floor. Thus people of varied classes could literally rub shoulders on the dance floor.

The early twentieth century was also a high-water mark for professional ballroom cabaret couples. These teams put on shows in dance venues, especially in the 1910s, when the US experienced a dance craze. Some clubs were open, and full, six nights a week. Professional ballroom couples provided entertainment as patrons ate, or drank, an important money-maker for the venue owners. Many teams had started out as Vaudeville acts before being hired for cabaret shows. These teams created careers out of theatricalizing ballroom numbers for performances, and teaching simplified, more accessible figures to the public. Thus some dancers forged careers out of teaching ballroom in the early decades of the century.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

⁴⁹ Malnig's study, as well as Lewis A. Erenberg's study of nightlife in the early twentieth century, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), focus on New York City.

The dance craze of the 1910s was fostered by a public who were open to new music, and to the new dances that accompanied that music. Music publishers, recognizing this, produced music that came with explicit instructions, either written or recorded verbally, for specific dance steps to be done to that specific piece of music. Some publishing companies sent employees to juke joints to listen to the music played there, and observe the dances being done. These were then recreated in the studio, with adjustments to avoid being labeled indecent, and sold to the public. It is estimated that between 1912 and 1914 as many as 100 new dances were created and danced in public dance venues.⁵⁰ These fad dances became the order of the day, with couples embracing each other as they danced The Turkey Trot, The Bunny Hug, and the Grizzly Bear.⁵¹ By 1914, one newspaper pointed out that those who could not dance might be considered social outcasts.⁵²

Even so, many objected to dance clubs, and especially fad dances, because of their identification with African American movement and musical stylings. In the context of early twentieth century immigration and the great migration, many elite white Americans at the turn of the century feared the dilution of white supremacy and cultural dominance in the United States. In an era when Teddy Roosevelt was calling for white Americans to have more children in order to ensure white hegemony, and when G. Stanley Hall was preaching the woes of neurasthenia⁵³,

⁵⁰ Ian Driver, *A Century of Dance: A Hundred Years of Musical Movement, From the Waltz to Hip Hop* (London: Hamlyn, 2000), 28.

⁵¹ David Nasaw in *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: New York, 1993), describes these dances: "In the Turkey Trot, the ladies' arms were placed around their partner's necks, not their shoulders; their lower bodies, from waist to knee, were enclosed within the men's extended legs. In the grizzly bear, the partners wrapped their arms around one another, with the man embracing the woman as a grizzly bear embraced his mate or foe. In the bunny hug, couples hugged like bunnies." (113) It is no wonder parents and authorities were concerned.

⁵² "Dancing Grips Gate City of South," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Atlanta, GA, September 13, 1914, 43, as quoted in Mark Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances: Outrage at Couple Dancing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 80.

⁵³ See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Race and Gender in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

the notion that dancing in a specific way gave black culture more power in the US was taken seriously, as demonstrated by the passing of laws to restrict dance venues and interaction between sexes and races therein.⁵⁴ In an era that idealized racial purity, Ragtime dancing was considered a “miscegenated dance form. Its practice, then, would have signaled a co-mingling of black and white cultures, the result of which was understood as black.”⁵⁵ While many working-class immigrants had no problem with temporarily being identified with black culture, especially since many were already considered ‘black’ on the social scale, middle and elite whites wanted a part of race mixing.⁵⁶

Fearing their children’s attraction to these lower-class and racially suspect dances, wealthy New Yorkers looked to Vernon and Irene Castle to elevate these fad dances. Famous for their stage and film dancing, this married couple were paragons of screen virtue, performing chaste, genteel ballroom dances in their shows. The Castles opened a dance school in New York

⁵⁴ For example, cities across the US enacted laws to control when, where, and how dance halls functioned. In July of 1906, Georgia governor Joseph Terrell signed legislation that prohibited commercial dance halls in any unincorporated areas of counties that had a city with 8,000 or more residents unless half the residents within a two-mile radius agreed to the establishment of the business. Dancing on Sundays was outlawed in Georgia, as it was in at least nine other states. (see Ella Gardner, “Public Dance Halls, their regulation and place in the recreation of adolescents,” (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1929). In Georgia this crime was a misdemeanor that was punishable by a fine of up to \$1000, or working on the chain gang. Vice inspectors were appointed in many cities to make sure that dancers in commercial dance establishments were not illicit on the floor, or off. (see Nasaw, 111-112)

⁵⁵ Danielle Robinson, *Modern Moves: Dancing Race During the Ragtime and Jazz Eras* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 93.

⁵⁶ See David Roediger’s works, especially *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), which demonstrates the messiness of race in the early twentieth-century US. Roediger shows how unclear delineation of race allowed Americans multiple options when it came to race – multiple groups could claim whiteness and make the identity stick within specific regions or groups. Multiple ethnic groups, including Irish, Slavs, and Italians, were identified as black in major urban industrial areas.

in 1914.⁵⁷ They “modified and renamed” popular dances; “the turkey trot, grizzly bear, and bunny hug were replaced by the one-step, the long Boston, and the fox trot.”⁵⁸ Elegance and sophistication were valued over the allegedly hedonistic sloppiness of the fad dances. The wealthy, upper class thus attempted to dictate what kind of dance was acceptable and valuable in this period.

In the black community, black elites also objected to evolving styles of vernacular dance. These elites “persistently framed their pejorative descriptions of dancing and dance halls in the language of class. . . . How one moved one’s body constituted one’s rank in society.”⁵⁹ Middle class African Americans disassociated themselves from black dance halls, and wanted to associate themselves with European ballroom dances. The parallels between the elites of each race group are clear – both wanted to exercise control over what bodies did on dance floors, and attempted to have their interpretation of dance be *the* acceptable interpretation.

Historian Danielle Robinson argues that the switch from ragtime dancing to modern social dancing was a calculated strategy that allowed ballroom dance teachers to stake their claim as a valid, and viable, vocation. Ballroom teachers marketed themselves as experts who could teach ‘correct’ dancing. Ragtime was difficult to teach to large classes because “its improvisational structure could not be adequately explained in quick and easy how-to-dance manuals.”⁶⁰ Ragtime had to be changed substantially to allow teachers to effectively give instruction. As part of that change, ballroom dance strictly delineated a leader and a follower, and created set figures that restricted (in the eyes of ragtime dancers) the individuality that

⁵⁷ Gerald Jonas, *Dancing: The Pleasure, Power, and Art of Movement* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1992), 175.

⁵⁸ Nasaw, 106.

⁵⁹ Hunter, 173.

⁶⁰ Robinson, “Ugly Duckling,” 184, 186.

dancers could express. In codifying ragtime dances, dance teachers actively re-designed social dancing in the 1910s in ways that created a market and a need for their services. These teachers were clearly business minded. Structured figures, taught in a controlled, orderly environment were sold as the best way to learn proper dancing. A career in teaching ballroom dance also offered working-class Americans who acquired these skills “a means of professionalization and a degree of economic stability.”⁶¹ Practitioners formed dance teacher organizations to protect their profession, and to add “an aura of acceptability and legitimacy” to their work, and to dancing.⁶² In contrast to the last half of the nineteenth century, the dance industry of the 1910s created a space where women stepped into the public spotlight to teach, rather than teaching in private, non-public spaces, like their homes, or clients’ homes.

By going to ballroom dance studios to learn modern social dancing, the economic elite reasserted their socially superior position by once again physically separating themselves from the working class – rather than dance halls, the wealthy once more retreated to their homes, dance schools, and more-expensive restaurants to dance. Even as the wealthy attempted to distance themselves from other socio-economic groups, the restaurants and hotels they frequented became more democratized themselves. Increased earnings meant a growing middle class that could afford to rub shoulders with the wealthy in these elite locations. Inherited wealth and the nouveau riche danced side-by-side on dance floors, and watched ballroom show dance teams perform.⁶³ The exhibition dancers, however, intentionally portrayed “contemporary ballroom dances [as]part of a cultured, even aristocratic tradition.”⁶⁴ Exhibition couples set the

⁶¹ Robinson, *Modern Moves*, 150.

⁶² Knowles, 36.

⁶³ See Julie Malnig, *Dancing Til Dawn: A Century of Exhibition Ballroom Dancing* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

standard to which people with good social breeding and manners should aspire. Thus as ballroom dance became more democratized, elites simultaneously reasserted their social superiority within the genre. Every time elites danced the figures taught to them by professionals, rather than figures picked up by observation at a dance hall, they performed “an elevated social status” that indicated they could afford private, personal instruction.⁶⁵ This pattern was repeated throughout the twentieth century.

Black Americans also used ballroom dance as a marker of elite status in the 1920s. Paralleling the Harlem Renaissance, with its celebration of black culture and society, black ballroom dance teachers and performers owned and operated venues where black New Yorkers could learn to waltz and foxtrot. The ability to execute European-based dances was a means to counter commonly-held attitudes about black Americans as lacking civility or class.

World War I also influenced dance culture in the US. Soldiers poured into military training camps around the country, bringing their diverse cultural backgrounds with them to whichever region they were assigned. In 1917 the US Secretary of War, Newton Baker, created the War Camp Community Service (WCCS) to find appropriate ways to entertain and provide meaningful recreation for US soldiers in training. The WCCS worked in communities adjacent to military installations to create meaningful off-base activities for soldiers.⁶⁶ Dancing provided a way for soldiers, and civilians, to de-stress. Tea dances were held in the afternoons, and became highly popular as “a welcome escape from war bulletins and ‘the fish bowl blues,’ [this being a reference to] a method of selecting military draftees by drawing names from a bowl.”⁶⁷ Trainees

⁶⁵ Robinson, *Modern Moves*, 98.

⁶⁶ The Georgia Historical Society has photos from the Savannah WCCS chapter at their website, <http://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/online-exhibits/three-centuries-of-georgia-history/twentieth-century/global-conflict/world-war-one/>, accessed 9 February 2016.

⁶⁷ Virgil Morton, *The Teaching of Popular Dance* (New York: J. Lowell Pratt & Company, 1966), 5.

in military institutions “were given the best hospitality the citizens could afford, and during their hours of leave they went to many dances and theatrical entertainments.”⁶⁸ Many GI’s fighting in Europe danced in nightclubs and dance halls in major European cities. Britons hosted regular Tea Dances in the afternoon, to entertain themselves and soldiers, as well as raise money for the war cause. Photographs and film from WWI demonstrates that partner, ballroom dance was popular with American soldiers wherever they served.⁶⁹ When soldiers returned to their homes after the war, they took their dance skills with them. This knowledge of dances fed the continued popularity of dance as leisure in the 1920s.

The 1920s saw fad dances diminish, and the foxtrot, derived from the One-Step, rise to prominence. Vaudeville star Harry Fox popularized the dance that was copied because of its simplicity, and because it was easy to lead, and adapt for differing sizes of floor, and numbers of couples. The 1920s was also the age of the flappers: women who embraced greater independence, and a corresponding willingness to show skin in public. Shorter dresses allowed more movement and this also had an impact on popular dance. The freedom to move was essential to those who danced the Charleston, a dance that used large movements of both arms and legs. Originated by African American dancers, and brought to Broadway in at least two musicals in 1923, the Charleston became a craze. The swinging arms and legs of dancers, combined with the swinging pearls of many of the female participants, made the dance precarious for many on the dance floor. Some dance halls posted ‘Please Charleston Quietly’ signs in order to avoid injury to patrons. The Charleston has become the iconic dance image of the 1920s, although it was eclipsed by the Black Bottom by 1927.

⁶⁸ Writers of the Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Georgia, 111.

⁶⁹ There are a number of photos, and even film clips, that show soldiers dancing with each other as a means to have some fun. That these men seem to have no hang-ups about the masculinity issues these acts raise indicates the normality of dance in their lives. See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n181x0eWmzY>.

Technological advancements in the early twentieth century became more readily available to all classes in the twenties. While the gramophone had been invented in the late nineteenth century, by the 1920s it was mass produced and available at prices that even some of the working class could afford. Record labels began to record more popular music, rather than the up-to-then dominant classical music. In the crowded urban areas of the nation, one gramophone might be heard by the owners, their neighbors (most likely in an apartment complex), as well as anyone visiting within the adjacent area. Some songs came with pre-choreographed fad dances in the liner notes, or even recorded as a track on the record. Others were identified as waltzes, or Charlestons, or Foxtrots. The number of Americans who owned radios also grew exponentially in the twenties, further expanding the reach of popular music.⁷⁰ Thus American popular dance grew in tandem with the US music scene – a process that continues into the twenty-first century.

The early 1920s saw the growth of ballroom dance studios nationally. While most teachers had been independent up to this time, and most often female, organized studios were increasingly the norm. Arthur Murray had made a name for himself teaching at the Georgian Terrace, a downtown Atlanta hotel. *Forbes* magazine featured Murray and touted his success in teaching over a thousand students to dance. Some dance historians cite Murray's start in Atlanta, and the studio empire that followed within ten years, as the start of "large" dance studios and a revolution in the teaching of ballroom dance.⁷¹ Importantly, the Murray studio catered to the wealthy in Atlanta, reaffirming the elite nature of ballroom in the minds of Americans. The

⁷⁰ In New York City, ballroom teachers even taught classes over the radio, instructing people in how to dance to the music that about to be played on radio shows. Malnig, 116, note 41.

⁷¹ Stephenson and Iaccarino, *The Complete Book of Ballroom Dancing* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 38-40.

studio sold packages of lessons to their clients, rather than single lessons. The average working-class American could not afford this expense.

The onset of Prohibition helped to temper the Charleston craze by the late twenties; dance halls had often made their profit from selling alcohol to customers, and that revenue stream was now gone. Speakeasies, however, often retained dancing as an enticement for consumers to buy their moonshine; customers could dance on their clandestine dance floors while drinking their illegal liquor. Indicative of the complex nexus of class, race, and gender, is the Cotton Club in Harlem. By the 1920s Harlem was an African American neighborhood that became closely linked with the black intellectual and artistic Harlem Renaissance which produced works that became canonical in US black culture. The Cotton Club was originally a nightclub for Harlemites to patronize. It was bought out, however, by a white gangster who transformed it into a location where he could sell bootleg liquor to elite white patrons who came to ‘slum it’ in Harlem. While patrons were white, the entertainment was black. Renowned bands, including those of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, wrote and performed their music for the white customers. The stars of the Cotton Club were black female singers, including Bessie Smith, Lena Horne, and Billie Holiday. Thus white elites danced ballroom dances in a black neighborhood, popularized black bands, and applauded black female performers.

When the Great Depression hit, numerous dance venues closed. Arthur Murray’s flagship studio in Atlanta closed, and his lesson-by-mail business failed.⁷² At the same time, some dance halls prospered as Americans looked for ways to get their minds off the harsh economic realities they faced. In depression-era Nebraska, perhaps not considered the most cosmopolitan state, Lincoln had five ballrooms in 1930, Omaha had three, and the small town of

⁷² Libby Smigel, “Arthur Murray (1895-1991) and Arthur Murray Dance Studios,” Dance Heritage Coalition Website, http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/murray_essay_smigel.pdf, accessed 10 August 2015.

Schulyer saw the Works Progress Administration build the Oak Ballroom in 1936.⁷³ Major metropolitan areas like Chicago and New York saw similar growth in participation in dancing as the Depression endured.⁷⁴ Atlanta saw significant growth in dance venues in the period that, like their national counterparts, were segregated. Just as in New York in the previous decade, Atlanta's black community created their own dance clubs in black areas.⁷⁵

The depression era also saw the start of competitive ballroom dancing. While competitions had been held episodically, the 1930s saw the establishment of the first consistent competition, the Harvest Moon Ball in Chicago. It also saw the start of weekly competitions at various hotels and nightclubs, notably the Roseland Ballroom in New York City.⁷⁶

Part of the endurance of dancing through the depression years was owed to film. Beginning in the mid-1920s, producers had put elaborate dance sequences in films, despite the fact that movies were still silent. With the advent of sound in film, dancing became even more prevalent on screen. Busby Berkeley spectacles had women in extravagant costumes, creating elaborate patterns and pictures choreographed for the camera, even though they typically had little bearing on the plot of the film. In the mid-1930s moviehouse owners attempted to lure customers to their locales by offering pre-show entertainment, including ballroom dance cabaret acts. Couples were hired to demonstrate old favorites like the waltz and foxtrot, as well as new dances popularized in movies.⁷⁷ The epitome of dance on film was Fred Astaire. He and Ginger

⁷³ Claudia Reinhardt and Bill Ganzel, "Having Fun – Dancing," Wessels Living History Farm Website, accessed May 2017, http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/life_18.html.

⁷⁴ See for example Lizabeth Cohen's discussion of how dance floors were divided by ethnicity in Chicago in the 1930s, in *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁷⁵ In the 1930s black Atlantans danced at the Top Hat Club, the Sunset Casino, the Roof Garden, and multiple clubs on Decatur street. See Darlene Roth and Andy Ambrose, *Metropolitan Frontiers: A Short History of Atlanta* (Marietta, Georgia: Longstreet Press, Inc., 1996), 106.

⁷⁶ In the 1960s, *Ballroom Dance Magazine* reported the weekly winners of each section at New York hotels, including the Roseland Ballroom.

⁷⁷ Malnig, 117, 121-122.

Rogers appeared in ten films together, and used theatricalized ballroom dance as a means to communicate emotions, and at times move the plot forward. Their first film, *Flying Down To Rio* (1933) was a financial success in a depressed economy, and led to nine more Astaire/Rogers films over the next fifteen years. The Astaire/Rogers films introduced many in the US public to Latin American dances that had migrated north onto city dance floors. One such dance, the Rumba which had been imported from Cuba in the late 1920s, had initially caused a stir because of its sensual nature. Astaire and Rogers created a demand among Americans who wished to dance as they did. Many Americans simply copied what they saw on screen, but those who could afford to sought out instructors to teach them how to do the dances made famous on film.

By the 1930s, dance teachers had established a number of teacher organizations that sought to protect their position within a growing industry. These organizations welcomed teachers of all genres of dance. Their goal was to create standards within the industry so that only qualified teachers could give instruction, rather than hacks who might give the industry a bad name. The New York-based Dance Teachers Business Association, for example, proposed legislation to license teachers, and thereby protect the six million Americans who took lessons annually; and spent more than \$100 million annually on instruction.⁷⁸ Dance organizations also tried to keep track of state and federal legislation that impacted the dance industry, lobbied against potentially harmful bills, and pushed legislators to support bills that helped teachers of dance.⁷⁹ In addition to protecting their livelihood, belonging to an accredited organization gave dance teachers an aura of expertise, which in turn appealed to clients seeking instructors.

⁷⁸ 6,000,000 in Nation Learning to Dance,” *The New York Times* (1923-current file), July 20, 1937, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 25. Accessed December 2015.

⁷⁹ The 1938 Pepper-Coffee Bill is an example of legislation and dance organizations’ response to legal procedures. The proposed legislation sought to establish a federal Bureau of Fine Arts, “to provide for permanent government positions for all people now temporarily employed under the [Works Progress Administration] projects,” including in dance.⁷⁹ The idea that the federal government should oversee and fund cultural pursuits, and employment, fits

The sound that had been developed in Harlem in the mid-1920s evolved into a musical style would come to dominate US dance culture for the next twenty or more years. Black jazz bands experimented and adapted their product into swing. Big Band music, as it became known, included the foxtrots and waltzes that had been popular since early in the century, but also led to the creation of swing dances, many of which became part of the ballroom dance family. These dances, including the Lindy and the Jitterbug, were still partner dances, but were faster, and had more breaks within the music that dancers attempted to accent. Foreshadowing the fifties, the breaks in Lindy music were sometimes used to have partners move away from each other slightly and perform solo pieces, before coming back together to continue partner work. The Savoy ballroom, in Harlem, became the headquarters for Lindy, and Frankie Manning and Norma Miller, two black dancers, became the trend-setters, and most respected Lindy dancers in the world.⁸⁰ Many elite whites believed the acrobatic nature of the Lindy made it less respectable as a dance, and thus they classed it as a dance for the lower classes. Indelibly intertwined with these generalizations were the same racial attitudes seen early in the twentieth century.

According to this trope, when limbs were flapping, the ‘African-ness’ of the dance was heightened.

with New Deal legislation and philosophy. Numerous dance organizations opposed this specific bill, however, not because it called for federal oversight but because it failed to specify qualifications and standards that dance (and music or drama) teachers would be required to meet. The bill called for regional committees to be established to license teachers, but the lack of guidelines as to what these teachers should know or demonstrate made this suggestion meaningless. The DTBA publicly opposed the bill not only for its vagueness, but also because they believed the creation of a federal fine arts division would mean dance lessons would become the right of every person, and those lessons would be free, thus “encompassing the ruin of the whole dance profession.” They also argued that self-governing dance organizations were the best protection from “incompetence and charlatanism.” The organization saw itself as the solution to the problems of dance organizations of the day. The Pepper-Coffee Bill failed to garner enough votes to move forward in congress. It is clear, however, that by the late 1930s dance teachers identified themselves as part of an industry, with a vested interest in how laws impacted the practice of their craft. “The Dance Resolutions: Teachers’ Association Opposes Fine-Arts Bill – Advocates National Academy,” *New York Times* (1923-current file), August 28, 1938. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, X8. Accessed January 12, 2016.

⁸⁰ For more on Lindy and Manning/Miller, see Frankie Manning and Cynthia R. Millman, *Frankie Manning: Ambassador of Lindy Hop* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), and Norma Miller, *Swingin’ At the Savoy: The Memoir of a Jazz Dancer* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

Just as World War I had influenced the dance scene, so too did the Second World War. Dancing was popular among American soldiers serving in WWII and a number of organizations that sponsored leisure activities for soldiers promoted dancing as wholesome entertainment. In 1941 the United Service Organization (U.S.O.) was formed to cater to the recreational needs of soldiers on leave.⁸¹ Dancing was seen as “direct and beautiful self-expression of the spirit of youth and joy” by the War Camp Community Service organization, which helped to coordinate military-civilian activities.⁸² Women volunteered to be hostesses for the soldiers on leave, dancing with them for hours on end. The U.S.O. attempted to have a two to one ratio at the dances, two women to every soldier.⁸³

Dancing especially proliferated in areas of the US where soldiers in training were near major hotels which had dance bands in residence. Soldiers used their R&R to attend dances, and thereby meet women. Some studios used the presence of soldiers as a selling point for their classes. A 1944 Fred Brooks advert announced: “We have an opening for a few more young ladies to balance the new classes for service men.”⁸⁴ There was an almost patriotic appeal in the call for young ladies to aid the servicemen, and by implication serve the war effort. The studio identified a ready market of GIs in Atlanta, and the lure that pretty young women might have for those soldiers to take dance lessons. Another ad has a headline, in bold type, that reads: “JOIN THE BIG PARADE OF SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE WAR INDUSTRIES.”⁸⁵ It

⁸¹ Kelly Smith Tunney, Ann G. Bertini, Chuck Zoeller and Eric Himmel, eds., *Memories of WWII* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2004), 43.

⁸² War Camp Community Service Pamphlet, “*Dances: How to Conduct Them*,” as quoted in Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 81.

⁸³ Tunney, 43.

⁸⁴ “Display Ad 29 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 30, 1944, 2B. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/hnpatlantaconstitution2/docview/504344692/7EB7EF3BAB24C5APQ/25?accountid=11226>. Accessed February 22, 2016.

⁸⁵ “Display Ad 11 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1943. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/hnpatlantaconstitution2/docview/504137400/181675C376BB4C64PQ/19?accountid=11226>. Accessed February 26, 2016.

isn't made clear exactly how one was joining these service people by taking dance lessons, but readers were encouraged to "Keep up your morale with a few lessons in Fox Trot and Rumba." Dance studios, in a similar fashion to most other sectors of the economy, used the war as a tool to increase business. American GIs took US popular dance, learned on the dance floor and at studios, overseas during the war, spreading it around the world. Dancing continued to play a role on military bases after the war, with an Annual Military Ball being held on base each year.⁸⁶

While dance in cities with large military contingents fared well during WWII, a federal tax on dance floors led to many dance halls removing the floors and becoming bars, or closing altogether.⁸⁷ Ballroom studios saw a decrease in numbers in the early 1940s, but by the late 1940s the number of franchised studios was rising. In 1947 Fred Astaire allowed his name to be used for a franchised ballroom studio chain. Astaire acted as a spokesman for the corporation, and touted the benefits ballroom dancing would bring to those who took it up.

During WWII, the many Cubans and Puerto Ricans who migrated to the U.S. to help assuage the labor shortage also influenced the American dance scene. They brought native versions of jazz with them, such as Mambo, and in the late 1940s and early 1950s a Mambo craze began. Miami Beach, Florida, helped to spread this craze.⁸⁸ Guests at the resorts were taught Mambo by instructors, and there were nightly exhibitions by local dance teachers. The resorts "competed with one another [to hire] the leading bands such as Tito Rodriguez, Pupi Campo, Tito Peunte, Perez Prado, and Machito."⁸⁹ Visitors to Miami then returned to their hometowns where they were able to introduce the dance to others. Similarly, another Cuban

⁸⁶ Howard Marlow, "News from Florida," *BDM*, April 1967, 17.

⁸⁷ Stephenson and Iaccarino, 48-49.

⁸⁸ Ralph G. Giordano, *Social Dancing in America: A History and Reference* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 129.

⁸⁹ Tunney., 30-31.

dance, the Cha Cha, became popular in Florida resorts in the early 1950s and spread throughout the US. These dances, along with the Samba from Brazil, were adopted into American social ballroom dance, and became the foundation for what became known as Latin American Ballroom Dance. The swing dances had also become part of the ballroom canon by the late 1950s, minus the acrobatic elements of the Lindy.

It is in this context that “Ballroom in the Big Peach” begins. At the end of the 1940s, the US public still had a vision of ballroom dancing as proper – and respectable. Chain studios grew, and became the dominant teachers of ballroom dance in the US. The prosperous post-war years saw a rise in the middle class, and an increase in expendable income for most families. Wealthy parents of white middle-school-, and high-school-, students often sent their children to ballroom dance classes. Some schools offered classes as part of school curriculum.⁹⁰ Ballroom dance teachers, as well as parents and social critics, debated the correct age at which children should learn to ballroom dance, and touted the many social benefits being able to dance brought – including good posture, self-confidence, and courtesy. In the pages of *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, detractors and defenders made their case, although all agreed that ballroom dance was beneficial. The images and reports, however, are obviously of children at country clubs, or other elite locales.⁹¹ While desiring to entice any client who had money to spend, the image presented through such articles was that of wealthy, socially elite clients.

⁹⁰ Margaret Bryan, who had been Arthur Murray’s assistant in Atlanta, taught youth ballroom classes in local white high schools for many years. See for example David Lowance’s interview with the Buckhead Heritage Oral History Project, 2009. Lowance, the son of an Atlanta doctor, talks of going to Margaret Bryan’s dance studio to take lessons.

⁹¹ See, for example, Elinor Ames “Let Them Dance!” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, March 1965, 4-5. The photos that accompany the pro-young people in ballroom classes article are taken at Mt. Kisco, New York, Country Club; and Ed Long, “The Young Need Dancing – Dancing Needs the Young,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, September 1963, 4. Long laments the falling standards and expectations at high school dances, and makes an argument for ballroom dance teaching courtesy, consideration, and social confidence.

The 1950s and 1960s were the decades that most threatened the continued existence of ballroom dance as a popular genre in the US. The public once again became enamored with fad dances. This time, however, the dances were solo – they were done without partners. Further, the choreography was most often simple enough that the need for formal instruction was limited. Young Americans danced the Frug, the Hand Jive, the Mashed Potato, the Swim, and the Locomotion. Chubby Checker’s version of *The Twist*, with its accompanying dance, is exemplary of the ease with which consumers could learn fad dances. The new music, Rock ‘n Roll, encouraged rebellion and individuality, attitudes that worked against the partner dances taught by ballroom teachers. Elvis Presley’s hip gyrating was emblematic of how an individual could interpret music bodily. Echoing early criticisms of ballroom dancing, Presley’s detractors objected to its sexuality, and its roots in black dance styles. Despite this condemnation, rock and its attendant solo dancing grew ever more popular. In fact, black music performers reached heights of popularity with the rise of Motown. Dance played a major role in their success. James Brown’s energetic jumps were imitated by young men. The moves of the Four Tops and the Temptations were copied as the epitome of cool. Diana Ross and the Supremes danced individual choreography that fit their music. Dance clubs increasingly catered to individuals or groups who came to dance without partners.

Technology continued to shape changes in the dance industry. By 1954 more than half of the US population owned a television. By 1958 that number was over eighty percent. Television became the national mechanism for communicating, eclipsing radio in urban America. Ballroom also had a presence in this new medium. *The Arthur Murray Party* was a TV show in which Kathryn Murray, Arthur’s wife, hosted guest musical artists, and introduced couples dancing to Big Band music. It was popular in its run, between 1950 and 1960, but with

the change in popular music, it became less-relevant nevertheless. Rock n' roll, on the other hand, was clearly aided by television. Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* went national in 1957, exposing the nation to not only popular music, but how teenagers were dancing to that music. It ran for twenty-four years, introducing new singers and bands, and helping to popularize those same performers. Ed Sullivan similarly introduced the US to many pop and rock acts on his show, including the Beatles, in 1964.

In response to this threat to partner dancing, ballroom dance teachers armed themselves with a working knowledge of fad dances. Rather than disparage the dances, ballroom teachers taught fad dances to those who struggled to pick them up. They went even further by inventing fad dances themselves, and publishing them for national consumption. Every issue of *Ballroom Dance Magazine* in the 1960s has instructions for at least one fad dance, and sometimes three or more.⁹² Dance teacher conventions taught instructors how to dance, and teach, fad dances. That studios felt the need to take this action indicates the impact of fad dances on the industry, and on US dance culture. Studios hoped that by encouraging clients to come to the studio to learn the fads, the students would enjoy the studio culture, and perhaps take ballroom dance classes and lessons in order to remain part of the studio social scene.

Having survived the fifties and sixties, the next onslaught ballroom dance studios faced was disco. Disco music became popular in the early 1970s, and reached its zenith by 1980. On the plus side for ballroom studios, disco was expressly about dancing. The music was created with the intent of being danceable. Record companies that produced disco records were unafraid of extending songs beyond the standard three minute playtime of most rock n roll songs

⁹² For example, in the November 1963 issue, *Ballroom Dance Magazine* has instructions for the Dengue, the Hootenanny Stomp, the New York Waddle, the Monkey, the Sugar Shack Lindy, the Surfer's Stomp, and the Slauson Shuffle. p.9-11.

produced for radio. DJs became adept at spinning records back to back, figuring out how to have no break between them. This meant longer dance time for discotheque customers. Disco artists were more diverse than traditional pop music groups. Black artists, notably women, including Donna Summer, sold millions of records. Disco appealed to gay men, perhaps because of the freedom that disco gave its adherents on the dance floor. The Village People were never shy about the campy gay image they had, and were popular with mainstream audiences. Disco was an inclusive genre for a period in the 1970s.

Most importantly for the ballroom industry, disco heralded a return to partner dancing. Disco music brought people out of the individualistic, non-partner dancing that Rock n' Roll had engendered in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹³ Disco was touch-dancing, where each partner was physically connected to another. As George B. Theiss, co-founder of the AMC chain, stated in a press release from the 1980s: “The discotheque-rock style of dancing so popular in the sixties, where partners moved independent and oblivious to each other, is no longer ‘in.’” He went on to point out that traditional dances, including the waltz, cha-cha, tango, and foxtrot, were back in style, and “even the very young are joining in, some with modified disco versions. People have discovered it’s nice to touch again.”⁹⁴ This “cheek-to-cheek” dancing reignited an interest in ballroom dance, especially as Americans grew tired of “the incessant beat” of disco music.⁹⁵

The popularity of partner disco dancing was helped immensely by the release of *Saturday Night Fever* in 1977. While the Hustle had been danced since 1975, with the release of

⁹³ “Americans in the mood again for big bands,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), August 9, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 7F.

⁹⁴ “Celebrity Studded Sixty Years Recalled By Arthur Murray Dance Studios,” AMCA, undated, 2. While there is no date, the press release talks about the company moving into its seventh decade, and refers repeatedly to the impact of disco. The references to movie stars of the 1920s through 1960s also imply that it is pre-1990s when AMC advertising uses more contemporary figures. The paper used to print the press release on has the Arthur Murray Sixtieth Year seal on. That event was celebrated in 1985.

⁹⁵ Yarden Arar, “Harry James recalls Big Band era,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), May 10, 1980. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, D55.

Van McCoy's "Do the Hustle," John Travolta's white leisure suit-wearing Tony Manero became the iconic image of the disco generation. Moviegoers who were not club dancers were exposed to the Hustle through the film, and looked for opportunities to learn it. Ballroom studios were in prime position to fill that need. Hustle classes allowed studios to stay in business, and expand. Dance's relationship to film had once again aided in the industry gaining cultural traction. In 1987 *Dirty Dancing* similarly helped studios see a spike in new clients. In the early 2000s, television mirrored this pattern when *Dancing With the Stars* premiered in the US.

When disco's reign subsided in the early 1980s, many dancers who had learned disco in a ballroom studio found that ballroom studio parties were one place where they could still go to Hustle. In addition, some of those disco exponents had been exposed to ballroom dances, and took those up, thus retaining links to the studios. The studio had become more than just a place of business for clients. It had become a place of belonging, of self-expression, and of relationships with other dancers. However, throughout the seventies this remained primarily true for white clients who were the main patrons of ballroom studios. Even though discotheque floors were often integrated, ballroom studios were very white.

From the late-seventies onward, ballroom dance retained a cultural presence in the American public's mind. As vernacular dance forms proliferated in urban areas, ballroom dance was the conservative, white genre that new forms could be contrasted with. As African American DJs in the South Bronx, including Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa, developed new skills and techniques for playing and mixing records, corresponding dance genres evolved. Hip Hop music led first to breakdancing, and then to a splintering of the form into myriad categories, including popping and locking, Electric Boogie, Funk, and House. Hip Hop forms of dance were expressly black American dance forms. Even when white Hip Hop dancers performed, they were

dancing within the context of a genre that was overtly, and proudly, claimed by black Americans as their own.

Whereas ballroom studios had used disco to revitalize the industry in the 1970s and early 1980s, street dancing did not hold the same potential. Teachers did, however, attempt to use popular music of the eighties, and later of the nineties, to encourage people to take lessons. The pop sounds of these two decades included music that most ballroom dances could be performed to. The rise of Latin music and musical stars in the US in the 1990s was also a boon to the industry. Dancers now had readier access to Rumba, Cha Cha, and Samba music. Latin dance clubs also led to an increase in people interested in vernacular Latin dance. Studios trained teachers in salsa and merengue, albeit in more formalized versions than what was seen in the clubs. The Lambada had its fifteen minutes of fame with the release of 1990's *Lambada: The Forbidden Dance*, and its sequel. Latin club dancing has continued to grow in the US, especially with the increase in the Latino population, but it cuts across ethnic lines. Salsa dancing has become a culture of its own, with a unique vocabulary and technique.⁹⁶

Another area of growth for ballroom was in Swing culture. In the early 1990s the US music scene saw the popularity of neo-swing groups take off. Dancers sought out swing, Lindy, and Charleston moves from the 1930s and 1940s. Going further, they adopted the dress of the era, and gathered at dances, clubs, and conventions to learn and refine their dancing. While ballroom studios have remained on the periphery of the swing revival, any publicity is helpful. Similarly, ballroom studios have taught West Coast Swing for decades, but over the past thirty years a large community of West Coast Swing dancers has coalesced. West Coast Swing adherents have conventions and competitions on their own circuits.

⁹⁶ For an in-depth study of salsa culture in the US, see Juliet McMains, *Spinning Mambo into Salsa: Caribbean Dance in Global Commerce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Competitive ballroom dance may be what the average American in 2017 associates with the industry. The popularity of *Dancing With the Stars* on ABC, now in its twelfth year, has introduced people to the competitive culture of ballroom, albeit in a mediated, exaggerated, and out-of-context form. The flashy costumes and complex choreography are burned into the memories of the viewing audience. This image belies the reality of what a huge proportion of the ballroom dance industry is about – business. Clients pay money to teachers to learn how to dance. In doing so, client and teacher form professional (i.e. service for pay), physical (they touch each other and move together physically), emotional, and social relationships. “Ballroom in the Big Peach” traces how the ballroom dance industry transformed itself from the struggling industry of the 1940s, to a thriving business based firmly in studio culture between 1950 and 1984.

CHAPTER 2: DANCING CLASSES: ELITES IN THE FAMILY

Ballroom dance studios in Atlanta were spaces that in many ways mirrored US society, from the 1950s into the 1980s. An examination of studio practices reveals underlying patterns relating to socio-economic class, gender, and race. This chapter examines how studios functioned in the three-and-a-half decades under discussion. Chain studios replaced the independent teachers who had taught in Atlanta, and across the US, from the 1920s onward. The rise of the chains brought standardization, and set generally-accepted practices for studios in the twentieth century. No study exists on how studios in this period functioned. This project fills the gap between Danielle Robinson’s work on the teaching of ballroom in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and Juliet McMains’ DanceSport-focused studios of the 1990s and

2000s.⁹⁷ Ballroom studios were businesses within the service sector, that exchanged services for money.

This chapter, and the one that follows, argue that studios were spaces where clients could go not only to learn to dance, but also to express and demonstrate their socio-economic status, or their desired socio-economic status. Chain studio advertising encouraged people of all classes to come to the studio and spend money on learning to dance. Studio policies and practices in the chain studios – which were white, and segregated – were designed to encourage wealthy clients to spend large sums of money on expensive programs, and extra services. While middle-class Atlantans spent money on ballroom dancing, it was the wealthier elites who had vast sums to spend on leisure. That wealth enabled them to spend much larger periods of time with ballroom teachers. As a result, wealthy clients were able to leverage their economic status to become another sort of elite *within* ballroom dance studios, reinforcing but also enhancing the status they held in society at-large. Their money created links in a consumerist chain that bound them to the studio, and the studio owners and staff to them.

Black ballroom studios will also emerge from historical obscurity in the pages that follow. While finding black teachers who taught in Atlanta in the fifties through seventies proved fruitless, newspaper coverage, and articles in black college yearbooks point to ballroom dance

⁹⁷ The studies by McMains and Picart, as well as Joanna Bosse's *Becoming Beautiful: Ballroom Dance in the American Heartland* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015), look at studios in the 1990s and 2000s and are more sociological studies rather than historical. Robinson's work on the first three decades of the twentieth century lays the foundation on which this chapter builds, and is the most historical approach to ballroom dance of any works consulted. Another informative and somewhat historical analysis is found in Edward A. Myers' article "Ballroom Dance as a Commodity: An Anthropological Viewpoint" (*Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*, 1984, Vol. 3, No. 2: 74-83). Myers' focus, however, is on how US business came to understand ballroom dance as a commodity. His ideas are used in this chapter. Other articles touch on aspects of running a studio, but give neither a broad, nor historical, understanding of studios. For example "Showcase Scheduling at Fred Astaire East Side Dance Studio" by Miguel A. Lejeune and Nevena Yakova (*Interfaces*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (May-June 2008), 166-176) looks at the mechanics of scheduling student showcases, and the development of a computer program to do so.

being a similar marker for class in black Atlanta. Black studios sought clients of all classes to create revenue, but it was wealthier, educated black residents who danced the ballroom dances at events. On both sides of the color line in Atlanta, being proficient in ballroom dance appears to have carried with it an implication of culture, and good taste – of class.⁹⁸

Atlanta patrons of ballroom dance studios took the skills they learned and used them in other locations where they could conspicuously demonstrate their social status. Atlanta was home to many spaces where residents could demonstrate their dancing abilities, and thereby demonstrate class. Newspapers advertised those locations as places to dance, and reported on the people who frequented them, reinforcing class distinctions within Atlanta society. In a segregated society, black Atlantans learned about the dancing activities of the elites in *The Atlanta World*, while white residents read about elite entertainment in the pages of *The Atlanta Constitution*, and *The Atlanta Journal*.

The experiences of teachers in Atlanta demonstrate that the relationship between teacher and client was complex, and at times problematic. The physicality of the genre, with the goal of having two bodies move as one, sometimes clouded the business nature of the teacher/client relationship. Spending time intimately close to a person made relationships within the ballroom industry both intimate *and* commercial. Underlying the relationships between teacher and client was a business arrangement. Clients paid for the time and attention of their teachers. The difficulties in interpreting, and practicing, this kind of relationship, however, is

⁹⁸ Class distinction in American society in the second half of the twentieth century was marked by tastes, as well as consumerism. In *Class: A Guide Through the American Status Systems* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), Paul Fussell argued that the American class system is not only about money, but also about taste, and the institutions one has access to, for example Ivy league colleges. Ballroom dance in the years under review was generally seen as an elite pastime. Fussell suggests that the upper-middle class is very concerned with how others view them, and hence they would be interested in acquiring outward signs of elite status, including elite styles of dance. This also ties in with Bourdieu's ideas about social and cultural capital (see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Routledge Classics, 1st Edition), London: Routledge, 1986).

demonstrated by both the time and money spent on dancing by clients, and the lawsuits that were brought against teachers and studios. These litigious clients were most often elites, the target demographic of studios across the country. Socio-economic class mattered to both client and teacher. Studios provided a space where these relationships played out in a business setting, a business that catered to leisure pursuits.

Forging the Chains

Ballroom dance in Atlanta in the 1920s through 1940s had been taught mainly by independent, private teachers, and privately-owned studios. Popular ballroom dance studios during this period were named for their founders, and generally had a single location. The three most-advertised studios in Atlanta were the Fred Brooks School of Dancing, Margaret Bryan School of Dancing, and the Hurst Dancing School. Arthur Murray's studio at the Georgian Terrace was also successful. Most listings in the Atlanta City Directory in this period were for individual teachers who had space in downtown buildings.⁹⁹ By 1950, however, eleven of the sixteen ballroom instructors listed under "Dancing Teachers" were studios. Only five individual teachers were named. The trend toward studios overshadowing individual teachers continued in the 1960s. In the Atlanta Yellow Pages of the late 1960s, only studios were listed – no individual teachers. Between 1965 and 1969, four studios were listed each year: Arthur Murray, Fred Astaire, Forest Park School of Dancing, and Stanley Wana School of Dancing. By 1973 Fred Astaire Studios (FADS) had three locations in Atlanta, each with a slightly different name: Fred Astaire Studio and Dance Club, Fred Astaire World of Dance, Inc., and Fred Astaire Dance Studio. By 1976 Arthur Murray, Inc. (AMI) had three studios in the Atlanta metro area, while FADS had six. Town and Country Dance Club and Studio appeared in Atlanta in 1971,

⁹⁹ *Atlanta City Directory*, 1923-1945, 1947-1964. Atlanta City Directory Co.

advertising itself as having “Nationwide Branches Coast to Coast,” another chain studio. Even when other ballroom studios opened in the late 1970s, the chain studios outnumbered them. In 1979, for example, FADS and AMI had seven studios in the Atlanta area, while the Yellow Pages lists another six ballroom dance studios – Atlanta Ballroom Studios, Jack Eppley Dancing School, LoCurto’s Ballroom, Shall We Dance, Terry Levine Dance Studios, and The Studio. By the numbers, organized ballroom dance in Atlanta was dominated by chain studios in the 1970s.

Arthur Murray studios have had a particularly close tie to Atlanta because Murray started his ballroom dance career here. The corporation failed to capitalize on that presence until the 1960s, and remained largely a northern-based business entity. An undated Arthur Murray Corporation *Dance Book*, most likely from the early forties, lists 36 Arthur Murray studios in the U. S., including Murray’s Atlanta studio in the Georgian Terrace.¹⁰⁰ By 1947 there were 125 studios throughout the country, 32 of which were in the South, but still only one listed for Atlanta.¹⁰¹ In 1953 the South had 69 Murray studios.¹⁰² In a 1972 *Murray-Go-Round* magazine, 182 AMI studios are listed in the US. This is a significant increase from what was listed in 1960s AMI brochures. 48 of these studios were in southern states, including Georgia studios in Atlanta and Savannah.¹⁰³ By the 1980s the total number of US listings had risen to 232, 75 of which were in the South. Augusta, Columbus, and Sandy Springs locations had joined the Atlanta and Savannah studios, making five AMI studios in Georgia – two of which were in metro Atlanta.¹⁰⁴ Atlanta’s growth mirrored the national growth of the chain studios.

Studio Life

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Murray, “For Your Protection,” *Arthur Murray’s Dance Book*, undated, A.M.C.A., back cover.

¹⁰¹ Kathryn and Arthur Murray, eds., *Murray-Go-Round* (New York: Arthur Murray, Inc., 1947), 60.

¹⁰² Arthur Murray, *Ballroom Dancing* (New York: Arthur Murray, Inc., 1953), A. M. C. A., 79-80.

¹⁰³ Arthur Murray Dance Studios, *Murray-Go-Round* (New York: Arthur Murray, Inc., 1972), A. M. C. A. 36-37.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Murray Franchised Dance Schools, *Murray-Go-Round* (New York: Arthur Murray, Inc., undated), A. M. C. A. While not all studios are listed in these publications, they give a good idea of the growth of the chain.

To be economically viable, studios had to have paying customers. The most common mechanism for business dealings in the ballroom dance studio was the contract, also referred to as a ‘program.’ Selling contracts was standard practice for ballroom dance studios in the 1950s through 1980s. These agreements sold a set number of lessons, or instruction hours, to a client, for an up-front amount of money. Most clients started with a complimentary thirty-minute lesson. In the FADS organization, especially in the early 1970s, introductory specials cost ten dollars. The FADS special included three half-hour private lessons, one group class, and one practice party.¹⁰⁵ The purpose of these inexpensive specials was to expose potential clients to not only dancing itself, but the experience of having a teacher give the customer undivided attention. Teachers helped newcomers to see that ballroom figures could be easily learned, but also that those figures needed to be practiced and perfected over time if a client wanted to become an accomplished dancer.

Following the introductory lesson, the instructor gave an evaluation of the client’s dancing. She or he emphasized the benefits that dancing would bring to the potential client, including a healthier heart, less stress, and importantly, a much-improved social life. The more a teacher learned about a client during the half-hour lesson, the more he or she could relate the benefits of dancing to that specific client’s needs and desires. This is classic mid-to-late twentieth-century sales technique, using psychology and methodology to market a product to a targeted clientele.¹⁰⁶ Atlanta studios were early adopters of these contemporary sales practices.

¹⁰⁵ Practice parties were an opportunity for students to go to the studio to practice what they had learned in their private lesson and group class. Some staff were on hand, but students were encouraged to dance with each other.

¹⁰⁶ Tony Hughes, “The Evolution of Selling,” <http://rsvpselling.com/content/history-of-selling>, accessed 4 September 2015.

From an introductory lesson, a client was encouraged to buy at least five or ten more hours of lessons. This post-first lesson program was known at AMI studios as the introductory special, and was usually given at a discounted price to encourage a student to continue taking lessons. Those five to ten lessons were another opportunity for teachers to learn more about their clients and determine not only how to effectively teach that student, but also how to sell him or her more hours.¹⁰⁷ In the AMI system, the post-introductory special program in the 70s and 80s was called Social-Ease. By the time a student completed this program they would have had at least 15 hours of lessons, and would hopefully be sold on how ballroom dance was improving their life.

In order to continue their progression, students were next encouraged to buy a Bronze program. The Bronze program taught the first ten figures of each of the major six dances – the exact material teachers learned in the training classes they took to become qualified teachers within a chain studio. The program covered a set number of hours; experience had shown AMI leaders that this amount of time was how long it would take an average client to learn all the bronze syllabus figures. If a client was slower to learn, they would need to buy more hours. If they learned quickly, however, they could not move onto more advanced figures with a Bronze contract. In addition to lessons, the contract included a set number of studio parties that the client could attend to practice the material learned in their lessons.

The cost of a Bronze program changed over time, increasing in price as time went on. In the early 1960s a Bronze program cost approximately \$1,000.¹⁰⁸ One teacher recalls that a

¹⁰⁷ See Joe Lo Curto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:15.

¹⁰⁸ This estimate is based off rates and contracts discussed in Debora L. Threedy's "Dancing Around Gender: Lessons From Arthur Murray on Gender and Contracts," (*Wake Forest Law Review*, Vol. 45, 749-777), which analyzes some lawsuits brought against Arthur Murray Corporation in the 1960s. In 2017 dollars, this would be over \$7,700, a significant expense. (<http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=10&year=1970>)

Bronze program in the early 1970s was \$5,000,¹⁰⁹ although this seems on the low end when compared to what other teachers recall. By the early 1980s teachers talked of Bronze programs being between \$30,000 and \$35,000. These were startlingly large price tags, comparable to spending \$74,000 to \$86,000 today.¹¹⁰ David Spencer has taught in the Atlanta area for more than thirty years. Spencer remembers being a nineteen-year-old brand-new teacher sitting in on Tommy Baity, a veteran teacher and studio owner in the Atlanta area, selling a client a \$35,000 Bronze program in the early 1980s. Spencer was so amazed when he heard the cost of the contract being sold that he blurted out, “How much?” Whereupon Baity told him to contain his excitement, and the client paid \$25,000 on the spot as a down payment.¹¹¹ Teachers noted that later in the 1980s the price of a Bronze program went up to \$50,000 in the FADS organization.¹¹² Clients would often buy partial programs, and buy more lessons as they went along. Teachers were impressed with the sales abilities of studio management who could sell a Bronze contract costing “an astronomical” amount of money to a student who had taken a \$24 introductory special (in the early 1980s).¹¹³ Many clients bought the contracts after limited dancing experience. To sell programs, AMI teacher Randy Knotts explained to his clients that they needed a complete meal to be satisfied; hence they needed to buy the meat of the meal (lessons), the potatoes (group lessons), and the side salad (the weekly practice party). By purchasing programs that covered all of these aspects, a person’s dancing would improve at a faster rate.¹¹⁴ Chain studios across the US sold many thousands of lessons via contracts.

¹⁰⁹ Phyllis DeNeve. Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:26. That is over \$28,000 in 2017 dollars. (<http://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=10&year=1970>)

¹¹⁰ “\$30,000.00 in 1983 had the same buying power as \$74,210.66 in 2017.” \$35,000 in 1983 would be over \$86,500 today. Ibid.

¹¹¹ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:28-0:30.

¹¹² This is equivalent to over \$109,000 in 2017 dollars. www.dollartimes.com/inflation.

¹¹³ Eddie Ares, Interview with the author. November 7, 2012. Buckhead, Georgia 0:10.

¹¹⁴ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia 0:22.

In order to move on to more advanced figures, a client would have to buy a Silver contract, and then a Gold contract. Technically, a client had to complete all the hours purchased on the Bronze contract before moving on to Silver. This system kept clients dancing less-advanced figures for extended periods of time, which some students found frustrating.¹¹⁵ Other teachers credit the system with producing dancers that were familiar and effective in dancing basic patterns, which created a strong foundation for future material. Whatever the justifications, the end result was that those who could afford more lessons were able to progress faster and further than other clients.

Studios wanted wealthier clients to buy large contracts in order to make a profit. Those clients saw their investment in the studio as a means to becoming better dancers than others at the studio, as well as purchasing greater access to teacher time, and studio resources. Because they spent more time in the studio, they knew teachers better than other clients, and in some cases felt they were investors in the studio because of the amount of money they spent there. They expected to be treated well because of their financial investment. Owners made sure these clients received the treatment they desired. Contract holders were known by name, and were greeted by all the teachers at the studio. Their lesson times were reserved permanently, to avoid anyone else being booked with a contract-holder's teacher at that specific time. Owners made sure that these clients were consistently danced with at parties and socials. This was a means of protecting a revenue stream. Wealthy clients retained their elite status within the studio system by purchasing *more* lessons and services.

The client/teacher relationship in the context of the ballroom dance studio is difficult to define. At its simplest, there is an instructor teaching an individual to dance. This relationship is

¹¹⁵ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author, January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:51.

far from simple, however. To start, instruction involves intimate physical contact – in a traditional ballroom hold, at the very least the two partners hold hands, have arms in contact with each other, and the man’s hand is held on the lady’s shoulder blade. If students are learning International Style ballroom, rib cages, hips, and thighs are in contact. Thus a teacher has a very physical relationship with his or her clients. Further, in order to help a client create the correct body action, including flight, sway, and stretch, the instructor is likely to touch, push, and pull various parts of the client’s body in order to help them obtain maximum movement, rhythm, and aesthetic appeal. Teachers talk to clients about hips and chests, but are essentially referring to buttocks and breasts. These are intimate body parts, but have to be addressed in order to obtain a desired outcome. As Joanna Bosse has said, ballroom dancing is an “embodied, visceral, cerebral, and emotional experience.”¹¹⁶ Clients, desiring (and paying) to become the best dancers possible, learned the lingo of the ballroom world, and processed the information presented by instructors in order to understand how to control their bodies, and thereby produce the most effective look, and feel, in any given dance. The physical nature of ballroom dance, and the hours wealthy clients spend with teachers working in close conditions, inherently demanded the building of trust, and close personal bonds, between the two parties.

Just as a person is often physically comfortable in their own home, or with their family, so the studio wanted to make a person comfortable in the physical location of the studio, and in the company of the instructors. This feeling of belonging was called, in passing, “familyness” by long-time Atlanta ballroom professional Tommy Baitly. The term is an apt summary term for the complex familial relationships that studios aimed to foster between clients and studios. Clients who felt the trust and intimacy of family relationships in the studio setting

¹¹⁶ Joanna Bosse, *Becoming Beautiful: Ballroom Dance in the American Heartland* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 4.

were more likely to continue taking lessons. Familiness became an important element of the practice of business in ballroom dance studios from the 1950s through the 1980s.

Adding further complexity to the teacher/client relationship was the fact that it was a professional one. A teacher would be hired to help a client produce an end product, in this case competent dance skill. Clients had an expectation of outcome, which inherently involved a physicality they may not have been used to, or comfortable with. Further, the intimacy of the instruction itself might have been misconstrued by either the participant, or an observer. And all of this was based on a monetary exchange. The public social mores of the upper and middle classes in the US in the 1950s, 1960s, and most of the 1970s, helped to ensure propriety, broadly speaking. More importantly, the desire for studios to retain sources of income further safeguarded both teachers and clients from relationships straying beyond instructor/student. The studios, from the corporate heads, to the owners, to the teachers, had a unified goal: to make money. That goal ensured that clients had their needs met, and teachers behaved in an acceptable, and appropriate, manner.¹¹⁷ If relationships became sexual, the studio risked losing a client when the relationship ended, or faced legal action if a client claimed the advances were unwelcome.

In many ways, ballroom dance teachers fit within the parameters of what Arlie Hochschild calls emotional labor. For Hochschild, emotional labor is “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage, and therefore has exchange value.”¹¹⁸ As this chapter, and the two that follow, will demonstrate, teachers had to be continually positive, and appear ‘up,’ when handling clients. As ballroom

¹¹⁷ Chapter four examines the lived experience of teachers, and how they dealt with this difficult task.

¹¹⁸ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003), 7.

dancing is inherently bodily, teachers' bodies had to send the right message to their clients, signaling a willingness and desire to dance, and to be friendly, as well as professional. Just as with flight attendants, teachers had to "disguise fatigue and irritation, for otherwise the labor would show in an unseemly way, and the product – [client] contentment – would be damaged ... this calls for emotional labor."¹¹⁹ More than most actors in the economy, service industry workers are required to use emotional labor, as they are most likely to deal with people, rather than things (as most lower and working-class jobs do). As service workers, ballroom teachers connected emotionally with clients. What many of the examples that follow show, however, is that unlike flight attendants who often had to create a second self, a side of themselves that performed the correct outward acting, ballroom dance teachers in Atlanta most often had a sincere interest in their clients. None of the teachers interviewed expressed a need to behave one way toward a client, while in reality feeling negatively toward them. At the same time, teachers were acting in a way that was dictated by corporate policy. The greatest difference between Hochschild's flight attendants and Atlanta ballroom teachers is that ballroom teachers built relationships with clients over an extended period of time. Where flight attendants had a few seconds or minutes of interaction with passengers, teachers spent hours on the dance floor and hours on studio-approved excursions, getting to know clients personally and intimately. Because of this, teachers knew their clients well, and this knowledge aided them in building a mutual personal *and* professional relationship.¹²⁰

Perhaps the most important clients to keep happy were those who purchased lifetime contracts. These contracts were long-term contracts giving clients a specified number of lessons

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹²⁰ It is also for this reason that ballroom teachers do not have to deal with the problems of work-self versus 'real' self, as Hochschild believes flight attendants do. See pages 132-135.

each week for life. For example, a client might purchase a lifetime contract that guaranteed them one lesson a week. If they wanted more hours in a week, they could buy additional hours. Some clients, notably older women, purchased multiple lifetime contracts. Each contract guaranteed them a lesson a week; someone with triple lifetime contracts would have three lessons a week.¹²¹ Lifetime contracts cost tens of thousands of dollars each. Clients who bought these contracts were treated especially well because they kept the studios in business. They essentially purchased social capital that set them apart from other clients within the studio system.

If a client wanted to participate in other studio activities, they had to pay for those separately. Teachers encouraged participation in these other activities and sometimes obtained a commission off the sale of extras, such as showcases. Student participation in studio activities benefitted teachers who were paid for those activities.¹²² Clients benefitted not only because their dancing abilities improved, but also because they strengthened their relationships with the instructors and owners. Spending time with each other increased friendships and loyalties. Interpersonal bonds grew. Revenue generated from studio activities helped the studios to stay economically afloat, and increase profits for owners and the corporation. By the time a student reached the point of buying extra services, they were, hopefully, fully inculcated into the studio system and culture. Their increased connection to their teacher and the studio – the familiness – made it more likely they would spend the large amounts of money full participation entailed.

In the booming economy of the 1950s and 1960s, it was the wealthy, and the growing middle class, that could afford large contracts. The US prospered in the post-war economy. By 1950 there was nearly full employment, with wages two to three times what they had been in 1935. The increase in income continued in each decade through the 1970s. Spending on

¹²¹ Dennis Rogers, Interview with the author, Savannah, Georgia, May 26, 2016. 0:25.

¹²² The next chapter, “Keeping the Family Connected,” discusses studio activities.

necessities decreased. This meant that an increasing number of Americans had more discretionary money to spend on leisure. The economy also saw the growth of Americans employed in white collar employment. By 1973, over 50% of the work force was considered white collar.¹²³ Working Americans also saw an increase in discretionary time to spend on activities outside of work. By 1960, “rising family incomes meant that households spent proportionally less for necessities, resulting in a higher standard of living.”¹²⁴ Between 1961 and 1973, the US economy experienced the longest period of economic expansion on record to that point.¹²⁵ This era of prosperity parallels the rise of chain studios, which was enabled by a booming US economy and consumers had money to spend on pastimes. By 1973 recreational expenses peaked for the period 1950-1984, accounting for 8.6 percent of all household spending in 1973, and more than twice the average four percent of household spending in 1961. By 1984, recreational spending had decreased from its 1973 high.¹²⁶ However, the general pattern for the post-war period is clear: Americans more than doubled spending on leisure. The ballroom industry in Atlanta benefitted from this trend, as evidenced by the growth in the number of studios in the city, which further implied a new willingness to spend discretionary income on ballroom dancing and the studio experience.

Large programs were sold to ballroom dance clients by professional closers. While teachers taught the first lesson, and perhaps sold an introductory program to a client, when it came to Bronze programs and larger, most studios in Atlanta relied on experienced sales experts to close deals. Clients were invited into the office where the closer worked to have clients spend

¹²³ Michael L. Dolfman and Denis M. McSweeney, “100 Years of US Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston, BLS Report 991,” Bureau of Labor Statistics Website, May 2006, 3. <http://www.bls.gov/opub/uscs/>, accessed December 2016.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25, 27, 35, 47.

“Big Bucks.” Phyllis DeNeve worked in the Atlanta ballroom industry for forty years. She started as an instructor in the Cheshire Bridge branch of FADS, was a manager for a number of the Astaire locations, and went on to own her own, independent, studio for many years in Atlanta. She recalls that when she was first trained in sales she was timid in asking clients to spend money. Johnny Long, the owner of a number of FADS studios in Atlanta in the seventies, trained her specifically in how to close a deal. Closers were trained to convince clients not only to buy more lessons, but to spend thousands of dollars on contracts. DeNeve became highly effective at closing. She used this training to close contracts at her own studio, after she had left the chain. Closing only worked, DeNeve noted, if a teacher had done their part in helping the client see the benefits that dancing would bring to them. Thus studios were selling clients the potential of what they could become, of the status they could have as a good dancer.

The use of closers could have both positive and negative effects. Oberia Porter, who has taken lessons in the Atlanta area for fifty years, recalls that after her introductory contract ended at the Atlanta AMI in 1970, she bought another fifteen-lesson contract sold to her by her instructor. A professional closer from New York came into town and tried to sell Porter a two-thousand-dollar contract. She did not like the man’s approach and demeanor, and told him no, and that she was going to quit once her fifteen lessons were up. The closer was ineffective enough on his trip that AMI sent a second closer to repair the damage. Pat Traymore, a California competitor, coach, and AMI owner and national board member, came to the studio and had a completely different approach. As Porter put it: “Pat taught me two very important words, ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ And she said, ‘do not be afraid to use either one.’ So she got me relaxed.” Working together, Jackie Walls, the Atlanta AMI owner, and Traymore, negotiated with Porter. Walls told Porter that if she bought 100 hours, which was \$2500, it would include a Dance A

Rama (a regional competition), a couple of showcases, plus one hundred classes and one hundred parties. They even had a company that would finance Porter's lessons! "Like a crazy woman, I signed up for a hundred lessons. \$2500. I put myself in debt. Now, this was in the sixties, so that was a lot of money."

This anecdote points to a number of significant principles relating to Atlanta, and national, studios in the decades under review. Firstly, it was significant that Porter was confident enough to say no to the New York closer. A number of female clients later sued chain studios claiming they felt coerced into buying expensive contracts. In this instance, a female client said no, and left without buying. Porter made decisions for herself. She was not a victim of predatory practices. She knowingly agreed to the contract. Second, a female closer came to clean up the mess made by the previous, male, AMI rep. Traymore empowered Porter by reminding her that she, Porter, had the power to say yes or no. Porter recognized the value of the package that was being tailored for her, and of her own volition she agreed to the contract. While it is possible that a male closer might have been able to accomplish the same thing, Porter emphasized that Traymore was the reason she felt comfortable buying. Lastly, AMI made credit available to their customers. Ballroom studios were business entities trying to make a profit. They used all commercial business tools available to them to increase their market share and profit margin. The fact that Atlanta studios brought closers in from other parts of the country demonstrates Atlanta's connection and participation in a national ballroom dance industry and culture.

Jim Day, who worked in the FADS organization for two decades, and now owns his own independent studio in Atlanta, notes that there were times when clients were "lined up outside the office door" to buy contracts. This eagerness to buy contracts was especially evident when the studios held their annual Festivals. Twice a year FADS studios had a major push to

increase sales. Each Festival was a month long. AMI had similar events annually. In the 1940s and 1950s studios lost major business during the winters because it was too cold for clients in the dance studios, and too hot in the summers where there was no air conditioning. To tie the studio over fiscally during these lean months, the studio hosted major events twice a year to bring in extra income.¹²⁷ During Festival, studio branches had competitions between each other to see who could make the most money. Prizes were awarded to top studios, and top-earning teachers. Management and staff spent months preparing for Festivals and teachers received extra sales training leading up to these events. Teachers pushed clients to buy lessons and extra activities so that they could win prizes, and the students could share in that glory. Studios hosted extra weekly parties, often themed, to entice students to spend money at the studio. In the early 1980s the Cheshire Bridge Studio had a *Gong Show* themed party during Festival. They also created a cardboard pie-chart that students could buy a slice of, for \$750 (the equivalent of approximately \$1,700 in 2017 dollars). The pieces of pie were numbered. A drawing was held and the client whose number was drawn won a certain number of lessons with their teacher.¹²⁸ Thus the studio made \$6,000 while providing lessons that would cost them less than \$750. At a time when the average American spent \$706 to \$1,055 annually on entertainment¹²⁹, it was the wealthy that could afford to dole out \$750 in one evening.

Day recalls that one year the Cheshire Bridge studio made \$178,000 in revenue during the first week of Festival, and \$326,000 over the four weeks.¹³⁰ The Cheshire Bridge location

¹²⁷ Knotts was told this by AMI managers and teachers who had been in the industry for many years. I haven't been able to verify this, but the explanation sounds plausible.

¹²⁸ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015, Conyers, Georgia, 0:16, 0:19-0:21.

¹²⁹ Dolfman and McSweeney, 39, 47.

¹³⁰ Jim Day, Interview with the author, January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:39-0:46. In today's dollars, that would be over \$750,000 in the first week, and over \$1.3 million for the four weeks.

was also one of the first Astaire studio in the nation to make over a million dollars in one year.¹³¹ This financial success, in addition to the other five locations within the metropolitan area, indicate that Atlanta was a prominent city in the FADS national system. It also demonstrates the large amounts of money clients were willing to spend in order to be part of this studio family. In turn, it was wealthy clients who could afford to pay to link themselves even closer to the studios that boosted Atlanta revenues.

Selling techniques would be one of the factors that led to a downturn in the ballroom industry in the 1980s. It is noteworthy that some teachers were uncomfortable with high-pressure selling practices. Roy Porter, who has taught in Atlanta for over fifty years, left a FADS studio because he felt the managers were “too intense” in pressuring students to purchase large contracts. He relocated to an AMI studio in Atlanta.¹³² Day recalled having a client in his office for three-and-a-half hours negotiating her program. He eventually stood on his head in a corner and told her he would stay there until she signed the contract! While Day knew this client had money to spare, and was somewhat joking, this anecdote, told in passing, demonstrates the techniques that some – certainly not all – ballroom studios in Atlanta used. Knotts noted that the Atlanta AMI studio where he worked had a client who had been taking lessons sporadically because she was not wealthy, and thus bought lessons when she could. When she was left a large amount of money after a relative died, the teachers at the studio dissuaded her from spending the money on dancing. They encouraged her, instead, to invest the money so that she could effectively support her children, and have a secure future. This instructor pointed out that he had heard that FADS, in contrast, encouraged people to take out second mortgages on their homes to

¹³¹ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:36.

¹³² Roy Porter, Interview with the author, July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:30-0:32.

pay for their dance expenses.¹³³ While the latter story may not be verifiable, it does indicate perceptions of high pressure tactics regularly being used to get students to spend money on dancing. It may not have been the norm, but it appears to have not been an anomaly in Atlanta studios in these decades.

From at least the 1930s, chain studios were the target of lawsuits related to contracts. Contract lawsuits were particularly prolific in the 1960s through 1980s. Most often, studio employees were accused of using flattery and “overpersuasion” to sell clients large contracts.¹³⁴ In *Syester v. Banta*, a 1965 case, a student sued a Des Moines Arthur Murray for “‘false and fraudulent’ selling techniques to pressure her into a contract for 4,000 dance lessons costing more than \$30,000, the equivalent of a six-figure sum today.”¹³⁵ Lawyers in a similar case in 1968 argued that Arthur Murray employees had lied about the client’s potential, telling her she had extraordinary talent, and that buying a massive contract would ensure that she became an exceptional dancer. She did not progress, and sued to terminate the contract.¹³⁶ In *Porter v. Arthur Murray, Inc.* (1967), a San Diego, California many spent over \$30,000 (over \$74,000 2017 dollars) on contracts with a studio, which then declared bankruptcy and closed. The plaintiff won his case, and Murray was ordered to reimburse him. This particular case cited the 1961 Dance Act, a California law which made it illegal to sell lifetime contracts, and placed limits on the time span of contracts. In a 1965 case, *The People v. Arthur Murray, Inc., et al*, the state of California made it illegal for ballroom dance studios to enter into contracts over \$500,

¹³³ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglasville, Georgia, 0:52.

¹³⁴ Debora L. Threedy, “Dancing Around Gender: Lessons from Arthur Murray on Gender and Contracts,” *Wake Forest Law Review*, Vol. 45, 757.

¹³⁵ Libby Smigel, “Arthur Murray (1895-1991) and *Arthur Murray Dance Studios*,” Dance Heritage Coalition, 2012. http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures/murray_essay_smigel.pdf.

¹³⁶ Lawnix, “Vokes v. Arthur Murray, Inc. – Case Brief,” <http://www.lawnix.com/cases/vokes-arthur-murray.html>, accessed February 12, 2016.

and set a seven-year limit on the length of contracts.¹³⁷ New York had enacted a similar law in 1964, as did other states, and national consumer protection organizations.¹³⁸ Just as they had in the first two decades of the century, ballroom dance teachers had to contend with legal actions. The greatest difference was that *studios* were now the main target for laws, rather than dance halls and unlicensed teachers.

As part of the growing national ballroom dance culture, Atlanta saw its share of litigation. In 1971 an Atlanta Fred Astaire studio was sued for over \$1 million by Mary C. Jones who alleged that the studio “cajoled her out of at least \$59,000 through various gimmicks,” including that “in spite of Mrs. Jones’ advanced age and limited physical ability, she was led to believe that she had ‘natural rhythm, exceptionally good animation and potential to become an accomplished dancer.’”¹³⁹ Other cases cite similar selling tactics.

Most interviewed teachers talked of high pressure selling as something others did, not their studios. They openly discussed sales training, however, and recognized their job as both teaching and selling. One of the corporate sales techniques that Lee Miller, owner of the Atlanta FADS on Cheshire Bridge Road, used was “Value Over Price.”¹⁴⁰ The point was to demonstrate to the client that the services and benefits clients received from ballroom dance lessons were far more valuable than the price tag. Nearly every teacher who started teaching in the 1970s or 1980s emphasizes, still, the inherent benefits of ballroom dance. Knotts tells of a professional

¹³⁷ “People v. Arthur Murray Inc,” <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/ca-court-of-appeal/1821176.html>, accessed July 2017.

¹³⁸ See, for example, “Lifetime Courses Outlawed in New York,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, June 1964, 3, 26 which describes how New York restricted contracts to a maximum of \$500, and argues that all ballroom dance teachers, not just the chain studios (against whom most lawsuits were levied), suffer from bad publicity because of the cases. In the same year, the national Consumer’s Council “filed 15 bills to protect consumers from bad business practices, including high pressure dance lesson contracts.” Lillafrances Viles, “Notes From New England,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, December 1964, 14, 16.

¹³⁹ Nat Sheppard, “Widow Sues Over \$59,000 Dance Course,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1971. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁴⁰ Bentley, 0:47.

sales trainer who came in to do some training at the studio. The trainer reminded the teachers that clients were “not here to learn to dance...They want to buy.” Repeatedly, interview subjects used the phrase “It’s not about the dancing.” This begs the questions of why people sought out ballroom dance studios in these decades. If it wasn’t about the dancing, what was it about?

Selling the Benefits of Ballroom Dancing

Every single chain studio teacher interviewed for this project, who worked as a teacher in a studio between 1950 and 2017, stated that people did not go to studios to learn to dance. Rather, “they come in here for something else. There’s something lacking in their life. There’s a hole they’re trying to fill. And that’s really what’s important. Dancing is the medicine that heals whatever that is.”¹⁴¹ As Atlanta-based student-turned-teacher Cheryl Sutherland put it: “Dancing meets a need. Dancing is the fun part of it, but [the clients] get more out of it than that. Dancing completes a need that they have in their lives at the time.”¹⁴² Teachers sought to recognize those needs and give clients the validation they sought.¹⁴³ Kathryn Lyon, former owner of the Magnolia Garden Ballroom, an Atlanta studio, gave a succinct summary when asked why people take ballroom dance lessons: “They are lonely, they have lost a spouse, they want to get out again, to do something for themselves. They are getting married, want to meet people. Some have always wanted to see themselves dressed up and on the dance floor. Perhaps they are going on a cruise, or have a child getting married and want to dance at the wedding.”¹⁴⁴ In other words there were a multitude of reasons why people wanted to learn to dance, but generally it was not

¹⁴¹ Ethylann Bonder Berse, Interview with the author. Buckhead, Georgia, 1:06.

¹⁴² Cheryl Sutherland, interview with the author, Powder Springs, GA, 28 January 2015. See also David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:19; John DePalma, Interview with the author. Atlanta, Georgia. May 2015.; Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:30.

¹⁴³ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:30.

¹⁴⁴ Kathryn Lyon, Telephone interview with the author. February 16, 2015, 0:45.

the dancing itself that motivated them – that came later. Studios sought to identify the client need, and use studio services to meet that need, and thereby generate income for the studio.

The most common motivation for clients going to a studio to take lessons, according to Atlanta teachers, was loneliness. People came to meet other people whom they hoped would become their friends. The system of encouraging students who took private lessons to also take group classes met the social need in two ways. Firstly, a client had a teacher who took an intense interest in their lives. This concern was most often genuine, and close bonds were developed. Secondly, the group classes and other activities allowed clients to meet other students at the studio, and develop friendships. Student-teacher relations were strengthened through studio activities like parties, or group vacation trips. Clients developed friendships with each other as well, which also connected them to the studio because the studio was their common bond. The more time people spent with each other, the closer their relationships could grow. Familial bonds were developed. Former FADS instructor Betsy Bentley initially came to the Astaire studio in Atlanta having recently divorced. She was looking for something to validate her self-worth, “something for me,” as she phrased it.¹⁴⁵ Through dancing she learned new people skills that helped her move forward with her life, and have continued to help her in her post-ballroom dance career, nursing.

Some clients started dancing as a way to get exercise, while having fun. The ballroom dance industry sold ballroom as a way to maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle from at least the 1930s, into the 1980s, and does so even today. A 1950 AMI advert argued that ballroom dance had “definite curative and corrective values.”¹⁴⁶ Some advertising in the forties and fifties went into great detail as to how dancing could improve health; “constructive metamorphosis of the

¹⁴⁵ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:01.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur Murray, “You Can Dance Your Way to Health,” *The American Magazine*, October 1950, 120.

cells” and “chemical changes” were promised to those who learned the art of dancing.¹⁴⁷

Testimonials of people who had benefited from ballroom were extensively printed, including one about a doctor with a broken leg who went to Florida to recuperate and was coaxed into dancing on his crutches. He enjoyed it and felt that it helped to speed his recovery, so much so that he began encouraging his own patients to use dancing as physical therapy.¹⁴⁸ In 1963, *Ballroom Dance Magazine* published an article by a woman whose doctors were amazed at how quickly she recovered from hip surgery after taking up ballroom dance.¹⁴⁹ Other doctors concurred, suggesting dancing for social, mental and physical rehabilitation.¹⁵⁰

Internal AMI documents show an emphasis on having customers recognize the benefits that ballroom dancing would bring to their lives. An advertising agency hired by the company proposed a campaign in 1986 called “The Benefits of Learning to Dance.” A section of the outline, circled in pen by someone at the AMI corporate office, states: “The benefits of learning to dance are as varied as the forms the art inspires. These benefits can provide physiological, psychological, social, and of course, aesthetic enhancement to dancers. You feel good, and you look good too. Dancing does it. Learning to dance improves your health, gives you an overall feeling of physical well-being and fitness.”¹⁵¹ The document went on to point out specific health benefits including weight loss, “inhibiting the aging process,” improved stamina and lung capacity, better posture and coordination, and enhanced flexibility.

¹⁴⁷ Arthur Murray Corporation, “Article for Publicity: Young and Old Can Dance to Health,” A. M. C. A., undated, 2.

¹⁴⁸ Arthur Murray, “You Can Dance Your Way to Health,” 120.

¹⁴⁹ Helen Koblin, “No Time for Sympathy,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, July 1963, 22-23.

¹⁵⁰ Emmanuel J. Jacobs, “Social Dance: An Aid to Rehabilitation,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, February 1966, 7, 30.

¹⁵¹ Poller & Jordan Advertising Agency, “You Feel Good & You Look Good Too: The Benefits of Learning to Dance,” AMIA, October 17, 1986, 2.

Part of the appeal of ballroom dance was that there were varying degrees of activity, “ranging from moderate, as in a foxtrot or rumba, to vigorous...which is so active that it compares favorably in terms of energy expenditure to sports like tennis or swimming.”¹⁵² Dancing was promoted as an activity that one could participate in “long after more strenuous or combative physical activities must be abandoned.”¹⁵³ When Vonnie Marie, who has been teaching in Atlanta since the late 1970s, started dancing, she realized that dancing was a way to stay fit without having to go to a gym, and it was in an air conditioned environment.¹⁵⁴ She notes that the studio where she taught had a number of elderly women who danced to stay active. Baity and David Spencer, who has been teaching in Atlanta since the early 1980s, both recall women who had serious physical problems that were overcome through ballroom dance. A 1978 FADS advert in the *Atlanta Constitution* stated that ballroom dance was a “healthful, pleasant form of exercise.”¹⁵⁵ Not only could a person get exercise, but they could also do it in a community of friends. Ballroom studios were thus sites for physical and social health.

Linked to the physical health that dancing promised, was the social popularity that an ability to dance would bring. Photos of smiling, well-dressed dancers graced the covers of booklets and adverts proclaiming that the “new happiness found by thousands of men and women” was attributable to their having become popular because of their new dance skills.¹⁵⁶

The better posture and carriage learned through dancing, the potential student was assured, “will

¹⁵² Seymour Kleinman, *Social Dancing: Fundamentals* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968), 1.

¹⁵³ Richard G. Kraus and Lola Sadlo, *Beginning Social Dance* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1964), 2. A 2006 Italian study found that ballroom dance is an excellent form of rehabilitative exercise for patients recovering from heart surgery. (*The Gainesville Sun*, Gainesville, Florida, 13 November 2006, 1A, 4A.

¹⁵⁴ Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:04.

¹⁵⁵ “Display Ad 26 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), February 27, 1978. Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 6B.

¹⁵⁶ Arthur Murray Corporation, *Why Good Dancers are Popular*, A. M. C. A., 1958, 2.

make you wear your clothes more smartly and with great distinction.”¹⁵⁷ Photo layouts sent as examples to Arthur Murray studio owners showed students in an Atlanta studio confidently dancing, all smiles (*Figure 1*, Appendix A).¹⁵⁸ In the preface to a manual of ballroom, the presidents of a Y. M. C. A. chapter and a Y.W. C. A. chapter wrote:

But not for physical advantages alone do we of the Y.M.-Y.W.C.A commend dancing, for here is provided also a medium for bringing into pleasant social relations all ages of sexes; for destroying that feeling of diffidence and for correcting that shyness of manner which is best overcome by actual contact through an activity that provides the opportunity to meet, get acquainted, see, and be seen.¹⁵⁹

Thus becoming a good dancer was a way to overcome shyness, be seen to possess a skill, and thus become popular. The myriad social balls held in the US is reflected in reports and articles in *Ballroom Dance Magazine* in the 1960s. From university cotillions, to military balls, to city functions, dancing was an important social grace across the nation that could, according to the ballroom dance industry, improve a person’s social life.¹⁶⁰ *The Atlanta Constitution*’s social columns were filled with news of dances, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. The activities reported on were elite activities. The growing middle class in the US who were transitioning into the upper-class bracket

¹⁵⁷ Arthur Murray, “How These Lessons Can Make You Truly Popular,” AMIA, undated, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Arthur Murray Corporation, “Photo Flash,” AMIA, undated, 1-2.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas E. Parson, *Popular Ballroom Dance for All*, Everyday Handbook Series (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1949), iv.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, *BDM*, Jan 1966, 21-22; Feb 1966, 21-22; March 1966, 8-9; May 1966 6-7; Nov 1966, 12-14; February 1967, 16-17; March 1967, 21; May 1967, 9-10; July 1967, 17; November 1967, 39; and December 1967, 41-42.

would certainly have desired to fit in at these activities, and hence they learned to dance ballroom.

A number of teachers believe that some people came to studios looking for romance. This category of clients came in two forms. One was the married couple, often retirees, who were at a stage in their lives where they wanted to reconnect or strengthen their relationship, and now had the time and money to do it. These couples most often took private lessons, as that allowed them to focus on each other while their personal instructor worked with them. Sometimes these couples took group classes too, although here they changed partners and danced with multiple people, so the focus on each other was not as intense.

The second, and more dominant, group in this category were people who were single. These students saw taking lessons as a means to find potential mates. Multiple teachers – especially women – pointed out that in the 1970s women were looking for “safe environments” to interact with men.¹⁶¹ The most common places that people went out to dance in the 1970s were nightclubs. Teachers Betsy Bentley, Marie, Baity, and DeNeve all talk about women who were tired of getting hit-on and propositioned by men in nightclubs. Ballroom studios were places where social and physical contact were mediated by teachers and the learning environment. As one Atlanta teacher put it, when a person accepts an invitation to dance with someone, they know that “the commitment is very light. You know, a song is two or three minutes. And in that time it’s amazing how well you can get to know somebody. So, it’s an easy way to meet people and have fun, and with very little expense, and with very little risk.”¹⁶² If they do not enjoy that person, whether it has to do with their dancing or their personality, they

¹⁶¹ See for example Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:11; Linda Weaver, Conversation with the author. Sandy Springs, Georgia; and Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:14.

¹⁶² Chuck Cuthbert, interview with the author. October 2012. Sandy Springs, Georgia.

can politely decline to dance with that person again. As a reporter for *Smithsonian* magazine noted when writing about the popularity of ballroom dance by the end of the 1980s: "...with casual sex currently out of fashion, people are looking for new ways of getting to know one another—and there's no better place to do that than on the dance floor."¹⁶³ Hence numerous women in the 1970s and 1980s found ballroom dance studios a haven from men with overt sexual intentions.

Of all the interviews conducted, only one narrator asserted that one of the reasons women took ballroom dance lessons was glamor. In fact, DeNeve's first response to the question of why clients dance was "glamor, and to live out some fantasies."¹⁶⁴ She went on to name many other benefits, but this was her initial response. Deneve is the only person interviewed in Atlanta, out of more than thirty, that identified glamor as a major factor in dance participation. Juliet McMains's book, *Glamor Addiction*, argues that glamor is the central motivation for women who participate in the industry. McMains notes that she was attracted to ballroom dance by "the romance it portrayed, its impossible promise of happiness and acceptance, the assurance that every woman would be accessorized with an adoring male partner, the clothes that signified such elegance and classiness, the inflated importance of each motion of an arm or an eyebrow—in short, the Glamour of it all."¹⁶⁵ Thus McMains's vision of glamor is one of overt signifiers – clothes, a handsome partner, and graceful dancing. Importantly, *Glamour Addiction* is about the competitive ballroom world in the late-1990s and early 2000s. The way glamor is deployed, however, the implication is that the whole industry is built on the image of women being glamorous. It is surprising, then, that only one teacher interviewed for this project, identified

¹⁶³ Alice J. Kelvin, "Cheek to Cheek is doubly chic, the second time around," *Smithsonian* (March 1989), 87.

¹⁶⁴ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:11.

¹⁶⁵ McMains, *Glamour Addiction*, xiii.

glamor as a major factor in ballroom dance participation. McMains wrote primarily about studios that focused on competitive dancing, and the comparison between her subjects and those of this dissertation, one could argue, is invalid. Certainly the majority of teachers interviewed for this study would place themselves more in the social dance teacher category, rather than competitive, however more than seventy percent of all narrators competed professionally with students, and many with professional partners. Perhaps McMains's findings were regionally specific, as her focus was on studios in California. Or perhaps the titular glamor addiction is too recent a phenomenon to have impacted the narrators in this project. Whatever the case, it is clear that in Atlanta up through the 1980s, glamor was not a major motivating factor for women to start dancing.

The opportunity to travel was another motivation some teachers presented for why people started ballroom dancing. Studios offered international dance trips to clients. Teachers went on these excursions as travel companions. Many of these trips were to tropical, exotic locations like the Caribbean or Mexico. For women whose husbands were too busy to travel, didn't like to travel, or who were deceased, studio trips offered a safe and exciting opportunity for them. Marie notes that her own mother started dancing and was able to travel to Europe on a studio trip. Marie's father hated travel and would never go overseas, so dancing essentially opened her mother's horizons and opportunities.¹⁶⁶ Studios around the country offered trips to clients. Nationally-known ballroom teacher Virginia Grosse led international ballroom-focused trips around the globe, in the 1960s.¹⁶⁷ It was clients with money, of course, who were able to purchase these kinds of extras.

¹⁶⁶ Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:03-1:04.

¹⁶⁷ Grosse advertised in nearly every issue of *Ballroom Dance Magazine*. See for example the advert in October 1964, 15, where dancers were told "You can see Europe, you can dance in Europe's most famous dance studios and ballrooms."

As former FADS instructor Ethylanne Berse put it, “Dancing just has so much to offer anyone. The list of benefits is long.” She went on to list many of the benefits she saw, including increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and a feeling of accomplishment for the student.¹⁶⁸ Each teacher interviewed pointed out specific benefits that ballroom dance provided to participants, both students and teachers. The social benefits were the reasons most often given, but a few teachers shared very personal stories as to how dancing changed their lives. Sutherland suffered from a debilitating health disorder that disrupted her life plans, including forcing her to drop out of college. Ballroom dance “came at a time in my life when I was on the upswing ...it not only helped me to dance, it helped me socially. It helped me again build my confidence. I was having fun. [Ballroom dance] ... got me through it.”¹⁶⁹ Berse was very close to her father growing up. When he died she felt that there was no reason to go on living. Right at that time, “dancing came along and kept me alive.” She has been in and around the industry for forty years now “because I love what dancing can do for people.”¹⁷⁰ Teachers’ own motivations for dancing motivated them to help others obtain the same benefits from ballroom.

While there are many benefits for all who dance ballroom, an underlying theme in the discussion of Atlanta studios in the 1960s through 1980s is that ballroom dance is an expensive pastime. Those in the ballroom dance industry openly acknowledged this. Knotts notes that Neil Evans, an influential studio owner and AMI national board member, repeatedly reminded teachers that the studios needed wealthy clients who bought big contracts – these clients allowed the studios to remain financially viable. That sales training was a regular and focal part of studio culture indicates that the ballroom dance industry was certainly part of a service economy. But

¹⁶⁸ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:54.

¹⁶⁹ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:28.

¹⁷⁰ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:52.

the expense of ballroom dance also excluded a significant portion of the population, and favored the wealthy elite. In this sense it appears that while ballroom dance was theoretically available to more people in the US as the middle-class expanded, the clients who could go the furthestmost were those who could afford to take more lessons, attend more parties, and spend more time and money at the studio. Ballroom dance thus continued to be an elite pastime in the 1950s through 1980s, just as it had been earlier in the century. It was elites who made Atlanta ballroom studios viable.

While it has proven much harder to document studio culture in Atlanta's black community, the most visible public accounts of ballroom dance point to a similar dynamic. In newspaper accounts of social events where there was dancing, reports clearly indicated that it was the middle-class and elite African Americans who attended. In particular, black college students and alumni appear to have valued dance as an indication of having class, and being cultured. In other words, of respectability.

Dancing Spaces in Atlanta

From at least the early 1930s, there is evidence of elite black Atlantans participating in ballroom dance. A newspaper report of a party at the Sunset Casino (on the corner of Magnolia and Sunset Streets) tells of 500 "cultured and refined" black Atlantans, including W.E.B. DuBois, attending the party hosted by local chapters of national fraternities. At the party, "the lithe Miss Reba Belcher and the suave Mr. Bernard Edwards gave the guests their version of the colorful Tango Waltz."¹⁷¹ The ethnicity of the demonstrators is unknown, however it seems unlikely that a party hosted by fraternities, which were strictly segregated, would have featured white dancers. Whether the *attendees* danced ballroom is not clear, but the fact that a proficient

¹⁷¹ Lucius Jones, "Society-Slants: Atlanta Society at a Glance," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 6, 1934, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

couple performed ballroom as a feature entertainment is undoubtedly an indication of ballroom's status.

Six months later *The Atlanta Daily World* covered a dance held at the Roof Garden Ballroom by the Atlanta chapter of Zeta Phi Beta, a black sorority. Lucius Jones, the social reporter for the ADW, wrote that the band “truly swayed the guests,” and the attendees were “the smarter ranks of Atlanta.”¹⁷² These kinds of references, and the very fact that they were included in the social columns of the ADW, indicates that dancing had associations with class in the black community. It was the cultured, refined, best-educated black Atlantans who participated in ballroom dance – in other words, those who were perceived as elites. The above examples were events hosted by college organizations, the educated elite. That portrayal of ballroom dance as an upper-class activity paralleled the image white studios sold their clients in Atlanta.

Of particular note in the Zeta Phi Beta party report is that the first guest listed is Fred Brooks. While it is possible that there was more than one Fred Brooks in Atlanta, it is quite feasible that the person referred to was the owner of the Fred Brooks ballroom dance studio chain in Atlanta. Fred Brooks was a popular figure who appeared regularly in the columns of *The Atlanta Constitution* as a host at white dance parties in the 1930s and 1940s. His presence suggests not only that that there was ballroom dancing being done at black Atlanta college parties in the period, but also that there may have been some interracial contact in the realm of ballroom dance. That Brooks was listed first might also indicate his position as a white male attending a black social event, and holding a prominent position at the event.

Black fraternities, sororities, and college clubs regularly hosted dance parties in Atlanta. When the Top Hat opened in 1937, it was acclaimed for its modern conveniences,

¹⁷² “Zeta Phi Beta Sorority is Praised for Delightful Dance on the Roof,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 2, 1934, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

including heating and cooling systems, and lighting designed by Georgia Power Company. Throughout its existence, the club advertised itself as “The South’s Smartest Ballroom,” where dancers could “Dance to the soft, sweet jazz rhythms” of the resident band, who provided “the best music in town at the keenest spot in Dixie.”¹⁷³ A newspaper article about opening of the club, located on Auburn Avenue, notes that the Top Hat had already been booked many fraternity and sorority Spring dances.¹⁷⁴ It is likely that ballroom dancing played a significant role in these dances, and thus the Top Hat was a significant location for exposure to the genre.

Clark University, located near the Auburn Avenue district, hosted many dances over the thirty-or-so years under discussion. Each edition of *The Panther*, the Clark University year book, has photos of students and alumni dancing. In the 1950s and 1960s the couples shown are in traditional ballroom hold.¹⁷⁵ While it is difficult to tell if the couples were merely slow-dancing in hold, or ballroom dancing, the acceptability of couples slow-dancing in a formal setting in the 1960s was most likely low. Black college students were expected to be examples to the rest of black America, and were thus expected to be morally flawless. College-educated black Atlantans were considered part of the social elite.¹⁷⁶

In the 1951 edition of *The Panther*, a photo from a dance shows a black couple taking a bow, and the caption reads “Latin Dance Team Takes Bow.” The couple appears to have performed a demonstration at the dance. The label ‘Latin’ implies that they performed a Latin

¹⁷³ “Display Ad 4 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 23, 1937, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁴ “The ‘Top Hat’, Atlanta’s New Ballroom, To Open At An Early Date,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 3, 1937, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁵ See for example Clark University, *The Panther 1951* (Atlanta: Clark University, 1951), 100; *The Panther 1957*, 18; *The Panther 1960*, 171-2; and *The Panther 1962*, 130.

¹⁷⁶ Lawrence Graham points out that wealthy families sent their children to black colleges in the mid-twentieth centuries, thus allowing the families to retain elite status through educational achievement. *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 10. Blacks who were educators, doctors, lawyers, and clergy had college degrees. This is the elite of black Americans in the 1950s. See “The Black Middle Class – Intro to Afro American Studies,” <http://eblackstudies.org/intro/chapter8.htm>. Accessed November 2017.

American ballroom dance. Latin dancing was growing in prominence in the US, and the world, in this time period. It is likely that Clark students were dancing ballroom dances, as were white Atlantans, and other black college students in the nation.

Throughout the fifties and sixties, Atlanta newspaper articles tell of black students dancing ballroom dances across the US, including at Atlanta's historically black colleges. A December 1953 article in the ADW noted that ballroom dance classes were taught at Langston University in Oklahoma, a black university. The Latin dances were taught by a teacher from a local studio, the Ketcher School of Dancing. Humorously, the author describes Latin American ballroom dancing as "that torrid torso-tossing art."¹⁷⁷ Ballroom dance was the theme of a show put on by the Kappa Omega chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority in Atlanta in March of 1954. The show included demonstrations of "Samba, Tango, Rhumba, Minuet, the Waltz," and other numbers, created for the show by Hilda Jenkins of Smith School of Dancing.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Omega Psi Phi's 1957 variety show at Clark College included a ballroom dance number.¹⁷⁹ In March of 1956, Yvonne Jackson, a member of Spelman College's Dancing Club, taught "the social graces of ballroom dancing" to the Teenage Jack and Jill Club.¹⁸⁰ Clark College celebrated Uganda's independence in 1962 with "a ballroom dance."¹⁸¹ Black Atlanta college students in the 1950s had exposure to, and participated in, ballroom dancing. Just as white dancers in Atlanta were part of a national community, so too were black dancers in the Atlanta community. The difference, however, is marked. White patrons of studios were part of studio networks,

¹⁷⁷ "Campus Roundup," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 16, 1953, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁸ "AKAs' Fashionetta Goes Dancing Charms Capacity Audience In Howard Gym," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 7, 1954, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁹ "Big Show By Omegas To Aid Deserving Students," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 7, 1957, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁸⁰ "With the Teen-Agers," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 8, 1956, 5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁸¹ "Uganda Gains Independence," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 10, 1962, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

operated by corporations. The above examples are of black college students, and alumni, who were linked through their participation in events related to educational institutions. Participation by both race groups, however, have links to elite society.

Just like their black counterparts, clients at white Atlanta studios used their dance skills at social events outside the studio setting. Hotels and restaurants in Atlanta continued to provide spaces for middle-to-upper-class white residents to dance ballroom in the 1950s through 1980s, as they had in the first half of the twentieth century. Restaurants and clubs downtown, including on Ponce de Leon Avenue, offered Atlantans dinner and dancing in the 1950s and 1960s. A late 1960s travel guide to Atlanta listed multiple locations to dance, including The Habersham Room at Lenox Square, The Windjammer Lounge at the Marriot Hotel, and Jennings Supper Club with its live, big-name bands.¹⁸² Adverts and social columns in the Atlanta Journal touted popular dance locales, including the Imperial Hotel whose Copa Caprice nightclub always advertised a live band for dancing, and the Georgian Terrace which continued to host large dances. The Standard Club, a Jewish social organization, held regular tea dances to aid Jewish youth in finding marriage partners.¹⁸³

In the 1950s, these locations competed with night clubs that increasingly catered to the new sound that had taken over US culture, rock n' roll. Big band orchestras of the forties attempted to maintain their bookings even as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Jerry Lee Lewis were dominating air time, and the youth audience. Ballroom dancing competed with fad dances, as it had in the nineteen-teens, but also with dancing done increasingly without a partner. Some hotels that had traditionally been ballroom dance locations, followed the trend and welcomed

¹⁸² Doris Lockerman and Patricia Lahatte, *Discover Atlanta* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969).

¹⁸³ Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, "Introduction," in Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds., eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,*" (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 13

rock n' roll acts. Some clubs hired bands that played both styles of music, and thus broadened their clientele. The Claridge, for example, advertised in 1963 that The New Gonzalo Barr Trio played the twist, but also mambo and cha-cha.¹⁸⁴

Dance floors were also spaces where business deals were struck, and where hierarchy within corporations were reinforced and transgressed. Companies hosted holiday parties at hotels and restaurants with dance floors, where employees and their spouses danced with each other, that is, on the same floor, and with each other's partners. A clerk could ask the vice-president's spouse to dance, muddying class lines on the dance floor. As one article portrayed it, a good word from the CEO's wife about an employee's dancing could place a lasting, positive image in the man's head, and lay the foundation for a promotion.¹⁸⁵ The article, "The Bureaucracy of Ballroom Dancing," argues that ballroom dancing has been the means of successfully closing deals, earning promotions, and finding love interests.

In the 1970s and 1980s, numerous hotels, restaurants, and bars offered bands that played ballroom music for patrons to dance to, especially on the busy weekend nights. One article in *The Atlanta Constitution* touted Club 112 on Roswell Road as "a place where ballroom steps are the accepted pattern," and where a six piece band played every Friday night.¹⁸⁶ The Savoy Restaurant and Bar advertised live music Tuesday through Saturday nights, with Sunday nights set aside specifically for ballroom dancers.¹⁸⁷ Adverts for new year's eve parties in Atlanta in the seventies and eighties almost always proclaimed the bands that would be playing

¹⁸⁴ "The Claridge 03/25/63," Atlantatimemachine.com, <http://atlantatimemachine.com/misc/twist1963a.htm>, accessed May 3, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Stephen Matanle, "The Bureaucracy of Ballroom Dancing," *Georgia Review*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 1977), 207-210. The article is an extended explanation of how a night of ballroom dancing at a company event can change the lives of people within the company.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Litsch, "They're Wells-Disposed," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), January 30, 1982. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, D42.

¹⁸⁷ "Display Ad 157 – No Title," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (1946-1984), April 22, 1982. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, HS12.

dance music, not disco.¹⁸⁸ Church groups held ballroom classes in the early 1980s, including Tucker United Methodist Church, and the Atlanta Jewish Community Center.¹⁸⁹ From 1977 through the 1980s Emory University offered ballroom dance classes as part of their non-credit “Evening at Emory” adult education program.¹⁹⁰ DeKalb Community College also offered ballroom as part of their continuing education programming.¹⁹¹ Ballroom dancing was considered “in style” at weddings in Atlanta in the 1980s.¹⁹² Ballroom dance maintained a presence in Atlanta nightlife during the thirty-five year period this study covers, and returned to prominence in the early 1980s after being overshadowed by fad dances and Rock n’ Roll in the previous two decades.

Popular locations for ballroom dancing in early 1980s Atlanta included the Presidential Hotel and the Perimeter Marriot in Buckhead, which was an upscale location with a live band that the Atlanta AMI studio frequented on their studio excursions. The Diplomat restaurant and bar featured the Newtonburke Orchestra that played ballroom dance music for guests.¹⁹³ The Savoy restaurant advertised Sunday night ballroom dancing that went until 2am.¹⁹⁴ Johnny’s

¹⁸⁸ See for example the ad for the New Year party at Perimeter North Inn that had the Dean Chotas Band playing until 2am. “Daily Ad 175 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), December 29, 1983. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 9H.

¹⁸⁹ See for example Sarah Cash, “DeKalb Churches Plan Leisure Classes, Bazaars,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), October 8, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, C21; and an advert for activities at the Atlanta Jewish Community Center, “Display Ad 43 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), January 24, 1981. Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Journal Constitution, D13.

¹⁹⁰ See for example “Display Ad 355 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), September 23, 1984. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 2HB.

¹⁹¹ “Calendar,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), December 31, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, A17.

¹⁹² Connie Green, “The formal wedding remains in style,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), April 5, 1984. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 2HS.

¹⁹³ “Other 19 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, (1946-1984), August 29, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, D30.

¹⁹⁴ “Display Ad 87 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), January 15, 1983. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 31.

Hideaway, “for your listening, dining and dancing pleasure,”¹⁹⁵ was a popular nightclub with ballroom studio teachers and students. As the “Spotlight” column of the AJC pointed out about the club in 1979, “While disco steps may dominate most dance floors in Atlanta, the jitterbug is still king at the Hideaway. And when can you remember dancing to a real, honest-to-God waltz?”¹⁹⁶ Ruperts, The foyer of the Galleria, near Cumberland Mall, hosted ballroom dancing every Friday night in the 1980s.¹⁹⁷ The Limelight was a popular disco in Atlanta, and studios took groups to Hustle and disco at this club where women danced in cages hung from the roof.¹⁹⁸ A column in *The Atlanta Constitution*, reporting on happenings around the city, noted in October of 1983: “Fox trot on the speakers: Members of the ballroom dancing class at a local Fred Astaire dance studio took over the floor at Limelight for a graduation party recently.”¹⁹⁹ This sort of publicity was positive for studios in that not only was it free advertising, but their existing clients felt part of a prestigious organization. That this many locations in Atlanta offered ballroom dance outside of the studio setting indicates the popularity of the genre throughout Atlanta in this period. Studios took clients to all of these locations at various points in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

However, ballroom dance continued to be marked as an elite pastime in Atlanta in the 1970s and 1980s. Newspaper coverage of ballroom dance was often linked to social events held by the monied in the city. *The Atlanta Constitution*’s society columnist, Yolande Gwin, often

¹⁹⁵ “Other 21 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), August 8, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, D36. This ad ran for years in the section of the paper that listed Big Band locations for entertainment.

¹⁹⁶ Joseph Litsch, “Spotlight,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (1946-1984), June 2, 1979. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Journal Constitution, 48T.

¹⁹⁷ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:32.

¹⁹⁸ Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:29.

¹⁹⁹ Ron Hudspeth, “Car sticker raises question,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), October 31, 1983. ProQuest Historical Newspapers” The Atlanta Constitution, 2B.

reported on ballroom dancing at debutante balls held at country clubs.²⁰⁰ Elite social clubs also hosted balls to raise funds for charitable causes. In 1982, for example, the Piedmont Driving Club held its annual Piedmont Ball to raise funds for local hospitals. *The Constitution* described the event as “an Atlanta institution attracting the city’s elite...for a formal night of dancing and fundraising.”²⁰¹ Pictures in an AJC article on the planning of the annual Gourmet Gala, a dinner-dance party, show an all-white committee enjoying a laugh as they sip wine in business suits and silk blouses.²⁰² Adding a historic dimension to the wealth and whiteness of dancing in Atlanta, the annual Confederate Ball was sponsored by the James M. Longstreet Camp No. 1289 of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. For the dinner and dancing at the Sheraton-Biltmore Hotel, it was “urged that those attending wear antebellum costumes.”²⁰³ Obviously the link between dancing and the *Gone With the Wind* image of Atlanta, was still prevalent in Atlanta during the second half of the twentieth century.

The numerous spaces where Atlantans could conspicuously demonstrate their dancing skills, and simultaneously their elite class status, evidences that ballroom dancing continued to resonate as an elite pastime in Atlanta, and in other parts of the nation. *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, published from 1960 to 1968, was filled with reports of balls from across the United States. The “Correspondents’ Reports” section of each issue included write-ups about large gala balls. The March 1966 issue offered a calendar of balls in Texas, including the Dallas Bar

²⁰⁰ See for example Yolande Gwin, “Debutante balls are planned,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), November 20, 1983. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 11ZA.

²⁰¹ Roger Witherspoon, “Fund-Raising Ball Scheduled for Hospital,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (1946-1984), March 15, 1982. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 15A. The article notes the first ball by a black fundraising group in Atlanta was to be held in the next few months. The Piedmont Club, notably, welcomed its first black member in 1994.

²⁰² Midge Yearley, “Social Studies,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), February 11, 1979. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 9F.

²⁰³ “German Ambassador to Visit Atlanta,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), October 16, 1977. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 12G.

Association inaugural ball, the Jewel Charity Ball held at the Ridglea Country Club, and the Sherman Service League Charity Ball.²⁰⁴ These events were clearly events for the wealthy, hosted in elite settings. The publishers of *Ballroom Dance Magazine* hosted an annual ball, called America's Ball of the Year, at an exclusive New York hotel. The May issue of each year is littered with photos from the event, with ballgown-, diamond-, and tuxedo-clad partygoers dancing ballroom dances in a lush atmosphere.²⁰⁵ The message for the national readership was clear: ballroom dancing was part of an exclusive culture. While not everyone who danced in Atlanta studios was wealthy, the studios revolved around wealthy clients in order to remain viable. In particular, wealthy women.

Clientele

Ballroom dance studios since the 1950s have been dominated by older clients. In a 1954 *Atlanta Constitution* article, social reporter Yolande Gwin reported that Atlanta ballroom studios were filled by “the older set,” defined by Gwin as “65 to 80.”²⁰⁶ In a 1974 article, a FADS trainee teacher noted that “[w]e have quite a few people around 28 or 30... but that's about as young as they get. Most of our people are over 50.”²⁰⁷ In the 1970s, “ninety-five percent [of female clients] were over sixty-five years of age.”²⁰⁸ This dominance of older clients was a shift from the first half of the twentieth century when young people went to dance instructors to learn to dance. One possible explanation for this may be that by the 1950s, rock n' roll, with its solo dancing, had become popular with younger Americans. No partner was needed to dance to

²⁰⁴ Goodloe Lewis, “Ballroom Notes from Texas,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, March 1966, 8-9.

²⁰⁵ See for example “An Enchanted Evening: Notes on the 1964 ‘Ball of the Year,’” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, May 1964, 4-9.

²⁰⁶ Yolande Gwin, “Oldsters Learning Newest Dance Steps,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 2, 1954, 14E. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.

²⁰⁷ Tish Young, “Ballroom Is Back? Not Here,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 14, 1974, 3B. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution (1868-1984).

²⁰⁸ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:17. See also Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:11.

this genre of music, nor any prescribed steps. Ballroom dance was, however, still the accepted norm for white-collar dinner parties and engagements. Further, it held a nostalgic place for those coming of age in the 1910s through 1940s. It was this generation that was increasingly prominent in management and ownership of commerce from the 1950s onward.

Every teacher interviewed for this project noted that female clientele far exceeded male clientele in the fifties through eighties, hence the preponderance of male teachers in Atlanta studios. The women who kept studios in the Big Peach in business in the 1970s and early 1980s were “women with money. They were true Atlanta Money.”²⁰⁹ Some were widows who had large amounts of expendable income. Others were wives of highly successful Atlanta businessmen who were lonely because their husbands’ lives were taken up with work. Whatever their specific circumstance, these were women that were “older, more established members of the community,” who had “above average income.”²¹⁰ In the ballroom studio these women found men who paid them inordinate amounts of attention. Teachers taught them on the dance floor, but took an active interest in their personal lives. Often ballroom teachers paid more attention to, and spent more time with, these women than their own families. Hence these clients forged close bonds with their male teachers, and often considered them their own children, a direct, clear articulation of the idea of familiness.²¹¹

The preponderance of female clientele in ballroom dance studios was a national trend. Teachers who taught in studios outside of Atlanta talked of this trend in Kentucky, Ohio, and New York, among other US locations.²¹² Mario Regis, the manager of Arthur Murray Dance

²⁰⁹ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:09.

²¹⁰ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:17-0:18.

²¹¹ Tommy Baity, Interview with author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:12.

²¹² See for example Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia; Day, Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia; and Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia.

School on Fifth Avenue in New York City noted in a 1981 *New York Times* article that in the fifties through seventies “the majority of people coming in for lessons were in their 50’s and 60’s and they were mostly women.”²¹³ A teacher in the same article noted that wealthy clients were able to become proficient because they had the money to pay for the private services of teachers.

In Atlanta studios, female teachers generally had fewer clients than male teachers. Men who came to dance in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were slightly younger than the average female client; these men were generally in their forties or fifties.²¹⁴ Some came with their wives or partners to learn to dance, others by themselves. Those who came by themselves were what Berse describes as “an average person.” Most female teachers emphasized that their clients were not as wealthy as the older widows their male counterparts taught, indicating that they were very aware that male teachers had more clients, and that those clients spent far more money on their dancing than did male clients. By “average,” Johnson and other female teachers mean middle-to-upper-class, mostly white-collar workers. This fits the pattern of the US increasingly turning from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy in the second half of the twentieth century. Male clients included government workers, insurance agents, oil company executives, Coca Cola executives, and airline pilots. When female teachers talk about having clients of varied income levels and occupations, very few clients came from a blue-collar background. Rather, the term working professionals was used. Some female teachers had wealthy clients, but even these clients took limited lessons, in contrast to the female clientele who daily spent hours in the studio.

²¹³ Ron Alexander, “Hustling Off to Dance Classes,” *The New York Times*, December 4, 1981. Accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/04/style/hustling-off-to-dance-classes.html>.

²¹⁴ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:11; Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015, 0:13; Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:24.

In the early-to-mid-1980s clientele began to change slightly. While wealthy women remained prominent, the socio-economic level of clients became more varied. Spencer noted that the socio-economic level of his clients was “across the board,” including blue-collar workers. His clients included restaurant servers as well as rich widows.²¹⁵ The demographic also shifted slightly younger as increasing numbers of people, including many men, desired to learn disco. Arthur Murray Studios claimed, in a news release sent to franchisees as the model for an advertising campaign in the early 1980s, that the age of their students “dropped substantially in a decade, from 44 to 31.”²¹⁶ Nearly every teacher interviewed talked about the impact of *Saturday Night Fever* on the ballroom dance industry. AMI studios saw a significant up-tick in younger students in the late seventies and early eighties, which they attribute to the film.²¹⁷ Numerous AMI ads from the 1980s feature disco dancing, leisure-suit wearing, happy dancers who “learned it all” at Arthur Murray. AMI teachers appeared on television. Eddie Ares, a former FADS teacher and current owner of Academy Ballroom studio in Buckhead, believes that older people were attracted to ballroom in the 1970s because they had dance icons from the Golden Era of Hollywood film that they could identify with, notably Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. He himself was drawn to ballroom dance through disco. The 1987 film *Dirty Dancing* also led to an increase in clientele at studios nationwide. The three Arthur Murray studios in Atlanta saw an increase in students as a direct result of the film.²¹⁸ Pop culture trends and tastes impacted ballroom studios and trends.

²¹⁵ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:21.

²¹⁶ “Celebrity Studded Sixty Years Recalled By Arthur Murray Dance Studios,” AMIA, undated, 3. (While undated, it is most likely from 1985 per the stationery seal.) Another AMI news release, on the same 60th Year stationery declares that the average age of competitors at the national championships was 34. See “Arthur Murray Dance Studios President Predicts the Return of Touch Dancing,” AMIA, undated, 3.

²¹⁷ John Kimmins, interview with the author. 5 August 2015. Coral Gables, Florida.

²¹⁸ Gerry Yandel, “Low-budget ‘Dirty Dancing’ stirs up merengue mania,” *The Atlanta Journal*, January 6, 1988, 1D.

Conclusion

Ballroom dance studios in Atlanta, and across the US, were spaces where wealthy clients could reinforce their elite status by spending money on dancing. Owners sought out clients from any socio-economic class, but desired elites to keep the studio profitable. The more money a client spent, the more lessons, classes, and attention they garnered from the studio, the teachers, and the owners. Clients in chain studios bought expensive contracts to enable them to learn to dance proficiently, and thereby participate in an activity that was associated with economic elites, and locales that catered to the wealthy.

Studios attempted to link clients to the studio by having them spend time and money in the studio. The following chapter examines the ways in which studios strengthened client/studio relationships by creating familiness.

CHAPTER 3: KEEPING THE FAMILY CONNECTED: FAMILYNESS IN STUDIOS

Owners and teachers in ballroom dance studios in Atlanta worked to create an environment where clients felt comfortable and needed. In doing so, owners hoped to make the studio a home for clients, with the staff and clients bound together as a family. The more time clients spent with teachers, the greater the familiness, and of course client financial commitments were expected to follow. As teachers and clients had fun together, “the studio environment became like a family.”²¹⁹ Familiness relied heavily on teachers following policies that enabled relationships to be built between paying clients and the studio. This chapter focuses on the ways studios enticed people to enter the studio as students, and the multiple activities studios offered in building relationships – economic and personal – with clients. It was wealthy clients who could most easily participate in these activities, and it was these elites who most

²¹⁹ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:14.

often established strong bonds with studios, but they were by no means the only group who became emotionally attached to studios.

It is important to recognize that studios created familiness within a business setting, complicating and enriching relationships within the ballroom dance industry. Creating a familial feeling within the studios was a purposeful business practice, created to increase clients' connection to the studio.²²⁰ The community at the studio became family, even though these were business relationships – clients paid to be part of the family. Despite the business nature of these interactions, clients and teachers created sincere, lasting bonds.

Advertizing

Teachers and managers in Atlanta studios worked together to craft studio activities that would increase each client's connection to the studio. The more activities a client participated in, the more loyalty and kinship they would feel to the studio as an entity, and to the staff and fellow students as groups within that entity. Every activity was designed to add a strand to the rope that bound a student to the studio. Numerous teachers referred to the studio as their family in interviews, and suggested that clients saw the studio as part of their own family too. While interpersonal relationships between teachers and students were genuine, they also took place in the context of a business. Clients did not simply receive, but paid money for the attention of their teachers. This does not negate the real relationship they shared but it is a reality that, from their foundation, ballroom dance studios were part of a service industry in the business of making money in a free-market economy.

²²⁰ While not using the term familiness, Caroline Eike has argued that high school students in Maryland in the 1950s and 1960s “were *at home* at Miller High, and *made it their home*.” The social institution that dominated their lives became the space that was home for them. See “Student Relationships Across Social Markers of Difference in a Baltimore County, Maryland, Comprehensive High School, 1950-1969,” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (August 2010), 367-8.

Studios had to get clients onto the dancefloor in order to make any money. From the start of ballroom studios in the 1920s, through the 1980s, the telephone directory was one of the two preferred methods of advertising for Atlanta studios. In the 1950s and 1960s the “Dance Schools” and “Dance Teachers” sections of the Atlanta City Directory was filled with ballroom dance studios and teachers. In the 1970s and 1980s the most common form of advertising was listing one’s business in the Yellow Pages.²²¹ The reason DeNeve chose to name her studio Atlanta Dance was because it would put her first alphabetically in the Atlanta Yellow Pages.²²² From the 1960s onward, some studios paid not only for a listing in the Yellow Pages, but also for adverts, complete with pictures. Echoing the motivations teachers cited for students learning to dance, ads in the phone book claimed that clients could “go out more” and “get more fun out of life” by learning to dance. A 1970 Murray ad promised increased popularity to those that danced at their studio.²²³ Telephone directory ads in the late 1970s saw AMI calling itself “Arthur Murray Disco Dance Studio,” a reference to the popularity of hustle, and a means of attracting the disco crowd to the studio.²²⁴ Ballroom dance studios adapted their advertising to meet the changing demographic and style within popular dance.

The other most popular medium for advertising was newspapers. Studios throughout the US advertised in local newspapers. The Arthur Murray Corporation put out a calendar for their franchisees each year that gave advice on how to advertise. This Executive Planner was sent to franchisees from the 1970s through 2000. An analysis of executive planners in the 1970s and 1980s reveals much about AMI policy and practice regarding advertising in those decades. One

²²¹ Eddie Ares, Interview with the author. December 1, 2012. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:31; Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:22; Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:13; Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:10.

²²² Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:41.

²²³ Southern Bell Telegraph and Telephone Company, *Atlanta Yellow Pages*, 1970.

²²⁴ Southern Bell Telegraph and Telephone Company, *Atlanta Yellow Pages*, 1979.

of the main purposes, as stated in the corporate letter that accompanied the planners, was to help franchisees plan their advertising for the year.²²⁵ The page for each month had a tip for the franchisee to focus on, as well as the actual calendar portion where AMI events were noted. The January tip dealt with advertising in general:

The most important element in advertising is consistency in the newspaper media on a yearly basis. As gross permits, pyramid to radio and/or television. Do not use radio or television in place of newspaper. T.V. in smaller markets is affordable as the second media ... Review advertising results (gross obtained and inquiries) every month. Adjust your advertising budget to the next level based on the results obtained.²²⁶

The corporation was looking to the future, recognizing that television and radio played an increasingly important role, but focusing on what was working – newspapers. The calendar page also gave guidelines for what percentage of advertising budget to spend at various times of the year. October and November were the biggest months of spending, hopefully to encourage readers to buy lessons as Christmas presents for themselves or others.

The succeeding months on the calendar gave sample adverts for owners to use, and told studio owners how to effectively rotate adverts, the best days of the week to run the ads, and emphasized that studios need to focus on their image. The sample ads told the reader that Arthur Murray studios are “a non-stop party” that would help you escape “boredom and daily tension.” The June sample ad from the calendar (*Figure 2*, Appendix A) had the word “FUN” in bold, large letters in the center of the advert. The appeal to people having a good time at the studio was

²²⁵ Letter sent with the 1985 Executive Planner, AMIA, 1985.

²²⁶ “January,” 1977 Arthur Murray Executive Planner Calendar. Arthur Murray Corporation Archive.

a constant throughout the decades of Murray advertising, even if the ads took advantage of fads and fashion to do so. The influence of the disco era, in particular, was evident in the clothing and iconography adopted for the ads. The March 1978 calendar had an advert specifically targeted at those wanting to learn the hustle (*Figure 3*, Appendix A), indicating the impact disco was having on the industry. Another common appeal ad, as AMI called them, extolled the value of dance as a way to keep fit. June's advert was targeted at the up-and-coming executive or upper-middle class American: "You've earned your leisure! Now enjoy it with dancing, fitness, and fun!"²²⁷ Mirroring the health appeal that ballroom dance held for clients, one advert screamed "Exercise doesn't have to be hard work, DANCE!" This was followed by a paragraph explaining how dancing is better than doing calisthenics at the gym.²²⁸ Another ad suggested that those who were shy, depressed, or lonely could change their lifestyle by learning to dance.²²⁹ These motivations for participation in ballroom dance mirrored those explicated by former FADS and AMI teachers in Atlanta.

Dance was rarely the focus of any of the newspaper adverts used in the decades under discussion. It was the *social* benefits that ballroom dance would bring the client – whether meeting new people, overcoming an inferiority complex, or improving your marriage – that were used to sell the consumer on the product. The idea that dancing had greater intrinsic value than being able to do figures on the dance floor was central to how studios functioned in this period.

Getting people into the studio to experience being part of a community was vital to getting clients, and retaining them. It was only through clients' continued participation in, and the attendant money spent on, dancing that studios survived. The effectiveness of AMI

²²⁷ "June," 1978 Arthur Murray Executive Planner Calendar. AMIA.

²²⁸ "February," 1979 Arthur Murray Executive Planner Calendar. AMIA.

²²⁹ 1983 Arthur Murray Executive Planner Calendar. AMIA, February.

advertising in magazines was evident in a 1984 memo sent to franchise owners by the president of the corporation, George B. Theiss. In the memo, Theiss gave a report on the success of an advert run in *50 Over* magazine which, he reported, led to over 800 people contacting an AMI studio somewhere in the US.²³⁰

Although there was not a similar corporate structure or a resulting paper trail dominating black studios, ads from the same era suggest a very similar business model. Black studios in Atlanta also used newspaper advertising. There were significant similarities in how black and white studios attempted to entice Atlantans to dance. A 1953 ad for Dixie Dance Studios proclaimed “it’s fun to dance.” Potential clients were encouraged to “take dance lessons today you’ll be popular tonight.”²³¹ Similarly, the Floyd Bolton studio encouraged Atlantans: “don’t be socially shy – visit our dance studios for the quickest way to greater popularity. ‘Walk In – Dance Out.’”²³² (*Figure 4, Appendix A*) These are the exact selling points – popularity and pleasure – that white studios were using at the same time. The announcement also highlighted value for money, another theme seen in AJC ads, by offering a “2 for 1” rate: “Divide the cost – save half by enrolling this week!” Many black Atlantans were beneficiaries of postwar economic growth, although given the restrictions of segregation, the impact was much more limited. However, the fact that this appeared in the 1950s, a time of growing prosperity and high employment in the US, suggests that at least some black Americans, such as professionals and business owners, experiencing a similar rise in discretionary income as well. The area around the studio, Sweet Auburn, was home to prominent and prosperous African Americans and this ad was most likely aimed at that. Classes were offered for both teens and adults, a model commonly

²³⁰ George B. Theiss, June 8, 1984, AMIA.

²³¹ “Display Ad 21 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 16, 1953, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³² “Display Ad 5 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 20, 1955, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

used by white studios. The Dixie Dance studio owners noted twice in the advert that the studio was air-conditioned. In a year when the average temperature in August and September was above ninety degrees, access to air conditioning was enticing, luxurious, and a proven sell.²³³ All of these elements collectively suggest that black ballroom dance studios attempted to paint ballroom dance as an elite, exclusive pastime, just as their white counterparts did.

Newspaper advertising is one of the few ways that black ballroom dance studios have been preserved in history. The only reference to Dixie Dance Studio is found in the *Atlanta Daily World* in August of 1953. It is impossible to tell from the newspaper evidence if the studio ran for long, although its absence in any further newspaper coverage seems to imply that it did not. Similarly, there is a single advertisement in the ADW for Marvo School of Dancing. In April of 1954, readers were invited to attend the open house for Marvo, “To Celebrate The Grand Opening Of The New And Spacious MARVO School of Dancing.”²³⁴ The announcement stated that this studio offered “Ballroom dancing for adults.” The open house promised exhibitions of ballroom. Being in the black business district, on Auburn Avenue, implied of course that there would be black dancers giving these performances. Where had these teachers and performers obtained their experience? How did they raise the capital to open schools independent of the large chains? Frustratingly, this is unknown. However, ads do suggest a very similar business model existed in both communities. Just as with Dixie Dance Studio, and Floyd Bolton, Marvo used an enticement that white chain studios used in their advertising, the “free dance analysis.”

Advertising for white chain studios in *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution* was consistent throughout the fifties through early eighties. Articles and reports on

²³³ “Historical Weather For 1953 in Atlanta, Georgia, USA,” WeatherSpark.com, <https://weatherspark.com/history/29669/1953/Atlanta-Georgia-United-States>, accessed March 31, 2017.

²³⁴ “Display Ad 22 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 25, 1954, 8. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

ballroom dancing dipped in the late sixties and early 1970s, indicating that public interest in the genre had waned. When the Disco craze in the late seventies reignited interest, newspaper coverage increased accordingly.

While advertisements and articles in the *Atlanta Daily World* relating to ballroom dancing decreased in the 1960s, they declined markedly in the 1970s. The only references to ballroom dancing were course offerings for ballroom dance classes offered at the YWCA, Decatur Recreation Department, and DeKalb College.²³⁵ There are no adverts for dance studios. Ballroom dance studios disappear from the newspaper. Photos in Clark University's yearbook show couples dancing separately, demonstrative of the rise of disco dancing in which no partner was necessary.²³⁶ This may be part of the answer to the demise of the genre among black Atlantans. Rock 'n Roll, as well as disco, have been cited as causing a decline in the popularity of ballroom.

In 1984 there were two references to ballroom dance in the ADW. An article in January discussed an up-coming ballroom dance weekend in Clear Point, Alabama: "Ballroom dancing has always been associated with elegance and grace. In these days of high-tech, sometimes the art of touch dancing gets lost in the shuffle, but Marriott's Grand Hotel has designed a special weekend to cater to couples who enjoy swaying to the music of big bands."²³⁷ That this article appeared in the ADW implies that the editors believed there was some interest among their readership. The other mention of ballroom dance was in the announcement of Clark

²³⁵ "YWCA Spring Program To Continue To April," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 22, 1973, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Summer Registration Set For Atlanta YWCAs," *Atlanta Daily World*, June 1, 1975, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "New Courses Offered At DeKalb College," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 24, 1976, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Decatur Summer Classes," *Atlanta Daily World*, June 6, 1978, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³⁶ See for example Clark University, *The Panther 1978*, 158-161.

²³⁷ "Weekend of Elegance at Marriott," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 22, 1984, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

University's Annual May Weekend, which included the Friday "night of ballroom dancing."²³⁸

While ballroom dance had lost its popularity, it seems that journalists and event planners believed that ballrooms still retained an image of elegance and grace in the minds of black readers of the *Atlanta Daily World*.

Some Atlanta chain studio teachers recall their studios having phone rooms where multiple telephone lines were installed to make random telephone calls to people to offer them a free lesson, with a goal of enticing those who took the lesson buying further lessons, and ultimately the purchase of a program.²³⁹ Atlanta-based teacher Cindy Johnson recalls that when Jackie Walls initially installed a telephone room in her downtown Atlanta studio in the 1970s, she used the teachers to make the sales calls. This was disastrous, and within a few weeks Walls hired a professional to run the room with professional phone-salespeople manning the lines. Johnson believes the phone room was relatively successful in bringing people into the studio.²⁴⁰

Location also had an impact on attracting clientele. Lyon recalls that having her studio in the same strip mall as a day care facility was great for business because parents saw the studio, and people could use the day care to watch their kids while they danced, if they desired. Her second location, on Buford Highway, was easily visible from that thoroughfare and the studio had a significant number of people come into the studio having seen the sign.²⁴¹ The Stone Mountain FADS studio was in the same complex as a grocery store. Baity's students wore their FADS T-shirts and "hung out" in the store, telling people about the studio.²⁴² The goal was to increase clientele, and thus make the studio more financially viable.

²³⁸ Ozeil Fryer Woolcock, "Social Swirl," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 27, 1984, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³⁹ See Wayne Abbey, Interview with the author. December 1, 2012. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:11; Johnson.

²⁴⁰ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:18-0:19.

²⁴¹ Kathryn Lyon, Telephone interview with the author. February 16, 2015. 0:36-0:37.

²⁴² David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:17.

Building Familyness

The best means for obtaining clients was via word-of-mouth. Knowing this, chain studios devised guest parties. Guest parties were generally held on Tuesday nights in both the FADS and AMI chains. In order to attend the guest party, clients had to bring a friend or acquaintance. The guest party was “the prime source of getting people into the studio,” and was designed as a “champagne affair,”²⁴³ with bubbly and hors d’oeuvres served to all present. FADS parties had what DeNeve described as an open bar, which she credited with, perhaps inadvertently, encouraging teachers to become alcoholics. All staff were required to be present, and dressed impeccably. During the 1970s and early 1980s, Marie noted that male teachers were required to wear catsuits, not just for the party, but for the whole day preceding the party! She recalled with laughter the looks and comments these men received when they went out to Shoney’s buffet for lunch on Tuesdays, wearing those catsuits.²⁴⁴

At AMI guest parties, the corporation developed a twenty-minute lesson in which guests were introduced to six dances. A teacher taught the participants how to do rock steps, forward steps, back steps, side steps, and triple steps. He or she then showed how the six dances taught in the Bronze programs were made up of those exact elements, danced in various sequences. All of the teachers had learned a dialogue designed to make the sales pitch that followed a fun, low-stress event. The teacher who had taught the lesson called everyone present into a circle where he (it was rarely a female teacher in the 1970s and 1980s) invited new guests to buy a ten-dollar program. Every time the lead teacher said “only ten dollars,” all of the

²⁴³ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, 0:05. Some FADS teachers called these events champagne parties. In the June 1967 issue of *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, a team of ballroom studio owners, Byrnes and Swanson, were credited with starting “something new in studio social life, the ‘Champagne Party.’” (7). This practice was clearly a national one.

²⁴⁴ Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:04.

teachers in the circle responded by saying in unison, “only ten dollars!” Students thought it was very funny, and the program was “highly successful in getting people into the studio.”²⁴⁵

Following the sales pitch, teachers made sure to dance with every guest that had come to the party. Thus clients who brought guests to the parties were able to spend time dancing with the staff for free, rather than having to pay for a regular studio party or for a lesson.

The goal of the party was to have guests sign up for an introductory special. The cost varied from the ten dollar special mentioned earlier, to small programs costing approximately twenty-five to thirty dollars in the 1970s and early 1980s. There were generally ten to fifteen new guests at the weekly parties, half of whom signed up for Introductory programs, and approximately half of those who bought Introductory programs bought larger programs after that.²⁴⁶ Guest parties were explicitly designed as a marketing tool to increase business in the industry. Baity noted that because much of the studio clientele was wealthy, there were often wealthy women at the guest parties. He recalls that as a new teacher in the mid-seventies, he was told by a veteran to look for the women with the biggest diamonds at the guest party and try to sell contracts to them.²⁴⁷ Thus teachers were explicitly aware of the business nature of the parties, and the class structure that made it profitable.

Studios generally held two other parties a week in this period. The first was a Practice Party. In order to have students both come to the studio on at least a second night a week, and as a means of helping them improve their dancing, the studio set one night a week aside as a time for teachers to dance with students who came to practice. As Joe LoCurto, co-owner of Academy

²⁴⁵ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:32-1:33.

²⁴⁶ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:06; Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:18; Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:31.

²⁴⁷ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. November 7, 2012. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:24.

Ballroom in Buckhead, explained it, parties were a means for studios to “show proof of progress to the students.”²⁴⁸ If students could effectively dance with other students, and with teachers, they were progressing in their dancing. Studios across the country hosted practice parties.²⁴⁹ All teachers were required to be at practice parties, and male instructors were to dance with each lady. A number of male teachers talked about how clients would keep track of how many times a teacher danced with each client, and would complain if they were not danced with as much as any other client.²⁵⁰ Female clients could be possessive of a teacher they felt they had a right to because they took lessons with him. This entitlement seems to have come from an expectation that their money was more important than the money paid by other clients.

The other weekly party was referred to simply as a studio party. These were designed to get the students into the studio on another night of the week, usually Friday or Saturday. A teacher played music for the two hours, on an eight-track, record player, or tape machine. Clients paid as they entered the party. Sometimes there was a group class before the party, an extra enticement to attend. Some parties had floor shows performed by teachers or advanced students. The opportunity to dance with the teachers was another attraction. The goal of the studio management was to have the clients be able to dance continuously throughout the party. This meant that all teachers had to be on hand, and male teachers from nearby branches of the chain were brought in to work the parties so that the female clients – of whom there were many more than males – could dance as much as those who came to the party as couples. Roy Porter recalls that it was not acceptable to the management for a female client to sit out two dances in a row.

²⁴⁸ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:36.

²⁴⁹ In 1968, for example, studio in Philadelphia advertised its Friday night Practice Parties, as a means of attracting clients. *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, March 1968.

²⁵⁰ See for example Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 0:25 and Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. November 7, 2012. Buckhead, Georgia.

This meant that teachers had to be constantly aware of who was being danced with, and who was not. Porter lamented that this does not happen at studio parties in the 2010s: “The attention to service was much better [in the 1970s and 1980s].”²⁵¹ Some FADS studio parties were so large that the staff used dance cards to keep track of which clients they danced with. The teachers conferred together to ensure that they had different clients on their cards, and after the ten dances listed on the card were over, the teachers traded cards so that they could dance with different clients.²⁵² The whole point was to ensure that clients felt connected to the studio. The more attention clients received, the more linked they felt. Through parties, familiness grew.

It is important to note that the above three parties were closed to anyone except clients of the studio hosting the party. Only clients taking lessons or classes at the FADS Cheshire Bridge studio, for example, could attend a party at that franchise. Not even students from a different FADS location could go to a party there. This closed studio system dominated the 1960s through 1980s. Studio management and staff understood they were in an industry that offered services for money. To remain viable, they all had to turn a profit. Each studio had to individually meet goals to prosper. Even when different locations of FADS helped each other out during Festivals, and in staffing parties, the focus of the management was on ensuring their own location was efficient and successful.

In addition to parties, studios created additional activities to increase familiness. At least once a month some studios would take their students to a tea dance. Originating in Victorian England, Tea Dances were afternoon dances held in public locations, often outdoors. In 1970s and early 1980s Atlanta, the most popular location for tea dances was Colony Square, a downtown mixed-use area that included a shopping mall. In the center of the mall was an open

²⁵¹ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:08.

²⁵² Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:45.

area that was cordoned off once or twice a month for dancing. Chairs and tables surrounded the dance floor and patrons could order drinks and light refreshments. A big draw of the Tea Dance was the live band that played dance music. A 1981 ad in *The Atlanta Constitution* for Colony Square included “Tea Dancing on the Mall” at 5pm as one of the activities on its calendar.²⁵³ The five FADS studios in Atlanta in the early 1980s would often bring their clients to the tea dance on the same day to dance with each other, and create a sense of camaraderie between the franchises.²⁵⁴ Occasionally the studios took their students out for a night on the town. Teachers and students went out for dinner at a local restaurant, and then would go dancing at a dance club. The Limelight and Johnny’s Hideaway were favorites of the FADS crowd.

Studios recognized that if they were to effectively encourage their wealthy clients to spend more, they needed to create activities that were exclusive, and gave those elite clients a reason to participate. Studio clubs had been in existence since at least the 1950s. In 1956 FADS invited potential clients to join the Party of the Week. For two dollars a week, members could come to a weekly party, and also receive free dance lessons.²⁵⁵ (*Figure 5*, Appendix A) The previous year, 1955, the Floyd Bolton studio advertised the Floyd Bolton Club which allowed members access to parties, classes, and “special privileges and special discounts.”²⁵⁶ (*Figure 6*, Appendix A) Both black and white studios used exclusive clubs as a way of enticing potential clients to spend money at the studio.

²⁵³ “Display Ad 301 – No title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), June 28, 1981. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 2EE.

²⁵⁴ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:56 and Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 1:05-1:06.

²⁵⁵ “Display Ad 109 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), October 30, 1956. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 29.

²⁵⁶ “Display Ad 8 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003), March 13, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Atlanta Daily World, 3.

Studio clubs rose to prominence, and became more exclusive, in the 1970s and 1980s. Where in the 1950s anyone had been invited to join studio clubs, clubs became more selective in the decades that followed. Each organization, and sometimes individual studio, had different names for these clubs – the Inner Circle Club, the Candlelight Club, the Hobby Club, and the Executive Club, to name just a few. Clients paid to belong to the clubs, and the clubs were by invitation only, the invitation being offered once a student had spent a certain amount of money on lessons. The Hobby Club was an invention of FADS’s Lee Miller. Only big spenders were invited to join, and the fee for joining was \$10,000.²⁵⁷ This club organized various excursions that were specifically for the members. The Cheshire Bridge Studio had the Around The Town Club “where you’d get dressed up and go out to one of the dancing joints around town. Or if there was a great show at the fox, we’d go there.”²⁵⁸ Teachers enjoyed the excursions, even if the pay was not spectacular. They got to dance, have dinner and drinks, and go to the shows, but they were also personally responsible for the clients having a wonderful experience. As Johnson expressed it, “you were expected to be charming.”²⁵⁹ Teachers were to perform emotional labor. If clients enjoyed the outing they were more likely to join the club the next year, meaning more money for the studio, and the teachers.

Another significant, and costly, activity clients bought from the studio was travel excursions. Teachers did the selling to the clients. The cost to the student was significant because it covered the expenses of both the client and the teacher. Porter went on trips with clients to Chicago, New York to watch Broadway plays, and the Caribbean.²⁶⁰ Cruises were the favorite trip for many of the teachers interviewed, with some studios offering ten to twelve cruises per

²⁵⁷ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:22.

²⁵⁸ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:27.

²⁵⁹ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:29.

²⁶⁰ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:19.

year.²⁶¹ Teachers essentially received a free trip, but it was by no means a vacation for them. Teachers met their clients at their room to take them to breakfast. They then accompanied clients to whatever activities were planned for the day. Dinner was always a dressy affair, and was always followed with dancing.²⁶² A teacher was thus expected to spend almost every waking moment with the client, usually 9am to 10pm. This certainly required emotional labor on the part of teachers, to ensure their personal attitude was a positive one, in order to provide a positive experience for the client.

This attention again bonded the client to the teachers and the studio. As Spencer noted about studio excursions: “So you created an atmosphere of – it *was* caring, because you spent so much time with these students, that most of the students that we had, especially at Tommy [Baity]’s studio, were closer to the people at the studio than to their own families because they got treated better by us than they did by their own family. Which makes them want to stay in the building, and come see us, and be a part of anything and everything that we do.”²⁶³ This was the point of all studio activities, whether in the physical building, or one of the external events. This was familiness. The studio wanted to provide an environment where clients felt part of a community, and wanted to spend time there. Time at the studio cost the client money, and thus the business benefitted from creating any activity that drew clients to the studio.

Dancing was central to the studio as it was what attracted people in the first place. As students worked on their dancing the studio created ways to help clients track progress. These programs were also useful in helping teachers map out future goals for students, which ultimately meant more income for the studio. One of these programs was medals exams. The

²⁶¹ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:34.

²⁶² Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:27.

²⁶³ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:36.

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance (ISTD) was one of the first organizations to introduce medals tests in the ballroom genre. Exams had been used for a long time in ballet and other dance fields. In a medals exam, the student would dance with their teacher in front of the adjudicator who would write down comments on both good things they observed, and things that needed to be improved. In the AMI system, couples demonstrated the syllabus figures of each dance, which were scored, and then students danced a Freestyle number as well. This meant that they could dance figures that were more advanced, and throw in non-syllabus material, including lifts. The Freestyle was not scored. If a student's score was high enough, he or she was awarded a small medal. Medals tests, still used today, were "an opportunity to have your dancing progress evaluated and critiqued by an independent source other than your teacher."²⁶⁴ The comments received could then form the basis for future lessons as they gave direction on which areas to work on. Students danced figures according to the level they were in, generally Bronze (beginner), Silver (intermediate), and Gold (advanced). Some studios created levels within those broad categories in order to help students mark achievement and thus recognize their progression, as well as allowing studios to make more money as students took medals in many levels. Each style of ballroom dance also had a separate medal which meant that a student could take medals in American Smooth, American Rhythm, International Latin, and International Ballroom. Within each style were at least five dances. Students were encouraged to take medals in each dance as a measure of their development.²⁶⁵ Taking medals exams required lessons, and medals were used as a selling point to encourage students to buy more instruction hours. The medals system was used throughout the US. Reports of medals tests pepper the "Studio News"

²⁶⁴ Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance, "Student Medal Tests," accessed online 11 September 2015, http://www.usistd.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=44.

²⁶⁵ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:17-0:18.

section of *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, including medals sessions in New York, Chicago, various Southern California cities, Boston, Miami, and Dallas.²⁶⁶

In the AMI organization, a day of medals exams was followed by a grand Medals Ball in the evening. The Medals Ball was essentially a celebration of the success of students, a graduation party of sorts.²⁶⁷ Each student who had taken an exam was spotlighted at the dance with a solo performance for the audience. This was a further opportunity to demonstrate one's abilities, this time to other staff members, fellow students, family members, and other invited guests. Taking a medal test was therefore a way to demonstrate to others within the studio social structure that you had progressed – and perhaps that you had spent a lot of money on your dancing in order to get better. *Ballroom Dance Magazine* regularly reported on medals balls across the nation.

Arguably the most common opportunity for students to perform were showcases. Showcases were concerts that included opening and closing numbers that were often performed by the staff. The bulk of the show consisted of teachers performing choreographed routines with their students. Students bought packages from the studio that covered the cost of a set number of lessons that were dedicated to learning and practicing the show number, paid the teacher for dancing at the actual show, and covered the student's dinner at the show. LoCurto points out that showcases helped his students improve their dancing as they had a goal to strive for, and that individual teachers, and the studio as a whole, benefitted financially.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Many examples could be cited, but a few include *Ballroom Dance Magazine* November 1963, September 1965, February 1966, and June 1967.

²⁶⁷ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:09. *Ballroom Dance Magazine* regularly reported on Medals Balls around the nation.

²⁶⁸ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:38-0:41.

In preparation for showcases, studios brought in coaches from around the country to choreograph numbers for showcases. Marie recalls FADS bringing in Roy Mavor, a US Theater Arts champion, to choreograph the opening and closing numbers for showcases, and to create individual showcase numbers for clients.²⁶⁹ AMI brought in US Latin champion Sam Sodano to work with students in Atlanta, paying him \$500 per day, plus expenses – a significantly large amount in the early 1980s.²⁷⁰ Studio patrons thus rubbed shoulders with renowned dancers, another perk of spending money in the studio. Anyone who came to watch the show paid for tickets and dinner. Showcases thus held the possibility of being lucrative for the studio if they could get numerous clients to buy into them, which they most often did. The shows were held at local hotels. Spectators and participants dressed up to attend the event, making it an occasion. Wealthier clients could afford more lessons with their own teachers, as well as guest coaches. Their peers were also more likely to be able to afford the cost of coming to watch the showcase. While showcases were by no means the exclusive domain of the rich, studios were aware of the money these clients brought into the studio, and they catered to them.

Competitions

Another major activity that enabled studios to both increase the connection between student and teachers, as well as make money for the studio, was participation in ballroom competitions. For many years only amateur competitions were held in the US. Perhaps most famous is the Harvest Moon Ball in Chicago, begun in 1935.²⁷¹ The Harvest Moon Ball was organized by the Chicago Sun Times for many year, and was then handed over to Ron Dodd, a

²⁶⁹ Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:35.

²⁷⁰ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:35.

²⁷¹ The Harvest Moon Ball ran continuously from 1935 to 1984, and continues to be run annually, under various names that incorporate the Harvest Moon Ball moniker. Claiming to be “the oldest ballroom dance competition in the US,” this year the Chicago Harvest Moon Ball DanceSport Championships will be held in October at the Westin-O’Hare . See <http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z6hmb37.htm>, accessed 15 September, 2015; and <http://chicagoharvestmoon.com>, accessed 15 September 2015.

prominent ballroom teacher in Chicago in 1962.²⁷² Weekly competitions at the Roseland ballroom in New York City were held from the 1930s onward, and the results were reported in *Ballroom Dance Magazine* throughout the 1960s. At those competitions, any person who qualified under the rules could enter.

AMI and FADS ran closed competitions for their students, meaning that the only participants at Murray competitions were students from Murray studios, and the only competitors at Astaire events were Astaire students. The Murray Corporation's first competitions, held in the early 1950s, were called Match Competitions. They were held in studios and were local events designed for the Murray studios in that specific city. Regional Match Competitions were also held, generally in hotels. In the late 1950s AMI began events they called Dance Olympics. These competitions were designed for students to dance solo performances. Each student's solo dance was judged against other solo showdances, and adjudicators placed the participants. By hosting Dance Olympics at hotels, the organizers could set up multiple ballrooms in order to run the showdances concurrently, and thereby cut down on the length of the competition. The company ran into trouble in the 1960s over trademark issues over the use of the term Olympics. Hence Dance Olympics switched names and became Dance-O-Ramas.²⁷³ Dance-O-Ramas were usually regional competitions, where AMU students from states neighboring the host-state came to compete. From the late 1960s onward, Murray hosted a World Dance-O-Rama, where top finishers from regional competitions came to compete for national titles.

²⁷² Polly Dodd tells the story of how she went to the newspaper on Ron Dodd's behalf when they heard that the competition was going to be discontinued. They offered to buy the event, but the editor, Andrew Carses, was so impressed with the Dodds that he gave the competition to them. They ran the event for nearly fifty years before selling it after Ron Dodd's death. See Polly Dodd interview with the author October 22, 2012. Dunwoody, Georgia.

²⁷³ All of the information on AMI competitions in this section comes from Phillip Masters, current chairman of the AMI Board. Tom Murdock, Vice President at AMI relayed this information via email, 9 September 2015.

The 1970s and 1980s marked the height of corporate closed competitions up to that time. More students bought lessons specifically to compete than had in the previous two decades. Longtime Atlanta, and former FADS, teacher Wayne Abbey suggests that the reason that Jackie Walls created the Atlanta Open, a competition which continues to run annually, was to get students to buy lessons.²⁷⁴ Ballroom studios were in the business of making a profit, and competitions were a means to that end.

The money for studios and teachers lay in Pro-Am dancing. The teacher was the professional or ‘Pro,’ half of the partnership, and the student was the amateur, hence ‘Am,’ half of the duo. Students paid teachers to dance with them at competitions. This meant that students paid for lessons with a teacher to learn material specifically for competitions. They then paid entry fees to compete, as well as to actually get into the venue to dance. The client paid for her or his teacher’s entry into the venue. In addition, the teachers were paid for their time at the competition, sometimes by the hour, sometimes per dance competed, and sometimes at a flat rate for the day. Amateur competitors also spent a significant amount of money on their costumes. As Knotts put it, ballroom dancing is “a game for the rich, [for] people who have the money to do that...it’s an expensive hobby.”²⁷⁵ Competing was a way for the wealthy to demonstrate their economic superiority on the dance floor. This in turn meant more money for studios. From at least the 1970s, the NCDTO recognized in their meetings that “Pro-Ams [are] an important source of revenue to the professionals,” and that Pro-Am was the jurisdiction of the professional body, not the amateur organizations.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Wayne Abbey, Interview with the author. December 1, 2012. Smyrna, Georgia, 0:10.

²⁷⁵ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:29.

²⁷⁶ Minutes of the Ballroom Department Meeting of the NCDTO, November 1971 and November 1977. NDCA Archive.

Non-chain studio competitions up until the 1960s were generally amateur events. With the introduction of International Style to the US in the 1960s, professionals began competing more. The NCDTO organized official US professional championships in International Latin American in 1966, while the US International Standard championship had started in 1964. A professional competition in International Standard was held at the 1964 World Fair in New York, as a way of exposing International Style to the public. Only US couples competed in the event, and it was televised. The US began sending representatives to the professional World Championships in the late 1960s to compete against other nations. US professional championships in the American Style only began in 1984 for Smooth and Rhythm. US championships for Pro-Am couples began in the 1990s.

Most of the AMI and FADS competitions between 1950 and 1984 were dominated by Pro-Am sections, with some professional sections for the teachers of those chains. The chains sold contracts for lessons to specifically prepare students for competitions. The Pro-Am competition was an American-born phenomenon. A few other nations permitted Pro-Am in the 1960s and 1970s, but it was never popular anywhere else until the 2000s.²⁷⁷

In the late 1960s the local Arthur Murray studio in Chicago told competition organizers Ron and Polly Dodd that if they included Pro-Am events in the Harvest Moon Ball, the studio would support their competition. Polly Dodd believes this was one of the first non-chain competition to offer Pro-Am.²⁷⁸ As time went on, many teachers who taught at chain studios throughout the US left corporate studios to teach independently. As these teachers grew

²⁷⁷ See, for example, Alex Moore's letter to the NCDTO regarding Pro-Am competitions. Minutes of the Ballroom Department Meeting of the NCDTO, November 1977, NDCA Archive, 2. In the early 2000s, the World Dance Council held the first World Pro-Am Championships. The NDCA actually sued, arguing that Pro-Am was an American institution, and that the NDCA held the rights to the world championships.

²⁷⁸ Polly Dodd, Interview with the author. October 22, 2012. Dunwoody, Georgia, 0:45.

clientele, they wanted to compete in Pro-Am competitions, but could no longer compete in closed Murray or Astaire competitions. In response, competition organizers in the 1970s and 1980s increasingly expanded Pro-Am sections. In the late 1960s the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance (ISTD), one of the most revered and respected dance organizations in the world, held competitions on the East coast that were specifically for Pro-Am couples.²⁷⁹ The term “Pupil-Teacher” was used in the 1960s, and much of the 1970s. The creation of Pro-Am events outside of the chain studio setting set the path for competitions in the US, to the present day. Pro-Am dancing today dominates the US competitive scene, something unique in the worldwide ballroom DanceSport scene.

Studios touted the benefits of competing to students. First, competing gave students a tangible goal to work toward. In a similar way to showcases, preparing choreography for competitions was a process that helped the client become more proficient. The major difference in a competition was that an outsider who had most likely never seen the competitor before would compare one student to another. Students learned to dance in high pressure situations. Many teachers took a different approach, stressing that competing was really a way to make your social dancing better because you had to remember figures and routines in an unusual, and charged, situation, something a dancer did weekly at the studio parties. Competitions were therefore sometimes sold as a means to improve personal dancing, not necessarily as a comparative system to out-dance other individuals.²⁸⁰

Studios restricted their students and professionals in terms of which competitions they were permitted to enter. Generally, they could only attend internal franchise competitions, as

²⁷⁹ Dennis Rogers, Interview with the author. May 26, 2016. Savannah, Georgia, 0:36. There is an advert in the May 1967 *Ballroom Dance Magazine* for the Imperial Medal Ball in Atlantic City, an ISTD Pupil-Teacher (i.e. Pro-Am) competition. (9) This may be the competition Rogers refers to, or at least one of the early events.

²⁸⁰ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 1:02-1:04.

well as the United States Ballroom Championships held in New York or Miami annually.²⁸¹ Professionals in the second half of the twentieth century jealously guarded control over who could compete, what they could compete, and with whom they could compete. Competition owners determined which sections to include at their specific event. Organizers were, in turn, overseen by the ballroom division of the NCDTO. Throughout its existence, the NCDTO (later the NDCA) created rules to ensure they controlled competitions in the US. From at least 1971, competitions had to register with the NCDTO (and pay the associated fee) if they wanted to use adjudicators from member organizations.²⁸² The NCDTO also registered both amateur and professional competitors, closing NCDTO-sanctioned events to anyone not paying dues.²⁸³

Just as with other outside studio activities, teachers were expected to dote on their clients at competitions, and ensure that the event was a pleasurable one so that the client would want to attend more competitions, and thus spend more money with the studio. Johnson remembers being “read the riot act” by Walls as to what she could and could not do while at a competition. There was a debriefing after each competition too, to address any issues that may have occurred. As Johnsons put it, you were to “be with your student except when you were asleep or in the bathroom. That’s the way it was.”²⁸⁴ Knotts concurs: “You were on call for the whole competition.”²⁸⁵ Teachers were paid to meet the wants of their wealthy clients, performing both emotional, and physical (dancing) labor. Competitions became a major source of revenue

²⁸¹ See for example Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:19; Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:43

²⁸² Minutes of the Ballroom Department Meeting of the NCDTO, November 1961, 5. NDCA Archives.

²⁸³ Ironically, the NCDTO registered amateur competitors for years before requiring professional competitors to register with the organization. When amateur organizations formed to take control of the pathway to Olympic competition, amateurs had to register with both organizations for a time, if they wanted to compete in all competitions.

²⁸⁴ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:26-0:27.

²⁸⁵ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 0:34.

for studios in these decades, and lay the groundwork for DanceSport-focused studios of the late 1980s, the 1990s, and the early 2000s.

In the sixties through eighties, each chain held local competitions that were open to all students in the chain from across the nation. For practical reasons, most competitors at the Atlanta comps were from the city itself, but also came from Nashville, Chattanooga, and various cities in Florida. In the 1980s FADS held their competitions in Atlanta at the Sheraton Century Center, located on I-85 and Claremont Road. AMI studios used various hotels to host their competitions in the 1970s and 1980s, including the Hilton in Chamblee-Dunwoody.²⁸⁶ The goal was to have clients in a luxurious atmosphere. The client, of course, paid for the extravagant setting, but the association of ballroom dancing with luxury was reinforced in their minds.

The local competitions hosted by Atlanta studios were the best attended by their clients, because these were the cheapest events. Competitions, like showcases, were another way for students to mark improvement. Competitive categories were, and are, determined by style, proficiency, age, and gender. In the 1960s and 1970s, most chain studio competitions held only American style sections. Most students danced syllabus sections. Syllabus sections were divided into Bronze, Silver, and Gold categories, and subdivided further within those categories. Students in Bronze 1 were brand new beginners, having danced for a few months to a year. Students in Bronze 4, the highest of the AMI Bronze categories, may have been dancing for two or three years. In these syllabus sections students were restricted to dancing specified figures at that level. For Bronze 1 Cha Cha, for example, couples could only dance the ten basic figures. In Bronze 3, variations on the basic ten were added, and specific Bronze 3 figures were allowed in choreography. Teachers were required to be aware of these rules. Judges could mark students

²⁸⁶ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:06.

down for dancing out of syllabus, and couples could be disqualified for dancing figures from a higher proficiency level than the section being competed.

Silver and Gold levels were similarly sub-categorized by proficiency, and restricted by syllabus figures. In the 1960s, the chain studios only had material up to the silver level. International Style was introduced to students who had already advanced to silver, and were looking for a challenge. Gold students competed Pro-Am International style in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁸⁷ International Style, also known as the English Style, had been codified in England in the 1950s. The British Board of Ballroom Dancing oversaw the codification, and certified teachers in the styles of Modern Ballroom (Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Quickstep, and Viennese Waltz), and, ironically, Latin-American Ballroom (Cha Cha, Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, and Jive). When International Style was introduced to the US, British teachers were brought in to teach American teachers the style. Many top British couples made the US their home in the 1960s and 1970s, coaching teachers and competitive couples in International Style. Thus the introduction of International Style in Pro-Am was very much a business-driven decision. From the late-1970s into the 1980s, International style grew, and then flourished in the 1990s and beyond.

Male students dancing with female professionals danced in Gentlemen's sections, and female students dancing with male instructors – a much larger group than the former – danced in the Ladies' sections. Male and female students did not compete against each other in the syllabus divisions. These gender groups were further divided by age. Age categorizations over these decades were mostly the following: under 16 years, Junior; 16-18 years, Youth; 18-49 years, Ladies or Gentlemen A; 50-64 years, Ladies or Gentlemen B; over 65 years, Ladies or

²⁸⁷ Dennis Rogers, Interview with the author. May 26, 2016. Savannah, Georgia, 0:09.

Gentlemen C. These categories shifted and changed over the years, and were sometimes different within each organization.²⁸⁸

Ballroom dance competitions are most often elimination events where students compete through various rounds of competitions, culminating in the top six couples dancing for placements in the final of each section. Judges mark which couples they want to call back to the next round, and a scrutineer uses the Skating System to determine which couples the judges have recalled.²⁸⁹ AMI Dance-A-Ramas were judged using a different system. Each couple was given a numerical score out of 100, indicating where the judges believed that couple's performance ranked compared to other couples at that competition, *and* at other AMI competitions. This allowed students to gauge how their dancing was improving based on scores they received from one competition to another.²⁹⁰ It also meant that that students were not faced with the public reaction (their own and the audience's) to results. At most ballroom dance competitions, couples are lined up and announced in ascending order of placement. The couples then line up in that order at the podium, where photographs are taken recording the placement. AMI's system allowed students to receive scores privately, while being publicly recognized for participation at a particular level, rather than for comparative placement to other couples. The risk of having clients publicly disappointed or upset was thereby eased, allowing teachers and studio owners to celebrate achievements with their clients by focusing on the positive comments and scores.

Only one teacher commented on the politics of ballroom competitions in the 1970s and 1980s, something that is highly debated in the competitive ballroom dancing world in the 2000s.

²⁸⁸ For the current, generally accepted divisions, see the NDCA's categorizations in their rulebook, II. "Classification of Dancers," Section B.3.f, http://www.ndca.org/rules-and-results/ndca-rule-book/#TOC3_8, accessed 15 September 2015. Just as definitions and classifications were fluid in the last half of the twentieth century, NDCA rules continue to adapt and change according to competition organizer needs and goals.

²⁸⁹ For an exceptionally readable and understandable explanation of the Skating System, see Jeff Carlsen, *Certified Correct* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Dancing Bear Publishing Co., 1996).

²⁹⁰ AMI continues to use this system. See discussion in chapter on 1990s and beyond.

Porter believes that grading at AMI competitions “was somewhat lax,” but that this worked in the studios’ favor. If a student was encouraged in their dancing, they would want to continue working and competing. At the same time, Porter notes that standards at Murray competitions were higher than Astaire competitions, implying that studios might lower expectations or standards in order to please clients.²⁹¹ Even if true, these were business decisions, made to increase corporate profits.

Students were encouraged to attend regional competitions, specifically designed to have students from different cities compete against each other. Regional AMI competitions were called Superamas. Students from all around the US came to participate in Superamas because they were destination events. Knotts recalls attending a Superama in New Orleans in the early 1980s. He took a number of his students from Atlanta to the event. While the competition was the central feature, all Murray events were designed to build camaraderie within the organization. There was a party nearly every night of the event, often themed so that everyone came in costume. Outings to local sights were held throughout the competition for those whose events had been completed, or were yet to be held. At a Superama in Orlando, some competitors went on an excursion to Disney World while they were not dancing.²⁹² Competitors who did well at regional competitions were invited to attend the national chain championships. National events were large, glamorous affairs. FADS held theirs at the Ritz Carleton in New York City each year. Murray rotated the location of their national competition each year until the 2000s, when it settled permanently in Las Vegas. These events strengthened ties between students and teachers, students and students, and students and the corporation.

²⁹¹ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:20.

²⁹² Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:12.

At each competition, a Top Teacher prize was awarded to the teacher with the most entries, most often a cash award. It thus benefitted teachers financially to have their students dance as much as possible. Baity was the first teacher in the nation to have 100 entries at a two-day Fred Astaire competition.²⁹³ Teachers who took large numbers of students to multiple competitions were rewarded at the corporate level. In the FADS organization, top selling teachers were invited to the largest competition in the region, held annually in Florida, and were given a Freddie Award – a trophy recognizing their contribution to the company. These awards were handed out by members of the national board, thus putting teachers in contact with powerful individuals.²⁹⁴ Thus competitions were also a means of linking teachers closer to the corporate group.

Studio activities were designed to build ties between clients and the studio, and, to a degree, to connect teachers and the studio closer together. Studio owners implemented corporate designs in order to build an environment which might be described as a second home. Repeatedly, teachers interviewed talked of clients treating them like family, and considering the studio a home-away-from-home. One woman who moved from Atlanta to Chattanooga continued to make weekly trips into Atlanta to take lesson and attend classes at the Murray studio where she started dancing. Speaking of that particular studio, but embodying what many teachers said about their studio experience, Sutherland said: “Everybody just enjoyed everybody else [in the studio] ... We were just like one big family.”²⁹⁵ Similarly, former FADS teacher Ethylann Berse summarized the studio experience as “a safe place where everybody had the same thing in common. It was a very clean environment. It was a safe environment. We offered

²⁹³ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:32.

²⁹⁴ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:22.

²⁹⁵ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:13.

the dancing, the camaraderie. We had picnics, we had all kinds of outings. We'd go to Lake Lanier, we had fourth of July parties, we had parties in the parking lot, barbeques. We had family day, we'd do a movie day, we'd do Around the Town Club."²⁹⁶ Studios were places of business that were crafted to be home-like environments for the clients. Activities were designed to increase clients' connectivity to the studio and the teachers.

Even as studios sought to create bonds with clients, they emphasized non-fraternization between teachers and clients. At its base level this meant that teachers were to have no contact with students outside of lessons, classes at the studio, or official studio-sanctioned activities.²⁹⁷ There were exceptions to the rule, but rarely. Baity was given permission to pick up some of his students and bring them to lessons or parties, but this was because they were elderly and could not drive themselves. It benefitted the studio to have these ladies – who were wealthy, package-buying clients – driven to the studio.²⁹⁸ The concern was that if a student spent time with a teacher outside of dance they would come to think of the teacher as “a regular person,” rather than remaining “up on a pedestal” as a model dancer and instructor.²⁹⁹ At FADS in Atlanta, teachers were told that if they were out at a restaurant, and one of their studio clients came into the restaurant, the teacher was to immediately pay their own bill and leave. That way any fraternization could be avoided.³⁰⁰

Another concern was that students and teachers might embark upon a romantic relationship, which could have problematic consequences. Narrators often talked about fraternization only in terms of dating students, or as Porter puts it, you could socialize at parties,

²⁹⁶ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:26.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 0:43; Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:20.

²⁹⁸ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:44.

²⁹⁹ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:15-0:16.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

trips, cruises, but “absolutely no dating between students and teachers.”³⁰¹ If a romantic relationship between student and teacher ended badly, it would most likely mean the client would leave the studio, losing income for the company. If the relationship progressed, and the two parties decided to marry, the student could (theoretically) get all the dance training they wanted from their new spouse, and thus the studio lost out. If the teacher was female, and married a male student, there was often no need for the female instructor to work anymore, and the studio lost a teacher in whom they had invested time and money.

As a manager, DeNeve told her teachers that they could marry a student, but they could not date them.³⁰² In other words, she was fine with students and teachers falling in love, but if it was less than that it was unacceptable. Teachers were fired for fraternization, but such determinations were case-specific. Knotts met his future wife at the Atlanta AMI studio where she was a student and he was a teacher. He was not her instructor, but when they both recognized their attraction, the student elected to stop taking lessons so they could date. That way there was no fraternization. They dated and married.³⁰³ Berse was annoyed when a fellow staff member accused her of fraternizing with a client. She had never done anything outside of the studio with any client, and was incensed that such an accusation should be made. She left that particular studio soon after the incident and called up the client to tell him what she had been accused of doing. He asked her out, and four months later they were married, and have been for 30 years. Berse noted the hypocrisy of the whole non-fraternization rule when “most of the master-franchisers, and CEOs [and] owners of the Fred Astaire organization married students. And there they are sitting there telling you you cannot date students.”³⁰⁴ These policies were national

³⁰¹ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:05.

³⁰² Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:16.

³⁰³ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:23-24.

³⁰⁴ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:46-0:47.

policies in both AMI and FADS. Polly Dodd was a student at an AMI studio in Chicago when she met, dated, and married her teacher, Ron Dodd. There were no repercussions for Ron, but that may be because he was so highly skilled and sought-after in the industry.³⁰⁵ Shortly after they married, the Dodds opened their own studio, so perhaps the fears relating to fraternization were justified by the corporations.

Few narrators gave specific examples of teachers who broke fraternization rules, but they acknowledged there were some. At least one narrator is convinced that some male teachers had romantic relationships with their clients in order to get the clients to buy more lessons and activities. Whether or not those relationships were sexual, they broke the fraternization rule which was often an unwritten, but much talked about, tenet of ballroom studios in Atlanta, and nationally. Dishonest teachers took advantage of students, giving the non-fraternization rules greater importance in the eyes of owners and managers. Baity told of teachers who borrowed money from clients, and who coerced clients into buying them expensive gifts. Baity himself found this “too gigilo-ish” for his taste, and he always looked out for the welfare of his own clients.³⁰⁶

This last example indicates that teachers were very aware of their colleagues. When teachers in a studio kept the same schedule, working side-by-side in the studio for ten or more hours a day, relationships were forged and tested. Most narrators recall their friendships with other teachers positively, and often refer to how the staff became a family to each other. Many also point out that even a biological family has its share of contention, competition, and unkindness.

Black Studio Familiness?

³⁰⁵ Polly Dodd, interview with the author, Woodstock, GA, October 22, 2012, 0:12.

³⁰⁶ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:25.

It is difficult to trace the history of black studios in Atlanta between 1950 and 1984, or to know exactly how they functioned. Unlike white studios, black studios were not part of corporate chains, meaning that most black studios remain in the historical record in name only. What the available sources show, especially advertising and articles in the *Atlanta Daily World*, is that there are significant parallels between black and white studios in Atlanta in the 1950s and 1960s. The venues where dances were held and studios offered dance instruction suggests that dance was similarly rooted in ‘community,’ if not family.

The Floyd Bolton studio established themselves as a club, inviting potential clients to receive special privileges and special discounts “available to members only.”³⁰⁷ While this can be interpreted as an appeal to elite status, it was also an invitation to belong; it was framed not just as a commercial venture, but the opportunity to be part of a group. In a similar vein, an article advertising the Smith School of Dancing attempts to link the reader, and existing clients, to the studio by reporting how “your teachers” received prestigious training at a conference.³⁰⁸ Atlanta’s black studios appear to be attempting to build a community of dancers.

From the 1950s onward, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) came to play a significant role in black ballroom dance in Atlanta, and paralleled studios as spaces that helped to create ties between dancers. From at least the 1940s, YMCAs taught ballroom classes.³⁰⁹ In 1954 studios and the YWCA became even more closely entwined when the Marvel School of Dancing opened *inside*

³⁰⁷ “Display Ad 8 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 13, 1955. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3.

³⁰⁸ “Smith School of Dancing Reveals Dancing Program,” *Atlanta Daily World*, September 1, 1957. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3.

³⁰⁹ See for example “Florence Warwick to Teach Modern Dances at YMCA,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 9, 1942, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and “Dance Classes Slated at YWCA,” *Atlanta Daily World*, November 30, 1952, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

the YWCA.³¹⁰ Adding even more depth to the studio/YWCA link, the article declared that the Marvel studio instructor was Miss Sonya Oglesby who taught using the Arthur Murray system. This statement points to black instructors being trained in the AMI system, although most likely not in Atlanta.³¹¹

The Butler Street YMCA was an elite, community-rooted social center for African Americans in Atlanta from the 1950s through 1980s. The institution became known as the “Black City Hall of Atlanta” owing to many prominent black leaders being members, including Martin Luther King Jr.³¹² When the Butler road YMCA became the permanent home of the Floyd Bolton studio in February of 1955, the announcement in the *Atlanta Daily World* noted that potential clients could learn Fox Trot, Waltz, Tango, Rumba, Swing, Samba, and Mambo – the same dances chain studios taught in their beginner classes.³¹³ Similarly, newspaper reports about the 1960 renovation of the Mozley Park Center, a recreational development in the Auburn Avenue district, noted that adult ballroom classes offering these dances continued to offered there.³¹⁴

Absent from any articles, reports, or adverts of this era was any mention of black dancers participating in competitive ballroom dance. The reality of the social culture of Atlanta, and the US as a whole, in this period, was broad segregation. Black ballroom dancers were only

³¹⁰ “YMCA Fall Program To Interest Entire Family,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 1, 1954, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³¹¹ It is unclear if these teachers were trained in chain studios elsewhere in the US. I did not see evidence of black instructors working in the 1950s or 1960s in the AMI archives, but I was not explicitly looking for it, so it is possible it is there. Dr. Cliff Kuhn told me in a conversation in 2014 that he knew a black man who had taught in the AMI system in the 1960s in New York. These connections remain to be interrogated, but Atlanta studios were clearly segregated.

³¹² “Butler Street YMCA,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/file/5617>, accessed March 24, 2017.

³¹³ “Floyd Bolton Dance Studio to Open At The YMCA,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 8, 1955, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³¹⁴ “Mozely Park Historic District,” National Park Service Atlanta Website, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/moz.htm>, accessed March 2017. And Clara W. Hood, “Atlanta Recreation News,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 9, 1960, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

featured in *Ballroom Dance Magazine* in photos demonstrating ethnically defined fad dances, like the Highlife from Nigeria, and the Jamaican Ska.³¹⁵ In July of 1964, Latino and Hawaiian teachers were pictured competing at a Dance-O-Rama in Hawaii.³¹⁶ Black competitors, on the other hand, appear to have been non-existent in the competitive ballroom world.

Conclusion

Ballroom dance studios in Atlanta in the 1950s through 1980s attempted to create spaces where customers would feel at home, and thus be willing to spend more time, and more money there. Lesson contracts, weekly parties, exclusive clubs within the studio, medals tests, vacation packages, and the rise of competition culture were all means to increasing client participation in white studios, and of binding them to their ‘home’ studio. While studios welcomed all clients, full participation in these activities was expensive. Wealthy elites could afford to spend more time and money at the studio, and thus they were able to retain their socio-economic status *within* the ballroom studio system. Teachers crafted relationships with clients that created familiness, a personal connection between people (teacher/client/owner) and place (the studio). Studios became proxy families to clients whose biological families were less-involved in their lives. Relationships between clients and teachers were most often sincere, but always occurred within the context of a business relationship. Wealthy clients made it possible for studios to thrive. Common business practices, particularly innovations in sales designed to build and take advantage of familiness demonstrate that ballroom studios were cognizant that they were part of an industry whose goal was to turn a profit.

³¹⁵ “High Life,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, July 1963, 1, 6-8; “Jamaican Ska,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, June 1964, 1, 4-5.

³¹⁶ “Southern California Notes,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, July 1964, 12-13.

Ballroom dance clearly played a role in the black community in Atlanta, but the lack of firsthand accounts or studio records make understanding what meaning it held for participants difficult to determine. Locating ballroom studios in centers like the YMCA indicate ballroom dance played a role in building relationships amongst participants, perhaps enhancing community relationships.

National chain studios dominated the Atlanta ballroom industry from 1950 to 1984. Independent teachers and studios faded in significance and market share as Arthur Murray International and Fred Astaire Dance Studios grew in prominence in Atlanta, and opened multiple locations in the city. Both AMI and FADS studios in Atlanta were national leaders in their respective chains. Local branches of these organizations ran according to national policies and protocols. Atlanta studios experienced the same development and growth as studios in other parts of the US, in the same time period.

Familyness in studios was not limited to relationships between clients and teachers. Spending ten hours a day with each other led teachers to develop close relationships. Teachers were integral to the maintenance of the studio system. They were the direct contact with clients. The success of the studio depended on them. The next chapter continues the examination of studios by looking at the experience of teachers in Atlanta ballroom dance studios between 1950 and 1984.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHING CLASS: BALLROOM DANCE TEACHERS IN ATLANTA STUDIOS, 1950-1984

Despite spending significant blocks of time with elite clients, ballroom dance teachers were working-class in a vocation that had limited prospects for moving into a higher socio-economic class. While teachers established standing within individual studios, within the chain

hierarchy, or on the national competitive scene, rich clients retained their social superiority *within* the studio hierarchy because they were the money that enabled teachers and owners to survive and thrive. This chapter examines what life was like for teachers who worked in ballroom dance studios in Atlanta in the decades under investigation. The policies and practices studios used in finding, training, and developing teachers were focused on maximizing profit for the studio. These were national policies and practices. The experience of teachers in Atlanta was the same as teachers in other parts of the nation. Teachers were part of a national industry.³¹⁷

The distinction between work and social life was often limited because of the number of hours teachers spent within the walls of the studio. This meant that there was often no other social group in teachers' lives, making the studio central to their lives. Just as clients became increasingly connected to the studio through family-ness, teachers developed familial bonds among themselves, with the studio functioning as a home. The relationships that developed between teachers within the studio impacted their professional and personal lives, as did the relationship between teachers and studio owners and managers. This family-ness had both positive and negative effects on teachers, and studios as entities. "Teaching Class" demonstrates the complex functioning of studios from the perspective of the teachers. The bottom line for owners was always profit. Teachers were a means to that end for the studios, but teachers worked within the studio system to forge individual and collective identities that set them apart as individuals, *and* as members of a skilled group.

Becoming a Teacher

³¹⁷ Just as in the previous chapter, the main focus here is white studios in Atlanta. While multiple white teachers were interviewed for the project, no black teachers were found. The black teacher experience is included, but has been teased out of newspaper reports and adverts, rather than personal narrative, and is thus less nuanced. As black teachers who taught in this era are found, their oral histories will help to fill out the historical picture.

Ballroom studios in Atlanta, and the US in general, have historically had a high turnover of teachers.³¹⁸ Teachers who taught in Atlanta came to ballroom dance in diverse ways. Most answered advertisements they saw in the newspaper. Newspapers were the dominant news medium throughout the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s.³¹⁹ The adverts declared that no experience was necessary, and portrayed a life of meeting interesting people, travel, and staying fit on the dance floor. Classified ads sometimes had specific age categories the applicants needed to be within, usually between 22 and 35. The lifestyle that ballroom dance teachers led was a physically taxing one. Young bodies could handle the physicality that dancing for up to ten hours a day required. Additionally, clients wanted to dance with young, good-looking partners. Studio owners sought applicants who were aesthetically pleasing to look at. Adverts recruiting teachers, used in 1977 and 1978 by the Atlanta FADS studios, feature the image of a smiling woman and man. The text of each starts: “WANTED. Vibrant, single people that enjoy travel, dancing and meeting people...”³²⁰ The target demographic was very specific. Married, older applicants stood little chance of being hired. From the start, therefore, ballroom teachers were judged on their physical appearance. Phyllis DeNeve was on summer break from college when she and her sister saw a Fred Astaire Studio (FADS) advert for their Atlanta location. They went to the studio to apply and, as Deneve puts it, “we were hired on the spot because we were cute and young.”³²¹ They were the right age and look for FADS.

³¹⁸ Tommy Baity, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, 3 February 2015.

³¹⁹ Newspapers in Atlanta were popular enough that even though *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution* merged in 1950, they continued to publish both papers until 1982. The former was an afternoon paper, whereas the latter was a morning paper.

³²⁰ See “Display Ad 43 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), October 9, 1978. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 3D and “Display Ad 126 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), October 29, 1978. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 9D.

³²¹ Phyllis DeNeve, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, 25 May 2015.

Ballroom studios used the late-night culture of studios to appeal to potential teachers. Kathryn Schneider Lyon recalls that, as a studio owner in Atlanta, one of her adverts for teachers started with the headline “Hate getting up early in the morning? Then this is the job for you!”³²² This appeal attracted individuals who enjoyed being active at night. Since studios only required their teachers to get to the studio between 10am and noon, there was time for night owls to sleep in while their peers were at work by seven or eight in the morning. Similarly, FADS classified ads in the early 1980s sought “Fun Loving Young Adults.” The accompanying illustration was of a couple disco dancing in a club.³²³ The socially active disco-goers of the late-seventies and early-eighties were exactly the demographic that Atlanta, and national, studios sought.

Echoing ads of the 1920s, AMI ads in the fifties and sixties often stated: “2 YEARS COLLEGE PREFERRED.”³²⁴ This preference indicates that studios were seeking clients of a higher caliber, a set who would appreciate college-educated instructors. It also held the potential that prospective teachers could study material effectively, and would grasp concepts quickly, thereby lessening training time. College education implied the applicant had intellectual capacity, and a measure of class. If a teacher had rhythm, that was even greater qualification – rhythm was hard to teach, even to a college educated person.

Black ballroom studios in Atlanta advertised for instructors in the newspaper using the same kind of tropes promoting professional expertise and a certain lifestyle. An August 1953 Dixie studio ad, which sought men and women who wanted to be professional ballroom dance teachers, told readers that teachers would be trained by “experts formerly associated with

³²² Kathryn Lyon, Telephone interview with the author. February 16, 2015. 0:29.

³²³ FADS used this advert repeatedly in the early 1980s. See for example “Display Ad 42 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1981, 11. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.

³²⁴ See for example “Classified Ad 1 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), January 27, 1950. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 23.

nationally known dance studios.” The racial identification of these trainers was unspecified, but in the 1950s the major national chains in Atlanta were exclusively white. Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire had no black franchisees in the 1950s. Mirroring classified ad in the *Atlanta Constitution*, the ballroom teaching vocation was touted as “exciting work in pleasant surroundings, [with] good salary and commission, for all who qualify.”³²⁵ The last phrase implied that there was a selection process, and that not all applicants would be selected. When Floyd Bolton advertised for instructors eighteen months after Dixie, they touted teaching ballroom as the “opportunity of a life time.”³²⁶ Further, just like the Atlanta Arthur Murray studio in 1950, Floyd Bolton emphasized the importance of education. They wanted high school graduates. The fact that Murray wanted instructors with two years of college experience points to the inequalities of higher education in the 1950s. A black person with a college education would be unlikely to consider dance instruction as a career.³²⁷

Many of my interview subjects found their way into ballroom dance through these newspaper ads. Looking for a job in 1958 Atlanta, Don Wallace saw an AMI ad in the *Atlanta Journal*, went to the studio, and was thrown into the ballroom dance world. Similarly, Jim Day had been looking unsuccessfully for work in Indianapolis in the late 1960s when he saw a newspaper ad. He went to the studio where they enrolled him in the training program.³²⁸

Another draw for applicants was that studios required no dance experience. Nearly every newspaper ad looking for trainees contained the line “no experience necessary, will

³²⁵ “Display Ad 23 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 2, 1953, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³²⁶ “Classified Ad 1 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 10, 1955, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³²⁷ In 1960, forty percent of white Americans had a high school diploma, compared to twenty percent of black Americans. Approximately three-and-a-half percent of black Americans had four years of college education, compared to over eight percent of white Americans. Clearly there were racial inequities in education. Thomas D. Snyder, Ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993), 8, 18.

³²⁸ Jim Day, interview by author, Atlanta, GA, January 2015.

train.”³²⁹ DeNeve, Betsy Bentley, and Eddie Ares had zero dance experience when they responded to Atlanta FADS ads in the 1970s and 1980s. Nor did Wayne Abbey when he walked into an Arthur Murray studio in Atlanta in 1974. These young, inexperienced dancers were just the people studios in Atlanta, and throughout the nation, were looking for, to train as instructors. They were blank slates who could be trained in the style, syllabus, and policies of FADS or AMI.

Newspaper ads weren't the only way teachers found their way into ballroom dance studios. Lyon had just interviewed for an air hostess position with an airline in 1968 when she walked past an AMI studio in Omaha, Nebraska, that had signs in the window advertising for instructors. She went in to interview for a position, and stayed in the industry for forty years.³³⁰ Another instructor, Linda Weaver, came to ballroom as an accidental second career path. The company she worked at for a number of years was in the Money Building, the same office building as Jackie Walls's AMI studio. When the business she had been working for closed, as a joke she told all the employees that she had found them all new jobs and took them up the elevator up to the Walls studio – nicknamed The Studio in the Sky by those who worked there – where she told them they could all learn to teach ballroom. She ended up taking the course herself, and remained in the industry for over forty years.³³¹ These examples suggest that ballroom dance teaching was rarely the career that most teachers in the 1950s through 1980s had dreamed of having. The love of dance and its purity of form apparently played no role in the decision. The jobs were available and offered training immediately. The applicants fit the desired demographic, and were thus qualified.

³²⁹ See for example “Display Ad 19 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1951, 15. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution; and “Classified Ad 16 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 18, 1980, 27. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.

³³⁰ Kathryn Schneider Lyon, telephone interview with the author, 16 February 2015.

³³¹ Conversation with the author, May 2015. Sandy Springs, GA.

Some teachers, however, started out taking lessons as students and progressed to become teachers. Ethelann Bonder Berse's experience gives insight into what might be considered a typical introduction to ballroom dance, and studios, in the 1970s. Berse was invited to attend a FADS studio party in Doraville, a suburb of Atlanta, by a friend who was taking lessons there. Berse recalls her reaction when she walked into the studio: "Amazing! Glamour! Everything I ever saw or imagined watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. That was when everyone greeted you when you walked in the door. Everyone was in formal attire – the men were in tails, the ladies were in gowns." After the party she enrolled in a guest program. She took her three half-hour lessons almost in a row, with a teacher named Bobby Scot, and then bought a larger contract.

Berse's experience became less typical when, two and a half weeks after she started dancing, one of her teacher's students dropped out of an upcoming competition. The entry had been paid and couldn't be refunded so Scot asked Berse if she would like to take the entry and dance for free. She "jumped right in," and learned a routine for the event. She went to the competition at the Century Center Hotel in Decatur where she won her event. Right there she decided that dancing was what she wanted to do the rest of her life. John Long, the owner of the Doraville FADS asked her to attend the teacher training class.³³²

Vonnie Marie took lessons for three years before she entered the teacher training program at the Atlanta FADS.³³³ The cost of lessons and contracts at the Atlanta AMI where Cheryl Sutherland had been taking lessons for a few years led her to barter with the owners. She cleaned two AMI studios in the area in return for lessons. This connection, and her years of dancing experience, allowed her to switch from student to instructor within the studio.

³³² Ethelann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. 21 May 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia.

³³³ Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. 15 May 2015. Atlanta, Georgia.

Sutherland transitioned smoothly into teaching as she was already part of the community. The manager of the Marietta AMI studio invited Randy Knotts to take the teacher training class after taking only one lesson. Knotts had watched *Soul Train* and *American Bandstand* regularly and taught himself the dances he saw. While visiting a girlfriend in Marietta, he answered a phone call from the local AMI studio offering him a free lesson. Knotts recognized right off that it was a business deal and the studio would want to sell him a lesson. He decided to go and show the instructor that he could dance, and didn't need their training. At the end of the lesson, the female manager who had taught the lesson started to close the deal by showing Knotts the program prices. At that point she stopped and said: "but I'd rather give you a job instead." She was impressed enough with his potential that she guaranteed him \$50 more than what he was making at that time. That night she taught him the bronze syllabus for 6 dances, and Knotts started teaching the following week.

The experiences of these teachers in Atlanta mirror the experiences of many teachers who started their ballroom careers in other states, and made their way to Atlanta. Roy Porter had been in the US Air Force and realized when he went out to clubs that he couldn't dance. On leave at home in the late 1960s, in Louisville, Kentucky, he saw an AMI studio and walked in to take a lesson. At the conclusion of the free first lesson, the teacher attempted to sell him a program that would allow him to improve his dancing.³³⁴ When he indicated that he could not commit to a program, the owner, who had been watching the lesson, invited him to join the

³³⁴ Different organizations use different terms to describe a package of lessons sold to a student. Usually, the more lessons you buy the greater a discount you receive. The terms 'contract,' 'program,' and 'package' are used throughout this paper to refer to a group of lessons purchased at one time.

teacher training program.³³⁵ Joe LoCurto took lessons in Allentown, PA for two years before being invited by the manager to take the training class.³³⁶

Central to the stories of how teachers in Atlanta entered the ballroom dance community is the availability of jobs, and access to training. The increase in ballroom dance teaching positions in Atlanta mirrored the rise of white-collar workers in the US. By 1956, a majority of Americans held white-collar jobs. Ballroom teachers were part of this white-collar ascendancy. Corporations, who also enjoyed significant growth in the 1950s, expanded and looked to train workers to fill new positions. Ballroom corporations Arthur Murray International and Fred Astaire Dance Studios had established a system whereby they could train teachers quickly, and get them generating income for the studio in a short time. The above narrators fit within the age demographic studios were advertising for. Young people learned quickly, and had energy to dance for hours at a time. It is also significant that not all Atlanta teachers started their careers in the Big Peach. Despite this, the experience of teachers who worked in Atlanta in this period is relatively uniform. No matter where they were in the nation, they found jobs at studios in similar ways. Studios around the country advertised for teachers in *Ballroom Dance Magazine* in the 1960s, although the primary mechanism was local newspapers.³³⁷ Atlanta was part of a national organized ballroom dance culture, within a national economy that increasingly moved toward a service-based economy. Atlanta studios were part of a national community that functioned and practiced in the same ways. The similarity of their experience continued in the training classes that prepared newly hired instructors to teach on the studio dance floor.

³³⁵ Roy Porter, interview with the author, Sandy Springs, GA, 2 July 2015.

³³⁶ Joe LoCurto, interview with the author, Buckhead, GA, 15 May 2015.

³³⁷ For example, ads in *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, November 1963, 20, sought teachers for studios in Allentown, PA, and the Bronx, NY. Teachers were sought for a Fred Astaire Dance Studio in St. Petersburg in an ad in *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, February 1967, 17.

Every teacher interviewed talked about the training classes for new teachers. Chain studios generally ran the classes twice a year, but held training classes more often if there was a need for teachers at a specific time. Classes varied in size. When Wallace took his class from Nona Garrett at the Atlanta Arthur Murray Studio in 1958, he was one of eight trainees.³³⁸ Teachers in training classes in the 1970s recall them as large, with up to sixty people who had applied to become teachers.³³⁹ In the 1980s classes were smaller, ranging from two to ten people. As the training program went along, people would drop out as they either found other employment, or realized they were not interested in the dance industry.

Most teacher training involved learning the first ten figures in each of the ‘basic six’ dances that the studios offered. These six were all American style dances: Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Cha Cha, Rumba, and East Coast Swing. Prospective teachers learned both the man’s and the lady’s part, and thus how to lead and follow each figure. Further, teachers were trained in how to learn as much as possible about a client from their first interactions in a lesson. The more a teacher knew about a client, the more they could create a personal connection. Understanding a client’s background and ambitions also helped a teacher to know how to sell that client on the service being offered. The ultimate goal of training was to produce teachers who knew some dancing, and who knew how to sell more dancing than they knew.

Generally, trainers were instructors who had spent significant time teaching in studios, and could thus offer their expertise to new teachers as mentors. The end goal of the teacher training program was to have teachers who could teach the Bronze Syllabus, which was the material taught to students over one hundred or so lessons. Thus teachers who could master the material in a short time would teach the same material to students over a year or more. This is

³³⁸ Don Wallace, Interview with author. June 2015. Roswell, Georgia, 0:04.

³³⁹ Ibid.

sound business practice, creating steady income for the studio with little initial outlay. Trainees were not paid while taking the course. They were only paid once they had passed off the material and started teaching lessons.

The length of training varied. Jim Day was only in training class for three days before he was on the floor teaching. Lyon cruised through the training in three weeks. She attributes her speed in completing the material to her experience teaching all the neighborhood kids dance figures she had learned from watching TV shows like *American Bandstand*. DeNeve was also teaching after three weeks of training, and found that at the start she had to “make up stuff as I went along” when she was unsure of what she was doing.³⁴⁰ She continued to study by herself, from the manuals that the studios published. AMI and FADS each had their own syllabi, with different names of figures – even when they taught the exact same figure.³⁴¹ One black studio offered an “intensive five-week training course” for successful applicants.³⁴² In the 1980s the chains also used videos to train their teachers.³⁴³ This cut down on the time a trainer needed to personally instruct trainees, thus saving the studio money, and putting the onus on the trainee to learn material.

Most teachers trained for a few months. Porter’s training lasted six months, six days a week, six hours a day. This intensive training made him exceptionally familiar with the material he would teach, as well as preparing him to present the material effectively. Marie maintained a fulltime job for the thirty-five years she taught in Atlanta. Because of this, the teacher training

³⁴⁰ Phyllis Deneve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia.

³⁴¹ This continued in the 1980s and 1990s as other studio corporations were formed, and as teachers became independent. Teachers feared being sued for using the names of figures chain studios used, so they created new names for the figures they already knew. Hence in the US ballroom dance world today there are many names for the same figure.

³⁴² “Display Ad 23 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 2, 1953, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. This was the Dixie Studio. The Floyd Bolton Studio’s ad also referred to training being given to prospective teachers.

³⁴³ Randy Knotts, interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia.

program she took was only in the evenings. It took her a year to complete her training. Berse also worked fulltime during her training, but Allen, the studio owner, took a significant interest in her career and trained her personally in the evenings. Baity spent full days in the studio while he trained as he had no other employment. He believes he was lucky in this respect because the trainer, Pat Spray, spent some of her own free time during the day working with Baity on the required figures. This allowed him to progress quicker, and to have a deeper understanding of the syllabus than those who could only spend time at the studio during the actual class periods. Even so, the training still took him three months to complete. Clearly, relationships with trainers and owners, as well as studio-specific circumstances, impacted a new teacher's training experience.

The goal of most studio owners was to give their instructors the best training that time afforded, so that they could effectively service their clients. Of course, the ideal was not always possible when fiscal necessities prevailed. Wallace was scared stiff in 1958 when the studio owner pulled him out of a training class in his third week to go teach a lesson. No other male teachers were in the studio that morning, and there was a client who wanted a lesson. Rather than lose the money, the owners pulled Wallace into service.³⁴⁴ David Spencer started a teacher training course at the FADS Cheshire Bridge studio around 1980. Jim Day was the trainer, and Phil Orsy – a FADS franchisee with significant influence and clout in the organization – was the owner. Orsy did not like Spencer, even though he had known him only a few days.³⁴⁵ Tommy Baity had recently opened a new branch of FADS in Stone Mountain, Atlanta. He called the studio desperate for a male teacher to immediately come and teach. Orsy saw an opportunity to get rid of Spencer, and sent him to the Stone Mountain studio. After only five days in the teacher

³⁴⁴ Don Wallace, Interview with the author. July 11, 2015. Acworth, Georgia, 0:05-0:07. Wallace tells how the client was the well-known madam of an Atlanta brothel.

³⁴⁵ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia.

training class, Spencer was on the floor teaching. Spencer had some background in teaching ballroom as a teenager, out of his basement, but his training was certainly not the ideal from the perspective of studio owners. As ballroom studios are a business, however, business sense dictated that Spencer bring in income by teaching sooner rather than later.

Most teachers recall the training class as the foundation of their career, and as a positive, necessary part of their progress in the industry. Cindy Johnson's experience offers an interesting perspective because she trained at both a FADS studio, and an AMI studio. At the FADS studio she trained at in Louisville, Kentucky, Johnson was put off by the studio's requirements. The teachers were trained in a back room of the studio, which wasn't a problem in itself, but trainees were told to enter and exit as discreetly as possible and were instructed to not talk to any clients. Further, trainees were taught to call all clients Mr. or Ms., rather than by first names – no matter the client's age. Johnson thought it ridiculous that she would be calling men and women younger than herself by these titles, rather than attempting to create a connection with them as real people. Additionally, each teacher created a pseudonym that they would be known by at the studio, so that clients could not know one's true background. This façade was too much for Johnson who dropped the course.³⁴⁶ A few years later she went to an AMI training class in Atlanta which she recalled as much more consistent and realistic. She was one of three people, out of the initial class of fifty, who completed the course. She has been teaching in Atlanta for over thirty years.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ While Johnson was the only narrator in this project to talk about pseudonyms, the disingenuousness described may contribute to the negative image that some dance scholars have attributed to the ballroom dance industry as a whole. McMains's dispersion of studios tends to relate back to the fakeness of the studios she uses to create her composite examples. The acting required by the FADS studio in this example might be more along the lines of what Hochschild talks about in her concept of work-self versus real-self, discussed in chapter 2.

³⁴⁷ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. 1 April 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:02-0:05.

Teachers continued to receive training once the training class was finished. Studios often brought in coaches from around the country to work with both students and teachers. Teachers were inspired by working with coaches who were well respected in the industry. World Ballroom, Latin American, and Ten-Dance champions from England, Bill and Bobbie Irvine, taught teachers and students in Atlanta in the 1960s and 1970s on their US visits.³⁴⁸ The early visits of the Irvines introduced International Style to teachers in the area. Knotts recalls regularly working with Bonita Vanderzell, a top Latin American ballroom competitor in the early 1980s.³⁴⁹ Sam Sodano, a world-renown Latin American champion in the 1970s, ran an annual convention for Arthur Murray teachers on the week of July fourth, in Ohio. Teachers from Murray studios across the nation attended, including teachers based in Atlanta. This was another way in which Atlanta teachers were active participants in a national ballroom culture. These national conventions helped to standardize teaching across the chain, and to increase loyalty and connectivity to the chain.

Other Atlanta teachers recall many coaches coming to the city to train teachers. A major player in the US ballroom dance community in the 1960s through 1980s, Roy Mavor served on both AMI and FADS national boards, and thus worked with teachers in both chains.³⁵⁰ Baity cites Mavor as the greatest influence in teaching him how to put together group numbers, and how to effectively run showcases.³⁵¹ Rubbing shoulders with the top professionals in the industry not only improved Atlanta teachers' knowledge, but also bolstered their confidence as they could claim to have been trained by the best in the nation.

³⁴⁸ Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:09; Oberia Porter, Interview with the author. July 30, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:10.

³⁴⁹ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:01.

³⁵⁰ Mavor is credited with bringing Theater Arts to the US from the UK. He was the US champion and went on to train multiple US and World champions.

³⁵¹ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:47.

By the 1970s, ballroom dance teachers in Atlanta had established themselves as practitioners of a viable, respectable vocation. The struggle to gain respectability within the commercial sector was led nationally by the NCDTO. From its founding in 1951 the organization wanted the establishment of “uniformly high standards” for teachers within member organizations.³⁵² The training classes, discussed above, were ostensibly part of this movement. In 1960, in a “Memorandum From the Joint Legislative Committee of the National Council of Dance Teachers Organizations and the United States Ballroom Council,” the organization stated their goal to “win professional status for the dance teacher.”³⁵³ In the 1960s and 1970s the council repeatedly addressed the need for organizations to produce qualified teachers who would stand out from the self-taught amateur who claimed to know how to teach. By adopting the NCDTO’s syllabus, a 1965 statement noted, clients would have assurance that the studio was of the highest quality, and teaching up-to-date material.³⁵⁴ The NCDTO’s goal was to protect the professional dance teachers of the US.³⁵⁵ Teaching ballroom dance was clearly considered a business interest.

Part of protecting the profession included restrictions on the age of teachers. The NCDTO’s constitution stated that no person under eighteen years of age could join a member organization. All the teachers interviewed, with one exception, entered the business in their twenties.³⁵⁶ Every teacher noted that teachers in Atlanta studios in the 1950s through 1970s were

³⁵² “Aims of the National Council,” 1. NDCA Archive, Coconut Creek, Florida.

³⁵³ Memorandum From the Joint Legislative Committee of the National Council of Dance Teachers Organizations and the United States Ballroom Council, attached to the Minutes of the March 1960 National Council of Dance Teachers Organizations, NDCA Archive, Coconut Creek, Florida.

³⁵⁴ “Statement from the National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations,” *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, May 1965, 29.

³⁵⁵ See National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations Ballroom Department Meeting Minutes, November 11, 1977, 1. National Dance Council of America Archives, Coconut Creek, Florida.

³⁵⁶ David Spencer had been teaching in his basement from the age of seventeen, but finally took the teacher training course when he was nineteen.

in their twenties or thirties. Even the dance directors, who oversaw all the teachers within a studio, were themselves in their thirties. Managers were at times older, but most became managers in their thirties and grew older while in that position. Spencer notes that every teacher at the Atlanta AMI studio where he was a student, was under twenty-five, with the exception of the manager. The youthfulness of the staff was designed to help keep energy high at the studio, creating an environment that was dynamic. This raises questions about how studios adapted as their staff aged in later decades. Teachers who have spent thirty or more years in the industry in Atlanta are a minority. Teachers generally moved on to other careers, or climbed the corporate ladder, which led them to other geographical regions. While clientele skewed older, careers in the Atlanta ballroom dance industry in the fifties through seventies were for the young.

Studio Life

The typical schedule for a teacher in the chain studios in the 1960s through 1980s started with arriving at the studio around ten or eleven a.m., to practice and improve his or her own dancing. At noon there was a daily teacher meeting. From 2pm until 9pm, a teacher was expected to have lessons scheduled. If a teacher did not have lessons, they were to remain at the studio, either studying dance figures, or being in the teaching area where they would engage clients in conversation. When lessons ended at 9pm or 10pm, the teachers often went out to party together. Days were long, and teachers were only paid for the hours they taught. This encouraged teachers to do all they could to keep their clients, and sell as many lessons and extras to clients as possible.

The daily teacher meeting filled several purposes. First it offered continuing practical dance training to teachers. As new material arose, or when managers saw particular problems teachers were experiencing with figures, they addressed those in teacher meetings. Second,

teacher meetings were motivational gatherings to fire the teachers up. If the teachers could feel the excitement and passion of the management, they could feed on that and spread it to the clients.

Third, and perhaps most important for the owners and managers, staff received regular sales training. To run an effective business, owners needed to ensure they turned a profit. When asked about sales training, one teacher rolled her eyes and with exasperation stated, “Oh there was sales training!”³⁵⁷ Another responded: “Lots, and lots, and lots, yes.”³⁵⁸ Many teachers believe that their sales training is what allowed them to be successful in the chain studios, and to be successful when they chose to leave the chain to be independent instructors. Others believed it a necessary but unpleasant part of the system, and preferred to leave sales to closers. Whatever their attitude, sales were essential to the life of the industry.

The main role of a teacher was to keep his or her clients happy. In the 1970s, the expectation was that after each lesson a teacher would write a note to each client expressing how much the teacher enjoyed the lesson, and noting the time of the next lesson. Baity did this religiously, and went further in sending birthday, Christmas, and Valentine cards to each of his clients. When interviewed in January of 2015, Baity was preparing to send 100 Valentine cards to his former and current clients. When one of his former clients passed away – a client he hadn’t taught in many years, but continued to communicate with – her daughter found dozens of notes and cards from Baity, sent over the years, in her top dresser drawer. Baity believes the personal touch is what made his clients so loyal. They followed him to whichever studio he taught at. Other male teachers talked of female clients that moved with them to different studios. Women attached themselves to teachers, and were willing to make an effort in time and money to go

³⁵⁷ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:46.

³⁵⁸ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:26.

where the teacher went, in order to continue their relationship.³⁵⁹ The client/teacher relationship was both personal *and* economic. Teachers' livelihoods depended on having clientele who were willing to pay for lessons, and hopefully the extras the studio sold. Just as in other sectors of the service industry, ballroom teachers had to practice excellent customer service.

Even as wealthy clients were fiercely loyal to individual teachers, those relationships – personal and business – had limited impact on changing the financial future of teachers in this period. The previous chapter's discussion of clientele in the 1950s through 1980s points to an interesting dichotomy. While ballroom dance teachers taught and mingled with wealthy Atlantans, few would ever leave the working or middle-class tier of the nation's economic hierarchy. While they took exotic trips with the studio, danced at exclusive clubs, and were loved by their clients, ballroom dance teachers earned relatively little, and helped to make money for studio-owners.

A 1968 AJC classified advert for Arthur Murray Studios enticed potential teachers with a five-dollar-an-hour wage, plus commission.³⁶⁰ The average wage in the US in 1968 was under three dollars³⁶¹, so the wage was not bad statistically, but what was not included in the ad was that teachers would only be paid for the hours they actually taught, not the eight to ten hours per day they were required to be at the studio. In the early 1970s teachers might earn five or ten dollars teaching a forty-five minute lesson for which the client paid sixty dollars.³⁶² In the mid-1970s Day was guaranteed fifty-five dollars a week at one of the studios he worked at. While he

³⁵⁹ This situation of clients spending time, money, and emotional attachment to retain ties with a paid teacher is an interesting parallel (or reversal?) of the idea of emotional labor. Were these clients performing emotional labor in order to retain ties with a favored teacher?

³⁶⁰ "Classified Ad 1 – No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution (1946-1984)*, Jan 6, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 20.

³⁶¹ "U.S. Average Hourly Earnings," http://www.data360.org/dsg.aspx?Data_Set_Group_Id=773, accessed May 3, 2016.

³⁶² Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia. 1:33.

enjoyed the people, the studio didn't have enough clientele for him to increase his earnings, so he left.³⁶³ A number of teachers noted that ballroom dance teachers didn't teach for the money, because there wasn't much. There were no retirement plans, few studios had benefits as part of their pay packages, and no holidays were paid – if you didn't work, you didn't get paid. If teachers didn't work, studio owners made no money. Some studio owners in the fifties and sixties made enough money to be considerably wealthy. Wallace recalls Hatch Thornton, owner of the downtown AMI in the fifties and sixties, driving a Rolls Royce, and dressing in expensive clothing.³⁶⁴ This appeared to be the exception, rather than the rule, and perhaps also a statement on conspicuous consumption. The 1950s in particular, and the 1960s to a degree, were an era of conspicuous consumption, of demonstrating your wealth through buying 'stuff,' or engaging in expensive activities that others would see one participating in. Owners of studios, and members of the national boards of AMI and FADS, were looked to as examples of how far teachers might go if they stayed in the business. At corporate events, these people dressed in expensive clothes, and drove expensive cars. There are no corporate records available relating to pay, so it is difficult to tell what the reality of their personal financial circumstances were, but they certainly gave the impression that they were wealthy.

In the 1970s and 1980s US ballroom dance studios, including in Atlanta, experienced a high turnover of teachers. Teachers who felt they were treated poorly by a manager would leave and go work for a different studio. Some found work in other fields and left the dance world permanently. Teachers might, therefore, change studios relatively frequently. Between 1968 and 1980, Lyon worked at studios in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska, two different studios in Florida,

³⁶³ Ibid., 0:16.

³⁶⁴ Don Wallace, Interview with the author. July 11, 2015. Acworth, Georgia, 0:08-0:09, 0:58.

and then multiple studios in Atlanta.³⁶⁵ In the same period, Day worked in studios in Indianapolis, Indiana, Cleveland and Cincinnati, Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky, and Atlanta. Other teachers taught in multiple studios in Atlanta. Johnson talks of one studio moving to five different locations within a ten-year period, and changing names and affiliation in three of those moves. Even when tenure at a studio was short, teachers made friendships with other teachers that lasted for years. The sometimes-transient nature of the business was also a factor that created ties between teachers as they shared and compared experiences in different studios across the country or, in the case of Atlanta, the city.

A shared experience around which teachers could bond was the first lessons they each taught. When teachers talk about teaching their earliest lessons, most recall the exhilaration they experienced at being able to share knowledge with others, and how nerve-wracking the act of teaching was. Repeatedly, interview subjects emphasized that being a successful teacher had little to do with one's knowledge of material, and more to do with power of personality. Day's first lesson as an instructor demonstrates this. He had only had a few days of training when he was put on the floor to teach a new client, Marge Beck, a widow who had suffered from polio and had a damaged leg as a result. Day taught her the man's part and the lady's part of the foxtrot. As he says, "I knew nothing! I ran out of material. I never danced *with* her, I just taught her the man's and lady's part." At the end of the lesson Day told her he realized he didn't know much and he could get her a different teacher if she purchased a package. Beck laughed and told him that she hadn't had so much fun in a long time. She purchased ten lessons and insisted that Day had to be her instructor. Day's personality had put Beck at ease and allowed her to enter the studio culture in a comfortable way. Three months later Beck competed in a FADS

³⁶⁵ Kathryn Lyon, Telephone interview with the author. February 16, 2015. 0:21-0:25.

competition.³⁶⁶ Spencer's first lesson was with an advanced dancer. Because of his gymnastics background, Baity suggested Spencer work with the student on spins. The woman enjoyed the lesson so much that she started taking two lessons a week from Spencer, despite the fact that she had been dancing for twenty years.³⁶⁷ That this woman could afford to take an additional two lessons a week also points to her elite socio-economic status, and perhaps to the studio's reliance on her money. The commonality of early teaching experiences was a common denominator for teachers to bond over.

Most teachers talked about ballroom studio staff being a family. Baity summed the relationship up by saying: "We all loved each other so much, but hated each other too ... It was like we were brothers and sisters."³⁶⁸ They relied on each other and supported each other. When one teacher was ill, another would voluntarily step in to fill the void and make sure the client was happy. As demonstrated by sales goals, teachers worked together toward a common goal, and celebrated the successes they achieved together to make the studio fruitful. When showcases and competitions were coming up, teachers worked to help rhinestone each other's costumes. This camaraderie helped to create a unity of purpose, and a "tightness" in relations among the staff.³⁶⁹

Even though teachers spent hours together in the studio, they also spent leisure time in each other's company. On weekends, they met to have Sunday lunch together, and talked about what was happening at the studio. Most narrators talked about going out to nightclubs together to decompress after a long day at the studio or after a studio party. Sometimes the teachers would party until 3am and then be in the studio at 10am the next day to teach. Many teachers believed they were able to live this lifestyle because they were young, and most were single.

³⁶⁶ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:12-0:15.

³⁶⁷ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:13-0:14.

³⁶⁸ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:53.

³⁶⁹ See Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:15-0:17.

Betsy Bentley's situation brings literalness to the idea of teachers being a family. Bentley worked part-time at the FADS Cheshire Bridge studio, and fulltime as a nurse. She had a daughter, Alison, who was in elementary school when Bentley started teaching at the studio. After school, Alison would come to the studio and do her homework while her mom taught. Bentley admits that trying to fit motherhood and the ballroom dance industry together was "real tough." The manager and teachers were initially wary of the situation, but got used to Alison being there. Baity was the dance director at Cheshire Bridge at the time and was very supportive of Bentley trying to take care of Alison and build a career. He allowed Bentley to finish framing and drywalling a room in the studio that became Alison's area to do homework and hang out. At one point Bentley could not afford to rent a musical instrument for Alison to play in the school orchestra. Baity heard about it and paid for it himself. Baity specifically, but all of the teachers to a degree, took a hand in helping to raise Alison. When she got married in the early 2000s, all of the living teachers who had taught at the Cheshire Bridge studio in the 1980s attended the wedding. As Bentley notes about her time teaching at the studio, "things like that bond you and bind you to one another. We've always been very kind and loving to one another." The studio family had, in a sense, become a literal family to the Bentleys.³⁷⁰

In talking of the era, Berse says that in studios in the 1970s and 1980s "there was no competition between teachers, except on the dance floor... We were family. We didn't have the drama." The stories that narrators shared supports Berse's contention that teachers competed against each other on the dance floor. Teachers competed together as professional couples against other professional couples, often their colleagues from the same studio. What narrator

³⁷⁰ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. March 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:34-0:39; 0:45.

testimony also shows, however, is that there was indeed drama, and at times outright hostility between teachers.

Many of the teachers interviewed competed with professional partners in professional sections. Competing allowed instructors to improve their own dancing, gave them increased incentive and opportunity to travel to competitions (and take students to compete so that the costs of the event would be covered by the students' fees), gave them exposure to national FADS judges and studio owners, and allowed them to earn extra money. Each organization had its own rules about competitions, whether AMI, FADS, or the National Council of Dance Teachers Organizations. Most chain studio competitions had syllabus and open sections for professionals. The idea was to encourage new teachers to work on syllabus figures, and more advanced teachers to continue competing in the advanced sections, often named Novice, Pre-Championship, and Championship sections, with Championship being the pinnacle of achievement. The desire to be at the top of the competitive chain, no matter one's level, encouraged brand new teachers and veteran employees alike to work on their own dancing. The studio and corporation benefitted because as teachers improved their own dancing they could help their own students improve, which meant happy, paying customers.

Because competitions were closed, many of the interview subjects who had worked at Fred Astaire in Atlanta had competed with – and against – each other in the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, some Murray teachers competed together in the period. DeNeve had only been in the business for three months when she competed a Theater Arts Paso Doble with Roy Porter at a 1972 FADS competition in Ashville, North Carolina.³⁷¹ Marie was one of Ares's early partners, competing American Rhythm, as well as Theater Arts, at FADS events. Marie noted that

³⁷¹ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:03-0:04.

competing allowed her to travel around the country, something she had never done before. She attended the United States Ballroom Championships (USBC) in New York City twice, and was honored to be asked to participate as a flag bearer in the early 1980s when the World Latin American Ballroom Championships was held in conjunction with the USBC. She also enjoyed meeting her fellow competitors, and hearing their experiences teaching at Astaire studios across the nation.³⁷² At least one Atlanta newspaper carried reports on the competition in 1977, educating Atlantans about the athletic and artistic prowess necessary to be successful in competitive ballroom dance.³⁷³ Competitions thus appear to have exposed Atlanta teachers to what was occurring on the national ballroom dance scene, as well as to other people, regions, and cultures within the US. Competing helped to make Atlanta teachers more cosmopolitan in their knowledge and understanding of the world.

Competing opened opportunities for some teachers to take positions elsewhere in the country. When Day was working in a Columbus, Ohio FADS studio in the early 1980s he had the opportunity to train with Sam Sodano, a major name in the industry then, and today. Sodano's studio was only a mile away from Day's and he took the opportunity to improve his dancing by taking coaching lessons with Sodano. A fellow-teacher, Rene Caterhorn, convinced Day to compete in a regional Ohio FADS competition, which they unexpectedly won. A studio owner in Cincinnati, Gerhard, saw Day dancing and called him a few days later to offer him a position at his studio. Day was unhappy in Columbus and took the job. In Cincinnati, Day was able to work with coaches who came into the studio, including Vernon Brock, a legendary US champion who revolutionized Latin American ballroom, and the first American to make the

³⁷² Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:19-0:20.

³⁷³ "'Athletes' Train for Jitterbug," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), September 5, 1977. Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 7C. Accessed October 30, 2015.

Latin final of the prestigious British Championships held annually in Blackpool, England.³⁷⁴

These opportunities improved Day's dancing, and eventually led to his moving to Atlanta to teach in FADS studios.

Competing was also a stressful experience. Some narrators talked of the toll it took emotionally and physically. When DeNeve was new in the industry she thought she would walk onto the floor and win everything. When she lost her first event she was so embarrassed that she went to the hotel hair salon and changed her hair color so that the judges wouldn't recognize her in her next section.³⁷⁵ This anecdote indicates how competing impacted the self-identity of some teachers. Competitive ballroom dancing is all about the visual. Competitors had to have a look on the floor that appealed to the judges. When they won or lost their reaction was watched, and judged, by both competition officials and the audience. Just as teachers were always "on" in the studio, they also had to be "on" at competitions – even when not with students. They represented not only themselves, but also the studio they came from. This was further emotional labor performed by ballroom teachers, not only for clients, but for other teachers, owners, managers, and corporate leaders.

Competing created a problematic circumstance for Spencer in regard to his relationship with his manager, Baity. The organizers of Atlanta's biggest competition in the early 1980s, the Dixie Invitational, called Baity to tell him that professional championship American Rhythm section at the competition was going to be cancelled unless one more couple entered. In Baity's interview he noted that he and Marie once competed in a Theater Arts section at a competition on the spur of the moment because Baity heard that only two couples had shown up to compete, and he felt bad that those two couples would not get the money they were counting on. He added

³⁷⁴ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:25-0:30.

³⁷⁵ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:43.

a lift to one of his Rhythm routines and he and Marie danced Theater Arts for the first time. He did this, he notes, “because that’s just me. Vonnie calls me the Good Samaritan.”³⁷⁶ Baity was entered in the Dixie Invitational Professional American Rhythm section with Marie as his partner. Not wanting to miss out on the prize money, according to Spencer, Baity convinced Spencer and his partner, Jennifer Burge, to enter the section. Initially Spencer had said no because he only knew basic figures, and he knew no bolero or mambo. Baity reminded Spencer that all competitors in professional finals received prize money, so even if Spencer placed last he would receive money. At the Dixie Invitational Spencer and Burge beat Baity and Marie, the odds-on favorites. Spencer worried that Baity would be so upset that he would fire him. Baity took Spencer aside and showed him the judges marks, pointing out that Baity and Marie had lost by a single point. Spencer was annoyed and angrily told Baity, “a win is a win!” Shortly after this competition Baity and Marie stopped competing in professional sections, but Spencer continued to work for Baity.³⁷⁷

This anecdote highlights a number of issues about ballroom dance studios in Atlanta in the 1980s. First, teachers were often motivated to compete by the financial payoff. Second, a teacher’s self-identity could be related to his or her competition results. Baity and Spencer appear to have placed significance in how they placed in competitions relative to each other. Third, competing against colleagues on the competition floor had the possibility of impacting a teacher’s opportunities and relationships at work. Beating his boss on the dance floor worried Spencer, but didn’t stop him from defending his dancing to Baity. Finally, distance from an event perhaps changes, impacts, or heightens a narrator’s perspective. Baity’s perception of making sure there were enough entries, at least in the story relating to the Theater Arts section, was his

³⁷⁶ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:21

³⁷⁷ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:37-0:42.

own kind act designed to help others. In the case of the Dixie Invitational, Spencer saw it as a protection of Baity's own financial interests. These two things were not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they reinforced the principle that interview subjects often present their histories in a way that meets their needs and interests at a specific moment.

Some teachers talked about contentious relations between teachers in studios. Just as in families, teachers bickered and openly despised other teachers, as siblings often do. One teacher watched competitive couples fight loudly and openly on the studio floor, and attempted to calm them down in order to avoid students being put off by their antics. Bentley and Ares disliked each other immensely at times, and teachers recalled them having screaming matches in the teachers' lounge.³⁷⁸ In the FADS Marietta studio, Eddie Ares – then a new teacher – clashed with Dennis Masters, a veteran teacher with a loyal clientele. When Ares complained to Jim Day, who managed the studio, Day told Eddie that when he brought \$150,000 a year into the studio, as Masters did, then Ares could complain about him.³⁷⁹ This specific incident again demonstrates that the business side of the ballroom industry was of paramount importance – you had to turn a profit. Of course, Day understood the difficulty of dealing with other teachers, having left a studio he co-owned because he didn't want to deal with his co-owner, another teacher.³⁸⁰ But he still made it clear to the teachers that money talked.

One teacher who had worked in both the AMI and FADs systems, noted that in FADS, but not at AMI, there was a lot of insecurity because the teachers were all trying to make money: “It was an intense sales situation – constantly.” The male staff were especially worried that another male teacher would steal their students, even though technically they were the studio's

³⁷⁸ Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:38.

³⁷⁹ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:04-1:05.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 0:24.

students, not an individual teacher's students. This fear was exacerbated when FADS implemented a program in the 1980s where each client had a primary teacher, and an alternate teacher in case the primary teacher couldn't make a lesson. But the plan dictated that a client took a lesson occasionally with the alternate teacher, just to get them familiar with each other. The problem was that the primary teachers were concerned that the client would like the alternate teacher better, and then they would lose the client and thus lose money. This teacher believed the program promoted a "testosterone-induced 'this is my student, and this is what I want you to do with them'" attitude toward other teachers. He suggested that FADS unintentionally fostered this attitude and feeling amongst its teachers because of all the sales goals and reports that were required. As he summarized: "We all got along, but nobody really felt like they trusted anybody because they were so busy worrying about making themselves look good, and making their money. I was never about all that. I would come in and do what I needed to do, and then leave or do my own thing. I don't have time for all that ego stuff, and that was very, very prevalent at Fred Astaire."³⁸¹

Teachers were promoted within the organizations, moving from introductory lesson teachers, to what AMI called specialists – teachers who taught the more-advanced students. They might also become supervisors, creating schedules, dealing with client queries and concerns, and ensuring teachers followed protocols with their clients, and with each other. Some enjoyed this experience, believing it contributed to building studio comradery and growth. Others preferred being on the dance floor with clients, helping them improve, and meeting their needs. Cindy Johnson trained to be a supervisor, but found out that she hated it. She noted that she "couldn't handle listening to these female clients whine about how their teacher hadn't walked them to the

³⁸¹ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:22-0:25.

elevator last week.”³⁸² These two examples contradict the happy family image most other teachers present, although a majority of interview subjects did say the teachers got along most of the time, and that clients were generally not problematic. Expanding the family metaphor, perhaps studios were more akin to dysfunctional families; teachers worked to secure their positions and avoid anyone obtaining more privileges than themselves, and clients fought to secure most-favored status within the family.

When it came to relationships with management, teachers had to be concerned with how their boss viewed them. If a teacher had a positive relationship with the owner and/or manager, their tenure in a studio was likely to be more positive and productive. John Allen, for example, set Berse up with a competitive partner when he brought her into his Atlanta studio to teach in the early 1980s. She thus entered the industry as a professional competitor, an unusual occurrence. Berse danced American Smooth and Rhythm with Don Azario, Jon Allen’s life partner. She danced International Latin and Theater Arts with another prominent teacher, Charles Sanders. Berse recognized that her connection to Allen, who was on the national FADS board of directors, was beneficial, as was her competing with Allen’s partner.³⁸³ When Allen and Azario moved to New York City to run a studio there, they flew Berse in to work at their studio for six weeks to allow her to prepare with Azario for the upcoming USBC in New York.³⁸⁴ Berse also received coaching from Richard LaVelle, another national board member.³⁸⁵ Internal politics operated within the competitive system, and being well-connected could aid in one’s competitive, and overall ballroom dance, career.

³⁸² Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:25.

³⁸³ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:10-0:12.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 0:22, 0:16-0:17.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:28.

Berse's experience highlighted the benefits that came to teachers when they had positive relationships with studio owners and managers. Allen's interest in Berse's success was further evidenced by the fact that once Berse had received significant training, he set her up in his studio as the receptionist and bookkeeper (she had been doing this professionally while taking her training), thus allowing her to quit her fulltime job and focus on dancing. Owners regularly took an interest in potential teachers, often assisting them financially. The owner of the studio Day initially worked at took him shopping for clothes the first day he met him. In exchange, the owner told Day "You're mine for a year." Day was on the floor teaching his first lesson the next day.³⁸⁶ One of LoCurto's fellow teachers, Edward Gabledeaux, saw the difficulty LoCurto had in living at home with his parents, a significant distance from the studio. He gave LoCurto a room in his apartment, fed him, and lent him clothes. LoCurto remembers Gabledeaux as "an important part of my life" because he made it possible for LoCurto to get to a point of self-sufficiency.³⁸⁷ Owners and managers could be a significant part of the familiness created within ballroom studios in this era.

On the other side of the spectrum, conflict between managers and instructors caused dissention in studios, and even led some teachers to change studios, or transition out of the ballroom industry. Sutherland notes that when the management changed at the Murray Studio where she had started teaching, she and the new female manager clashed. Sutherland taught briefly in another Atlanta Murray location, but decided to give up studio teaching as she was about to get married.³⁸⁸ When LoCurto arrived in Atlanta, he went to see Jackie Walls who hired him on the spot because of his experience and ability. Walls informed one of her main teachers,

³⁸⁶ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:10-0:12.

³⁸⁷ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:11.

³⁸⁸ Cheryl Sutherland, Interview with the author. January 28, 2015. Powder Springs, Georgia, 0:18-0:19.

Doug Wilson, that a significant portion of his students would be given to LoCurto. Her reasoning was that LoCurto had a wife and child to support, and Wilson did not. Wilson resented this for months, but he stayed and was successful in the studio for many years.³⁸⁹

In the FADS organization, managers were often talked of as either good or bad; there was rarely middle ground. For example, while Bob Mitchell's name was mentioned with respect and admiration by numerous former-FADS teachers, Phil Orsi's name was mentioned with disdain and derision. Both the major chains had non-compete clauses in the contracts that teachers signed to become employees. Under this clause, teachers agreed that if they left the studio they would not work at a studio within a specified distance of that specific studio, usually 25 to 50 miles. In the Fred Astaire organization in Atlanta, Phil Orsi was a controversial figure. Orsi owned and managed a number of FADS locations in the 1970s and 1980s. Two Astaire teachers credit Orsi with their decision to leave the organization. In the late 1980s, Lee Miller – who owned three FADS studios in Atlanta - brought Phil Orsi in to manage the Cheshire Bridge studio. From the start Baity and Orsi clashed. Baity believed Orsi had a God complex and wanted to micro-manage every decision in the studio. Baity had been the top seller in the studio for years, but “nothing was ever good enough” for Orsi, and he hounded Baity about sales. Unable to tolerate this behavior any longer, Baity quit. Baity's students followed him, but he insisted that he would only teach them if they continued to have lessons with FADS; Orsi tried to sue him anyway, but Tommy was interviewed by Clark Howard on TV for an investigation on Tommy's exit, and the lawsuit. Tommy told them to “go look at Fred's, my students are all there taking lessons.” This turned out to be true. Orsi dropped the lawsuit.³⁹⁰ Studio owners wanted to protect the bottom-line. It was about the money.

³⁸⁹ Oberia Porter, Interview with the author. July 30, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:38-0:39.

³⁹⁰ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:43.

Orsi was also central to Spencer quitting the Astaire studio system. Spencer had worked for FADS for twelve years. He was consistently a big seller, had a significant number of students, and competed heavily with both pro-am and professional partners. When Orsi promised to alter Spencer's schedule to make his competitive commitments easier, and then reneged, Spencer quit and went to teach elsewhere.³⁹¹ For Spencer, peace of mind, and physical health, were of more importance than the money. He knew that his clients would follow him, and that he could build a following wherever he taught. It was this relationship with managers and owners, however, that led to his leaving the chain and becoming an independent teacher in Atlanta.

Conclusion

Ballroom teachers in Atlanta in the second half of the twentieth century were part of a national ballroom studio industry. The way they entered the ballroom industry, the training they received, and their positions within studio paralleled teachers in other parts of the US. Even though they worked within the context of the chain system, teachers made decisions about their careers. They created relationships, and developed skills, that allowed them to move up in the studio system, or to use their skills to become independent teachers.

The familiness of Atlanta ballroom studios extended to relationships between teachers. Teachers developed familial bonds among themselves, with the studio functioning as a home. Studios fostered increased connection to individual studios, and the chain, through training, and through encouraging teachers to compete on the dance floor. Teachers bonded over shared experiences within their career paths, as well as spending large amounts of time together inside, and outside, the studio. The relationships that developed between teachers within the studio impacted their professional and personal lives, as did the relationship between teachers

³⁹¹ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:43-0:45.

and studio owners and managers. While most teachers painted a near-idyllic work setting, this chapter shows that relationships were complex, just as in traditional families.

Testimony from teachers indicates that while teachers generally had a similar experience teaching in the Atlanta ballroom industry, some differences can be explained by gender. Ballroom dance is fundamentally gendered. There are explicitly different parts for men and women. This gender binary led to attitudes and policies within ballroom dance studios that intentionally, and unintentionally, portrayed ballroom dance to the public as a male-dominated, heterosexual world. The lived reality of Atlanta ballroom studios was significantly different from this image. The next chapter argues that in the thirty-four years under review, women played a dominant, powerful role in the Atlanta ballroom dance industry, even as they were portrayed as subservient followers on the dance floor.

CHAPTER 5: “THEY WERE THE STRAIGHT STUDIO:” GENDER IN ATLANTA BALLROOM DANCE STUDIOS, 1950-1984

Atlanta ballroom dance studios in the years 1950 to 1984 provided a space where women and, later, gay men, could build careers and be part of a community. As women made up an increasing proportion of Atlanta studio clientele between 1950 and 1984, studios saw an attendant decrease in the proportion of female instructors. Even as the ratio of female instructors decreased, women retained a major influence over the Atlanta ballroom industry. The first part of this chapter examines the experience of female teachers in the Atlanta industry during this period. Despite being at a disadvantage in the market, female teachers carved out a space for themselves in the Atlanta context. Studying the ballroom dance industry allows the opportunity

to examine men and women doing the same work, in the setting of the service industry.³⁹²

Gender had a significant impact on the experience of instructors in the Atlanta, and national, ballroom industry.

An analysis of advertising for studios demonstrates the messages about gender that studios communicated to potential clients in Atlanta, and the US as a whole. Women defied the male-domination implied in advertising, and built decades-long careers in teaching, managing, and owning ballroom studios in Atlanta. Female clients were also powerful actors in Atlanta studios. The binary of male-female partnerships in ballroom dance in some ways ensured the influence of women on Atlanta studios.

The decline in numbers of female teachers in Atlanta mirrored the declining influence of women at the national level. The number of women playing prominent roles in the National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations decreased markedly between its founding in 1950, and the reorganization of the body into the National Dance Council of America in 1984. While the decline was significant and indicated the increasing dominance of men in positions of power at the national level, women in Atlanta continued to wield major influence in the Atlanta ballroom dance industry.

As male teachers gained increasing prominence, Atlanta studios ironically became spaces where gay men thrived in an industry that sold an image based on traditional gender roles. In the 1970s and 1980s, gay male teachers became more prevalent, even dominant, in Atlanta studios. The second half of this chapter argues that gay men carved a niche for themselves in the Atlanta ballroom dance community, despite the dominance of heteronormativity in US society at

³⁹² This study has similarities to Hochschild's study of flight attendants, in that neither flight attendants nor ballroom teachers are considered elite vocations. Secondly, and more importantly for this study, males and females in each vocation do the same work, so "any differences in work experience are more likely due to gender." (Hochschild, 15)

large. These men were accepted by both staff and clientele, and prospered in the industry until the AIDS crisis decimated the teaching staff of Atlanta studios, notably in the Fred Astaire Studio system. This acceptance of gay culture was ahead of its time for the South, but not unusual in Atlanta. That gay communities thrived in Atlanta in the 1970s and early 1980s indicates the cosmopolitanism of the city. Ballroom dance studios contributed to that cosmopolitanism through helping to build not only gay culture, but the acceptance of gay men by a broad range of clients, and thereby enhancing the familiness connectivity the studio desired between teachers and clients. The ballroom dance industry in Atlanta provided spaces and opportunities for both gay teachers and female teachers to flourish.

Women in the Ballroom Dance Industry

The broadly accepted gender norms in the US during the 1950s and much of the 1960s were based on the primacy of the nuclear family with a male breadwinner and stay-at-home mom. Popular entertainment helped to perpetuate this ideal. Television shows like *Leave It To Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *The Donna Reed Show* portrayed perfect nuclear families, complete with obedient children, and a dog. Large families were typical in these decades. Between 1940 and 1960, “the number of families with three children doubled and the number of families with a fourth child quadrupled.”³⁹³ Men and women remained within their separate spheres, public (male) and private (female). The context of the Cold War saw the US government suggesting that Communism forced women to work, contributing to the breakdown of families, while women in the US were free to raise their families in their homes. Women contained in their homes were the feminine ideal.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ American Experience, “People & Events” Mrs. America: Women’s Roles in the 1950s,” Georgia Public Broadcasting, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/p_mrs.html, accessed June 2, 2016.

³⁹⁴ For a discussion of gender in the Cold War US, see Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, Basic Books, 1988).

This ideal, however, was only an image. The reality was that in 1950 one third of women worked outside the home.³⁹⁵ By 1960 that percentage had increased to thirty-eight percent, and to forty-three percent by 1970.³⁹⁶ Women comprised 28.8% of the US workforce in 1950, 32.3% in 1960, and 36.7% in 1972. By 1984, the end of the era under discussion, 42.1% of the US workforce was female.³⁹⁷ Women were a significant portion of the US work force during the fifties through eighties.

Female ballroom dance teachers were part of the increasing proportion of US women who entered the labor force. Female teachers in ballroom dance studios in the 1950s and 1960s were not emblematic of the stay-at-home mom ideal. They were women working outside the home to support themselves, and sometimes their families. In an industry that was defined by the gender binary, they were keenly aware that they were women. Ballroom dance was and is inherently gendered. On the dance floor women, in theory, followed what men led. The technique books that codify how each dance is executed are written with one column indicating the man's part, and another indicating the lady's part.³⁹⁸ The man is designated as the 'leader,' and the lady as the 'follower.' In the twenty-first century these terms may seem archaic and sexist, but they were the terms chosen in the 1950s to best explain the choreography of syllabus figures. The debate over the merits of whether ballroom dance is inherently sexist have been addressed elsewhere and is far from settled.³⁹⁹ In the case of Atlanta ballroom dance studios in

³⁹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Changes in women's labor force participation in the 20th century," Bureau of Labor Statistics Website, February 16, 2000. Accessed July 24, 2016.

³⁹⁶ Mitra Toossi, "A Century of Change: the US Labor Force, 1950-2050," *Monthly Labor Review*, No. 125, Vol. 5 (May 2002), 18. Accessed online: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2002/05/art2full.pdf>, August 23, 2016.

³⁹⁷ Michael L. Dolfman and Denis M. McSweeney, "100 Years of US Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston, BLS Report 991," Bureau of Labor Statistics Website, May 2006, 22, 27, 34, 42. <http://www.bls.gov/opub/uscs/>, accessed December 2016.

³⁹⁸ See for example The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance, *The Ballroom Technique* (London: The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance, 1994).

³⁹⁹ See for example McMains, Picart, and Ericksen.

the 1950s through 1980s, female teachers were well aware of their position within the studio system. All teachers interviewed in Atlanta studios – male and female – agreed that there were always more male teachers than female teachers in studios in Atlanta, and indeed in studios across the US. Male teachers worked fulltime at a greater rate than female teachers did, perhaps explaining why several female teachers retained part-time employment while teaching, or why they were employed by the studio as receptionists to supplement their teaching pay. In the Marietta FADS studio in the late 1970s there were seven male teachers and only three female teachers. Similarly, when Day started working at the Cheshire Bridge location of Atlanta FADS, there were sixteen male teachers and eight female teachers. This ratio of two to one matches what Porter experienced in the early 1970s when he moved to Atlanta to teach at an AMI studio. When one compares this to the 1930s and 1940s when female teachers dominated the listings of ballroom teachers, there appears to have been a shift in clientele from mostly males, and married couples, to primarily women.

Women teaching in Atlanta studios were always aware that male teachers had more students, and thus made more money. Male clients did not come into studios in the numbers that female clients did. The very names of the two major chain studios in Atlanta, Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire, implied that expertise in ballroom dance was heavily masculine. Female teachers in studios from the late 1940s onward were, in a sense, teaching as representatives of men.

Of the six ballroom dance studios that were consistently listed in the teacher and studio listings in the Atlanta City Directory for the period 1947 to 1960, four – Arthur Murray, Fred Brooks, Jack Eppley, and Jack Rand – are headlined by men. The O'Mara Dancing Studio had a gender-neutral name. Earlier listings indicate that the O'Mara referred to is Doris O'Mara. This was one of only two studios named for a female owner. The other was the Margaret Bryan

Studio. All of the non-affiliated teachers listed were women, with one exception. Women teachers therefore fell into two main camps during the 1950s and 1960s: independent female teachers, or chain studio employees. As time progressed, the listings for independent teachers diminished.

The hiring process itself was marked by gendered language and attitudes. In a 1951 *Atlanta Constitution* advert seeking teachers for the Atlanta Arthur Murray, the ad states that the studio “has opening for girls and men, 25 to 30 years of age.”⁴⁰⁰ Immediately, females are ‘girls,’ and males are ‘men.’ The implication was that females are always immature, while males of the same age were men, not boys. A classified ad for a receptionist at one of the Atlanta FADS studios in the early 1980s asked for applicants who were “mature, attractive, unencumbered, [and] well-dressed.”⁴⁰¹ Here, aside from being attractive, women also needed to be ‘unencumbered’ or in other words single. It is apparent that between the fifties and the eighties, there were specific expectations relating to the type of women who applied to teach. Women entered the ballroom dance industry with this sort of baggage.

Studios offered the public carefully crafted images of women in their industry. In a 1949 in-house magazine published by the Arthur Murray corporation, *Murray-Go-Round*, headshots of two female instructors overlapped (*Figure 8*, Appendix A). The upper image was of a woman in her twenties or thirties wearing a black blouse and a thin strand of pearls around her neck. The teacher, identified as Genevieve Glover, looks to the left of the camera. She had a welcoming, warm smile – as well as waves in her hair, sculpted brows, and some lipstick. Below her, Betty Chando stared directly into the camera with her chin dipped into her shoulder as she

⁴⁰⁰ “Display Ad 19 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1951, 15. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.

⁴⁰¹ “Classified Ad 16 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 28, 1984, 20C. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.

looks over her shoulder at the camera. Where Glover's picture was welcoming and demure, the angles of Chando's pose, and the directness of her gaze gave her picture a different message. Glover appears to be closer to the gender ideal of the 1950s, the happy housewife who loves to serve – even as she was in reality a woman working in an industry. The depiction of Chando, on the other hand, was almost one of the femme fatale. She was dominant and direct. Each picture had a caption with a quote from the subject talked about “Types of People We Like To Teach.” Glover's caption talked about teaching those with disabilities and how much she enjoyed seeing them progress. Chando's caption was about how teaching the shy and timid dancer is a personal challenge to her. Teaching was all about her, not the client. It is unlikely that the Murray Corporation analyzed the gender messages implicit in the images. Perhaps Murray was being wise in trying to show that there was a teacher to fit every type of client. Even so, there were clearly different images of women in studios.⁴⁰²

Atlantans, whether active ballroom dancers or not, were continually reminded of the specific role men and women were to play within ballroom dance. Numerous articles in *The Atlanta Constitution* in the 1950s encouraged men to avoid being boring dance partners, and to treat women respectfully. A 1954 article warned that romance would be destroyed if a man didn't hold his partner in the correct way.⁴⁰³ A number of examples of poor male dance partners were given, and demonstrated in photographs. The article was addressed to women, and at the end suggested that to avoid the problematic types of partners discussed, women should play deaf, or “tell him that you need to run outside to check the parking meter.” “If all else fails,” author Yolande Gwin wrote, “fainting right on the scene is the only escape.” While humorous, these

⁴⁰² Kathryn and Arthur Murray, eds., *Murray-Go-Round* (New York: Arthur Murray, Inc., 1949), 62.

⁴⁰³ Yolande Gwin, “Dance Room Bores Give Sparks to Gossip,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jul 10, 1954, 14. Proquest Historical Newspapers, accessed 10 January 2015.

stories made women appear to be at the mercy of any man who asked them to dance. Rather than say no, a ruse was necessary to avoid the pests. Women were to boost male egos by being willing to dance, and take evasive action only when absolutely necessary. While the article was addressed to dancers at parties and clubs, this attitude embodied the attention that teachers gave clients in studios, and on studio trips and activities. It begged the question of what lengths teachers had to go to in order to rebuff unwanted advances by male clients.

The language of some AMC adverts and articles from the 1950s indicated the gender attitudes women faced within the system. In an article entitled “How to Hold Your Girl,” males are always men, but females are most often girls, and only sometimes women. The article deals almost exclusively with how poor dancing by men caused the lady pain or social discomfort. The “physical torture” inflicted by men who hold their left hand too high (“imitate[ing] the Statue of Liberty”), or who have a “furious clutch” on their partner’s spine, or who pump their partner’s arm, was chided by the author. Similarly, women who hung on their men were considered poor dancers.⁴⁰⁴ In the end, it was Arthur Murray experts who could help the reader to improve. The photos in the article show a couple, Arthur Murray instructors, with the correct holds and positions for the reader to model. Apparently the ‘girl’ in the photos could teach men to dance correctly. An ironic notion.

In the late 1960s, and especially in the early 1970s, Second Wave Feminism dented the domestic ideal of the 1950s. Women increasingly demanded equality, and recognition in society. Building on Betty Friedan’s influence, especially her work in founding and presiding over the National Organization for Women, the women’s movement had significant victories with the passing of Title IX in 1972, and with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

⁴⁰⁴ “How to Hold Your Girl: Arthur Murray’s experts demonstrate good dancing,” accessed 14 January 2015, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/2/prweb9159631.htm>.

Media portrayals of women increasingly included strong, independent women, notably Mary Richards in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and the outspoken *Maude*. Female ballroom dance teachers in Atlanta in this period of increasingly feminist messaging, worked in an industry that in some ways retained the messaging of male-domination that had been the accepted norm in the US up to that time. Conceptions of what was ‘manly’ or feminine were debated and contested across the nation.

Some female teachers who taught in 1970s Atlanta studios believe that it was more difficult to deal with male clients because of the prevailing attitude about men and dance in the 1970s. A number of teachers refer to the idea that dancing was not accepted as a masculine activity by mainstream society, at least not until John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever* made Tony Manero’s disco-dancing anti-hero an icon.⁴⁰⁵ When women came into the studio the male teachers paid them the attention they sought, learned as much as they could about them, and built a relationship as a confidant and partner in fun. This sort of relationship was considered desirable. When “men came [into the studio] they have this macho air about them. It’s very difficult to get to that vulnerable place” where they trusted the teacher.⁴⁰⁶ Veteran Atlanta ballroom instructor Cindy Johnson, in her characteristically blunt fashion, said of teaching male clients:

“It’s harder because there are fewer men that come through the doors to take lessons... Men are much more specific about their reasons for wanting or needing to learn to dance. You cannot snow a man with compliments and pretty costumes and sparkly jewelry. And I’m not saying that to degrade my fellow

⁴⁰⁵ See Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia; and Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁰⁶ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Georgia, 0:49.

sisters... You cannot talk to men the way a lot of these guys talk to women, because you would be out on the street with your shopping cart, starving. You know, it's very different."⁴⁰⁷

Johnson's assertion raises important principles relating to gender in the industry. She was not the only teacher interviewed to talk about male teachers who spent more time praising their clients and pushing them to compete in expensive competitions and dresses, than actually teaching. But, her point is well taken that fewer men were willing to put themselves on the competition floor where they would be vulnerable not only to the judgment of the qualified adjudicators, but also to the audience who watched. Wrapped up in the masculine identity there seemed to be a great concern with being seen as a poor dancer in a public setting. Men came into the studio to learn to dance, often to be proficient when dancing at business events. This defined purpose was a barrier to female instructors easily convincing men to continue to develop their skills to compete in ballroom competitions. Male teachers did not have to deal with the same circumstance.

In a broader sense, male clients had to be handled in a different way than female clients. DeNeve's sentiments mirrored Johnson's: "It's easier to sell women lessons because they sell on the beautiful gowns they are going to wear, the fantasy. With men it's more logical. You can't sell on how they will look. It's about how much money they will be spending." Men had to be assured that they would never be made fools of. Once they recognized that, men were more willing to trust female teachers.⁴⁰⁸ In making these statements, teachers from the period appeared to be buying into the prevailing gender stereotypes of the 1970s and 1980s. Men were seen as more logical, and women as somewhat flighty.

⁴⁰⁷ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 1:09.

⁴⁰⁸ Phyllis Deneve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, Addendum I, 0:01.

Prevailing concepts of masculinity in the 1970s and 1980s United States were still, to a large degree, based on the traditional notions of men as the breadwinner, and women the homemaker. Women were expected to remain at home and raise the children while focusing their efforts on making the home as idyllic as possible. The home was a separate sphere from the man's domain of work and the outside world. While dancing in dance halls with a partner had been somewhat acceptable in urban America in the 1950s and into the 1960s, notions of masculinity bent back toward a rejection of dance because of its feminine nature. Perhaps fueled by the Women's Liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, ballroom studios continued to have to convince men that dancing would enhance their personal and professional lives, rather than make them look effeminate. Manliness and masculinity were (and in many ways still are) traits that society rewarded in men. In a 1984 AJC editorial article on the banning of victory dances in the National Football League, for example, the editorial board stated: "Whereas, dancing is for sissies and football is for men, and whoever heard of Astroturf in the Savoy ballroom anyway?"⁴⁰⁹ The masculine nature of football, and the feminine nature of dance were overt here, and were opposites. The AJC used them to represent the opinions held by Americans in the 1980s.

Echoing this bifurcated sentiment regarding gender and dance, DeNeve noted: "Women love to dance, men have to learn that they love it by being exposed to it. They usually come in as a couple, with their spouse. When they realize they are not going to be made fun of, and that there's no women's lib on the dance floor, they learn to love it as much or more than women."⁴¹⁰ This comment is a fascinating commentary on ballroom dancing. The most overt

⁴⁰⁹ "NFL Spikes the hands that feed it," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), March 28, 1984. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Journal Constitution, 10A.

⁴¹⁰ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:10.

was the gender essentialism DeNeve expressed, crediting women with loving dance, and men with being less excited about ballroom. Her comment about women's lib is indicative of the time period in which she was trained. The US in the 1970s was the era of an increasingly public push for gender equality. The Equal Rights Amendment was passed by congress, and then failed to be ratified, repeatedly. DeNeve implied that men were – and are – tired of women trying to be assertive, and that the ballroom dance floor was the place where men could be manly, by leading, and women could follow. This is exactly the rhetoric used in the 1950s and 1960s. Making this comment in 2015, DeNeve implied that forty years after the height of the women's liberation movement, these same basic gender ideals of men leading and women following remained desired gender roles. A number of teachers intimated that this was how ballroom dance worked, but none were as open and specific as DeNeve. It seems that there is some continuity in outlook from the 1950s into the twenty-first century. LoCurto, on the other hand, notes that getting men to dance in the 2000s is relatively easy compared to the 1970s when it was not a socially-accepted pastime for men to participate in.⁴¹¹ Either way, female teachers in the 1970s and early 1980s had a more difficult task than their male counterparts when it came to selling.

Looking at the industry from a different perspective, Johnson pointed out that she believed women had an advantage when it came to teaching couples. Numerous married couples came into Atlanta studios to learn to dance together, often to strengthen their relationship, or to fulfill a lifelong desire to be able to go out to parties and dance together. Female teachers had an advantage because they were most often better leaders *and* followers than men. While male teachers most often led ladies around the floor, they rarely followed except in lessons where they were teaching men how to lead and took the role of follower. Because of this, Johnson posits,

⁴¹¹ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:45.

women who taught were better able to relate to, and understand, both sides of the partnership. Female teachers were therefore more experienced, and more skilled, to teach both genders. Men were learning how to be leaders from women, not from other men, an inversion of the generally accepted image of dominant men on the dance floor.

In addition, there were “a lot of homophobes in the world, and a lot of men are uncomfortable with other men touching them.”⁴¹² Male clients who took lessons with a partner, Johnson says, often believed that dancing with a male teacher in a lesson indicated that that a teacher was gay, and somehow the client was complicit by dancing with the teacher. Clearly, sexuality and sexual identity played a role in how clients and teachers experienced the world of the ballroom dance studio.

Women teachers were aware that their physical looks played a significant role in their work, especially compared to men. Ballroom studios are most often ringed with floor-to-ceiling mirrors, used to help students evaluate their own dancing and make corrections. It also means that teachers are constantly seeing themselves in the mirror. Female teachers recognized that they were at times judged by their bodies, and that as their bodies aged they were compared to the younger teachers’ figures. As Johnson said: “I think it is harder for a female to stay in the business long term... Who wants to take a lesson with a fifty-something woman when they could have a tiny twenty-something?”⁴¹³ In a separate conversation with Johnson and Linda Weaver, they both recalled having to dress as Santa’s elves for a studio Christmas party – short dresses that barely covered the rear end and low cut in the front, together with fishnets and high heels. This wasn’t the only time female teachers were expected to dress in skimpy, sexualized costumes for studio events. It could be argued that the requirement that men dress in catsuits for parties

⁴¹² Cindy Johnson, Interview by the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 1:10.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 1:11-1:12.

might indicate equality in using teachers' sexuality for studio purposes, but catsuits were accepted club attire for men in the 1970s and early 1980s.⁴¹⁴ Elf costumes were not.

Johnson identified the confluence of age and looks in the ballroom industry, a theme that has been addressed by scholars studying competitive ballroom dance.⁴¹⁵ Where the competitive side of ballroom dance has separate age categories for competitors, and markets those sections to specific age demographics, the teaching side of the business has no such allowances. Many more men appear to have maintained a long-term presence in Atlanta ballroom studios than women. Johnson credited this to the fact that men didn't have to deal with being judged by their appearance: "Men get older and distinguished, and women get older and wiser, but sag."⁴¹⁶ Thus a double standard relating to physical appearance was at work in the industry, as it was – and is – in US society at large.⁴¹⁷

Women in Atlanta were aware, too, that their position within a studio could be tenuous precisely because of their gender. Being married and having a family did not fit into the lifestyle of ballroom dance teachers. Of those people interviewed about the 1970s and 1980s in Atlanta, only one of the eight female teachers was married, and only two of the eight male teachers were married. Knotts left the ballroom industry because he recognized that the teaching lifestyle meant he was away from his wife and children every week night, and he wanted to spend time with them.⁴¹⁸ LoCurto remained married throughout his career. DeNeve was the sole married woman among the teachers interviewed who worked in the 1970s and 1980s. She talked openly about

⁴¹⁴ Thank you Benny Anderson, Agnetha Faltskog, Anni-Frid Lyngstad, and Bjorn Ulvaeus.

⁴¹⁵ See Marion, McMains.

⁴¹⁶ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 1:13.

⁴¹⁷ This double standard has received much attention, and continues to be debated today by both academics and the public. See for example Patricia Reaney, "Aging a Concern For Many Americans, But Harder for Women – Poll," *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/21/women-aging-different-from-men_n_2913869.html, accessed 2 October 2015.

⁴¹⁸ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:02.

how the ballroom dance industry impacted her marriage relationships. DeNeve met her first husband, Greg Lawrence, in high school, and brought him into the dance industry after she had started teaching with FADS. DeNeve talked about the difficulty of that marriage. Even though they worked alongside each other at the studio, he still expected her to fulfill the same traditional role that women who were not in the workforce performed, including cooking meals for him at night, and housekeeping. The marriage lasted under a year. When they divorced they continued to work in the same studio. DeNeve watched as Lawrence moved on and dated other women, including another teacher who would become his next wife.⁴¹⁹

DeNeve met her second husband, Curt, while dancing at a nightclub looking for potential teachers.⁴²⁰ He did not enter the ballroom industry as he had his own career already. After getting married the couple decided to have children. When she got pregnant, Lee Miller fired DeNeve from FADS. DeNeve pointed out that she had a contentious relationship with Miller before getting pregnant, but she was fired specifically because she was pregnant: “They thought I was useless because I was pregnant... You know how it is, they think ‘she’s pregnant, she’s not going to be able to do this much longer, and she’s causing us problems – let’s get rid of her’”⁴²¹ DeNeve stayed at home with her first son for seven months. Miller, who had fired her, called her and asked her to come back and take over the Marietta studio. Although she didn’t want to go back to work, her husband’s business was struggling, so she returned to FADS. When she had second son, four years later, she stayed at home two-and-a-half years. She again returned to work to help the family finances.

⁴¹⁹ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:29; Adendum I, 0:03-0:05.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 0:30.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 0:31-0:32.

The mini-case study of DeNeve, which will be more-fully interrogated later in the chapter, demonstrates how working in the ballroom dance industry was not conducive to the generally-accepted notions of gender roles in the 1970s. DeNeve was fired during her first pregnancy specifically because she chose to have children – the socially accepted role for women in the US. She *chose* to stay out of the industry when she had her second son, perhaps indicating that she had more choice in the early 1980s. DeNeve also had a husband who worked, something that other female teachers interviewed did not, although the economic difficulties of the late 1970s pushed her to return to the studio sooner than she would have liked to. As she summarized it when asked directly about being a woman in the industry: “It’s been hard for a woman to have a family and to be married in this industry. I know very few women in this industry who are married. They’ve given that up to be in the business. [They] don’t have children.”⁴²² None of the men interviewed had children. This indicates that perhaps men made similar sacrifices in terms of marriage and family, although none of them would have been fired if their wives were pregnant.

Betsy Bentley’s difficulties in trying to raise a daughter while teaching in the ballroom dance industry supports DeNeve’s contention that having children as a female in the ballroom dance industry was difficult. While DeNeve was a married woman, Bentley was divorced. Bentley worked part-time at the FADS on Cheshire Bridge Road. Her daughter, Alison, was in elementary school. Having no other feasible option, Bentley brought Alison to the studio while she taught. This meant that Alison spent hours at the studio each day, doing homework, and entertaining herself while waiting for her mom. Bentley notes that having a child as a teacher in the ballroom industry was “real tough.” Unlike DeNeve’s manager, however, Bentley was

⁴²² Ibid., Addendum I, 0:02.

fortunate to have a manager who played an active role in helping her with her child. The manager even went as far as finishing an upstairs area of the studio so that Alison had a place to spend time that was comfortable, and removed from the everyday activities of the studio.⁴²³

On a number of occasions, female teachers referred to the women they taught with as ‘sisters.’⁴²⁴ Women who worked together formed a bond as they found themselves in a male-dominated industry where they continually asserted themselves. Some women made it their business to ensure that other female teachers obeyed studio and corporate policies, in order to protect themselves. Bentley and Ruth Ann Lawrence were “sticklers about relationships with clients, and ... got on the case” of any female teachers who attempted to have romantic relationships with clients. Bentley and Lawrence didn’t want to be associated with the image of gold-diggers looking for rich men to marry. “It was important to keep our reputations,” says Bentley.⁴²⁵ Teachers were keenly aware of the image of female ballroom studio staff, and desired to avoid the appearance of unseemly intimate relations with male clients.

Female Icons in the Atlanta Ballroom Industry

While Arthur Murray has become perhaps the best-known icon in the Atlanta ballroom dance industry, it is women who have dominated the public imagination in the ballroom dance industry in the Big Peach. Murray left Atlanta in the mid-1920s, taking up residence in New York City. His assistant, Margaret Bryan, took over his studio. After a few years she opened a studio under her own name. Bryan had become the doyen of ballroom dance in Atlanta (*Figure 10*, Appendix A). Bryan’s name peppers the social columns of the AJC from the twenties to the

⁴²³ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:34-0:39.

⁴²⁴ See for example Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 1:09.

⁴²⁵ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:31-0:32.

sixties as she hosted parties, and taught high school students to dance.⁴²⁶ From the 1920s through 1958, Bryan took a special interest in teaching youth both dancing and etiquette. She taught thousands of high school students in Atlanta each year through the courses she taught at schools in preparation for formal dances, as well as hundreds who attended her dance school for weekly training.⁴²⁷ These were children of upper-middle-class and elite parents.⁴²⁸ Underscoring her significance in Atlanta's ballroom industry, Bryan was named Atlanta's business woman of the year in 1950. An article cited her work with more than 20,000 students in Atlanta, and called her a dancing teacher and an etiquette arbiter. Bryan was a public figure who openly displayed her expertise and business acumen.

The article also pointed out another fascinating aspect of Bryan's business. In the highly segregated Atlanta of the 1920s through 1950s it is interesting that Bryan had a black business manager, "a faithful negro named Selma who has worked with her from the start of her school."⁴²⁹ Aside from the patronizing tone of the reference, and the first-name-only identification, the fact that Selma was given recognition is significant. Black Americans are almost entirely absent from organized ballroom dance writings relating to white studios in Atlanta in the twenties through fifties. This passing mention of Selma indicates that black

⁴²⁶ For an example of Bryan's social activities in her early years, see "Miss Margaret Rogers to Give Tea Dance Today for Younger Set," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 6, 1934, 10. High school students in 1950s Atlanta recollect Bryan's classes in some of the oral histories conducted by the Buckhead Heritage Society. See for example David Lowance, "David Lowance," interviewed by Caroline Johnson, Buckhead Heritage Society Website, 3 August 2009, 6 and Henry Grady, "Henry Grady," interview by Chad Wright and James Ottley, Buckhead Heritage Society Website, 9 October 2011, 5.

⁴²⁷ "Margaret Bryan Joseph, Dancing Teacher, Dies," *Atlanta Journal constitution*, January 31, 1973. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/hnpatlantaconstitution2/docview/1557728920/E889876BD0AF4DBAPQ/2?accountid=11226>. Accessed February 15, 2016.

⁴²⁸ Two narrators in oral history interviews conducted by the Buckhead Heritage society reference taking lessons at school with Bryan. One, David Lowance, was the son of a doctor who practiced in Atlanta for forty years. The other, Henry Grady, had parents who were able to send him to private school in Massachusetts for some of high school in the depression-era 1930s, indicating their socio-economic standing. Buckhead Heritage Society, "Interview with David Lowance,"

⁴²⁹ Katherine Barnwell, "Dancing Teacher named Business Woman of Year," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 9, 1951, 12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed January 2016.

Americans had some kind of connection to white ballroom dance studios in Atlanta. It is unlikely that the business manager played any front-of-house role in the studio, but that she worked in an Arthur Murray Studio in these decades – in any capacity – is noteworthy because of the highly segregated social circumstances of the US South in the mid-twentieth century.

When Murray International sold the Atlanta franchise, it was sold to a couple, Hatch and Paige Thornton. From teacher accounts, it was Paige who was the driving force in the studio. In fact, when those interviewed for this project were asked who the most influential people in the ballroom industry in Atlanta over the previous sixty years were, two names were most often given – Paige Thornton and Jackie Walls.⁴³⁰ Thornton actively managed the Murray studio in the city in the fifties and sixties. She hired, trained, and fired teachers. Paige Thornton was a personality and presence in the city's dance industry. When the Thorntons sold their franchise, they sold it to their business manager, Jackie Walls.

Walls had spent ten years as the office manager in the AMI studio, and the Thorntons relied on her to run the day-to-day issues of the studio. She had extensive experience having already run the business. She was not, however, an accomplished dancer when she took over the studio. When Wallace worked at the Thornton AMC studio in the late 1950s, Walls was the office manager, but he never saw Walls dance, ever. When talking about the years Walls owned he studio, however, studio teachers and clients from that era talk about Walls teaching students, competing with students, and training teachers.⁴³¹ She learned to dance competently, and taught both clients and teachers.

⁴³⁰ Thornton died in the 1980s. Walls has been diagnosed with maladies relating to age. I was therefore unable to interview her. What is presented here is pieced together from interviews with those who knew and worked for each of them.

⁴³¹ See for example Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Marietta, Georgia; and Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia.

Walls owned the rights to all the Murray studios in Atlanta. Anyone wishing to open a franchised AMC studio in the city had to go through her. As a manager Walls was to-the-point and hands-on. Those who worked for Walls described her as a fun-loving, no-nonsense owner. She ran studio parties and actively sought to ensure her teachers serviced the clients. When Roy Porter complained in his interview about the lack of attention teachers give clients in ballroom studios in the 2010s, he recalls his time at Walls's studio as the example of exemplary customer service: "Ladies would not sit out for more than two dances in a row. The attention to service was much better."⁴³² Photos in one of Walls's studio publications show her hamming it up in publicity shots aimed at showing how fun the studio environment was. Porter also recalls that while Walls sold large contracts to students, she only sold contracts she knew she would be able to fulfill. To Porter, who had briefly worked for the shady Kelly and Murdock studio in Atlanta, Walls was very ethical.⁴³³

While Walls was a large presence in Atlanta in the 1970s through 2000, multiple witnesses noted that she often used her male assistant managers to do her dirty work. Terry King and Bobby Richardson were fiercely loyal teachers who were seen as harsher, and more mean-spirited than Walls. Walls and King were married for a time, but later divorced. Richardson stayed with Walls right up until she sold the studio in 2008.⁴³⁴ Walls had these men fire problematic teachers. Using this tactic, Walls was able to distance herself from the actual act of letting teachers go, although it is clear that she was in control and made those decisions. In the early 1980s Walls left the Arthur Murray Corporation and merged the studio to the TC Studios

⁴³² Roy Porter, Interview with the author. July 2, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:08.

⁴³³ Ibid., 0:34.

⁴³⁴ Richardson has refused to be interviewed. He remains the one key player that I have been unable to convince to tell his story.

group.⁴³⁵ Not much changed in the running of the studio. She kept the same staff and general procedures and protocols, but moved locations to a small studio on Peachtree Battle Street, right next to a nightclub called The Imperial Fez.⁴³⁶ The TC connection lasted a short time, and Walls found a location on Copeland Road where she opened the Atlanta Ballroom Dance Center (ABDC).⁴³⁷ The studio would move a few more times, finally settling in a location on Roswell Road in Sandy Springs. Through most of this time, Walls retained a core group of teachers who remained loyal to her. She owned and ran the studio for thirty-five years. Walls was as effective a manager as any male studio manager in Atlanta.

As a closer, Walls finalized contracts with clients. She took clients into her office and strongly encouraged them to buy large programs. One former client of Walls recalls her using “high pressure” tactics to close sales.⁴³⁸ Even so, her students and clients loved her. As one client put it: “There was something about Jackie that you liked, no matter how, you know, she’d take you in that back room and put the screws to you, and you’d end up signing all this, but then she’d go: ‘now honey, we’ll work this all out. This is okay.’ And she just knew how exactly to deal, so that you did not dislike her. You would like her anyway.”⁴³⁹

Some clients believe Walls was dishonest in double-selling contract hours that clients didn’t use up. This practice involved selling unused contract hours of clients who had indicated they would not be returning to the studio. The hours were sold at discounted rates to favored clients. The studio essentially got paid twice for the hours. Was this shrewd business practice, or

⁴³⁵ TC Studios was a company named for the major stakeholder, Tom Chapman. Walls still owned and operated the studio herself.

⁴³⁶ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:12-0:16.

⁴³⁷ ABDC closed while this dissertation was being written, in October of 2015. It had remained at the Sandy Springs location for twenty years before being forced to close due to the site being razed and rebuilt as apartments.

⁴³⁸ Oberia Porter, interview with the author. July 30, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:08.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 0:45.

unethical double-dipping? It is interesting to consider how the perspective might change if the person double selling hours was a man. Was Walls's business sense acceptable because she was a woman doing business in the male-dominated US economy, or was it unacceptable because she was a woman using feminine wiles to get the better of people?

Despite her reputation as a powerful force, Walls often used two male managers to do her dirty work for her. When teachers were fired for breaking rules, it was Bobby Richardson or Terry King who did the firing, not Walls. They played the bad guys to Walls's good guy. By doing this, Walls attempted to avoid the teachers resenting her personally. Ironically, she broke the precise rule she had threatened to fire others for – she dated and married a co-worker, Terry King.

Another female teacher in Atlanta, Polly Dodd, noted that she had started as a student in an Arthur Murray studio in Chicago. While she had no problem with the teachers that initially taught her, she pointed out that *she* decided how much money to spend on her dancing. She was unmarried at the time, and in fact met her husband dancing at a studio. She had no problem telling the studio what she was willing to pay for, and what she could not spend. When she became a teacher she actively made decisions about what to teach her students, how fast they should progress, and what studio events they should participate in. Dodd painted a portrait of strong women in the ballroom industry, as both clients and teachers.

An example of a powerful woman in the national ballroom, going into homes in Atlanta, and across the US, was Kathryn Murray, Arthur Murray's wife. Television has been one of "the most potent forces underlying the homogenization of contemporary American culture. [It] brought national fads, accents, and trends into Southern living rooms."⁴⁴⁰ Some have argued

⁴⁴⁰ Richard Pillsbury, "Landscape, Cultural," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 540.

that television helped to blur regional differences in the US and “forge a national pop culture.”⁴⁴¹ Television certainly helped to introduce millions of Americans to ballroom dancing. Fred Astaire television dance specials in the 1940s and 1950s garnered high ratings, and buttressed the elegant picture of ballroom dance that his popular films had created.⁴⁴² In 1947 the Fred Astaire Dance Studios ran a five-week series in which they taught the viewers how to dance.⁴⁴³ The show that made it big, however, started in 1950 when CBS aired the *Arthur Murray Dance Party*. Arthur Murray bought fifteen minutes of airtime and Kathryn Murray taught the viewers some basic ballroom. Notice that it was Kathryn Murray who was the instructor, despite Arthur Murray – Mr. Ballroom Dance himself – being present and participating in the show. She was obviously effective, and appealing to the viewing audience; after the third show Murray bought a half-hour time slot that rose in the ratings. In 1952 General Foods became the sponsor of the show, and it ran successfully until 1961. The Murray Corporation believed that 2,000 new students a week started lessons at a Murray studio because of exposure to dancing on television.⁴⁴⁴ Much of that success must be attributed to Kathryn Murray, not the name that comes to mind today when one thinks of the Arthur Murray Corporation.

Phyllis DeNeve started teaching at Fred Astaire in Atlanta in 1972. Within six months she was in a management position, and remained in management and ownership for the rest of her career, which ended when she retired in 2015. At one point in the late seventies Johnny Long, the Fred Astaire franchisee in Atlanta, sent DeNeve to manage the Marietta location. The studio had been damaged by fire and had suffered as a result. Within a year the studio was

⁴⁴¹ UShistory.org, “Land of Television,” accessed 10 January 2015, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/53c.asp>.

⁴⁴² Selma Jean Cohen, et al., eds., *International Encyclopedia of Dance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 630.

⁴⁴³ “The Arthur Murray Dance Party,” http://www.tvacres.com/dance_arthur_murray.htm, accessed 7 Nov 2004.

⁴⁴⁴ Arthur Murray Corporation, “A History of ‘Arthur Murray’ & the International Franchised Dance Studio,” TMs., undated, AMIA, 3.

running at a profit. DeNeve cites hard work and adherence to protocols as the reasons for her success. DeNeve stood out in the industry not only for her success, but because she defied conventional expectations. Unlike most female teachers in the industry in the 1970s, DeNeve not only married and remained in the ballroom industry, but decided to have children, and ultimately returned to the industry to fix a studio that was failing. A few years later DeNeve left the corporation and opened an independent studio. She was the first Fred Astaire instructor in Atlanta to leave the franchise and open a separate studio. She ran her own studio for more than twenty years. In an industry that became increasingly dominated by male owners and managers, DeNeve made it a point to personally deal with problems in the business. As she says, “I can fire a person and they will end up hugging me.” Dozens of teachers were trained by DeNeve, and many others taught in her studio over the years. She became a pillar in the ballroom dance community in Atlanta.

Vonnie Marie and DeNeve forged a sort of proto-feminist bond as they worked together in multiple studios. For over thirty years they moved together to different branches of FADS in Atlanta, and finally into DeNeve’s own studio, Atlanta Dance. Marie and DeNeve taught, marketed, managed, scheduled, dealt with the finances, and counselled together to carve out a space in Atlanta’s somewhat crowded ballroom studio arena. These close and long relationships of women working together, professionally, demonstrates that women actively sought to assert themselves prominently and permanently in the Atlanta ballroom industry.

It is of note that in *The Atlanta Daily World*, the only black ballroom instructors named are women. In a 1957 Atlanta Daily World article, Mrs. M. T. Smith and Miss F.L. Smith are reported to have attended the National Convention of Dance and Affiliated Artists in New York

City.⁴⁴⁵ The Smiths are noted as being the only two black Americans at the conference of 700 attendees to have been certified as trainers of dance teachers. The Floyd Bolton studio was founded by two black women, Bette Bolton, who is identified as the president of the organization, and Dorothy Floyd, the vice-president.⁴⁴⁶ The studio was located inside the Butler Street YMCA, and offered classes for teenagers, young adults, and adults. Bolton is described as “one of the leading authorities in this country, having taught celebrities and managed well known dance studios in Chicago.” In an article a week later, the reporter tells the reader that Bolton “has been acclaimed in various parts of the country by thousands as being one of the finest dancers and teachers.”⁴⁴⁷ As studio owners, and teachers within studios, black women played a central role in ballrooms studios in Atlanta.

These examples of influential women disrupt the image of women as somewhat passive partners on the dance floor. The bulk of their clientele were men, or married couples. It was women, therefore, who were teaching men who came into the studio how to be masculine on the dance floor. Particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, but on into the 1980s, there was a stigma attached to male teachers teaching male students. Ballroom dance was inherently geared toward heteronormativity, and in the decades prior to 1990 this was especially evident. Women benefitted in some ways from this because they taught the bulk of couples who came to studios.

Gender in Ballroom Dance Advertising

Thousands of adverts for ballroom dance studios ran in *The Atlanta Constitution* from the 1940s through the 1980s. Ballroom dance studios in the USA in this period sold the public an

⁴⁴⁵ “Smith School of Dancing Reveals Dancing Program,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Sept. 1, 1957, accessed January 2014. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁴⁶ “Display Ad 8 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 13, 1955, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁴⁷ “Dancing Classes Starting at YMCA,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 13, 1955, 5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

image of the male in a ballroom dance partnership being the leader, and the female being the follower. Advertising for ballroom dance studios in the US perpetuated this image through both pictures and text. Perhaps inadvertently, the implication was that men were ‘in charge’ on the floor, and women were at their beck and call. This image of women as passive followers in a dance partnership has been an enduring public perception of how ballroom dancing functions. Even today, popular television programming relating to ballroom dance – including *Dancing With the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance* – uses the same trope to sell their product. Women continue to be portrayed as the submissive receivers of men’s lead. They graciously follow what the men direct them to do.

In examining advertising in Atlanta, and also looking at ballroom dance studio practices in Atlanta between 1950 and 1990, it is apparent that women both used this image to their advantage in selling ballroom dance to consumers, and defied it as they carved out a vital space for themselves in Atlanta studios. They transcended the social boundaries relating to the role of women in the workforce, *and* publicly maintained those boundaries as a means of enticing clients. Off the dance floor, female teachers assumed positions of power and prominence as studio owners and managers. They also established themselves as influential players in the ballroom dance industry *on* the dance floor. This section examines the contradictions and dimensionalities of the image of ballroom dance in Atlanta and the US as perpetuated in newspaper and corporate advertising, and the lived reality of those who participated in the Atlanta ballroom dance culture. Who, in reality, was leading, and who was following?

Studios in Atlanta advertised in the local daily, *The Atlanta Constitution*. In almost every advertisement in the 1950s, and many in the 1960s, there is a picture of a couple dressed in

formal eveningwear looking as though they are elated to be dancing. In each picture, the man dominates. In a 1951 ad for the Atlanta Arthur Murray studio, female elation at being held by the charming, tall, dark, and handsome male was clear. The ad offers the reader the chance to be “the most envied couple in your set.”⁴⁴⁸ In an advert for the Fred Brooks Studio the man was broad shouldered and the viewer sees his face full-on (*Figure 10*, Appendix A). His partner’s face was in profile and appeared to be experiencing great enjoyment in the arms of her partner. The banner over the top of the ad proclaims that “Social And Business Success Demands Social Skills.”⁴⁴⁹ In the 1950s US, business success was the purview of men. Social success included the expectation of marriage; having a wife to dance with at social engagements was an indication of reaching social success. Being a good dancer was an indication of good breeding and manners. A 1964 *Atlanta Constitution* article asked the question “Does Dancing Improve Manners?”⁴⁵⁰ Local teachers and parents resoundingly agreed that ballroom dance taught good manners, and lamented that society was not teaching children those manners at home and school. Charles Reagan Wilson has written that Southerners have “traditionally equated manners – the appropriate, customary, or proper way of doing things – with morals, so that unmannerly behavior has been viewed as immoral behavior.”⁴⁵¹ An appeal to propriety and social skills would therefore have a ring of familiarity to Southerners. Part of this Southern ideal of manners was the cult of chivalry, women being treated with absolute courtesy. Thus ballroom dancing with the man’s part delineated from the woman’s part perhaps had a particular appeal to elite southerners, the group who attempted to protect and uphold this image. Significantly, all the

⁴⁴⁸ “Display Ad 18 -- No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Aug 21, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution pg. 7. Accessed March 5, 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Atlanta City Directory Co., *Atlanta City Directory 1947*, 272.

⁴⁵⁰ Sarah Cash, “Does Dancing Improve Manners,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 1, 1964, 6E. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed February 4, 2016.

⁴⁵¹ Charles Reagan Wilson, “Manners,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 634.

dance teachers quoted in the AJC article were women, including Doris O'Mara and Martha Ridley, two staples in the Atlanta ballroom dance community of the 1960s.

In a 1946 AJC ad, a businessman sits with his feet on his desk, talking on the telephone (*Figure 11*, Appendix A). He tells the person at the other end of the line that he is taking a refresher course at the Fred Brooks Dance Studio: "I want the sure way to get fun out of dance music and to be sure I'm going to lead my dancing partner in a sophisticated masculine manner."⁴⁵² In another studio print ad, a couple in evening gown and tailsuit danced suavely. The lady appeared to almost swoon in his arms. He appeared strong, capable, and of course handsome. Text next to the image proclaimed that "Ladies are taught to dance with the tread of a queen. The men with masculine confidence that all admire."⁴⁵³ A third image (*Figure 12*, Appendix A), this one from 1950, featured a beautiful woman staring up at the handsome man, their faces inches apart. She tilted her chin up toward him, expectant. He looks calm and secure as he holds her in a ballroom dance hold. Above this sensuous scene is the bolded statement: "Don't let Romance Pass You By," and a cartoon heart dripping tears from its eyes.⁴⁵⁴ Arthur Murray, the ad told the reader, could make you fun and popular by teaching you to dance. The image also implied that ballroom dance held the opportunity for real love; you might find your life partner on the dance floor.

In an Arthur Murray corporate publication from the 1950s or 1960s, photos taken at a Murray studio in Atlanta serve as a model for publicity campaigns that other studios in the chain

⁴⁵² "Display Ad 41 -- No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Feb 17, 1946; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution pg. 14A. Accessed December 1, 2015.

⁴⁵³ "Display Ad 33 -- No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Mar 10, 1946; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution pg. 10A. Accessed February 17, 2016.

⁴⁵⁴ "Display Ad 302 -- No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov 12, 1950; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution pg. SM21. Accessed March 5, 2016.

were encouraged to follow.⁴⁵⁵ In nearly every photo the men in the photo are the focal point. Women's faces were seen in profile, or not at all, while the men were smiling and full-faced. What are we to make of this? Perhaps Arthur Murray studios were attempting to attract men by showing how much fun they could have. Showing them in a dominant position, enjoying themselves, would certainly be an image that might appeal to a male-breadwinner in the 1950s. Perhaps it might have appealed to women because it indicated that there were men to dance with at that studio; ballroom studios have consistently had more female clientele than male. Whatever the interpretation, it was clear that men were the focus in the publicity pictures.⁴⁵⁶

Studios also used the idea of the virtuous woman, and the need to guard her emotions and virtue, to sell their services. A prime example of this was found in a promotional pamphlet entitled "Won't You Dance With Me?" Originally published as an article, it told the story of a woman who desired to dance, but her husband would not learn. The author states that the wife, "if she is the patient, tolerant type ... will in all probability, bear it." But, he warns that if the husband continues to refuse to dance, the wife will go out dancing, fall in love with someone else, and "ultimately she may even decide upon a divorce."⁴⁵⁷ All because a man refused to learn to dance! The message: protect your wife from straying by learning to dance. Women needed protection, and manly men (who danced) could protect them.

Adverts throughout the 1950s and 1960s generally used an image of a couple dancing, and text encouraging the reader to call or come in to the studio to take a lesson. The strong

⁴⁵⁵ Arthur Murray Corporation, "Photo Flash," undated.

⁴⁵⁶ The need to continuously re-inscribe masculinity is most likely related to the midcentury crisis of masculinity/femininity in the US. Men increasingly became white-collar office workers following WWII, a space formerly dominated by women. Robert Corber's *Homosexuality in Cold War America* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997) argues that men were now expected to "passively accept submission to other men," and were comforted by the representations of breadwinner-as-man portrayed in popular television sitcoms and commercials. Ballroom dance studios contributed to this image through their portrayal of male dominance on the dance floor.

⁴⁵⁷ Neal Stanton, *Won't You Dance With Me?* AMIA, 1951.

man/related woman dichotomy continued to be used.⁴⁵⁸ When Arthur Murray studio advertising changed its focus in the 1970s to herald the return of ‘touch dancing,’ the messages were still gendered. Arthur Murray sent franchisees Executive Planners annually during the 1970s and 1980s. These planners were calendars with suggestions for good advertising and business practices. The May 1978 sample ad shows a picture of one Pancho Gonzalez holding an Arthur Murray dance trophy while wearing his tennis whites (*Figure 13*, Appendix A). His Arthur Murray instructor is draped on him. In a second photo, the two are in a traditional ballroom hold, dancing in the same clothing as the tennis picture. Part of the text reads: “If you find yourself in opposing courts too often – get closer. Dancing together moves a lot more than your feet.” Gonzalez is identified as the resident tennis pro at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas, and “the little lady” as an Arthur Murray teacher. Despite the fact that AMC banned teacher-client relationships beyond teaching in the studio, the ad gives the impression that these two are a couple. A man’s masculinity, the ad suggests, can be enhanced by learning to dance, and you too can have an instructor drape herself on you. The condescending “little lady” tag clarifies who AMI believed had money to spend in the studio. Men were the breadwinners and had money and time to spend on leisure.

Most ballroom studio ads in the 1980s use graphics that were in some ways generic, and indicative of the disco era.⁴⁵⁹ Even so, some adverts might still be interpreted as inferring the ideal of a dominant male. A 1983 advert depicted a man holding a lady in what is called a cuddle position (*Figure 14*, Appendix A). While the position is relatively common in ballroom dance,

⁴⁵⁸ See for example “Display Ad 12 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 14, 1961, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 10, 2016. And, “Display Ad 136 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 24, 1962, 22A. Accessed March 14, 2016.

⁴⁵⁹ See for example “Display Ad 278 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Marh 6, 1983, SM27. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 8, 2016.

the image was presented to a public without knowledge of ballroom dance. The non-dancer reader saw a photograph of a woman happily wrapped in her own arms, which are controlled by her partner's hands. While perhaps not as overt as other ads, the implication was that men could control the dancing that women did on the dance floor, and perhaps retain the dominant position in society that he desired.

A common theme AMC used in the 1970s and 1980s was that learning to dance at a Murray studio could lead to romance. Often the implication was that married couples could reconnect through ballroom dance, but this was not always explicit. An AJC ad for a "Winter Warm-Up" proclaimed that ballroom teachers could "teach you how to touch your partner, move as one!"⁴⁶⁰ Just who that partner would be was not defined. Another ad campaign declared that "Arthur Murray changes people into couples" (*Figure 15*, Appendix A).⁴⁶¹ The graphic of the advert depicted a woman with her hands placed behind her head, staring at the camera as her partner has his hand on her waist and is looking downward. The message the picture sends is a sexualized one. Obviously the man is enjoying this sensual moment, but the woman appears to be willing, and in some ways dominant. Here is the more 'liberated' women. She is making the choice to be objectified, but she *is* being objectified.

While not all advertising in the years between 1950 and 1990 portrayed women as the lesser sex, the idea that men were dominant in ballroom dance and women passive followers was perpetuated by studio advertising in Atlanta newspapers. Despite this image in the media, women were in reality powerful, purposeful players in the Atlanta ballroom dance industry for most of the twentieth century. In sheer numbers, female teachers dominated the listings of

⁴⁶⁰ "Display Ad 125 – No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1982, 4GG. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 10, 2016.

⁴⁶¹ "Display Ad 2 – No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 4, 1979, 3A. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 8, 2016.

ballroom teachers in the Atlanta City Directory for the 1950s. Individual women continued to be prominent in the industry throughout the next three decades.

Female Clientele

While women dominated dance teaching in Atlanta in the 1920s through 1950s, the decades that followed saw women become the primary clients of studios, meaning an attendant decrease in women teaching in the city. With the onset of a full economy in the 1950s, businessmen had come to studios to learn to dance to meet accepted social norms and expectations. Many accomplished this, and moved into the upper echelons of Atlanta society. By the 1960s, the wives of these successful businessmen were looking for ways to spend their husbands' money, and perhaps find people who would give them the attention that their busy spouses could not. Ballroom dance was one way some found this need met. Teachers interviewed for this project all pointed out that clientele was dominated by women from the late 1960s onward. The majority of female clients were older, generally in their sixties or seventies.⁴⁶² Female clients thus became the financial backers of Atlanta studios.

The women who kept studios in business in the 1970s and early 1980s were “women with money. They were true Atlanta Money.”⁴⁶³ Some were widows who had large amounts of expendable income. Others were wives of highly successful Atlanta businessmen who were lonely because their husbands' lives were taken up with work. Whatever their specific circumstance, these were women that were older, more established members of the community, who had “above average income.”⁴⁶⁴ Tommy Baity, a teacher in Atlanta for nearly 50 years, recalls one Maddy Lou Burns, a Southern belle whose husband owned huge tracts of land

⁴⁶² Roy Porter, interview with the author, Roswell, GA. July 2, 2015, 0:11.

⁴⁶³ Tommy Baity, interview with the author, Atlanta, GA. February 2015, 0:09.

⁴⁶⁴ Joe LoCurto, interview with the author, Buckhead, GA. May 14, 2015, 0:17-0:18.

downtown, who took lessons for years at the Fred Astaire studio on Cheshire Bridge road. Jean Smith was Margaret Mitchell's best friend, and part of Atlanta's old elite. Her mother had been the first woman to drive a car in Paris, and Smith and her sister were the first women to drive a car across the US. These were privileged women.

In the ballroom studio these women found men who paid them inordinate amounts of attention. Teachers taught them on the dance floor, but took an active interest in their personal lives. Some women bought lifetime contracts which entitled them to a certain number of lessons a week, plus entry to all parties. Teachers tell of how some women used those lessons to sit and talk to their instructors, rather than actually dance. Often ballroom teachers paid more attention to, and spent more time with, these women than their own families. Hence these clients forged close bonds with their male teachers, and some even considered their teachers their own sons.⁴⁶⁵ These connections were family-like relations that strengthened the connections between clients and the studio.

Wealthy women bought large numbers of private lessons, and often bought extra services including cruises, studio-organized trips, nights on the town, and membership in studio clubs that offered more parties. Male teachers were able to see the world on studio trips because teachers' expenses were covered by their clients. These women were valuable clients for studios. Numerous teachers pointed out that Atlanta studios were profitable because of these wealthy, female clients. The average client who walked in off the street allowed the studio to pay the bills, but it was elite women who bought packages and studio extras that allowed the studio to thrive.

Despite rhetoric that framed men as leaders and women as followers, women carved a prominent space for themselves in the ballroom dance industry in Atlanta between 1950 and

⁴⁶⁵ Tommy Baity, Interview with the audience. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:12.

1990. While studio advertising invited men to come and lead on the dance floor, the teachers who taught men were most often women, in studios managed by women, and sometimes owned by women. The patronage of wealthy women allowed male teachers to earn a livelihood, and become more cosmopolitan through travel and exposure to elite society. Even as male teachers outnumbered female students in the seventies and eighties, it was women who enabled studios to remain economically viable. Women turned the generally accepted image of ballroom dance on its head. Women led, and men followed.

The above examples of influential women in the ballroom dance industry in Atlanta demonstrate that despite the dominance of female clientele, and despite the industry's image of males dominating women, female teachers and owners were powerful players in the Big Peach's studios. In terms of numbers, women accounted for an increasingly smaller proportion of studio teachers and owners. Where the 1950s listings of teachers had been dominated by women, by the 1980s men controlled much of Atlanta's ballroom industry. By the 1980s there were no female franchisees in either Arthur Murray or Fred Astaire. Walls and DeNeve had become the owners of independent studios. The four FADS and one AMC studios were owned and managed by men, as were most independent studios. Walls, Deneve, and Katherine Lyon were the only female owners in the city. Even so, female teaches exercised significant influence in the Atlanta industry.

At the national level from 1950 to 1984, women held meaningful, powerful positions within the ballroom dance industry. Women had been the driving force behind the founding of a national dance organization that included ballroom dance teachers. The most significant player in the founding of The National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations (NCDTO) was Helen Wicks Reid, the president of the American Society of Teaching of Dance (ASTD). Concerned

with the passing of the 1947 Maryland Bill which lay restrictions on dance teachers, Wicks Reid took a trip to England, in June of 1948, to learn how the British had organized dance teachers there in the 1920s and 1930s. In August of 1948 Wicks Reid called a meeting of representatives from US dance teacher groups. The ASTD, the Dance Masters of America, the Dance Educators of America, the New York Society of Dance Teachers, and the Chicago National Association of Dancing Masters were invited to meet to talk about cooperation in protecting the profession. The presidents and secretaries of these organizations met in October 1948 and agreed to talk to their membership about forming a national organization to represent and protect dance teachers. Meetings were held on numerous occasions during 1949 through 1950. The first official meeting of the NCDTO was held in February of 1951.

The founding meeting was attended by seventeen female teachers, and six males. This preponderance of women in dance was not unusual, and mirrored the dominance of female ballroom teachers in Atlanta from the 1910s to the 1940s. It is also significant to note that the six founding organizations catered to multiple genres of dance, including ballet, tap, jazz, and ballroom. Dance in the US for the first half of the twentieth century was considered the purview of women, especially when it came to theatrical dance forms like ballet. The gender imbalance in the NCDTO is therefore not surprising. At the November 1960 meeting, seven of the eight member organizations were headed by female presidents. Fourteen of the seventeen participants at the meeting were women.

In the early 1960s, women continued to dominate the council in terms of numbers. In 1968, Joan Voorhees was the president of the NCDTO, Helen Merrill was Vice President, Catherine McVeigh was the treasurer, and Joy Elin headed what was, arguably, the most influential committee of the organization, the United States Ballroom Council (USBC). From the

next year, however, men began to increasingly dominate the governing of member organizations, and the elected positions of the NCDTO. At the October 1969 meeting, there were 16 men at the Board of Governors meeting, and eight women. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the NCDTO still claimed to be an organization that sought to help dance organizations across genres avoid conflicting scheduling of events, hoping to encourage dancers to attend multiple conferences and training sessions. The inclusion of organizations that focused on ballet and modern, meant a larger number of female representatives. From the 1960s onward, however, the NCDTO became heavily ballroom dance-focused.

This ballroom-centric situation, with an attendant male-dominance within that genre, can be more clearly seen from 1974 onward, when the minutes for the Ballroom Department meetings were separated from the Board of Governors minutes. At the December 1974 Ballroom Department meeting, there were six women, and thirteen men in attendance. At the Board of Governors meeting, on the other hand, there were thirteen women, and eleven men. In November of 1975 there were twice as many men as women at the Ballroom Department meeting, and 10 women, to 16 men, at the Board of Governors meeting. At no point between 1974 and 1983 were there ever more females than males in attendance at any Ballroom Department or Board of Governors meetings. The January 1983 Ballroom Department meeting had five women, and twenty-one men representing member groups. The numbers at the Board of Governors meeting were six females to twenty-one males. At the January 1984 meeting where the National Council of Dance Teachers Organizations changed into the National Dance Council of America, five women and eighteen men voted on the decision to transform.

Despite the diminishing numbers of women in the leadership of NCDTO organizations over the fifties through eighties, some women played major leadership roles in the organizations

during those decades. From the founding of the NCDTO until 1963, Helen Wicks Reid served as either the director or chairman of the organization. She was also a prolific contributor (and at times editor) of the only national magazine devoted specifically to ballroom, *Ballroom Dance Magazine*. She was also appointed to the National Advisory Board of the Recreational Dancing Institute, ““which is the organization set up through which to operate the public relations program to promote ballroom dancing. The program is being financed jointly by the National Ballroom Operators Association, the American Federation of Musicians and the music licensing organizations.”⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, Katherine McVeigh was the organization’s executive secretary or historian from the 1950s through the 1970s. Two other women served as president of the NCDTO. Katherine Dickson sometime in the 1950s, and Joan Voorhees 1968-1970, and 1974-1975. Voorhees was the last woman to serve as president of the organization. Rickey Cunningham Geiger served as Second Vice-President from 1979 to 1981, and was elected as First Vice-President in 1983.

Women continued to play leadership roles in the industry in the 1970s, but not always on the NCDTO board. In 1970 Mary Molaghan, a member of the FADS national board, was awarded an exclusive charter, by the NCDTO, to organize the official US championships in both International and American styles. Out of this charter, Molaghan formed the American Ballroom Company (ABC), which has grown to be a powerful business group that continues to organize the official US professional and Pro-Am championships.⁴⁶⁷ Since at least 1990, however, only men have served as the chairperson of ABC. Women retained a presence, but their position and influence within the NCDTO diminished between 1950 and 1984.

⁴⁶⁶ Minutes of the National Council of Dance Teacher Organizations Meeting of the Board of Governors, March 1960, 1. NDCA Archive.

⁴⁶⁷ NCDTO Board of Governors Meeting, February 1970, 3. Some of the history of the American Ballroom Company can be found at <http://www.ndca.org/directories/member-organizations/american-ballroom-company/>.

In contrast, while the percentage of female teachers in Atlanta studios decreased between 1950 and 1984, women in the Atlanta industry had an outsized impact on the local ballroom community. Women working in the Atlanta context defied the gender image being sold to the public by the industry at-large, creating a space where they excelled in the male-dominated business world.

Gay Teachers in Atlanta

The seeming growth, or the visibility, of gay teachers in the ballroom industry in Atlanta, and in the US as a whole, mirrored the growth of openly gay culture in Atlanta. As gay Atlantans became increasingly evident and assertive in the 1970s and 1980s, gay men dominated the teaching staff of many ballroom studios in the Big Peach. Ballroom studios were spaces where gay men could participate in a pastime that gave them an artistic outlet, and a career. Studios also provided a support system for gay teachers when the AIDS epidemic hit Atlanta in the late 1980s and into the 1990s.

Gay men were not visible in Atlanta in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Condemned broadly by religious and social leaders, homosexuals hid their desires and activities in order to avoid shaming and exclusion. By the 1940s, however, social networks of gay men and lesbian women were quietly established throughout the city. Some had served in the military in World War II and recognized, often for the first time, that there were others who felt exactly as they did. Creating discreet networks of friends who socialized in private homes allowed individuals to avoid public scrutiny, and the ever-present threat of police action – sodomy laws were often enforced, nationwide.

In the 1950s most gay socializing continued to be in private homes. Social groups of gay men and lesbian women would often meet more than once a week, rotating locations.⁴⁶⁸ As Atlanta's nightlife grew downtown, certain locations became prominent for gays and lesbians. Two restaurants were notable in the 1950s, Mrs. P's on Ponce De Leon Avenue, and the Camelia Garden Restaurant. By the 1960s an increasing number of businesses catered to the gay community. In 1967 The Joy Lounge opened on Ponce De Leon Avenue and catered exclusively to gay Atlantans. As Chenault and Braukman note, this marked an important moment as "lesbian and gay Atlantans claimed public space for themselves" in the city.⁴⁶⁹ By 1969 the gay-centered travel publication "The International Guild Guide" included Atlanta gay night life listings for "the Blue Room in the Americana Motel and the Cameo Lounge on Spring Street; Dupree's Lounge and Restaurant, Joy Lounge, and Mrs. P's on Ponce De Leon; the Club South Baths; the Riviera Motel and the Piccolo Lounge on Peachtree Street; the Prince George Inn, and Wit's End."⁴⁷⁰ The gay community in Atlanta was clearly established.

Following the Stonewall rebellion in 1969, Atlanta gays and lesbians became more overt. In the 1970s Atlanta became a regional center for gay men and women. There had been an "explosion of bars, restaurants, lounges, bookstores, centers, and sports and recreation teams catering to lesbians and gays" in the city, and Gay Pride marches were held every year.⁴⁷¹ Drag shows were popular entertainment in gay establishments. Multiple teachers interviewed for this project, gay and straight, talked about spending recreational time in gay bars and nightclubs. Gay bars were spaces where teachers could relax because they were not under the vigilant eye of the

⁴⁶⁸ Wesley Chenault and Stacy Braukman, *Images of America: Gay and Lesbian Atlanta*, (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 48. Not much has been written on Atlanta's gay community, but this work by Chenault and Braukman is perhaps the richest study, using photographs to tell the story of 20th century Gay Atlanta.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 55

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

studio owner. Gay bars were thus spaces where gay and straight ballroom teachers could get away from the rules and restrictions that applied to their everyday lives.

While gay ballroom dance teachers spent leisure time in gay bars, few, if any, teachers were openly gay in the studio setting. In the 1960s, Roy Porter knew no gay teachers in the studios he taught in, including those in Atlanta. DeNeve states that there were no gay teachers in the Atlanta FADS studios until 1973 when John Allen and Harry Baker took over the FADS studio where she worked.⁴⁷² Allen and Baker were both gay. Recalling the FADS studios of the 1970s and 1980s, Baity remembers that in the Cheshire Bridge studio only two out of eight male teachers were straight, every teacher at the Decatur location was gay, and “Doraville was the straight studio.” None of the male teachers at that location were homosexual. Day recalls that 95% of male teachers in Atlanta in 1975, when he started teaching for FADS in Atlanta, were gay.⁴⁷³ In a short space of time, therefore, it seems that Atlanta studios became dominated by gay male teachers. As Baity put it, “It was just a very gay-oriented business, for the teachers.”⁴⁷⁴ The appeal of earning a living by interpreting music, and helping others use their bodies to move with skill, was appealing to many gay teachers.

Part of the appeal for gay teachers may have been the strict gender roles within which they worked. Men, no matter their sexual identity, were the leaders in a dance partnership. Gay men led women around the floor, playing a socially accepted gender role. Competition was another way that gay men could assert themselves within the norms of accepted gender roles. By being the best at something, by beating other men in a competitive environment, even the

⁴⁷² Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:45.

⁴⁷³ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:40.

⁴⁷⁴ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:59-1:00.

supposedly feminine activity of dancing could acquire masculine social capital.⁴⁷⁵ Ballroom dance therefore aided men in portraying a masculinity that was acceptable to society.

Whereas dance had been seen as an integral social skill by mainstream US culture up to the 1960s, by the 1970s ballroom dancing appears to have maintained its masculine appeal mostly in the minds of the upper class. In the 1970s straight guys didn't dance, "that was just the mentality" of the general public.⁴⁷⁶ Perhaps emblematic of the general mindset, Day told the story of when his father came to Atlanta for the first time, to see Day receive an award from FADS corporate for excelling in salesmanship. His dad arrived the day before the event and visited the studio. That evening he asked Day if all the male staff at the studio were gay. Day knew that his dad was angling to ask if Day was gay, but wanted his dad to come out and ask. As a result he told his dad that most, but not all, of the instructors were homosexual. At the award ceremony the next night, right before the start of the award presentation, the woman Day was dating at the time came by the table and gave Day a passionate kiss. Day's girlfriend told Day's parents that she and Day were dating. In Day's words, "my dad was relieved."⁴⁷⁷ Day's father's relief at knowing his son was not homosexual highlights the image that 'real' (i.e. straight) men did not dance.

This anecdote indicates the attitude of US society at-large toward gay men in the 1950s through early 1980s. There was a general homophobia, and certainly a lack of acceptance in the broader public sphere. This was an age when the federal government feared that a US civil servant's sexual preference could be used against him or her by the Russians to blackmail them into treason. It is not surprising then, that teachers did not openly identify themselves as gay

⁴⁷⁵ Ericksen found that this gender heteronormativity held true in the 2000s. See Ericksen, 155-156.

⁴⁷⁶ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:01.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:12-1:15.

within the studio culture. Corporation policy prevented teachers from telling students anything meaningful about themselves anyway, so the opportunity to reveal such things was limited. At the same time, few gay teachers attempted to actively hide their sexual orientation. Other teachers were aware of colleagues' sexuality, as were many clients. Studio policy therefore put gay teachers in the position of not being in the closet, but perhaps forced them to stand at the open door of the closet, rather than come out.

Within the ballroom dance community in Atlanta, teachers, no matter their own sexual orientation, were accepting of gay teachers.⁴⁷⁸ The familiness, or close relationship, of studio staff was not dependent on a teacher's sexuality. Baity, a prominent gay teacher for decades in Atlanta, was adored by every teacher who worked with him, male and female. Gay teachers were professional in their work. Interviewees talked of them as nice guys, regular people who were perhaps better humans than heterosexual men. Knotts tells the story of a female teacher who had an affair with the manager of the previous studio she had worked at, who discovered she was pregnant. A fellow teacher agreed to marry her to cover up not only her pregnancy, but also his own homosexuality. Both parties were aware of what they were mutually hiding. They married and left Atlanta for the mid-West.⁴⁷⁹ That this gay teacher opted to enter a fake marriage to hide his sexuality, and that the woman did the same to avoid the stigma of having a baby out of wedlock, indicates the accepted social norms of the sixties, and even into the 1970s. Some gay teachers felt the need to hide their non-conforming sexuality.

Atlanta was not alone in having significant numbers of gay teachers in ballroom studios. Ethylann Berse, who spent most of her ballroom teaching career in Atlanta, got into the

⁴⁷⁸ See for example Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:54.

⁴⁷⁹ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:06.

ballroom business because of John Allen, a member of the FADS National Dance Board who was gay. Allen took a liking to Berse, trained her, and then set her up to compete professionally with Allen's life partner, Don Lazario. When Berse later went to work for Allen in New York City, she found that the majority of male teachers there were also gay.⁴⁸⁰ Baity notes further that a majority of Fred Astaire National Dance Board members were gay in the 1970s. Atlanta was thus on a par with other major urban centers when it came to gay ballroom teachers.

A number of those interviewed differentiated between gay teachers who were the norm, and those who were "flamboyantly effeminate."⁴⁸¹ In speaking of gay teachers, Spencer noted that while many FADS teachers were gay, only one was extravagantly gay: "everybody else was very clean cut and you wouldn't know any different."⁴⁸² The implication was that flamboyant behavior was somehow unacceptable in terms of gender norms, even though most teachers in the FADS organization in Atlanta were gay. As long as gay teachers upheld socially-acceptable norms of masculine behavior in the studio context, other teachers had no problem with a person's sexuality. One gay interview subject noted that straight male teachers "ended up liking me, but they couldn't stand the nelly ones."⁴⁸³ While gender is not necessarily performative⁴⁸⁴, it is obvious that teachers in the 1970s and 1980s, both gay and straight, believed there were acceptable ways to act as a man. To some men, dancing was not masculine. To others, John Travolta was the epitome of masculinity as he danced disco in *Saturday Night*

⁴⁸⁰ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:10-0:12; 0:56.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 0:57.

⁴⁸² David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:55.

⁴⁸³ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:00

⁴⁸⁴ While it has been highly criticized, Judith Butler's argument that gender is performative as presented in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) is useful in thinking about how men and women 'act' certain roles, and why. This is especially interesting because ballroom dance complicates the idea of what a feminine or masculine image is, and who gets to define and determine that. Much of Butler's argument stands up, although some have argued that the trans-gender population destroys her argument. (see for example Julie Serano's "Performance Piece" in *Gender Outlaws*, edited by Kate Bornstein and S. Bergman).

Fever. Gay men could act like men – i.e. appear masculine – even if they were dancers, and homosexual. This perspective muddies the binary of masculine/feminine that some have argued ballroom dance has at its core.⁴⁸⁵

When questioned about how clients felt about gay teachers' sexuality, gay male former FADS teachers pointed out that instructors were not allowed to talk about themselves to their clients. Instructors attempted to learn as much as they could about their clients in order to tailor teaching and selling pitches to the needs of the customer. Teachers' personal lives, however, were off limits to the client. If clients asked personal questions, teachers were trained to deflect the question and turn it back onto the client to show an interest in the client's life.⁴⁸⁶

Even so, teachers acknowledged that most clients knew their teachers' sexuality although some were semi-oblivious. As Bentley put it: "I think for the most part [clients] knew that this one was gay, or that one was gay, but they didn't always know that their own teacher was gay."⁴⁸⁷ At a minimum, most clients knew there were gay teachers in the studios they attended. "Were clients aware that their teachers were gay? They knew, but they didn't care."⁴⁸⁸ This sentiment offered by a former teacher is echoed by clients who acknowledge they knew certain teachers were gay. One noted that clients talked about teachers amongst themselves, and at Walls's studio they identified one gay teacher as "the best looking man. What a waste!"⁴⁸⁹ Porter pointed out that clients discussed which teachers were having relationships with each other, and offered opinions to each other on the subject.⁴⁹⁰ The attempt to keep the client from knowing the personal details of teachers' lives seems, from today's perspective, both ineffective

⁴⁸⁵ See, for example, Juliet McMains' criticism of the heterosexuality of ballroom dance.

⁴⁸⁶ David Spencer, Interview with the author. July 23, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:56.

⁴⁸⁷ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:55.

⁴⁸⁸ Linda Weaver, conversation with the author. Sandy Springs, Georgia.

⁴⁸⁹ Oberia Porter, Interview with the author. July 30, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:52.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-55.

and unnecessary. But in the social setting of mainstream Atlanta in the 1970s, this was a safeguard for the business.

Clients in Atlanta studios were generally accepting of gay teachers. The general impression from the perspective of interviewed teachers was that even though no-one openly acknowledged the fact that some teachers were gay, “it was just there; it was accepted.”⁴⁹¹ Female teachers who worked in the FADS organization unanimously stated that female clients “loved” having a gay teacher.⁴⁹² Women could talk with gay instructors about fashion, make-up, and hair. These were issues that neither the clients’ spouses, nor straight male teachers, were interested in talking about: “Here’s the thing that I noticed,” said Oberia Porter, “and that several of us [female clients] said at competitions: If you want to be taken care of, really taken care of, get the gay... That’s kind of the way. They looked after their students. You wanted water, there it was. You wanted coffee, they got you the coffee. You get the straight, you must go get your own! (laughs)”⁴⁹³ While female and male teachers and clients talk about there being flamboyantly gay teachers and ‘just’ gay teachers, the implication that all gay men enjoy traditionally feminine interests is problematic as it appears that even those who worked alongside, liked, and supported, gay teachers bought into common stereotypes. This also suggests that in the ballroom industry these stereotypes may have had some – limited – validity.

There *were* clients who objected to working with gay male instructors. Most often these were men who came in with their wives to have lessons. As Johnson puts it, “there were

⁴⁹¹ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:56.

⁴⁹² See for example Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:47; and Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:59.

⁴⁹³ Oberia Porter, Interview with the author. July 30, 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:59-1:00. Ericksen’s work suggests that this sort of personal attention by gay teachers continued into the 2010s, although her examples indicate that straight male teachers sometimes took the same interest as gay teachers. She talks about a male teacher who did the hair of his competitive partners, and designed all their costumes. This complicates the seemingly gender essentialization of gay men loving sparkle and glamor. See Ericksen, 138-139 and 141-142.

some homophobes, but not many.”⁴⁹⁴ She also pointed out that most men who took lessons from gay instructors were more educated than the average person in Atlanta. They accepted the instructors for who they were. Similarly, DeNeve says that some men initially had issues with having other men dance with them – as teachers often dance with both partners in a lesson in order to help them feel how a particular step should feel – but within a few months those men had no issue with the practice because they realized that it was all about the dancing.⁴⁹⁵ Atlanta’s ballroom dance industry may have thus helped some heterosexual Atlantans to overcome concerns regarding gays in society. As clients recognized that gay ballroom teachers did not pose a threat, their attitudes were changed. Ballroom studios were thus also spaces where clients’ attitudes and perspectives on sexuality could be challenged and changed.

All of Baity’s established students knew he was gay soon after they started having lessons with him. He found that knowing this endeared him even more to these women in a maternal sense. They loved him and looked out for his welfare. One, whose husband had been the co-editor of the *Atlanta Journal*, effectively adopted him and helped him in any way she could. He took her out to gay bars to party, and she loved it. His younger female clients loved going to gay bars as well because they “wouldn’t get hit on by perverts who just wanted to sleep with them.”⁴⁹⁶ Baity’s sexuality helped him to increase the bonds he had with his clients, thus increasing familyness.

Some clients had a fascination with gay culture and practice. Gay teachers fed this interest by taking their students to gay bars to people watch.⁴⁹⁷ This gay-watching is talked of as entertainment, much as one would go to a circus to watch the performance of the grotesque or

⁴⁹⁴ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 1:02.

⁴⁹⁵ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author. May 25, 2015. Marietta, Georgia, 0:47.

⁴⁹⁶ Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:04.

⁴⁹⁷ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:53.

weird. One competition trip to Miami included a voyeuristic introduction to gay sex for a number of female clients.⁴⁹⁸ While older female clients loved their gay teachers, many were fascinated by what, at the time, was taboo in mainstream society, especially among the upper echelons of the Atlanta elite. The way interviewees talked about clients going to gay bars makes it feel like they were like white elites who went slumming in the Harlem nightclubs in the 1920s. Even though they respected and appreciated these teachers, clients also treated them with an air of curiosity about the exotic.

After working-hours, most teachers in Atlanta studios went to gay bars to decompress. Baity says he agreed to go to strip clubs with his straight co-workers if they agreed to go to gay bars with him. Betsy Bentley recalls going to gay clubs and drag shows at Back Street, a gay club on Peachtree Street. This was an opportunity for teachers to bond outside of the sometimes restrictive, and always observed, studio setting. As one female teacher said of gay bars: “Those places were fabulously fun! We could lead, we could follow, it was great, it was the perfect scenario.”⁴⁹⁹ Gay bars thus offered a space for teachers, gay and straight, to transgress societally accepted gender norms, and industry-approved gender norms. Johnson also notes that teachers from multiple studios would go together to gay bars where they would dance and socialize with each other. Gay spaces were therefore also places where differences in business practices could be ignored, at least for a late night party.

Gender roles on the dance floor have been interrogated by scholars over the past twenty years.⁵⁰⁰ Much of the debate has to do with semantics and the use of the binary terms

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 0:54.

⁴⁹⁹ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:57.

⁵⁰⁰ See for example McMains’s discussion in chapter one of *Glamor Addiction*, Marion’s discussion in chapter two of *Ballroom: Costume and Culture in Competitive Dance*; “Participation Motives in Relation to Background and Involvement Variables among Finnish Non-Professional Dancers,” Pipsa Nieminen. *Dance Research Journal* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Autumn 1998), 53-70; “Ballroom Dance as an Indicator of Immigrant Identity in the Filipino Community,” Carolina San Juan. *The Journal of American Culture* Vol. 24 (3-4), 2001, 177–181.

“man” and “woman” when referring to the leading and following roles. While it has been argued that in practice there is an equality in power and agency on the dance floor, the fact that female teachers actively taught both parts at the studio, and also went to gay bars where they actively danced both parts, dents the idea that women were, and are, somehow lesser on the dance floor. Of added import is that no person interviewed talked about gay men dancing ballroom dance together at these locations. There must have been men dancing together, but no one made any reference to this fact. On the other hand, relieved of any expectation of their role in a dance partnership, female instructors actively demonstrated the ability to play all roles available on the dance floor. They did this in the studio as they taught men how to dance, but in gay clubs there was an overt, unabashed opportunity to demonstrate those roles in a public setting.⁵⁰¹

In contrast to the teachers in the Astaire organization, teachers in the Arthur Murray organization in Atlanta had much less contact with gay teachers. Neither Lyon nor Sutherland recall any gay teachers in the AMC organization in Atlanta. Lyon notes that she knew gay teachers in Nebraska where she had started her ballroom career, but none in Atlanta.⁵⁰² Roy Porter estimated that at most, twenty to thirty percent of Murray male teachers were gay. In Knotts’s experience working in three AMC studios in Atlanta, he knew three gay teachers. He was surprised that there were so few because he was dating a woman who taught at FADS in Atlanta, who told him that ninety-five percent of the male teachers in that system were gay.⁵⁰³ When he got involved with the ballroom industry in the early 1980s Knotts almost quit because of his concern over the image of men in ballroom as effeminate, especially as they competed.

⁵⁰¹ Today, in 2015, it is common for female instructors to dance the leader role with female clients at parties, not because of sexual orientation, but because of the continued deficiency in the numbers of men who attend studio parties.

⁵⁰² Kathryn Lyon, Telephone Interview with the author. February 16, 2015. 0:52-0:53.

⁵⁰³ Randy Knotts, Interview with the author. February 18, 2015. Douglassville, Georgia, 1:10.

Once he committed to teaching he realized that many men looked masculine on the dance floor, and he could follow their example.⁵⁰⁴ These differences between organizations indicates there were differences in corporate culture *within* the US ballroom industry.

Despite his initial concern, Knotts found that all the gay teachers he met were “nice guys.” He was never propositioned by any male teacher, but he was aware of flirtation. In one specific instance he recounts, a renowned visiting coach came in to coach teachers and their program students. This coach was prominent in the AMC organization, and was a national Latin Champion. During a number of lessons with Knotts, this coach flirted. Knotts suggested that it was a way for the coach to see if he was interested. Knotts was polite and enjoyed the lesson, but made it clear that he was not interested in any romantic sense. The coach offered Knotts a job in a prominent studio in Ohio, but Knotts reiterated that while he was flattered, he was happy where he was.⁵⁰⁵ A fellow-teacher *was* interested, however, and moved to Ohio to pursue a long-term relationship with the coach. Ballroom networks of coaching and competing appear to have allowed gay men opportunities to meet other men, as well as expose other teachers to homosexuals within the industry.

How was it that some teachers in AMC were apparently oblivious to gay teachers? Interestingly, those interviewees who were unaware of teachers’ sexuality were women. They might have been less aware because they were less likely to have experienced sexual advances made by these men. Women in the FADS system were acutely aware of the sexual orientation of their co-workers. The studio culture of the two organizations was markedly different. Teachers in the FADS studios spent much more of their free time together and were much more involved in each other’s lives. Murray teachers seem to be genuinely less aware than Astaire teachers of the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 1:05-1:06.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:13-1:14.

ins and outs of their coworkers' lives. That is not to say they did not have close relationships, but the family-ness of AMC studios in the 1960s and 1970s had dissipated by the 1980s. While present in FADS studios into the 1980s, this closeness between teachers, and with clients, would all but disappear in the 1990s.

AIDS in Atlanta Ballroom Studios

Without exception, every teacher from the FADS organization that was interviewed talked about the havoc wreaked by the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s. AIDS was first diagnosed in the US in 1981, and was quickly found to have highest incidences among gay, white men who were sexually active. The disease was labeled an epidemic as it spread rapidly, and increasing numbers of deaths were linked to it, rather than the deaths being attributed to other health conditions. As with other studies relating to HIV-AIDS, this section demonstrates the impact of the disease among studios in Atlanta, that is, how AIDS was a “concentrated force, producing compelling effect.”⁵⁰⁶ It was not only the teachers who died who were victims. Coworkers and clients also dealt with the impact of the epidemic.

This was true in Atlanta ballroom dance studios. “When AIDS hit Atlanta, it hit the dance business very, very hard....Within five years [gay male teachers] were all gone, just like that.”⁵⁰⁷ When one teacher died in the early 1980s people said he died from Pneumonia. Berse explained that people didn't know or understand how the disease impacted the body.⁵⁰⁸ Increasing numbers of gay teachers got sick, and most died.⁵⁰⁹ Gay male teachers began to fear

⁵⁰⁶ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Social Impact of AIDS in the United States* (The National Academies Press, 1999), 5. Accessed online, <https://www.nap.edu/read/1881/chapter/2>, October 2017.

⁵⁰⁷ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:55, 0:58.

⁵⁰⁸ Little was understood about AIDS by even the medical community. Mary B. Mallison, an RN, talked about the public's lack of understanding, and the bigotry that resulted in the early 1980s in Mary B. Mallison, “Editorial: AIDS: Opportunism and Opportunity,” *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (February, 1986), 115.

⁵⁰⁹ Ethylann Berse Bonder, Interview with the author. May 21, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:58-0:59.

for their lives as they watched their friends die around them.⁵¹⁰ A third of the twenty-four male teachers at the Cheshire Bridge FADS studio died of AIDS in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁵¹¹ Others contracted the disease, but were able to manage it.

Stephen Smith had been a star in productions at the Fox Theater downtown and was well-connected to powerful people in Atlanta. He had made a name locally dancing hustle in clubs where he was a local celebrity. He had worked for AMC studios since 1968, but left to open his own studio in 1975. Smith had won the Top Teacher award at the national championship in 1977, indicating that he had a strong ballroom background.⁵¹² Smith's star rose to national prominence, however, with the disco craze. The AJC wrote in 1978 that Smith had 2000 students at the Atlanta Ballroom, his studio. In the same article Smith talked about Disco being an attitude, and a combination of Latin and Ballroom dances.⁵¹³ Smith famously taught First Lady Betty Ford, and her daughter Susan Ford, to disco dance. The photographs of the lesson, given at a Vail, Colorado ski resort, appeared in both *Glamour* and *McCall's* magazines.⁵¹⁴ In the same article Smith claimed that he had students "from 13 to 74" dancing at his studio. If that is true, disco was helping bring a younger generation to ballroom dance.

An analysis of the articles on Smith published in the AJC, and presumably in other newspapers and magazines that picked up the story, finds no mention of Smith's sexuality. Smith was gay, and his studio had all gay teachers, with the exception of Joe LoCurto. In one article Smith talks about how at fourteen years old he realized that dancing was a way to have fun and

⁵¹⁰ Betsy Bentley, Interview with the author. May 15, 2015. Conyers, Georgia, 0:57.

⁵¹¹ Jim Day, Interview with the author. January 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 0:40.

⁵¹² Steve Dougberty, "Look Out Travolta, Smith Is It," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), September 8, 1978. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 1B.

⁵¹³ "You, Too, Can Disco: Some Steps To Success," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1946-1984), March 25, 1978. Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution, 32T.

⁵¹⁴ Dougberty, 1B.

meet girls. This placed him, at least rhetorically, clearly in the socially acceptable heterosexual realm. Interestingly, the article went on to talk about Smith frequenting The Backstreet, a club in Atlanta, because there “anything goes,” and Smith can do all the figures and tricks he liked without upsetting other men who felt threatened by how good he was.⁵¹⁵ To those unfamiliar with The Backstreet, this probably appeared quite civil of Smith to dance in a less-flashy way at clubs, except on his home turf, The Backstreet. What most probably didn’t realize was that The Backstreet was a club “frequented by the gay community” in Atlanta in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵¹⁶ While perhaps a small example, it is evident that gay men were not fully accepted in Atlanta, although there were spaces for them. Further, Smith seems to have purposefully presented his history, and thus his connection with ballroom dance, as heterosexual.

In speaking of Smith’s Atlanta Ballroom, LoCurto said: “They were my friends. And then they died. Everybody passed away in that studio. Gone. Shock, just a shock. And I saw Stephen die.”⁵¹⁷ Every teacher in Smith’s studio, except LoCurto, died from AIDS. Harry Baker was one of the teachers from Atlanta Ballroom that died of AIDS. He had been teaching in the Atlanta area for an extended period of time, having come to Atlanta in the early 1970s with his boyfriend at the time, John Allen, to take over the management of the FADS studios. The victims of AIDS in Atlanta studios ran the gamut in age. “A couple of them were over fifty, some of them were over forty, some of the guys were in their thirties, in the prime of their life. And all of them but, I think, two, passed away within two or three years.... It hit really hard and really fast. It seemed like every time we turned around someone else had died. It was awful. It was awful. It extended on into – that was probably eighty-five, eighty-six ... then one by one they started

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 4B.

⁵¹⁶ Wesley Chenault and Stacy Braukman, *Images of America: Gay and Lesbian Atlanta* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 74.

⁵¹⁷ Joe LoCurto, Interview with the author. May 14, 2015. Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:56-0:58.

getting sick.”⁵¹⁸ The ballroom industry in Atlanta was hard-hit by AIDS, and had a high percentage of teachers die. No national study of AIDS in the ballroom industry has been conducted and it is therefore hard to gauge how Atlanta compared to the ballroom industry in other major metropolitan areas. Some teachers mentioned that gay teachers died in other cities in the US, but no concrete numbers are available. Atlanta’s place as a center of gay life in the South makes it feasible that the numbers in Atlanta were higher than in other cities in the nation.

Numerous clients of teachers who contracted AIDS took on the role of caregiver to their instructors. Many of these women had come to see these men as their sons. Just as their teachers had taken care of them in the ballroom dance world, meeting their needs in the studio and competition settings, so these clients took care of their teachers. A number of female clients nursed their instructors until the men died. Watching their friends die took a toll on these clients. Most took a break from ballroom following the AIDS-related deaths of instructors. Some permanently left the pastime because it was too painful to remember those who had died.⁵¹⁹

Multiple interviewees point to the miracle of one beloved gay teacher in Atlanta who contracted HIV and survived. At the time of writing, the instructor is still teaching in Atlanta studios. Day was this instructor’s roommate in the mid-1990s and gives some insight into the experience. Day had come to know Jack⁵²⁰ when they both taught in the Cheshire Bridge studio. When Jack traveled to competitions and on studio trips he attempted to bed as many men as possible. Day had wondered how Jack had not become sick like so many other of the gay teachers in FADS. In the early 1980s, however, Jack “went a little crazy.” His behavior became erratic, he lost the ability to keep track of his bank account (something that was very unlike him),

⁵¹⁸ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:55-0:56.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:01.

⁵²⁰ Not his real name. To protect this teacher I have chosen to use a pseudonym.

and students had asked Day why Jack's behavior had changed. Jack had contracted HIV. Jack went to an AIDS clinic and started taking Anti-Retro Viral medication. Within two weeks Jack was his normal self again. At the writing of this work, Jack was still taking Anti-Retro Viral meds and living an otherwise normal life. Those teachers who died of AIDS in the early-to-mid 1980s were not as lucky.

The teachers interviewed for this project had a difficult time talking about the AIDS crisis in Atlanta. All were willing and open to talk about it, and often brought it up without prompting. Once they began talking about it, however, some could not bear to recall the death and suffering they had witnessed. Some offered short, perfunctory answers and indicated further through their body language that they did not wish to talk more about it. Female teachers were more open to talking about the AIDS crisis, and were often emotional as they talked about the friends they had lost. This emotional reaction reinforces the idea that teachers had a family-like connection as they taught in studios in this period. Male teachers who died of AIDS in Atlanta were mourned by their colleagues, and left voids in the community that had been established in each studio, and across the industry in the city. Steven Smith and those who worked in his studio were not part of a chain studio, but had all at one time taught for FADS or AMC. This interconnectedness meant that teachers and clients at the Astaire and Murray studios, as well as those at Smith's studio itself, were impacted by the loss of these men.

By the time Walls's studio moved to Sandy Springs in the early 1990s, all teachers over fifty years old had either moved out of Atlanta, or died of AIDS.⁵²¹ In the 2010s, Atlanta had a significant number of gay teachers, but the percentage of gay teachers didn't come close to the levels of the 1970s and 1980s. Baity suggests that when gay teachers died in such large

⁵²¹ Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author. June 2015. Sandy Springs, Georgia, 0:54.

numbers in the mid-1980s, studios were desperate to fill teaching positions. Most of the men who applied were not gay, and those men remain in Atlanta studios.⁵²²

Conclusion

Atlanta ballroom dance studios in the 1950s through 1980s were spaces where both gay and female teachers built careers, and forged family-like relationships within the studio setting. Female teachers became leaders in the business, not the followers they were perceived to be on the dance floor. Women led as professional teachers and studio owners, as well as being the major clients for most studios. As the Atlanta ballroom dance scene changed in the late 1980s, women continued to play a significant role in amateur organizations, and to a decreasing degree in Atlanta studios.

The cosmopolitanism of Atlanta is evident in its acceptance and support of a vibrant gay community. The ballroom dance industry was a commercial sector that provided a space where gay men could build careers and rub shoulders with the elite of Atlanta. Elite women loved these men like sons, and were profoundly affected by the death of so many gay ballroom dance teachers in the 1980s. AIDS decimated Atlanta studios, indicating the extent of gay male teachers in the city. Atlanta's industry was similar to the rest of the US ballroom industry. Studios in New York City and Los Angeles had gay men teaching ballroom dance, and building similar communities of trust to the ones created in Atlanta. Rather than being exceptional in the nation, Atlanta once again mirrored the changes and trends of ballroom dance studios across the nation. Atlanta was a regional capital for gay men, and the ballroom industry was at the forefront of their acceptance.

⁵²² Tommy Baity, Interview with the author. February 2015. Atlanta, Georgia, 1:05.

EPILOGUE: INDEPENDENTS, AND AMATEURS, AND RUSSIANS, OH MY! 1985 TO THE PRESENT

When the National Council of Dance Teacher Associations changed its name to the National Dance Council of America (NDCA) in 1984, it marked a distinctive change in the ballroom dance industry. By 1984 it was no longer possible to claim that the organization had any other focus than ballroom dancing. More significantly, however, the council's business had become dominated by competitive dancing. Teachers who made money from training students to compete, especially compete with the teacher in Pro-Am sections, had become the largest contingent of members. The industry surrounding competitions had been expanding since the 1960s, but with the defined focus of the NDCA, it grew into a multi-million dollar business. While still based in studios, the business of ballroom dance had become competition focused.

The 1980s marked a period of change in the ballroom dance industry. This chapter will give an overview of developments within the industry between 1984 and 2017. Where familiness had dominated the studios of the previous era, 1950 – 1984, the focus on competition dancing led to a decrease in clients feeling connected to a studio. Two major contributing factors to this decline are the rise of independent teachers, and an increase in active participation of amateur dance organizations. Atlanta demonstrates the national trends, proving an apt case study for the industry. The third major issue for the industry in this period was the arrival of large numbers of well-trained Eastern European and Russian ballroom dancers in the United States. The impact of this influx will be examined.

These three occurrences led to a decrease in familiness, and a new kind of studio setting. By the early 2010s, however, new studio owners, many of whom had had successful competitive careers, began to recognize the need for something more to bond clients to the

studios. These businesses returned to the concept of familiness. In the past five years, studios have once again sought ways to link clients to studios through multiple connection points. Studio owners recognized the need to keep the business of ballroom focal, rather than dwelling exclusively on the art side that many studios of the eighties through 2000s had adopted.

Independents

From at least the 1960s, teachers who left the chain studios had taught outside of that system. These independent teachers were divided into two main groups. The first was those who left the chains and could afford to open their own independent studio, as Dennis Rogers did in 1963.⁵²³ Those who did not have the ability to open their own studio remained on the periphery, teaching in whatever spaces they could find to rent at an affordable hourly rate. The number of teachers who became independent increased in the 1970s, and grew exponentially in the 1980s and 1990s. The earliest independent studio that teachers in Atlanta recall was Ray Gardner's studio.⁵²⁴ Gardner had left the FADS organization in 1970, and opened his own space in 1975. Gardner's studio was popular, especially for the parties hosted at the location. Atlanta teachers recall their chain studio clients attending parties at Gardner's studio, and amateur organizations renting the studio for events.

The other major independent studio in the late 1970s was Steven Smith's studio. Smith had left FADS with a number of other male teachers, and they opened Steve Smith Dance Studio in 1975. Smith had made a name for himself in Atlanta through his roles in various productions at the Fox theater, as well as teaching Gerald Ford's daughter to disco dance. Joe LoCurto was one of the teachers at that studio. Following the deaths of his coworkers during the AIDS crisis

⁵²³ Rogers, 0:53.

⁵²⁴ Cindy Johnson suggested that Dancing Time and Space was the first independent studio in Atlanta, but this has not yet been verified.

of the 1980s, Lo Curto opened his own independent studio in 1990. The 1990s saw a slew of independent studios open, and the chain studios disappear. By 1990 Jackie Walls had left the AMI group, and had linked her studio to Dance Club International, and later TC Dance. Within a few years she had left that group to open the Atlanta Ballroom Dance Center (ABDC), a completely independent studio. In the late 1990s, Phyllis DeNeve opened Atlanta Dance after being linked to chain organizations TC Dance, and Dance Stop. Eddie Ares and Carter Butler opened an independent studio, Hotlanta, in the nineties.

Every teacher interviewed talked about the freedom they felt when they left chain studios. Teachers no longer had to follow the schedule demanded by the chains. As David Spencer noted, chain studios are fantastic at training teachers, but being independent was a great pathway for teachers who were tired of having the corporation set the terms under which the teacher taught.⁵²⁵ They set their own schedules, taught the material they felt students were ready for, and got paid significantly more.⁵²⁶ Rather than getting paid a relatively small portion of the fee students paid for a lesson, independent teachers paid a floor fee (anywhere from nine to twelve dollars per hour) and kept the rest. Independents thus made significantly more money than their chain studio counterparts.

The biggest challenge in the 1980s was for independent teachers to find a space to teach. Chain studios only allowed their own teachers into that space. Teachers in Atlanta used church halls, YMCA racquetball courts, and ballet studios, among other locations, to teach their students. Once independent ballroom studios opened, teachers rented floor space. Jackie Walls' ABDC stayed busy with independent teachers using the facility. Some made ABDC their

⁵²⁵ David Spencer, Interview with the author, July 23, 2015, 0:48.

⁵²⁶ See, for example, Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author, May 25, 2015, 0:28.

permanent base, but maintained their independence. ABDC ran some group classes, but the majority of their business was floor fees from independent private lessons.

A number of studios began to focus increasingly on DanceSport. While most kept social group classes as part of their core offerings, many had an equal – or greater – focus on competition. Teachers saw the opportunity to increase revenue through competing. Whereas there were limited numbers of NCDTO-approved competitions in the 1960s and 1970s, by 2017 there were over 130 competitions on the NDCA calendar. Each competition is a mini-industry event within itself, with vendors offering ballroom shoes, ballroom costumes, ballroom make-up, ballroom jewelry, videography, photography, and hair services. Competitions are generally held in hotels that benefit not only from the rental of the ballrooms, but rooms sold to competitors, judges, officials, and teachers. Food and beverage commercial establishments benefit from out of towners who come to Atlanta to participate in competitions including the Atlanta Open, and Hotlanta.

A focus on competing led to a decreased emphasis on studio events that connected students to the studio as an entity, and to the staff. While students remained loyal, and bound, to their teachers of choice, competitive students did not frequent studio parties. Rather, the only time they were in the studio was with her or his teachers. Students generally only saw each other peripherally at the studio, perhaps dancing with their teacher on the dance floor at the same time that another student had a lesson with her or his instructor.

Amateur Dance Organizations

Since the 1960s, amateur ballroom dancers had attempted to form organizations to protect and advance their interests. The NCDTO had continually attempted to maintain control of amateurs, and had registered amateur competitors before they registered professionals, the

people they claimed to represent.⁵²⁷ The United States Amateur Ballroom Dance Association (USABDA) had been formed in 1965 for the initial purpose of helping get ballroom dancing accepted as an Olympic event. The organization expanded in the next decades, and had more members who identified themselves as social dancers, rather than competitive dancers. Most chapters in the 1960s were on the coasts, but by the 1980s, as a result of a concerted membership drive, the group had become national, with chapters across the US.⁵²⁸ In 2005 USABDA changed its name to USA Dance, Inc.

Atlanta was part of the rise of amateur ballroom organizations in the early 1980s. A number of dancers who had been taking lessons at local Atlanta studios became tired of having to constantly deal with studios trying to up-sell them on services. They recognized that only studio clients could attend parties at that studio, and this entailed spending money on lessons and classes, as well as paying to attend the parties. Further, the places available to go ballroom dancing had drawbacks. Country clubs frequently held dances, but they were limited to members of the clubs – the elite who could afford those fees. Some nightclubs, including Johnny's Hideaway, had ballroom dancing, but the floors were small, and the bands used had difficulty maintaining tempos that allowed ballroom dancers to effectively dance. In addition, hotels and clubs in the 1980s had diminishing floor space, many of them dividing their large dance floors into multiple small floors that were still somewhat conducive to disco, but not ballroom dancing. Singles groups held ballroom dances, but that meant that women were constantly being propositioned, and hit on, by men, something they preferred to not deal with.

⁵²⁷ See for example *Ballroom Dance Magazine*, February 1967, 25-26.

⁵²⁸ "Our history and activities," USAdance.org, <http://usadance.org/about/our-history-and-activities/> (accessed January 2017).

In 1981, a small group of dancers, including Bobbye Hightower, Betty Carrington, and Bill Moore, decided to create a space where dancers could go to dance, with no prerequisite or qualification. Hightower raised a small amount of money at a local flea market, and that seed money was used to publicize the event. Ray Gardner offered his studio as a location, and the group put up flyers around the Atlanta area. The first party drew 65 people, a good crowd for a party. Moore played records and tapes on Gardner's studio equipment, and the party marked the start of the Atlanta Ballroom Dance Club (ABDC). After the party, however, Gardner told the group he would need to charge them rent in the future. Members of the group were also concerned that using the studio was a tacit endorsement of the studio, and might threaten the non-partisan stance they wanted to have in the Atlanta ballroom world.

For the next year, the group scouted locations. They decided to use the largest floor in the city, in the Knights of Columbus (KOC) building on Buford Highway. The first dance at this location drew 80 dancers. The music system at the KOC was poor however. They used live bands for the next three months, but again the bands couldn't get the tempos right. In those three months, however, they made enough money to buy a sound system that they installed in the KOC building. From 1982 to 2015 the Atlanta Ballroom Dance Club held monthly dances at this location. Word-of-mouth, as well as postcards mailed to those on their mailing list, led to an average of 150 people at parties, although at times attendance was as high as 250.⁵²⁹ In 1988 the club became a registered non-profit group, with proceeds being put right back into better equipment, paying an instructor to give a class before each dance, and publicity. At approximately the same time, ABDC started weekly classes in a women's club building they rented every Monday night, later moving to the KOC building. These classes attracted sixty to

⁵²⁹ Much of this section comes from Bobbye Hightower, Interview with the author, Duluth, GA, 21 May 2015.

seventy people each week. The class was an hour, followed by two hours of music to practice. At a cost of four dollars per session, these were affordable for all. In a dance system that was increasingly focused on competitive dancing, and that charged exorbitant fees, the creation of spaces to learn to dance for an affordable fee, was welcomed by many social dancers. ABDC was patronized by people of diverse ages and socio-economic levels. African American dancers have served on the board of directors since the 1990s, notably Marsha Evans, although black Atlantans remained a very small minority in terms of overall attendees. Women have been prominent on the board, with women holding the chairmanship for the vast majority of the existence of the group.⁵³⁰ While remaining independent, the group also supported the formation of local USABDA chapters.

In 1989, one of the board members, Ann Smith, suggested ABDC run a competition in Atlanta.⁵³¹ The group had approximately \$1,400 in its account, and Smith and Cecil Phillips believed using it to run a competition would promote ballroom dance in Atlanta. In the early 1990s there were few competitions run by the amateur organization. The NDCA believed it held the sole right to control ballroom competitions, and its relationship with USABDA was at times explosive. Smith founded an official chapter of USABDA in Atlanta, and with the help of Phillips organized the competition, despite having no experience. The first Georgia Ballroom Open was held at the Knights of Columbus in 1990. It was a success, with the largest sections being the bronze (beginner) American sections. These sections were well-supported by local dancers, many of whom were ABDC members. A central tenet of Smith's competitive

⁵³⁰ At the writing of this work, ABDC suspended its activities as a result of lack of funds. The KOC building was torn down in 2015, forcing the group to find a new location for its activities. Finding affordable locations proved difficult, and also led to a lack of continuity, decreasing attendance at dances.

⁵³¹ Most of what follows comes from Ann Smith, Interview with the author, Atlanta, GA, 30 May 2015. Smith passed away a few months after this interview.

philosophy was that the costs should be kept as low as possible for the competitors. The entry fees were small when compared to what amateur dancers paid to dance at NDCA competitions. The competition recouped its costs, but did not turn a significant profit.

In organizing the Georgia Open, Smith found that USABDA had no competition rule book. As a result, she wrote a rule book. This pamphlet became the basis for USABDA's official rule book, which they published in the mid-1990s. Realizing that the KOC building was too small for the needs of the competition, Smith looked for a new location. Her suggestion that they should use the World Congress Center was met with some opposition by members of the ABDC board. The expense of renting the center was huge in comparison to the KOC building. She convinced them it was necessary, especially if the competition was to attract competitors from outside of Georgia. Smith began sending personal invitations to competitors around the country. Perhaps conveying the attitudes of the era, Smith noted: "I wrote to the men. I didn't write to the women, because if the man would come, he could get a lady – where maybe the lady couldn't get a man. But a man could get a lady. And maybe the couple would be interested. So, I was very rude to the ladies."⁵³² Smith is aware of the sexism she deployed in her invitations, but sees it as a practical step on her part. She recognizes the innate inequality in those years (and perhaps today) in the ballroom competitive world. Smith's justification was also one of practicality – she did not have the financial resources to send out unlimited invitations. Postage costs restricted her to inviting those who she believed would be most likely to attend. By the third year of the Georgia competition, amateur dancers from across the US were coming to the Georgia Open. The competition had become the largest on the national scene. Smith is credited by multiple

⁵³² Ibid., 0:40.

actors in this time period as being responsible for the success of the competition.⁵³³ She continued a legacy of strong women playing influential roles in the Atlanta ballroom world.

The importance of individual effort in making the Southeast regional competition succeed is exemplified by the thousands of personal invitations, and thank-you cards, that Smith sent each year, and perhaps even more by Smith's gumption in gaining official USABDA recognition. Smith went to the annual board meeting uninvited, and waited to be called on to talk. After a number of hours, the chair told her she could address the committee. She told the group that she was hosting a regional USABDA championship in Atlanta. She was met with silence, which she took to be tacit agreement. The next year the first Southeast regional championship was held. This was the first regional championship, and USABDA modeled regional championships around the nation on Smith's competition.

Differences of opinion within the chapter over hosting the competition led to Smith resigning, and the chapter deciding not to host the competition after two years. Much of this dispute had to do with the board being split over where the focus of the chapter should be, social dancing, or competing. Following the decision to relinquish the Southeast regional, Archie Hazelwood, the then-president of USABDA, telephoned Smith and asked her to create a new Atlanta chapter of USABDA in order to once more run the competition. This she did, and successfully ran the competition until 2006. In 2007, USABDA awarded the hosting of the Southeast regional to another USABDA chapter. Smith was devastated, as this had been her life. The competition, according to Smith, never retained the personal touch that she had brought to it.

⁵³³ Bobby Hightower, Interview with the author, May 21, 2015; multiple conversation with Derry Martin, a long-time amateur competitor who traveled from Alabama to attend the Georgia Open for its entire existence, 2016; Cindy Johnson, Interview with the author, June 2015.

The split in the amateur organization continues at the time of this writing. There are currently two chapters of USADANCE in Atlanta, although there were three up until 2015. Each hosts a monthly dance. Members of USADANCE receive a discount on their entrance fee to the dance, but otherwise there are no perks to becoming a member.⁵³⁴ Atlanta Ballroom Dance Club cancelled all activities for the last three months of 2017. In 2017 USAdance held an amateur competition for the second year in a row, catering mostly to the Russian youth competitors in the area. The competition has struggled to gain a large entry, and may not continue. Where amateur groups in the early 1980s provided a space for dancers from non-elite socio-economic backgrounds to dance outside of the context of the studios, by 2017 they appear to provide the exact same services as a studio party, and are generally held in studios. Women continue to play an important role on the boards of the USAdance chapters, with one chapter having a female president, and the other a male. Black Atlantans have served on both boards, although they continue to be a small minority. The amateur groups appear to lack a clear vision for what their role in the ballroom industry in Atlanta should be.

The Eastern European Invasion

During the Cold War, the Soviets had endorsed ballroom dance as an acceptable pastime.⁵³⁵ Russian dancers attempted to learn about advances in the genre through publications that were banned in the USSR. The Baltic Republics had greater access to these materials as they were on the periphery. The knowledge and insights gained seeped into Russia as teachers and

⁵³⁴ Shawn Fisher, former vice-president of USADANCE, believes that this is one reason that social USADANCE chapters fail to grow – there is no buy-in. Until there is a significant advantage to being a member, Fisher believes the social chapters will not grow. Conversation with the author, October 23, 2017, Rexburg, Idaho.

⁵³⁵ See, for example, Jens Richard Giersdorf's discussion of how the USSR used ballroom dance as "a weapon of class struggle," by creating a new ballroom dance for the nation, in *The Body of the People: East German Dance Since 1945* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 34-38.

dancers crossed borders within the USSR.⁵³⁶ When the USSR fell in 1990, thousands of soviet citizens were highly skilled in International style. In 1990, Igor and Irina Suvorov, a successful Russian competitive couple, attended the United States Dance Championships in Miami, FL. They made the finals of both Standard and Latin, indicating the high level of ballroom behind the iron curtain. The Suvorovs never boarded the plane to head back to Russia. They instead made their home in the US, the first Russian ballroom couple to do this after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁵³⁷ Since 1990, thousands of Russians and Eastern Europeans have moved to the US, coming specifically to use their ballroom skills to build careers.

Whereas dancing in soviet-era Russia and Eastern Europe was mostly a pastime, ballroom in the US was a means to earning a good living. From the 1990s onward, AMI and FADS brought couples to the US on work visas, having them teach in the chains across the US.⁵³⁸ These dancers brought with them a discipline that some studio owners believed was lacking in US youth they hired. In addition, the foreigners came trained in International style, and had experience in competing. Both sides of this business relationship thus, theoretically, benefitted: the studios had strong teachers, and the couples earned a living while being able to compete across the US with their partners, and their clients.

The arrival of Eastern Europeans irrevocably changed the competitive scene in the US ballroom world. On the amateur side, Russians dominated both International styles from the early 1990s onward. Eugene Katsevman and Maria Manusova, both born in Ukraine, immigrated with their family to the US in the late 1980s. From 1997 to 2008, Katsevman and Manusova

⁵³⁶ Leonid Pletnev gives insight into the lived experience of ballroom dancers in Soviet Russia in his article "Features of Ballroom Dance Development in Russia," World Dance Council Education Department Website, March 6, 2015. Accessed January 16, 2017. <http://wdced.com/2015/03/features-of-ballroom-dance-development-in-russia/>. Pletnev grew up in Russia, dancing in the system that he writes of.

⁵³⁷ Robert Cooper, "Ballroom Dance Video – Interview with Igor & Irina Suvorov, Organizers of the Desert Classic," Video, 10:35, August 11, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DkRn6hIXQ8>.

⁵³⁸ John Kimmins, Interview with the author, August 2015, Coral Gables, Florida, 0:07.

were the undefeated US amateur Latin American champions. The finals of both styles were dominated by dancers of Russian and Eastern European heritage from the late 1990s onward.⁵³⁹ In the professional sections, the impact is equally stark. Since 1998, Katusha Demidova, a Russian-born dancer, has held the US professional ballroom championships title; for the first five years with a British-born partner, and for the rest with a Lithuanian-born partner. The US professional Latin American title has been held by various partnerships, each with at least one Russian member of that team, since 2001. The US American Rhythm section was essentially owned by Bob Powers and Julia Gorchakova, a Russian, from 1993 to 2004. Since that time, every single champion partnership has had at least one Russian or Eastern European member of the partnership. In comparison, the title was held by American-born couples for the entire existence of the section.

In the professional American Smooth championships, the title was won by US-born couples from 1984 to 1996. In the intervening twenty years, the smooth title has been awarded to nine different couples. Six of those nine couples, accounting for fourteen years, have been partnerships where one or both members of the partnership were Russian or Eastern European. The last time a US-born couple won the title was in 2006. For an additional four of those 21 years, the champions were a partnership who originally hail from Britain and Australia.

The impact of foreign-born teachers has been felt in Atlanta. Nearly every teacher interviewed noted that Russian and Eastern European teachers in Atlanta have brought about an

⁵³⁹ The national championships hosted by USABDA, the precursor to USAdance, was dominated by these couples. Many of these amateur competitors have gone on to successful professional competitive careers in the US. For an example of the ubiquity of Russians and Eastern Europeans in amateur comps, see the results for the 2002, 2003, and 2004 nationals, at <http://usadance.org/dancesport/forms-and-resources/competition-results/>. When USABDA became USAdance, the organization failed to transfer online links to results to the new website. Hence results from the late 1990s are inaccessible online. The author, however, competed in this period and competed alongside many Russians and Eastern Europeans in the mid-to-late 1990s.

increased focus on competing.⁵⁴⁰ This is unsurprising, as these dancers come from a competitive background, rather than from a social dancing background. Teachers saw both positives and negatives to the arrival of this group. On the plus side, International style grew and opened opportunities for students to learn more ballroom. The technique of International style has prompted proponents of the American style to codify the style's own unique technical aspects, setting it apart from International style.

This codification is a direct response to a major complaint that teachers have had about the proponents of International style. Numerous Atlanta teachers noted that non-American-born dancers have diluted the definitive style of American Rhythm. Rather than learning American technique, it has been argued, International style dancers have used International technique, thus ruining American Rhythm by making it less distinctive. One teacher noted that while she thought Eastern European dancers were "very good," they were "not like the English. They're not as precise." This comparison implicitly privileges the British version of International.

A major criticism of teachers from former-Soviet countries is that they are excellent dancers, but lack teaching skills. Repeatedly, teachers told of witnessing poor teaching, and that the clients were under-served by this lack of skill. Some professionals have circumvented the lack of teaching skills by training a few students who excel competitively, and thus have not needed to polish their teaching ability because their results represent success. As the first generation of non-US-born professionals has started to retire from competitive dancing, however, and open their own studios, they have realized the need to have a wider understanding

⁵⁴⁰ See, for example, Vonnie Marie, Interview with the author, May 25, 2015, 0:37-0:39; Eddie Ares, Interview with the author, November 7, 2012, 0:19-20, 0:23.

of the industry.⁵⁴¹ Studios need to have a base of students that extends beyond a small competitive group.

DanceSport-based Studios and Beyond

What developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s was a studio model based on competitive students. Students came to the studio, practiced with their professional partner, and left until they came back for another lesson. There was limited time spent in the studio. When the student and teacher went to competitions, they competed and then left the event, participating in little else at the comp. This type of student/teacher relationship may have built strong connections between the two individuals, but it did nothing to bond the student to the studio as a space or institution. Today, in the 2010s, studio owners “are recognizing that there is a facet missing.”⁵⁴² John DePalma, a former professional competitor and teacher, and current studio owner, emcee at most major ballroom competitions in the US, and business consultant, travels the US helping studios to adapt to current market trends. He believes that, just as was the case in the 1950s through early 1980s, people want to dance for the social benefits it brings, more than the perks of competing. As he works with owners to build their business, he suggests ways to create an experience for the client, to create an environment where they will feel welcome, and feel part of the community. In other words, studios of the 2010s are returning to familiness. Studios are finding that they cannot rely purely on competitions, but need to find ways to connect clients to the studio. Competing is definitely one of the means of doing that, but parties, trips, and group classes are important tools available to studios to accomplish their goal of being successful businesses.

⁵⁴¹ Dennis Rogers, Interview with the author, May 26, 2016, Savannah, Georgia, 0:39-0:42.

⁵⁴² John DePalma, Interview with the author, May 2016, Atlanta, Georgia, 0:27-0:30.

The ballroom industry appears to have circled back to the familiness model of the 1950s through 1980s. The successful studios in Atlanta in 2017 are those that provide private instruction, group classes, and social activities that aid in binding clients and teachers to the studio. Competitions remains an important element of helping students improve their dancing. One relatively new studio in Atlanta has survived its first three years on a model that focuses on competition, and on independent teachers paying floor fees.⁵⁴³ Arthur Murray has two locations near Atlanta, one in Kennesaw, and one in Alpharetta. These locations are areas where clients with expendable income are more likely to live, than in the downtown locations of the 1960s and 1970s. In 2017, FADS returned to the Atlanta area after an extended absence.⁵⁴⁴ The Astaire studio is located in Marietta, just North of Atlanta. Planet Ballroom, a boutique chain of ballroom studios, has two metro Atlanta locations. These spaces are smaller studios, designed to create a welcoming atmosphere. Academy ballroom, established by FADS alumni Eddie Ares and Joe LoCurto, has been in business for nearly a decade. The most established ballroom studio in the metro area, Atlanta Dance, has been in business for 18 years.⁵⁴⁵ Its tagline perhaps exemplifies the return to familiness: “The friendliest ballroom in town.”

In Atlanta today, clients in studios come from varied economic backgrounds. Those who take regular, weekly (or more) lessons, however, still tend to be wealthier females. Men are a significant demographic of client, but are still a minority compared to female clients. In the competitive field, women are many times more likely to compete than men. This means that there are still significantly more male teachers than female. Female sections of Pro-Am

⁵⁴³ Rock Steady, owned by Jared and Natalie Pruitt, has been operating since 2014, in Sandy Springs, east of downtown Atlanta.

⁵⁴⁴ No one has been able to fully explain why FADS left Georgia. There are allusions to some sort of legal trouble, but this is undefined, and unsubstantiated.

⁵⁴⁵ Phyllis DeNeve, Interview with the author, May 25, 2015, Marietta, Georgia, 0:42.

competitions are vastly larger than male sections. The top female competitors in the US are women who can afford to pay for many lessons with their professional partner, and who can afford to attend competitions around the country regularly. This means, of course, that women control the economics of ballroom dance, at a practical level. But it is significant that none of the major studios in Atlanta are owned by women. This is a significant change from the 1960s through 1980s. Women have lost economic power at the ownership level, while remaining the financial power of studios via their patronage.

At an administrative level, women arguably play a less-significant role than perhaps at any time since the founding of the NCDTO. There has not been a female president of the professional organization since the 1970s. Judy Hatton has been the most active, and significant woman on the NDCA, serving as vice president for many years. Hatton is a former North American champion, and has served on the governing body of the USISTD. Ricky Gieger has served on the NDCA governing body for long periods of time over the past five decades. Two other women currently serve as officers of the NDCA, Cassandra Schneider as executive secretary, and Diana McDonald who heads the credentials committee. Within member organizations of the NDCA, women hold many positions of authority, although few serve as the presiding officer of those organizations.⁵⁴⁶ The heteronormative binary of ballroom dancing appears not to have assisted women in improving their position within the US ballroom dance industry.

⁵⁴⁶ Of the sixteen member organizations listed in the NDCA directory, four have female presiding officers, including Geiger as the president of the North American Dance Teachers Organization. These numbers do not project the fact that numerous organizations have high-ranking female officials, but at face value they further enhance the image of a male-dominated industry. One interviewee who has served on the national council for decades, believes that the current leadership is particularly sexist.

Black Americans remain a small proportion of US ballroom clientele, although the numbers appear to be growing. Kimmins believes that the percentage of black teachers in the Murray organization has grown significantly over the past twenty years. In Atlanta, a significant number of black teachers are working in studios. Increasing numbers of black, Hispanic, and Asian-American dancers are seen on the dance floor at amateur organizations, as well as in ballroom studios. On the national competitive scene, Victor Fung was for most of the 1990s the US amateur standard champion, including with two of his sisters. He and his current (Russian) partner are ranked second in the world. Fung is one of a large number of Asian American competitors in California. The current US national amateur senior II ballroom champions, and British Open Over 50 champions, are an Asian-American and Russian pairing, Xingmin and Katerina Lu. The male half of the US national professional Rhythm champions in 2014 and 2015 was Emmanuel Pierre Antoine, a black Haitian. While these examples appear anecdotal, they are increasingly becoming normative.

Ballroom dance studios in Atlanta, and around the US, continue to be spaces where dancers can create relationships that help establish a social identity, just as they did in the 1950s through 1980s. Socio-economic class, gender, and race still impact how Americans experience the ballroom dance industry. It is clear, however, that these issues are more complex than the image in popular memory. While the industry has increased in diversity since the mid-twentieth century, the role of women in the national power structure has diminished since the organization of a national body for ballroom dance in the US. Little has been done to counter the image of a dominant male, and subordinate female partner, even though it is clear that this binary is far from reality. Further work remains to be done on the experience of ethnic minorities in the very white world of ballroom dance, as well as on how non-elites fare in a competition system that rewards

those who can financially afford more – more coaching, more travel, more entries, and more lavish costumes.⁵⁴⁷ “Ballroom in the Big Peach” establishes the historical context to address these questions.

⁵⁴⁷ Jonathon Marion’s work starts to address this issue in the contemporary context. The historical perspective of the 1980s through 2000s has yet to be interrogated.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

UNLIMITED
1943-44

PHOTO FLASH

IMPORTANT-To Branch Managers!
This is a sample layout to show how you can play up your own studio, etc. You may have noticed there are no names of people or places in this magazine. That's so you can use it in any manner where your studio is located. However, some editions must have local pictures with local names.

We illustrate about six, various pages to prepare this sample Photo Flash page. You can have a similar page printed locally, at low cost, using actual news of your own studio, students, teachers and parties. Your Photo Flash page can be slipped into your copies like a leaflet-size strip-page sheet.

ARTHUR MURRAY, INC.



This is a good spot for your best local exhibition pictures. Here, the Virginia Reel is shown. Be sure and name the dancers you illustrate in party pictures.



Show of Best Dances like this one are always good. Try to get groups of action and always identify your local people.



A group around the refreshment table. Perhaps you'd prefer to show a picture of your own reception room or a studio.

The sample above pictures from Atlanta and will give you an idea of what to do with your own page. Mr. Warren Hill can do your layout job and will take care of the printing for you at a nominal fee. Write him in care of the Detroit studio.



These are prize winners for four corners at Atlanta's Barn Dance party. Always show local prize winners at your parties. Mention BOB and JOE Club.



1. Another shot of the Virginia Reel. Use children's pictures also, if you have them.



2. A young couple atop the show. When you write your captions try and make them lively.



A Spotlight exhibition by students of the Atlanta studio. There's always popular interest in studios who dance well enough for exhibitions.



3. Promenade The Hall, during the Barn Dance. Don't forget to play up local Lifetime members.

These photos of Atlanta students and teachers were used to show you how you can prepare a similar insert in order to feature local names.

Figure 1: "Photo Flash," Arthur Murray, Inc. Archives (AMIA), Used by permission.

**Arthur Murray
sells only one product-**

FUN

take it home

... TAKE IT ANYWHERE!
Fun is the neatest little package you can buy. It goes where you go—out with friends—to a party—on vacation. All you need is music, and right away you've stirred up great fun. At Arthur Murray we have all the ingredients—music—friends—parties—dancing—and the best teachers! Start today—and in no time you'll be wondering why you waited so long.

FREE "INVITATION TO DANCE" guide with easy to follow diagrams of Fox Trot, Rumba, Cha-Cha, Tango and—the HUSTLE!
Plus FREE gift certificate for 1 private lesson.



Arthur Murray
FRANCHISED DANCE SCHOOLS
"We change people into couples."

Call Now 000-0000 ADDRESS

ARTHUR MURRAY - WORLD'S FASTEST GROWING DANCE SCHOOLS - OVER 200 LOCATIONS WHERE YOU'LL LEARN TO STAY IN TOUCH

Figure 2: "June," 1977 Arthur Murray Executive Planner Calendar. AMIA. Used by permission.

Get together at Arthur Murray's and learn the Hustle.

Makes you feel so good—
Makes you look so great—
The only way to move
is to

HUSTLE!

The coordinated self-expression for two.

You'll be full of energy and rhythm when you learn the Hustle:

- THE DIPS—THE SPINS—
- THE SMOOTH BRAKES—
- THE FANCY TURNS—
- THE JAZZY FOOTWORK.



Arthur Murray
FRANCHISED DANCE SCHOOLS
"We change strangers into friends"

ADDRESS
CALL NOW
000-0000

Call for your FREE "INVITATION TO DANCE" guide with easy to follow diagrams of Fox Trot, Rumba, Cha-Cha, Tango and—the HUSTLE!
Plus FREE gift certificate for 1 private lesson.

© 1977 Arthur Murray, Inc.

Figure 3: "March," 1978 Arthur Murray Executive Planner Calendar. AMIA. Used by permission.

ANNOUNCING THE OPENING OF
THE
FLOYD BOLTON DANCE STUDIOS, INC.
181 1/2 AUBURN AVENUE
MARCH 1st

SPECIALIZING IN

Fox Trot		Swing
★		★
Waltz		Rumba
★		★
Samba		Tango
★		★

FEATURING

"THE MAMBO"
(NEWEST DANCE SENSATION)

MEDAL AWARD — DANCE CLUBS — SOCIAL ACTIVITIES
DON'T BE **SOCIALLY SHY** — VISIT OUR
DANCE STUDIOS FOR THE QUICKEST
WAY TO GREATER POPULARITY

"WALK IN — DANCE OUT"

Figure 4: Advert for the opening of the Floyd Bolton Dance Studios. *Atlanta Daily World*, February 20, 1955, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

A Party Every Night



JOIN THE
**FRED
ASTAIRE**
"PARTY-OF-THE-WEEK"
CLUB FOR ONLY *2
AND GET A
*25 DANCE COURSE
FREE!

Figure 5: Advert for Fred Astaire Dance Studios Party-of-the-Week Club. "Display Ad 109 – No Title," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 30, 1956, 29. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

ONLY \$2 **MAKES YOU A MEMBER**
IN THE
Floyd Bolton
Dance Club
 One Of America's
Fastest Growing Clubs!

If you like to dance, or would love to learn, this unique club was made just for you. It was created by the famous Floyd Bolton to give you the most fun and instruction for your dancing dollar... Now, for just a \$2 membership you get...

- (1) Two private lessons—in private studios!
- (2) Learn to dance the latest steps!
- (3) Invitation to gay Studio parties—Dancing to our own orchestra—in our beautiful Ballroom Studios!

Take advantage of this opportunity to join the only club of its kind in America. Receive the many SPECIAL PRIVILEGES and SPECIAL DISCOUNTS available to members only. Just a \$2 bill will start you on the road to much greater happiness and social success.

Mail This Coupon Today

with your \$2 membership fee and receive
 2 Free Private Lessons
 Dance Party And
 Special Privileges.

FLOYD BOLTON Dance Studios
 181 1/2 Auburn Ave., N. E. **DANCE STUDIOS**
 Betty Bolton, Pres. Dorothy Floyd, V. P.
 181 1/2 AUBURN AVE., N. E. CY. 3027

Figure 6: Advert inviting readers to join the Floyd Bolton Dance Club. “Display Ad 8 – No Title,” *Atlanta Daily World*. March 13, 1955, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

WANTED



Vibrant, single people that enjoy travel, dancing and meeting people —to train for a professional career in ballroom teaching and competition dancing, also management training for studio operation from the most respected name in ballroom dancing—**FRED ASTAIRE STUDIOS.**

CALL US NOW!
ATLANTA
321-0306

Figure 7: Fred Astaire Dance Studios Advert for Teachers. “Display Ad 43 – No Title,” *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 9, 1978, 3D. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

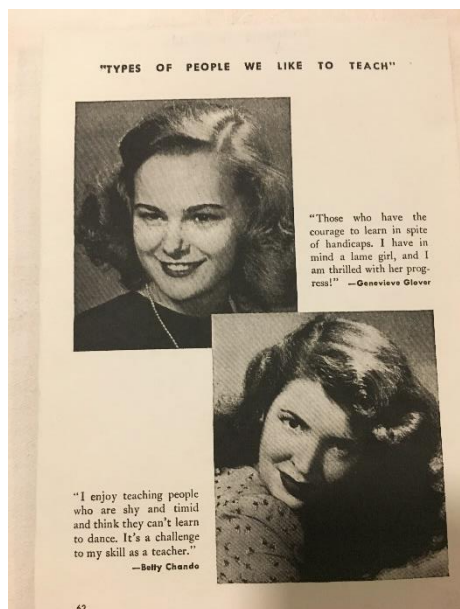


Figure 8: Arthur Murray, Inc. "Types of People We Like To Teach," *Murray-Go-Round*, 1949. AMIA. Used by permission.



Figure 9: Picture of Margart Bryan, featured in a 1950 *Atlanta Constitution* article. Katherine Barnwell, "Dancing Teacher named Business Woman of Year," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 9, 1951, 12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

372

SOCIAL AND BUSINESS SUCCESS DEMANDS SOCIAL SKILLS

"That One Dance Well" is a Compliment to Dance Partners, Worthy of Friends' Invitations

LEARN TO DANCE THE FRED BROOKS WAY

"The World's Finest Ballroom Dancing"

Learning to dance the Fred Brooks Way, with grace and confidence in every movement, is life-time assurance of POPULARITY and HAPPINESS.

Selected professional instructors personally trained by Fred Brooks, America's foremost dance authority, guarantee you will be an accomplished dancer in a very few lessons. It is FUN to learn to dance the Fred Brooks Way. Let us show you how quickly and economically you can become a superb dancer.

PRIVATE LESSONS BY APPOINTMENT.
TEN AGE AND COLLEGE CLASSES.

ADULT CLUB
and
GROUP CLASSES

FRED BROOKS
DANCE
Studios

FOXTROT - RUMBA
HYPERIC - SAMBA
TANGO and WALTZ

Biltmore Hotel H.E. 1867

"There is a plan to suit you at Fred Brooks' Studios."

Let us give you a Complimentary Dance Analysis—no obligation whatsoever.

HEmlock 1867 ATLANTA BILTmore HOTEL HEmlock 1868




Figure 10: Advert for Fred Brooks Studio. Atlanta Yellow Pages.

"Out of Civics, Meet Me at"

Fred Brooks Dance Studios
Biltmore Hotel
HEm. 1867

"I'm beginning that refresher course at **Fred Brooks**. When I go dancing I want to be up on the latest Rumba, Samba, Fox Trot and Waltz. I want the sure way to get fun out of dance music and to be sure I'm going to lead my dancing partner in a sophisticated masculine manner."

Many men back in "civics" are taking private lessons or joining classes with their friends. Call and let us tell you more about the sheer joy that is yours after we streamline your dancing.

Open evenings to 10 p. m.

Let us give you a Complimentary Dance Analysis—no obligation whatsoever.






Figure 11: Advert for Fred Brooks Dance Studios.

DON'T LET ROMANCE PASS YOU BY

Come to Arthur Murray's and learn the secret of good times . . .

WHAT A FITTY that some people miss out on fun and popularity just because of their dancing. It's so needless, too, when just one lesson at Arthur Murray's can give you the secret to good times. Thanks to Arthur Murray's exclusive "Magic Step To Popularity" you learn the key to all dances your very first lesson. Even beginners can dance in an hour. So don't sit on the sidelines wishing for popularity. Come in to Arthur Murray's now and be sure of it.

ARTHUR MURRAY
101 Carnegie Way Air-Conditioned

Figure 12: Arthur Murray, Inc. advert. AMIA.

PANCHO GONZALEZ WON HIS FIRST TROPHY



If you find yourself in opposing courts too often—get closer. Dancing together moves a lot more than your feet.

He's an Arthur Murray Man!

Resident Pro
Caesar's Palace

Pancho knows how to win. The little lady is an Arthur Murray teacher; she knows all there is to know about foot faults. Now Pancho knows all about touch dancing! Your Arthur Murray coach will teach you THE HUSTLE without a foot fault, too . . . and all the other "touch" dances as well—Bossa Nova, Tango, Waltz . . . It's the surest way to shorten the distance between two people.

Arthur Murray®
FRANCHISED DANCE SCHOOLS
Touch Your Partner—Move As One
ADDRESS

**Call Now
000-0000**

© 1975, Arthur Murray, Inc.

Figure 13: Pancho Gonzalez advert. AMIA.

ARTHUR MURRAY STUDIOS CELEBRATES THEIR NEW CUMBERLAND LOCATION BY OFFERING 12 SESSIONS FOR \$8.50 TO THE FIRST 25 CALLS PER STUDIO

Put fun in your life and life in your fun at Arthur Murray's! Learn the latest dances and ballroom standards while having fun with interesting new people. Nightclub ■ Ballroom ■ Swing Slow Dancing ■ Hustle ■ Latin ■ Disco ■ Country.

Let the professional dance instructors at Arthur Murray's show you just how easy it is to be a super dance partner and enjoy life more. Call today. Tonight you'll be dancing! And loving it. 10am-10pm Mon-Fri-Sat Noon-5.



Arthur Murray
Franchised Dance Studio

SMYRNA 2764 Hangrove Rd. 432-5991	SANDY SPRINGS 6600 Roswell Rd. 256-0324	DORAVILLE 5080 Buford Hwy. 458-6077
--	--	--

Figure 14: AMIA.

Arthur Murray changes people into couples.

PRE-ENROLLMENT OFFER \$10
5 Lessons For

- Two 1/2 hour private lessons
- Two class lessons
- One studio party lesson (for new students only)

Arthur Murray
FRANCHISED DANCE SCHOOLS

233-5303
2964 Peachtree Rd. N.W.
Suite 590

256-0324
6600 Roswell Rd.
Sandy Springs

© 1977, Arthur Murray, Inc.

Figure 15: Arthur Murray