Department of Social Anthropology
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Spring 2020

Masculinity and Dance

Male Dancers, Gender and Society in Stockholm, Sweden

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the conditions for professional and aspiring professional male theatre dancers across two separate field sites in Stockholm, Sweden. By analysing these conditions I aim to discuss how hegemonic masculine social norms inform and affect the lives of these male dancers and the consequences of those norms for the wider male population. Through interview, unobtrusive observation and dance participation I will scrutinise the male experience of dance work and training in order to understand the lives of professional male dancers and their perception of themselves and their work, as part of a very small minority of men in Swedish society. Through a comparative analysis of dance and sport, I suggest that the stark gender imbalance in dance work and training is indicative of a larger pattern of hegemonic masculine social norms that stymie male social development and undermine wider societal efforts towards gender equality.

Keywords: masculinity, gender, dance, embodiment, Sweden

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the dancers, staff and students of the Royal Swedish Opera and of the Ballet Academy for their time and forbearance in helping to make this thesis a reality. The high level of engagement with the subject and the willing attitude of everyone who took part was a constant source of support and motivation. I dearly hope that my research will be of some benefit to them in their lives and careers. I would especially like to thank Eytan Sivak of the Ballet Academy for his encouragement and advice which really made me feel as if I had stepped deeply into the Swedish dance world, despite my lamentably short time there. In addition, Jan-Erik Wikström, Pascal Jansson, Oscar Salomonsson, Jaakko Kulmala and Dan Johansson provided exceptional insights which helped me to form both my questions and eventual answers and this work would be much the poorer without their input. In what follows most of them appear pseudonymously.

This undertaking was made all the more manageable and dare I say fun, by my classmates and I wish to give thanks for their support, engagement and lively debate throughout the last two years. I count them all as being in a special group, but my particular thanks go to Bartira Fortes, Karl Wahlmann, Agnes Lansrot, Sophie Justesen, Marzia Bethaz, Dario Bassani and especially Zarreen Kamali who all helped lift my spirits and make me feel like what we were doing was useful and important.

I would also like to give a special thanks to my supervisor, Professor Helena Wulff, for her guidance and insights during the writing of this thesis. Having such an eminent anthropologist and scholar of dance guiding me through this thesis was a great help and gave me the freedom to work confidently in my field, despite my lack of experience in the dance world.

Finally, I must give my deepest gratitude to my partner, Sarah, for her patience and love and without whose tireless work and generous support this thesis would have never even begun.

I dedicate this work to all the boys and men who love to dance, even in the face of a world that would rather they didn’t.

Introduction

I am in studio 8, of the Ballet Academy in Stockholm, sitting quietly beside a baby grand piano, trying my best to be unobtrusive, which is difficult when you are the only person not actively contributing to the ongoing class. Although it is late November in these northern reaches there is some rare dappled sunlight coming in through the large studio windows, the shadows of the trees outside sway across the rubberised timber floor, doing their best to ape the graceful flow of bodies interspersed around the room. It seems as if I am succeeding in my attempt at being unobtrusive, nobody looks my way, even the pianist next to me keeps to himself, his eyes rarely straying far from the teacher strolling the floor. Except I know that my success is unlikely; this is a place where everyone is aware of any eyes on them, it is a place devoted to visual communication. I am watching and listening ("observation" is not part of the lexicon of dance) to a ballet class for pre-professional dancers. Despite the name, the Ballet Academy teaches a plethora of dance styles, but ballet remains one of its foundational training modes. I have seen many classes like this one before and will see still many more before my work is done and the format is always some variation of barre exercises, followed by jumping exercises, followed by traversing exercises, for 90 minutes. There are 15 or so dancers, their teacher, a pianist and me watching and listening in this room and I am acutely aware that I am the only one not contributing to the goal and purpose of the space. The language used by the teacher, who talks often to describe and explain the work and critique the students' technique, has its own cadence and form that is particular to dance. However, most of the time, as with the work of dance training itself, it is repetitive and focused on purely mechanical demands; which is why, early during this Friday afternoon lesson, I am taken by something the teacher says: "I know it has been a long week and you are all tired, but try to keep focused and think: 'I am a dancer, I know my body.'" As he speaks those last eight words, laying emphasis on "know" and "body," he straightens his already exemplary posture and draws the finger tips and thumb of his left hand together at his chest, as if to suggest the collection of disparate parts into a coherent and controlled whole. This is the first time I have heard a reference of this type, though not the last, and when I later press the teacher about it, he barely seems to remember saying it, or even how to fully articulate what he meant by it. And so I have another example of the challenging nature of conducting research in a field more concerned with bodily understanding than explanation and of trying to describe experiences with words that feel so clumsy, in the adroit world of theatre dance.

This thesis will unfold in four parts, beginning with this introduction where I will outline my central research problem, theoretical underpinning, background to both how I arrived at my research problem and the existing literature around the topic and discussion of methods. Following the introduction there will be two chapters focusing on my two main field sites and the key collaborators I met at them. In those chapters I will further discuss my methodological approach and highlight the data I collected most salient to my research question. The final chapter will feature analysis of said research question, combining my field data with a theoretical and comparative analysis of the related fields of

sport and sports anthropology, finishing off with concluding thoughts and reflections on my findings as well as some potential further avenues of research in this field.

Aims

In this introduction I will be discussing the interaction of hegemonic masculinity and male engagement with pre-, post- and peri-professional theatre dance, particularly ballet and contemporary dance in Stockholm, Sweden. Through unobtrusive observation and semi-structured interview, I have investigated the characteristics of professional and aspiring professional male theatre dancers, with a view to understanding their path to professional dancer-hood and the particular conditions and challenges they face in a Euro-American cultural milieu that is at best ambivalent towards them. Through analysis and comparison between their reported experiences of dance training and performance and the more conventional male form of embodied physical expression, sport, I wish to derive an understanding of the broader conditions that restrict male engagement with dance in the Western societies more generally and the challenges that stand before those who would seek to increase male participation in female dominated arenas.

Background

I came to dance as a field of research through a broader interest in contemporary masculinity and embodied knowledge and experience. As a white, Northern English man living in Sweden, the differential natures of what noted gender researcher Raewyn Connell (1995) terms “hegemonic masculinity” — a term that I will be returning to later — in British and Swedish society have interested me ever since I moved to Stockholm in 2013. In particular I was struck by the common sight of men who, able to take considerable amounts of parental leave, roam the streets of the city in groups, pushing child laden buggies before them with an obvious sense of ease — a sight I could not recall ever seeing in my home country. However, masculine behaviour which seemed impossibly progressive in comparison with much of my experience of British masculinity, was combined in the men of Stockholm with clear similarities to their British counterparts, when it came to dealing with other activities and modes of being that are typically gender coded.

Despite some significant differences, a cursory examination of Swedish news reveals that the same problems persist in Sweden as Britain, or anywhere else: widespread sexism manifested across all levels of society, affecting employment, the division of labour, norms of behaviour, health, security and justice. Legal frameworks (such as those relating to parental leave) notwithstanding, how is it that Sweden has been able to integrate, to a degree greater than almost any other country in the world, the most traditional of female roles — child care — into hegemonic masculine behaviour? And if it can be done, what other gendered activities can also be neutralised as part of the greater project of gender equality?

Such thinking has been given extra impetus by the wide-ranging challenges to contemporary masculinity that have arisen in the last 10 years, as manifested most visibly in the #metoo movement and the concomitant online and political backlash amongst conservative and far-right communities. These developments have demanded that we engage with the issues surrounding contemporary masculinity, not only in critical resistance to standard bearers of patriarchy, but in examining the taken for granted characteristics of normative masculine behaviours that buttress those more retrograde patriarchal attitudes.

It was with the above factors in mind that I set out to find a research topic for this master thesis and discovered my field in dance. In December 2018, at a seminar entitled Pedagogical Turns in Practice, held at the Swedish Arts Grants Committee in Stockholm. (Iaspis 2018) Educator and curator Sepake Angiama presented her ideas on how she believes teaching could be done differently, that instead of traditional classroom environments educators should develop "pedagogical forms of practice" (Iaspis 2018) outside of the typical style and environments assumed in educational institutions; one example of this approach was using dance as a teaching tool. Angiama showed a short video taken at a workshop she ran entitled "Under The Mango Tree" in which the attendees performed a simple dance routine, however, what was notable about it to me — though it was not apparently intended as a feature of the work — was that of 20 to 30 attendees appearing in the video, I could only identify three men.

While such an occurrence did not at first seem especially remarkable, it was interesting to me that there were not more men involved, given the current societal context mentioned above and perhaps more saliently the widely reported and consistent failure at all levels of Euro-American education to properly engage male school students, which has resulted in their consistent underperformance compared to their female colleagues. (Weaver-Hightower 2003) While the notion of men lacking engage-

ment with issues of gender equality, educational attainment and dance, in particular dance as a meaningful mode through which to address those issues, did not especially surprise me, though it certainly begged the question, why? My instinct was that a deep-seated reason was at play and the stark gender differential in Angiama's workshop spoke of wider social issues.

In discussing my proposed field with friends, family and colleagues, both male and female, I was met with reactions ranging from genuine interest to polite surprise, confusion and even outright ridicule. That I would want to investigate dance and specifically theatrical dance, which was implicitly viewed as the most feminine form of dance, or participate in the form as part of my research seems to some as odd, of unclear or questionable value, overtly feminine, or even betrayed an unmanly character suggestive of latent homosexuality. However, everybody I spoke to admitted to knowing at least one man in their lives who *does not dance*. One friend described a man he knew who refused to dance at his own wedding, outside of the required first dance and remained seated for the entire rest of the festivities. It is clear to me that within the realm of hegemonic Anglo-Swedish culture there is still a problem with men who take dance seriously or display any interest in doing so.

My initial idea was to speak to *men who do not dance* however, finding such an amorphous group proved too much for the scope of this research (how does one find a group of people who are avoidant of an inherently social activity?) So instead I turned my mind to men for whom dance is the definitive part of their lives: Professional dancers. Once I did that my research aims became clear: Is it possible to make claim to a particular path to male dancer-hood and if so, how and why does it diverge from the roads more commonly taken? In this period of history, often popularly characterised with notions of "toxic masculinity" and a "crisis of masculinity" do male dancers feel the negative social pressure of heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity on their dance careers and if so, how do they handle it? What are the consequences of this situation for the lives of men more generally and the wider struggle for gender equality?

Theoretical Background

With the kernel of an idea I began to investigate the existing anthropological and social scientific literature related to masculinity and dance and perhaps unsurprisingly found a wealth of information to support my interest that spanned the length and breadth of the anthropological cannon, as well as other valuable social scientific fields.

Masculinities

If I am to speak of gender and dancing, it cannot be done without some recourse to feminist thought, which has a long and significant association with both gender studies and dance scholarship, offering many insights regarding both patriarchal social structures and the diverse ways in which bodies are shaped and come to have meaning. Feminist discourse around dance and ballet has changed over time from its construction as simply a "vehicle for patriarchal oppression" to a more nuanced perspective that allows for the potential of dance to "disrupt the male gaze" and provide opportunities for women to resist its power to shape their behaviour. (Oliver & Risner 2017:5)

While feminist theory is important and useful for an analysis of dance — after all masculinity is defined in relation to femininity — the particular interests of feminism mean that it has justifiably focused on the experiences of women. I would like to refer my work to the intimately related field of Masculinity Studies, which offers valuable perspectives in developing an understanding of dance masculinity from the perspective of masculinity. Connell (1995) — who I will return to later — and the edited volumes by Ervø & Johansson, (2003) Tarrant, (2008) Emig & Rowland (2010) and Haywood et al. (2018) all have added to the growing body of masculinity studies literature that speaks to the central role of performativity and embodiment in understanding men's experience of masculinity.

However, perhaps it is best to begin with the basics: What do we mean when we speak of masculinity and of dance? In the words of Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay in *When Men Dance* "Whose version of masculinity? What sort of dancing?" (2009:3)

In response to the question of what masculinity is, an easy answer might involve the invocation of ideas such as "normative masculinity," or "heteronormative masculinity," concepts which speak intuitively of common ideas around what men are, or what men should be. Do we speak of certain behaviours, or physical attributes? Is masculinity a social or biological phenomenon, or perhaps a mixture of both? Of course, such simple delineations fail in the face of the myriad types of masculinity to be found in different cultures around the world — the extensive canon of social science research teaches us that there is not one monolithic, global masculinity, but many masculinities, often contradicting, both around the world and within cultures and societies. It is therefore important to set the terms of this discussion before moving on.

My research into masculinity took me by way of one of the most distinguished figures in anthropology and social science more broadly, Pierre Bourdieu, and his body of work demands regard in this instance. Not directly related to Masculinity Studies, though relevant to this discussion on gender, Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination* (2001) is an important contribution to the understanding of Masculinity and useful referent for developing the theoretical underpinning of this research. In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu attempts to strike at the fundamental questions regarding gender divisions in society: "What are the *historical* mechanisms responsible for the *relative dehistoricization* and *eternalization* of the structure of the sexual division and the corresponding principles of division." (Bourdieu 2001:vii) This is a question which underlies my research and the answer to which sits at the root of understanding the problem I am addressing here. For Bourdieu, the masculine domination of society is tied up in the *doxa* (that is to say the social artefacts of a society that are taken for granted and considered self-evident) of all members of a society, male and female, and as such takes on the character of a natural condition, independent of social structures. Referring to the Kabyle of North Africa and his classic research amongst them, but explicitly tying his findings to Western society, Bourdieu sites gender divisions within a larger system of "homologous oppositions" between various positions in space and different bodily movements. Oppositions such as up/down, right/left, go in/come out, go up/go down are perceived as dyadic states that are related through their differences to the extent that they form a co-dependent pairing, giving each other "a kind of semantic thickness" (Bourdieu 2001:7-8) that reinforces their status in society as natural and self-evident. If Bourdieu is correct and the Kabyle homologous oppositions pertain also to Western societies, then it might be possible to ascribe a dyadic relationship of the types he observed amongst the Kabyle between concepts like soft/hard, collaborative/competitive and dance/sport that in some sense corresponds with a more general female/male opposition.

Bourdieu's attention to the underlying social structures that cause gender divisions is a valuable and necessary step in the ongoing process of creating gender equality in any society and is deeply influential on my approach to this research, however, his most useful reflection relates to a more practical, methodological consideration:

> Being included, as a man or woman, in the object that we are trying to comprehend, we have embodied the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation. When we try to understand masculine domination we are therefore likely to resort to modes of thought that are the product of domination. Our only hope of breaking out of that circle lies in finding a practical strategy for objectifying the subject of scientific objectification. (Bourdieu 2001:5)

While I am not able to use the "practical strategy" that Bourdieu refers to and take myself off to study the "at once exotic and very close to us… Berbers of Kabylia," (Bourdieu 2001:5) his reminder that the position of the researcher is of paramount significance for understanding the field they place themselves in, is naturally of continuing salience to anthropologists everywhere, but perhaps especially so when one is dealing with topics so deeply ingrained as gender norms and practices within a home, or very familiar society, as I do in this research.

Although Bourdieu offers valuable insights regarding the powerful ways in which gender binaries can be embedded within wider social structures and the resulting appearance of their relationship as being "in the order of things," (Bourdieu 2001:8) I found his approach to be too focused on the specific interrelation between genders, as opposed to the genders themselves. As I have already mentioned and which will come up again, the interrelations between genders is of vital importance in understanding any one of them, however for my work in Stockholm I needed a framework which takes its cues from the broader sweep of Gender Studies, confronts and incorporates Western social norms and research and takes greater account of a gender's relation to itself.

For this research I decided to anchor my work in a different theoretical stream from that developed by Bourdieu by relying on a term I have already mentioned and will continue to use when discussing the gender context of my work: "hegemonic masculinity". Sherry Ortner was the first anthropologist to articulate the notion of a "hegemonic" masculinity in her article "Gender Hegemonies" (1989) as a useful means of expressing the particular types of masculinity we mean when we most often speak on the subject. Although Ortner admits the term "hegemony" is not without its problems, it is useful in the context of this work which is focused on the particular Swedish context, where notions of gender norms and gender-based issues are broadly understood and debated in society. However, it is not Ortner who gives the term most of its theoretical and analytical heft, but Raewyn Connell and her book *Masculinites,* (1995) a seminal text on the study of masculinity which offers one of the most well developed discussions on what masculinity is. Drawing on a breadth of psychological and social scientific traditions to make her case, Connell invokes some of classical anthropology's greatest contributors to illustrate the contested nature of the term. Going as far back as Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Societies*. (1927) Connell gives a brief overview of the progress of anthropological inquiry, as it relates to the scientific understanding of masculinity, drawing on other luminaries such as Margaret Mead, (*Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies,* 1935) Marilyn Strathern (*The Achievement of Sex: Paradoxes in Hagen Gender-Thinking,* 1978) and eventually leading the reader to Gilbert Herdt's *Guardians of the Flute,* (1981) a work that plainly illustrates

quite how diverse and seemingly contradictory masculinity can be, when viewed only from a single socio-cultural perspective.

The usage of the term hegemonic masculinity speaks to the dominant, though not the only, or immutable, form of masculinity which is prevalent in any given society. “Hegemony, then, does not mean total control. It is not automatic, and may be disrupted — or even disrupt itself.” (Connell 1995:37) Such a variable and manipulable understanding of dominant modes of masculinity then, is necessarily dialectical not only in the way that it is defined in opposition to femininity, but in the way that it is defined in opposition to other masculinities. “To recognise diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognise the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity.” (Connell 1995:37) Such a perspective provides the grounds on which one might fruitfully discuss the particular conditions of male dance and male dancers. “School studies show patterns of hegemony vividly. In certain schools the masculinity exalted through competitive sport is hegemonic; this means that sporting prowess is a test of masculinity even for boys who detest the locker room.” (Connell 1995:37) It is not enough for those who cannot, or will not, conform to the hegemonic version of masculinity they live under to simply choose a different path, they must first “establish some other claim to respect.” (Connell 1995:37)

My interest, then, in the project of hegemonic Swedish masculinity and its relation to dance, is to observe the conditions under which those who fall outside it in some meaningful way — those dedicated to a life of dance where so few exist — and the particular social practices that circumscribe their lives.

Ulf Mellström in *The Current Predicament of Masculinity Studies* (2019) contextualises my work, offering a salient reminder that there is still a great deal of work to do to properly elucidate the male experience, especially in light of recent global political developments. Referencing the rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and his chauvinistic sexism and misogyny, Mellström places the study of masculinity in its proper political context “masculinity must also be understood as a key political and ontological dimension of… regressive change. The political dividing lines are currently being articulated and popularised along the GAL (Green, Alternative, Liberal) - TAN (Traditional, Authoritarian, National) scale.” (Mellström 2019:1) Therefore, studying men and masculinity in a social realm widely conceived of as feminine, is not only an anthropological act, but a political one too. Mellström (2016) has laid great emphasis on the historical and political importance of studying men and their

ways “masculinity studies have much to offer in the current political development of revived masculinist agendas and reactionary gender politics” (Mellström 2016:135) and it is within this theoretical and political milieu that I wish to place my own work.

Dance Scholarship and Gender

If I have successfully explained the whys and wherefores of my interest in masculinity, why then is dance of interest? I had my inciting incident mentioned above, but the deep research on dance conducted through the anthropology of dance and other dance scholarship made it clear that there was more than a single researcher’s curiosity about an unremarked gender divide in a single event.

Dance has its own specific and extensive field of scholarship, independent of anthropology, however anthropology has had much to say on the topic. Like in the literature on masculinity, it quickly became clear that one cannot meaningfully speak of dance as a monolithic global phenomenon, practiced under the same conditions and with the same meaning everywhere. Even as far back as E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1928) dance has been considered a suitable field of inquiry for the discipline, although a specific sub-field did not properly emerge until the 1960s with the work of Gertrude P. Kurath. (1960) Building upon Kurath’s work Royce, (1977) Hanna, (1979, 1988) and Kaeppler, (1985) have all made significant anthropological insights. Hanna’s *To Dance Is Human* (1979) has a clear perspective on the important position of dance in human social life, offering a poetic examination of dance and dancing. For Hanna, dance is an activity entangled with the very fundament of humanity.

> To dance is human, and humanity almost universally expresses itself in dance. Dance interweaves with other aspect of human life, such as communication and learning, belief systems, social relations and political dynamics, loving and fighting and urbanization and change. It may even have been significant in the biological and evolutionary development of the human species. (Hanna 1979:3)

In the context of my work Hanna’s interest in the communicative aspects of dance feels particularly relevant. It is, of course, the job of the anthropologist to communicate. Perhaps even more so than a good fieldworker, observing and recording their surroundings, the anthropologist must be an adept communicator, able to thoroughly and accurately relay their findings to their audience. However, dance is a form of communication that sits outside the realm of the written and spoken word and yet possesses great communicative power. Dance has the “capability to communicate affectively and cognitively” (Hanna 1979:4) in a way that is characterised by Hanna and others as non-verbal, but

which one might, in anthropological parlance popular today, characterise as *more-than-verbal*. More-than-verbal because although dance is widely considered to be a language "with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, a system of physical movements, and interrelated rules guiding performance in different social situations," (Hanna 1979:5) those movements are not immediately translatable to spoken or written word, if at all. The mode of communication done through dance is not merely non-verbal, it is super-verbal, using tools that have no equivalent in the auditory or static, two dimensional realms of the word, but combinable with both, or neither.

More recent contributions to the canon include the collection *Dance in the Field* (1999) edited by Theresa Buckland, which compiles then current ideas on how to conduct fieldwork on dance and Helena Wulff's *Ballet Across Borders* (1998) which placed the theatrical dance style of ballet, the genre of dance I have most closely examined, in its proper context as a globally integrated socio-cultural milieu, rich with anthropological potential. I will return to both these volumes in my methods discussion, however, such potential has been followed up in a variety of anthropological works including the volume *Dancing Cultures*, (2012) edited by Hélène Neveu Kringelbach and Jonathan Skinner, in which dance is placed dialectically with society at large and identified as a catalyst for social change. "The capacity of dance to encapsulate a multiplicity of messages, and to remain open to interpretation, means that it lends itself particularly well to embodying identities in the making." (Neveu Kringelbach & Skinner 2012:14) Dance is an important locus of identity for individuals and societies, with the simultaneous power to reinforce, or undermine individual and societal notions of who they are. In discussing Argentinean dance scholar, Marta Savigliano, Neveu Kringelbach and Skinner illustrate the complex role that dance can play in identity. "[Savigliano] writes about her identity and the tango dance with… ambivalence: it is the 'locus of [her] identification … ever since [she] moved outside of her culture.' [Savigliano 1995: 12] She recognizes that it is a stereotype of her culture but that she still needs it as her cultural prop." (Neveu Kringelbach & Skinner 2012:1) Such an example provides clues to how dance may affect the identities of my collaborators, not necessarily as a "cultural prop" to retain an identity in an unfamiliar place, but as a distinguishing identifier that marks them as different in a place totally familiar. For Savigliano, dance gives her something from which to base a national and cultural identity, but what does ballet give to Swedish men, for whom native culture and social mores provide scant support for dance as a legitimate cultural identifier?

So, what of the specific relationship between men and dance? Male dancing is a highly proscribed and controlled social activity across the world and at various periods throughout history. (Fisher & Shay 2009) The apparent tropes of the *man who does not dance* and the *man who cannot dance* are

commonly accepted truisms of the Swedish and Anglophone cultural milieu and form just one part of a range of social factors that place dancing outside the realm of what might be considered proper masculine behaviour. If a Euro-American, white man is dancing it is often conceived of in popular culture as due to an uncontrollably extreme situation, be it joy, drunkardness, or some form of duress ("dance for me, boy" drawls the Hollywood villain as he shoots his gun at a younger man's feet) and that's if men are depicted dancing at all. American novelist Norman Mailer, a powerful writer on American masculinity, even went so far as to title one of his books *Tough Guys Don't Dance,* (1984) which makes explicit the connection between "proper" masculine behaviour and dance avoidance. Even though Mailer's writing is now over thirty years old and well-trodden Hollywood masculine tropes have been consistently challenged in recent times, in both "popular and scholarly definitions of masculinity... There is still much to say regarding the stigma and challenges that regularly arise around the topic of men who dance." (Fisher & Shay 2009:5)

Ramsay Burt's seminal *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (1995) offers valuable historical insights into the development of male dancers in Western society that echo down to us today, not least of all the extensive historical intertwining of ballet and male homosexuality in both popular conception and the lived experience of male dancers. Burt provides invaluable historical background as to why it is that dance is widely considered unmanly behaviour, reaching back to the nineteenth century, he reveals a fundamental issue sitting at the root of ballet. When discussing attitudes to ballet at the time, Burt summarises the situation thus: "There was no acknowledged distinction between ballet as aesthetic experience and ballet as erotic spectacle. To enjoy the spectacle of men dancing was, therefore, to be interested in men, but that was socially proscribed." (Burt 1995:27) Although it is true that dance and masculinity have changed in the intervening period, that such a description could also be applied to male attitudes to dance in this day and age shows the saddening extent to which hegemonic masculinity has been resistant to change in the last 170 years. The continuing existence of strip clubs, for example, or the prevalence of sexualised commercial dance in the music industry is suggestive of the continuing lack of distinction between the aesthetic and erotic dimensions of dance that Burt highlights. With this ongoing conflation of dance and eroticism that exists throughout masculine social and cultural space, it is perhaps no surprise that homophobic attitudes still pertain regarding men and dancing.

Doug Risner (2007) offers his own literature review in regards the "boy code" in twenty-first century dance education that shows the homophobic social structures put in place during the nineteenth century persist over 150 years later. Risner highlights the disjunction between the studio bound pleasure of dancing and wider familial and social gender policing that male dancers must endure and suggests

a line of inquiry for my work in this "under-researched field." With Risner's article being over ten years old and with citations stretching back to the mid 1990s, a revisitation of his line of questioning could be fruitful. Particularly pertinent for my work, Risner highlights the internalised homophobia of dancers and heterosexist assumptions and actions of dance educators that, "unintentionally create an environment of shame, humiliation or embarrassment for males. In the studio and classroom." (Risner 2007:149) An American sociologist, Risner has a long association with and interest in dance education and masculinity and his book *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance* (2007) takes an empirical approach to the topic, one which reviewers Karl Rogers & James H. Sanders III felt was lacking: "We yearned for the second part of his project, the qualitative results of interviews with young male dancers, to consider a broader definition of whom the preprofessional dancer might be and how young boys might move through that wider aperture." (Rogers & Sanders III 2012:180) This review by Rogers and Sanders III in the *Journal of LGBT Youth* clearly shows that the particular methodological strengths of anthropology can have a role to play in providing a deeper understanding of how to engage with the issues around men, boys and dance.

In a similar vein, Kai Lehikoinen's *Stepping Queerly: Discourses in Dance Education of Boys in Late 20th-Century Finland* (2006) draws upon gender studies and queer theory to make an analysis of male focused dance teaching. Lehikoinen presents a convincing picture of the issues facing male dancers in Finland that supports Risner's position and illustrates the powerful ways in which the structures described by Burt cause harm in contemporary society. "The same father [supporting his son in dance education in the face of local oppression] also told a story about his own mother who spat in his face when he, as a young boy, had asked if he could take up ballet." (Lehikoinen 2006:217) Such vehement reactions, while possibly extreme in this case, are inherent in masculinist culture and form a complex of social controls that include the dance world itself. "In dance education social conventions of heterosexual discourse are embodied through learning [heterosexually normative choreographies]… However, not all dance students are heterosexual and some of them can be quite uncertain about their sexuality." (Lehikoinen 2006:200) This passage indicates the level of social pressure that can be applied to male dancers, that not only emanates from homophobic and heteronormative non-dance arenas, but is also applied from within dance itself. Lehikoinen invokes Adrianne Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality to describe the state of society and the dance education that makes male dance participation (and the participation of non-heteronormative people) so fraught with difficulties.

That Lehikoinen and Risner are some of the few researchers to have actively analysed the specific conditions of boys and young men in dance supports the notion put forward by Michael Gard that the particular conditions of masculinity and patriarchy experienced by men in dance is not well known. Gard's *Men Who Dance* (2006) asks "what does it *mean* to be a male dancer, and what does it *feel like* to be a male dancer?" (Gard 2006:8) That such questions are only recently being addressed further suggests an opening for new findings for anthropology and for gender studies. For Gard "the male dancer was interesting because, in some respects, he seemed to contradict dominant gender constructions. It is, in part, the oppositional status of the male dancer… which potentially tells us something about the dominant constructions of men." (Gard 2006:79) Gard's work centres around interviews with twenty (at the time) current, or former male ballet, or contemporary dancers and is an approach I replicated to some degree, although I included pre-professional dancers as well. The perspective quoted above is one I agree with and I have tried to do the classical anthropological work of discovering something about masculinity in general, by studying something about masculinity that is specific.

I too turned to ballet when choosing a dance style to investigate. My thoughts were immediately drawn to ballet and contemporary dance as styles with a certain reputation for femininity and the existing literature supported this idea. If I wished to investigate the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and dance, then the dance styles most closely associated with women in Western society seemed like a good place to start. Though I had considered expanding my scope to include more stereotypically masculine styles such as break dancing and other hip-hop related forms, I thought it more fruitful to focus on an area where men are under represented, since my inciting incident was an encounter with a lack of men dancing. While there are a multitude of diverse styles of dance practiced in Stockholm, I chose ballet and contemporary dance (otherwise described as theatre dance, or theatrical dance, both in this thesis and in wider dance literature) for their apparently dominant position within societal understandings of what dance is and for their particularly female characters. The interaction between hegemonic masculinity and theatre dance, though perhaps a niche concern in society at large, provides fertile ground on which to analyse how typically masculine ideas such as physical mastery, pain endurance and hierarchical leadership, to name but a few features of the dance world, are expressed in an iconically female profession. In the words of Judith Lynne Hanna (1988) in *Dance Sex and Gender*: "Whether a ritual social event, or theatre art, dance has important yet little recognised potential to move and persuade us about what it is to be male or female." (1988:3) What does a stark gender disparity in the active pursuit of theatre dance careers say about the allowances and capabilities of men and masculinity in this time and place?

Embodiment

If the instrument of dance is the body and I wish to speak to questions of gender, then my research must in some sense address the body itself and embodied experience. The body has always been at least implicit in anthropological enquiry and has been a specific analytical category dating back to Paul Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher,* (1927) however, it was Marcel Mauss' article *Techniques of the Body* (1973) that laid the groundwork for the later blooming of a more widespread interest in the body and embodiment within anthropology. That later interest would emerge fully with Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966) and *Natural Symbols* (1973) where she put the body at the centre of her theorising and described the dual nature of the human form as both social and physical. Following soon after Douglas, the body became a site of considerable debate and analysis with Michel Foucault (1975) and Pierre Bourdieu, (1977) building on earlier work by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (1962) both contributing hugely influential perspectives on the topic. From the period of Foucault and Bourdieu onwards the long standing and powerful Cartesian body/self paradigm begins to seriously breakdown as a meaningful analytical tool within social scientific literature, creating the conditions for the body, "self" and society to come together as a gestalt whole, acting upon and interacting with each other continuously to the transformation of all. It is in this period of intense and dynamic theorising on the body that sex and gender are disentangled to be seen as meaningfully separate ideas and the very idea of a bounded and unitary corporeality ceases to theoretically hold water.

Given the significant developments in body and embodiment theorising over the last fifty years the body is doubtless of central significance in the context of dance and gender scholarship. This can be seen more recently in Brenda Farnell's extensive work *Dynamic Embodiment for Social Theory: I Move Therefore I am,* (2012) which provides a wide ranging take on the importance of embodied knowledge. In a call back to Mauss's *techniques du corps* Farnell portrays such knowledge as inherent to a wide variety of choreographed human actions, not least dance.

> Such dynamically embodied acts generate an enormous variety of forms of embodied knowledge, systematized in various ways and to varying degrees, involving cultural convention as well as creative performativity. In all cases, such *techniques du corps* — the "ways in which from society to society [people] know how to use their bodies" (Mauss 1979 [1935]: 97) — are everywhere constitutive of human subjectivity and inter-subjective domains. (Farnell 2012:20)

Although my area of interest is not dance in and of itself, it is clear that the act of dancing is entangled with my question and thus the embodied experience of dance practice must be one of my central themes. Having an awareness of dance as constituting a movement system, which can be fundamentally gendered, and the ways in which a researcher can engage with them is then important in this context. Farnell's invocation of Mauss's body technique also provides a useful and inspiring link to one of anthropology's greatest theorists, who is also called upon by Nick Crossley in *Researching Embodiment by way of "Body Techniques."* (2007) Again, while I am not interested in the body as research object per se, it is clear from much of the literature I have accumulated that the pervasive influence of Cartesian dualism has affected social scientific research a great deal, not to mention society at large. That said, Crossley makes the claim that, sociologist at least, have not preferred a Cartesian approach to embodied action, but instead have "tended to foreground other aspects of those (inter)actions than their embodiment, for example their purposes and normative character." (Crossley 2007:81) This is a tendency that can be seen in anthropology as well and one that I intend to continue.

To that end Beatrice Allegranti's *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies* (2011) provided valuable insights to my research. Embodied Performances is a wide ranging, esoteric text that seeks to draw in multiple disciplines to interrogate the confluence of dance, embodiment and gender and to "put the organism back together" as she and many others have termed it, in the wake of the Cartesian hegemony over scientific inquiry. For Allegranti, dance is a site redolent of embodied and gendered concepts ripe for research; her work draws upon a wide variety of theoretical frameworks and aims to "ontologically ground 'knowing' with/in the body." (Allegranti 2011:12)

Sports Anthropology and Masculine Identity

As will become clear throughout the rest of this thesis, sport was discussed at length with a number of my interlocutors and clearly played a big role in their lives before and to a lesser extent during, their dance careers. If I am to discuss an embodied experience, such as dance, that has a clear female gender bias and its relationship to hegemonic masculinity, it is theoretically useful, but also necessary given my interview data, to include as a reference point a similarly embodied activity that sits more comfortably within that dominant mode, namely sport. Sport is a field that is intimately entwined with the formation and maintenance of contemporary masculinity and has been a historical locus for masculine ideology, ever since the concept emerged in mid-nineteenth century Imperial Britain. While games have long been considered useful, though by no means central, in the anthropological understanding of the lives and societies of indigenous groups, the specific character of sport was long

regarded as an artefact of modernity and therefore not within the sphere of an anthropology that for a long time was concerned only with societies viewed as pre-modern. However, by the latter part of the twentieth century, as the influence of post-colonial thought and ever increasing globalisation changed what anthropologists consider to be both effective and proper work, sports ceased to be an inconsequential pastime and began playing a central role in what would become important entries in the anthropological canon; most notably Clifford Geertz's (1972) work on Balinese Cockfighting. Around the same time as Geertz's work was being undertaken further research was being done that focused on, amongst other things, the relationship between identity and sport in Western societies and by the end of the century a wealth of sports related anthropology ranging from cricket in India (Appadurai 1995) to the introduction of modern sport in China (Brownell 1995) and the Winter Olympic Games (Klausen 1999) had greatly fleshed out anthropological perspectives on sport. The capacity of sports to shape identities through their embodied practice is tied directly to its exploitation by colonial powers, most notably the British empire, to spread cultural hegemony across their subject holdings. In this period we can see that the formation of sport as a tool of behavioural change is concomitant with an intentional spread of British masculine norms. (Alter 2004, MacAloon 2006) The combination of sport's ubiquity, global reach and profoundly masculinist history means that I would be remiss not to include it in any discussion of embodied activities and gender. (Archetti 2001, Dyck 2015, Brownell et al. 2017)

Methods

According to Theresa Buckland, (1995) in *Dance in the Field*, "The mode of fieldwork of the anthropologist of dance and movement is essentially that of the lone participant-observer who aims, in true Malinowskian fashion, to become totally competent in the culture under investigation." (Buckland 1999:5) While I hope I have made it clear that I have not conducted research into dance only in its own right, it is necessary to address the question of dance anthropology and the methods by which a researcher might understand their field. The methodological challenges for this fieldwork, while perhaps not in the order of those faced by Malinowski, required some consideration. With my work taking place in my home city and both I and my interlocutors able to speak each other's language, there were none of the potential difficulties faced by colleagues conducting research in more far flung places. However, my work was split across two discrete field sites and two related, but separate, groups of people; all of which were located in the meta-site of the dance world. This overarching pseudo-place, which everyone I spoke to discussed as if it were a real place, was one very unfamiliar

to me prior to this fieldwork and one which proved to be a limiting factor on how deeply I was able to immerse myself in my field. To wit, working in a "true Malinowskian fashion" was never an option for me.

My first field site, The Royal Swedish Opera House, which I will describe in more detail in the next chapter, is a place and organisation unlike any other in Sweden and gaining the type of access Buckland demands proved impossible for two reasons. The Opera House is an ancient institution, with antecedence which goes back longer even than the discipline of anthropology itself and as such has developed a particular relationship with the world outside its walls. I was not allowed unmediated access to any part of the Opera House and even if I were granted the ability to roam freely and especially take part in ballet classes and rehearsals, the second reason for my limited presence would have come into effect: I have no skill or training in ballet dancing. Lacking, as I do, the ability to take part in high level ballet training and performance there was a central element of the male dance experience that I was unable to personally access.

A similar situation pertained at my second field site, The Ballet Academy, which again will be described in more detail in a later chapter. Unlike the Opera House, the Ballet Academy was much more open to my presence and I was allowed to watch almost any lessons I wished, however my lack of dance training and skill, again, limited the participation side of my participant observation to virtually nil.

My interactions with the Opera House as an institution often gave me the impression that I was, in the words of Ulf Hannerz "studying up," though my interactions with the often young and always down to earth dancers felt very much more like "studying sideways." Ultimately, working out my position in relation to them and thus my behaviour was initially a worry, though thanks to the easy manner of my collaborators I was able to quickly adapt to the dual nature of my fieldwork. In all instances I was conducting anthropology-by-appointment, as even at the more open Ballet Academy I was bound by the academic timetable for my field interventions. (Coleman & Collins 2006) I felt the hierarchies of the dance world and my outsider status very much during all parts of my fieldwork, though as I discuss in the next chapter, overcoming such issues certainly is possible and felt so during my limited research period.

Conditions such as these are not unique for anthropologist and I was minded to think of Helena Wulff's (1998) entry into the world of ballet. In *Ballet Across Borders*, Wulff spent a year conducting fieldwork in The Royal Swedish Opera House and had a similarly negotiated entrance to the field as

mine. From the start Wulff was exhorted to watch practice and rehearsal "like a fly on the wall" and my presence in the field was required to be similarly unobtrusive. I was repeatedly told, at the Opera House and the Ballet Academy, that dancers are exposed, both physically and emotionally, during their work and as such an observer such a myself must do their best to not disrupt what can be a delicate process.

Methodologically then, many decisions were made for me by the nature of the field in which I worked. The question of how much participation and/or observation is best for the field was never addressed from the researcher side and this lack of control was a concern initially, however such questions, while worthy of consideration, are of secondary importance to the overall quality of the participant observation, as determined by the reflexive mode. (Aull Davies 2009) Maintaining the necessary reflexive mode while watching long training and rehearsal session was at times challenging. The focus of my experience through only my visual and auditory senses had the potential to turn me into a passive audience of one, instead of an attentive, reflexive anthropologist and I don't doubt that that happened occasionally. However, even if I were able to more actively participate that would have been no guarantee of quality in my final analysis. The relative quality of ethnography comes from the anthropologist's ability to remain cognisant of their position and reflexive regarding their impact on any give encounter (Aull Davies 2009) which I could not help but be given the uniqueness of my presence in most field situations.

As a consequence of my field limitations I derived much of my data from interviews. Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured format, the questions for which can be found in the appendix, and varied widely in tone, content and length. I quickly became aware of the need to be attentive to the ways in which my interlocutors responded to me and my questions. The success of interviews during ethnographic fieldwork is largely dependent not on the specific technique used — formal, informal, group — but on the anthropologist's engagement with the process. The balance between guiding an interview towards desired information and prompting answers that can be described as "what they think you want to know" is an ever-present demand and so it was vital to maintain a reflexive mode during interview as well. The relative socio-economic position of interviewer and interviewee to each other is also a factor. "Such differences tend to undermine what is sometimes regarded as a fundamental distinction of research interviews… Namely, the presumption of equality of the participants within the context of the interview." (Aull Davies 2009:110) While questions of socio-economics never surfaced, some of my collaborators talked of dancers as "doing what they are told" and not being "big thinkers" and so I was cognisant, especially in light of the youth and openness of many of my interviewees, to take particular care to avoid the "exploitative potential" (Aull Davies 2008:53)

of our interactions. Each collaborator gave their informed consent, and was given confidentiality in kind, for this research.

I was able to conduct some more participatory work towards the end of my time at the Ballet Academy, which I address during chapter two, though it was a beginner ballet class, very much separate from the training carried out by my interlocutors. While this was a vital experience in developing my understanding of the field, it is important to note that in some sense it ran parallel to the main body of my work.

Chapter 1: Being and Becoming a Professional Male Ballet Dancer

The Royal Opera House, otherwise known simply as Operan (The Opera), sits on the North central mainland of Stockholm, at the confluence of the Baltic Sea and Mälaren, one of Sweden's characteristic vast lakes, that stretches inland from the capital for 120 km. Across the narrow strait are the national parliament and the Royal Palace and beside the Opera House there is Kungsträdgården (the King's garden), famed for its pink cherry blossom display. The Opera House itself is an imposing Neo-Renaissance edifice, which stands detached and aloof from the buildings around it, is roughly seven storeys tall and in addition to the grand auditorium, houses three restaurants and is a major city centre landmark in a terrain replete with other iconic Stockholm landmarks.

The Royal Swedish Ballet was founded in 1773 and the current Opera House was built in 1898. The public interior of the Opera House is as one might expect of a European building of such age and apparent import. Decorated in a Neo-baroque style, there is a great deal of gilt and scrollwork with a grand marble staircase in the main entrance lobby, a style which continues in the auditorium. By contrast, the back stage areas that I was allowed access to, were almost completely unadorned, modelled in a style typical of nineteenth century institutional spaces, with narrow corridors, high ceilings and possessed of the kind of well maintained, though care worn character that only occurs after some considerable time. It is important to note that my knowledge of the inner condition of the Opera House is limited to a specific selection of corridors and rooms, my presence there was closely regulated and I saw only a small portion of what is a very large building.

My first entrance and indeed all of my entrances to this field site were granted only under the direct supervision of a specific member of staff. Initially, I was given an appointment with the Ballet Director, Nicolas Le Riche, which set the tone for my interactions with the Opera House and the Swedish Royal Ballet Company. I was collected at the stage entrance by Assistant Director Mikael Jönsson and escorted to the office of the Director, a large room situated near the top of the building, with commanding views of Lake Mälaren, the national parliament and Stockholm City Hall.

While awaiting my meeting in an adjoining office, the clear interest in which my research topic is held in Stockholm Ballet and likely all of the ballet world, was indicated during a conversation with Mikael Jönsson and a colleague in which both were keen to discuss what to them was the vexed topic of gay stereotyping of male dancers by wider society. It was clear both were steeped in the history and culture of classical ballet and had well rehearsed opinions about the illogicality of such prejudice,

given the history of ballet as part of a (implicitly heterosexual) gentleman's education, alongside horsemanship, training at arms and courtly etiquette. Once the meeting started, Nicolas and Mikael were both genial hosts and expressed interest and enthusiasm towards my research. During the meeting they agreed to grant me access to speak with some of their dancers and at its conclusion I was escorted back to the stage entrance. In subsequent email communications (I had no more meetings with the Director, but encountered Mikael in the staff canteen) a list of specific dancer profiles was requested, so that they could select suitable collaborators for me; given the context of my work I requested to speak only to Swedish citizens so as to both limit the scope of my work to a manageable amount and provide a group more likely to have shared experiences. Almost all of my subsequent interactions with administrative staff were diverted to Project Manager Cecilia Falk, who operated as the initial liaison between myself and the dancers. Before my work could start in earnest I was required to submit a brief outline of my research and a clear description of what any dancer taking part could expect from me, to be made available to all dancers, which I successfully completed only after agreeing to a number of revisions.

The above description of my early interactions with the Royal Swedish ballet company is intended to provide background to what is a unique institution (there are no other classical ballet companies based in Sweden), but also to reiterate the methodological challenges of this field. I hope I have made it clear how the institution of the Opera, from the physical building itself, to the hierarchical social structures that control it, mean that I would not be able to employ the favoured anthropological method of hanging out with my collaborators and getting to know the inner workings of their lives and the Opera House itself, though that is not to say such access is impossible. Helena Wulff (1998) was able to spend a great deal of time in the very same field site, so a deeper knowledge is possible, however, without the *longue durée* of a full ethnography I was unable to develop Wulff's close connection and fulsome engagement. Being present for periods of time longer than one or two hours and having unmediated access to the dancers, or their place of work was quickly sidelined during my access negotiations. Although my work is not in any meaningful way directed towards the anthropology of organisations, or elite groups, it bears mention that such work at the Swedish Opera could be valuable and such a setting clearly had an impact on the lives of my collaborators.

During my time at the Opera I was able to interview seven active dancers and one former dancer who still works for the company. I also spoke to some former Opera House dancers who work at the Ballet Academy, but I will address them in the next chapter. Most of the interviews took place in the Opera canteen, with two taking place in cafés a short distance from the House, the duration of which ranged from between approximately 50 minutes to two hours, with most taking around one hour to complete.

As suggested above, each visit to the Opera House followed a consistently formal pattern. I arrived at the stage entrance to the House five to ten minutes before I was due to meet one of the dancers, during which I would make myself known to the reception staff and register my presence at a computer terminal specific for visitor use, stating my name, organisation and the person I was due to meet. That information would then be printed on a visitor pass, which I was instructed to wear prominently at all times while in the House. When my interviewee arrived they made the receptionists aware that they had collected me and then escorted me to either a studio, when I was able to watch practice or rehearsal, or to the staff canteen. As such, my exposure to the inner workings of the Opera House was extremely limited and while negotiating the space I was made to feel very aware of my outsider status. When this feeling was combined with the somewhat claustrophobic transitional spaces and the opaque purposes of the diverse staff that I witnessed coming and going, I was given the overall impression of the Opera House as an ancient and somewhat byzantine institution. The sense of mystery surrounding the Opera is clearly intentional. Though my limited access to this field site was explained to me in my first meeting as being the result of previous difficulties with public access to practice and rehearsal sessions, it was clear from my interactions with my collaborators that there were likely also other reasons for this. All my interviewees who work, or had worked, at the Opera described an institution somewhat at odds with the mores of the society in which it exists. Popular Swedish notions of modesty, moderation and fair play are complexly entangled with ballet culture. Certainly, some of the opacity of the ballet can be ascribed to the nature of theatrical productions in general and theatrical dance in particular. I was told by a number of my interlocutors that what the audience perceives must be tightly controlled in order to deliver the desired outcome in any given performance. However, all of my collaborators described an institution with an ingrained and strictly hierarchical structure, which may go some way further to explain my experience there.

I used a semi-structured interview technique with my collaborators that followed a roughly chronological order, beginning with questions about their childhood and upbringing and ending with questions regarding their current and future status as dancers. All of the dancers I interviewed at the Opera House and all of the former Opera House dancers that I spoke to across both field sites, were either wholly or partially educated at the Swedish Royal Ballet School, with the only exception being one who was educated at the Swedish National Ballet School in Gothenburg. While this may not be surprising, given that all my collaborators are Swedish citizens, it is noteworthy how similar their educational experiences were and how institutionally insular their dance experiences have been.

The Challenges of Male Ballet Dancing

The insulated nature of their dance experiences goes at least some way to answering my initial research question: Why, in the face of evident social pressure to choose a career in something other than dance, did the men I met become professional ballet dancers? As all my collaborators indicated in one way or another, they were at least somewhat shielded from negative social pressure regarding dance careers. The Royal Swedish Ballet School was, until recently, integrated into a conventional state school with the dance students undergoing the same national education as any other school child, with dancing "on the side" as one respondent said to me. All of the Stockholm educated dancers experienced at least a few years of this mixed type of education, before the Royal Swedish Ballet School was granted its own facilities, however the simple of act of collecting ballet dancers together — even in a conventional school — seems to have provided a shield for those who have managed to carve out a ballet career in Stockholm.

> I remember when I joined and I was 10, and when I left, I don't remember anyone judging anything. Because I notice a lot of, I mean, bullying. If someone says like, oh, they're dancing, even in normal dance, it can be a lot of pointing fingers, but I haven't experience anything so far.

The above quote is from Henrik, an early career dancer, who explains the particular young male dance experience that many of my interviewees described. All cited a general tendency amongst their age group peers for bullying dancing boys for their atypical choice to dance, however they often denied having direct experience of that same bullying. The apparent contradiction that bullying exists, but none of my respondents experienced it first hand, or to any great degree, was a common refrain when discussing their early years, schooling and the difficulties of dancing as a boy and man.

One senior dancer, Francois, was more forthright with his perspectives on the recurrent stereotype that all or most male dancers are gay, a theme mentioned by almost everyone I encountered at the Opera House. His experience of life long homophobic prejudice seemed to reflect the assumptions of those who claimed no personal experience of such problems.

> I was very open [as a child], I loved to perform when we had guests, I would play the guitar in front of them and sing songs and I grew up with the Fame TV series, which I loved. So I did the whole fourth grade in a [regular] school and then my mother thought that I should try ballet. She put me in a local ballet school. But there were only girls there, so that was no fun. But then the teacher handed my father an application form for the Royal Swedish Ballet School and it was quite funny because he threw it away, but my mother found it in the garbage. I don't know why she was going through the garbage, but

> you know he threw it away. He didn't want me to go… I think he was afraid. Throughout my school years, I didn't have a girlfriend and my first girlfriend I had very late when I was like 17-18. Until then, I think my father was a bit scared or worried that I was gay. But he was very supportive in my work. So when I met my first girlfriend, I think it really pleased my father somehow. I mean, he's not prejudiced in that way that he thinks some gay people being... He was afraid of something. I mean, it's easier if someone else's son is [gay] than his own, I guess.

Though Francois claimed the support of his father, despite his father's concerns about his sexuality, his story was not the only example of a dancer's father having reservations about their son's career choice and its implications for their gender. Hans, a mid-career dancer, had a similar experience, with his father having a less than favourable view of his serious commitment to dance education.

> When I started at the Ballet school, they were really, I mean, my dad was pretty against it in the beginning, like the first year, two years maybe. But then he got around like accepted more and more. But at first he was very like, oh it's not for boys, you know?

While these were by no means the only reactions of the fathers of my collaborators, I believe it could be indicative of the degree to which boys have to overcome not only what one might consider typical social pressure to conform to gendered norms of behaviour, but also social pressure from those nearest to them, as Francois pointed out:

> I have heard people say that there is a lot of gays in dance. And probably there is, but I think it's because it's accepted. I think of construction workers, I think there is a bunch of gays there [in the construction industry] but they don't dare to come out, how can you come out when you know guys who are telling jokes about gay people, you know? So, I mean, it's accepted in our profession so it's much easier to come out, much easier to be who you are because we accept you. But in other professions, it's like I mean there's only one football player who is openly gay in Allsvenskan [The Swedish Football League]. I'm sure there is one or two or three or four, five.

I suggested that statistically there must be some more and that the English Premier League, with hundreds of active players seemingly has none that are gay.

> Of course there is. And actually I've met a lot of these [prejudiced] people, I sat at a bar and these really butch construction workers, they asked me why is there so many gays [in ballet]? They asked if I was gay and I said no I'm not gay. Now I wouldn't even answer that question. I guess [in the past] I've had a bit of you know, I didn't want people to think I'm gay. Probably I have had that too you know that you want to...

Francois trailed off, seemingly trying to align his words and thoughts. I replied that, if someone thinks you are gay when you are not, then it can be quite a big difference in expectations. If someone thinks you're gay, it might change their behaviour towards you and their expectations of your behaviour. Francois went on:

> But I told these construction workers no, there are gays in our profession. And they were wur wur wur wur, talking and I told them, you know, you probably have friends who are gay and they were like, oh yeah, but gay blah blah blah and then I said, do you know why you don't have gay people [in the construction industry]? Because of people like you. Because how can anyone say they're gay if they hang with people like you? So somehow I don't think there are more gay men in the ballet world. I mean, you don't have to be gay to dance. It's not like the gay side of you that pushes you to dance… But there are people in the dance world also who don't like gay people and who don't want dance to be connected with gayness.

Francois's account of homophobia directed towards him and other dancers, based only on their choice of profession, was something which all my interviewees either experienced, or professed some knowledge of being a common occurrence. There was a stronger correlation with senior and retired dancers of experiencing, or being exposed to, homophobic prejudice than those at the start of their careers, however the reasons for this were not clear. There was a general sense of society becoming more accepting of homosexuality and male dancers in recent times, but as I will show later, if that is the case it is perhaps not consistent across all age, class and ethnic groups. It is also possible, as earlier mentioned, that spending their teenage years amongst other male dancers and in the recently established exclusively ballet school, insulated them from the type of direct and potentially damaging prejudice experienced by older dancers and, as I will show in the next chapter, by dance students in other environments.

Dance, Affect and Homophobia

Illustrative of just how pervasively homophobia and ballet are linked is the conversation I had with Filip, a former dancer and now community outreach worker on behalf of the Opera. Filip's career as a dancer was some years distant when I spoke to him, active as he was in the 1980s and 90s, however, it was suggested to me by Cecilia Falk that speaking to him would be of interest due to his more recent work on the Unga på Operan (Youth at the Opera) program run by the Opera House and so it proved to be. Filip's job, amongst other public facing duties, involves visiting schools around Stockholm and running workshops designed to introduce dance and more specifically ballet to children and

young people as a participatory activity, with the hope of creating new generations of ballet fans and dancers.

> … Going into schools, especially the kids from 0 to 6, 7, 8, 9, they don't care [about their gender and dancing]. They do anything. They're not so aware yet if they're making a fool out of themselves. So it's fun. They'll do anything you ask them, more or less. And then, of course, this awareness comes in: What's male and what's not male and what's expected of you. They become very aware of how they are and how they should be and they try to create an identity based on what the signals are from around them. And of course further out [from the city centre], well, if you go to the less fortunate areas, then it's much more important that you're cool and masculine and it's like they have a little ten point program. If you can tick all these boxes, you're a man, right?

The notion that there is a specific period of time during which boys in some sense collectively decide that ballet dancing is not an activity for them was a recurrent theme both in conversation with Filip and with collaborators I met at the Ballet Academy. While the fact of radical behaviour change amongst any group of pre-adolescent children is neither unusual or necessarily problematic, it is my belief that the above changes in relation to dance are part of the power of Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity, which defines itself hierarchically in relation to other masculinities and it is clear from Filip's account which type of masculinity falls outside of the hegemonic norm.

> So coming out [to a school] to start with a dance workshop, which they are supposed to try something they've never tried before and when you get to the age of 10, 11, 12, then it's a long time [before any dancing is done], sometimes forty-five minutes of just talking. And of course, our body is very revealing. It's like our voice, you know… and it's all about feelings, emotion and expressing them with your body. That is pretty hard stuff if you're a guy. I don't know why girls are fine with this… For girls usually it doesn't matter what age they are, they try anything and it's like they don't risk anything by trying to make a fool out of themselves. They laugh. They laugh, you know, and they think it's all right, or they just say, I didn't like this. Men - they have this obstacle and it's being gay of course and that's already when they're ten and eleven. That's what they're afraid of.

That the girls of Filip's workshops find engagement with dance easy is perhaps an unfortunate compounding factor in the story of the rejection of dance from within hegemonic masculinity. According to the logic of hegemonic masculinity, the things that come easy for girls and women in some sense should be difficult for boys and men to do and if it is not then being gay (i.e., a feminine male) must be the reason.

In addition to the recurrent theme of homosexuality as a necessary characteristic for serious male engagement with dance, the specific demands of dance as being "all about feeling, emotions and

expressing them with your body" presents an additional challenge to the hegemonic masculine. The "pretty hard stuff if you're a guy" of the relationship between emotions and the body was a theme which while less prevalent amongst the dancers of the Opera was an area which perhaps speaks to a deeper lying reason as to why dance is a feminine activity in the context of hegemonic masculinity.

In discussion with many of my collaborators and in seemingly common discourse within the dance world of Stockholm, were notions such as those expressed by Filip, that dance enacts and is enacted by a relationship between affect and the body. I tried to engage all of my interviewees, at both field sites, on the topic of embodied emotion, with varying results. The ballet dancers of the Opera House tended to express a relationship to emotion and embodiment which was largely mediated by the professional demands of their work. The common notion cited above, of dance being about expressing emotion through the body, was accepted by all but was largely equated to the work of a stage or screen actor and the process of portraying an emotion was what was important, with any personal engagement with said emotion seeming to begin and end when they stepped on the stage. In response to the question of whether the emotional work has an effect on him besides when on stage, Hans had this to say:

> Not really. Like, you keep a fair distance, I would say. You don't feel it like in your heart I would say, to the point where it takes a toll, but I mean, you think about it of course. But it's not like, for me at least, it doesn't affect me more than that.

Such a response was common amongst all the dancers; however, it was often expanded upon in ways that could be construed as counter to, or at least in conflict with Hans's distant and professional approach. Senior dancer Johan, perhaps drawing on his greater experience characterises his emotion engagement thus:

> I think it's like actors do, they try to become the person they're portraying and if I think like an actor, how should this person react? How does it feel? And in different ballets you could use the music too, like in [Stravinsky's] *Rite of Spring* [for example] you could use the music a lot, like trying to have the same energy as the music. That's very helpful in ballet… You should try not to follow the steps. You should be [finger snap] there already. So in the beginning, in the process, maybe it's 'oh how do I learn the steps?' But then it's all about trying to forget what the steps are and trying to express something with it, to use it, like a painter. If you're going to do a painting, you can't just do what someone taught you, it becomes boring if you're just doing the things that someone taught you and doing it correctly. You have to use this ability to express something more, to have something more. And that's the same with dance. Or if you're an actor also, or whatever it is. It's the last step. The most important, which is the hardest.

Johan's description of the artistic process of the dancer betrays a complex relationship with emotion which seemingly must go beyond a professional detachment into a world where the ballet dancer is deeply entangled with his role.

However, Johan's interpretation of the dancer's process was something of an exception, with most of the other dancers leaning more towards Hans's outlook. Whether this was because Johan was a principal dancer with more opportunity to develop a particularly articulate view on the subject, the others were less engaged in their work, or the tendency — widely expressed amongst my interviewees — for dancers not to think or speak about the inner workings of their work and minds and therefore lack developed opinions about it, is impossible to say with great certainty, however a combination of all four factors seems likely.

Why Ballet?

The widely expressed opinion amongst dancers, that they are not "big thinkers," seemed to be borne out of the question of why they became dancers at all. All of the dancers across both field sites characterised their early childhood behaviour as in some sense hyperactive and many described their entry into dance as an attempt by their parents to tire them out, often having already and concurrently inducted them into many sports. Henrik describes both the lengths that his parents went to quell his energy and the almost mysterious way in which he became a dancer.

> I have always danced, I started very young, just moving around and my parents got kind of sick of me dragging around this guitar and smashing it and jumping around to music, making them sit and watch. So they said, OK, let's put him in a theatre school. So I did a bit of theatre and I didn't really think anything of it. I think I was three or four, I was super young. So I've always been doing something. When I finished school, I always had something to go to. I went to theatre for a few years, but then my dancing and stuff didn't stop at home, so my grandmother and my mother were like, okay, he needs something extra, I was already playing tennis and stuff with my dad. I played soccer, tennis, I tried ice hockey and that wasn't really my jam, but soccer and tennis I liked. They put me into dance school after theatre, just to get rid of this extra energy at home. So I went to try it [dance] and then we exchanged the theatre for dance. So I stopped with the theatre and just danced, because it was kind of combined for me. I don't actually know how that transition happened, it just kind of happened. And then I was doing street dance for maybe a few months and it became clear I had some sort of potential. And they [the dance teachers] said I should audition for this other group. I didn't know what an audition was, but OK let's do it and I went and did it and they were like, OK, you got it. And I was like, cool. All right.

> Sweet. And I just kind of continued doing what I did. And all of a sudden I was doing like the children's part in musicals. And I was like, OK.

Henrik's experience was by no means unique and expresses the extent to which dance is rarely an active choice for the young boys who became the dancers of Stockholm Opera. The intercession of female family figures, in Henrik's case both grandmother and mother, but usually one or the other, created the conditions for dance to happen to the young male dancer. It seems that the influence of female family members could be a significant factor in the development the male Swedish ballet dancer, given the common mention of mothers and grandmothers as inciting influencers on the decision to try dance. Again Henrik's story is instructive. He was very open about the extent to which his father influenced his career, coaching him and driving him to attain the excellence necessary to become a professional ballet dancer, but dancing was not apparently an activity his father was initially interested in.

> My dad was a very sporty person. He was very keen on me being a sporty person, I guess. But I didn't mind it. I liked it already from the start. So I was playing soccer and then I remember I had to switch to a different soccer group because dance always somehow came first. Not that I even thought about it. But I was like, all right, I'll do the dance. And then after if there's any soccer practice. I think also my parents noticed that I was more talented in dance than in soccer, although with tennis [I was equally good] so I would have tennis in the morning with my dad and then go to school and then dance and then soccer if there was soccer that day… Tennis and dance were always kind of intertwined. And then when I was nine my mom just happened to see this ad in the paper which had Royal Swedish Ballet school…

After describing the lengthy process of gaining entry to the Royal Swedish Ballet School and the long and demanding days of education and training, Henrik continues to describe his father's consistent sports focus, even during his dance schooling and the lengths to which his involvement stemmed from a desire to mould his son into a sportsperson, which only gradually transformed into a meaningful engagement with dance.

> … And so I was still playing tennis, because my dad was like, I mean really, like every holiday I would play tennis. But then slowly, those two [tennis and musicals] started fading away once I got more into ballet… I always watched sports documentaries with my dad when I was playing tennis and while I'm dancing here as well. He never knew anything about ballet, but suddenly he became almost as involved in it as I was. He would get all the DVDs and he would study almost religiously, like, okay, I know all these great male dancers have big butts, so they must use that muscle a lot. He works with ergonomic technology so he just applied what he knew about that into dance to try to help me make a stretching program, strengthening programs, so I always had him in a sense, I've always had something extra. When we watch these sports documentaries, you always see [Lionel] Messi or [Cristiano] Ronaldo when they were young. I mean, they were talented, but they didn't do much. And then suddenly, you know,

> Lionel Messi with five Ballon D'Ors* [sic] or something. You never see, like, the journey. And the teachers.

Although Henrik's father's engagement with dance was atypical in the stories of my collaborators it points to some of the underlying challenge for the male dancer. The point of entry for Henrik's father was sport and to some degree this naturally comes from the way humans heuristically draw upon superficially similar activities to inform action under a new set of circumstances. However, the requirements of sport and dance and the significant differences between the two, demand further analysis.

Many of my interviewees described some level of engagement with sport from an early age, usually as a means of expending energy and usually tried before they started formal dance training. Just that simple fact is suggestive of the very early gendering through physical activities that parents do to their children and has strong implications for the choices available to boys only a few years later in life and the available range of responses they can generate to those choices. For the male dancers of the Stockholm Opera, their path to a career in ballet was typically fairly narrow, generated from a set of conditions and characteristics which may be construed as a form of destiny; such is the rarity of the professional male Swedish ballet dancer. In the third chapter, I will address some of the issues raised here, namely the relationships between dance, sport, emotion and embodied experience as they occur in the hegemonic masculine sphere. However, before I can do that, I must provide insights into my second field site, the Ballet Academy, which offers a similar yet more diverse picture of the male dancer and I hope will provide information that will make the discussions in chapter three more fruitful.

* The annual prize awarded to the world's best footballer by FIFA, the game's governing body.

Chapter Two: Being and Becoming a Freelance Male Dancer

The Ballet Academy was founded in 1957 as the first vocational dance school in Sweden not orientated solely towards the education of ballet dancers and was established to provide a diverse curriculum of training that, in addition to classical ballet, taught dancers for a variety of popular theatrical performance types and modern choreography. For forty years, the school was based in no one single location, using a variety of studio spaces across Stockholm to provide its education. In 1996 the Ballet Academy moved to its current home, a purpose-built venue on the busy Birger Jarlsgatan that roughly divides the upmarket district of Östermalm from neighbouring Norrmalm and Vasastan. The building itself, while modest in size and design when compared to the Opera House, is not lacking in grandeur and from the outside there is a subtle influence of Palladian architectural stylings, suggestive of many Neo-Classical European theatres and opera houses. The interior of the Ballet Academy is utilitarian in nature, with a character typical of a well-used and well-maintained educational institution. Like many modern schools, the Ballet Academy has a rhythm that is in time with the class schedules, with it becoming momentarily flushed with students, teachers and musicians moving from one studio to the next, carrying the sights, sounds and smells of mostly fit young people industriously engaged with creating their futures.

My preliminary fieldwork had been spent at the Ballet Academy and during the preceding summer I had spent a week observing a dance workshop, as preparation for this research. From those earliest interactions the Ballet Academy had been very accommodating and keen to be part of research in an area of dance that they feel demands greater regard. It was quickly apparent that, like many at the Opera House, the topic of male dance and masculinity in dance is something of a disquieting topic for those working at the Ballet Academy. My first in person interaction with a staff member produced a line which I would go on to repeat many times in subsequent conversations, always garnering much feedback. My initial visit in the summer of 2019 was spent watching a workshop run by French contemporary dancer and choreographer, Martin Harriague. I had by chance, or the errant snooping of facebook and google, come across an online advertisement for his summer workshop and thought it an opportune time to see an active male dancer, teaching his repertoire and perhaps in some sense imparting dance masculinity to young male students. The summer schedule was controlled by a mature female dancer of much experience who provided one of the most memorable lines for my fieldwork. After outlining my research idea to her and the reasoning behind choosing Martin's workshop, she exclaimed "That's great because, you know, he's not gay like all the others." While, as detailed in previous chapters, I was well aware of the stereotype of the gay male dancer, I was surprised to

hear it reproduced so unreflexively by a person from within the dance world. In subsequent conversations with Mikael Jönsson at the Opera House I reproduced the line, omitting the identity of person who said it and he was anyway able to guess who it was. While Mikael's guess and simultaneous dismissal of the comment, seemed to suggest that that person's opinion was well known within the world of Swedish dance and perhaps questionably extreme, the unquestionable power of the stereotype, even within the dance world, was amply demonstrated.

In Martin's workshop I had hoped to observe dance masculinity, however, I had underestimated how few male dance students there were at the Ballet Academy; there was only one male student in a class of 15 and so my hope of seeing male specific dance lessons was immediately lost (though would be revived later in my fieldwork). Non-the-less I watched the class for five days and was able to have an informal chat with Martin towards the end of the week. His style of teaching and dance and the repertoire he taught, a mixture of new work and work from his time at the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, had a confident muscularity about it that trod a line between demanding and nurturing, and I was struck by the way he communicated with his students. Martin used vocal noises and sounds as much as words to describe the actions of his dance, a reflection of the communicative limitations experienced by many, if not all, dance teachers, as described by Helena Wulff: "There is a unique and complicated feature of teaching and coaching [dance]… The teacher or choreographer has a mental picture, a memory if they are basic steps, of what they are supposed to look like — but is unable to execute them in that way. Nor can he or she… Verbalize them completely." (Wulff 1998:61) The common refrain that dance is a non-verbal language was both amply illustrated, but also, I believe shown to fall short of describing exactly what it is and can do. Oftentimes the use of plosive sounds, sighs, sharp inhalations and other non-linguistic vocal sounds, in concert with able and precise demonstration, more accurately and succinctly communicated the minute subtleties of movement and posture of a given dance phrase than any attempt to describe it using words and underlined the complicated, deeply embodied nature of dance enactment. Although I would come to see that such a communication style is relatively common in the dance world, I did not observe any teacher use it to the extent that Martin did. This early introduction into dance teaching gave me the first impetus to regard dance as more-than-verbal communication, not less than the spoken or written word, but a *different frame of reference*, capable of powerful immediacy and subtlety. This insight also gave me an important indication of the challenge I faced in trying to translate the embodied experience and language of dance into spoken and written English. I will address the task of making the experience of dance, male or otherwise, comprehensible in written form in the next chapter, but suffice it to say that my initial experience with Martin was just the beginning of a highly subjective and ongoing process of interpretation and translation.

Securing a longer term period of field research at the Ballet Academy proved somewhat simpler than at the Opera House, though not without its own requirements. As with the Opera House, the Ballet Academy had a clear interest in my research goals and after a short period to reflect on my request to conduct fieldwork at their school, granted me almost unfettered access to their classes and even a specific liaison, Head of Ballet and Community Outreach, Eytan Sivak. Eytan became a key figure for this research in part due to his seniority within the Ballet Academy, which meant gaining access to students and events was relatively straightforward, but also due largely to the combination of strong engagement with my research topic and willingness and ability to discuss my work and the particular characteristics of the dance industry within Sweden and more widely.

There were a number of notable differences between the two cohorts at each field site. In total I interviewed 13 individuals based at the Ballet Academy, compared to eight at the Opera House and in addition to there being more of them, they ranged wider in age, too. The wider age range at the Ballet Academy can be attributed to its solely educational focus, creating a population that, unlike the Opera House, included both pre- and post-professional dancers. However, my interviewees at the Ballet Academy were also more ethnically diverse. It is possible that this reflects to some degree the wider array of dance styles taught at the Ballet Academy that might naturally attract a wider array of types of people, however, it is hard to ignore the possibility, suggested to me by some of my collaborators at the Opera House, that the ballet world has a problem with institutional racism. Whether that is true or not is beyond the scope of this work, though a "ballet look" was mentioned by Hans at the Operan House (which includes preferences on height and hair colour) and the clearly coded representations of ballet in general media suggests further inquiry is warranted.

Male Ballet Academy Students

At the Ballet Academy, I was fortunate enough to interview six students, the youngest of who was 21 years old and seven staff members, the oldest of who was 57. There were five gay and one queer dancer who also identified as gender non-binary and while all the students were Swedish citizens, two of the teachers were from other countries, Finland and Israel and in contrast to the dancers at the Opera House, more of the students were from places other than Stockholm. One hailed from Gotland, another from Västra Götaland, a region roughly four hours drive from the capital and three of the dancers were of an ethnicity other than white Swedish. One such dancer was Law, a first year student

and former refugee from Myanmar, who lived the first seven years of his life in a camp on the Myanmar/Thailand border, before moving to a remote village in Sweden. Though Law's early life was markedly different from those of my other collaborators, his entry into the dance world was very similar to that of his fellow students

> I went from first grade to gymnasiet [in regular schooling] and in gymnasium I studied the theatre program [which was] only acting for three years. But in second year I chose to add dance into my schedule. So I got to dance one day a week and it was a one hour class, so it wasn't that much… So I took classes after school, two ballet classes and one jazz class. And yeah, it was a challenge because I started late, at 17 years old and I had to dance with people 12 and 13 years old. So yeah, it was a challenge, because I felt like I started too late. And many times I thought, why am I still doing this? But people around me and my teachers, they saw potential, so I didn't give up. And also I know my body, what my body can do and I know more and more everyday when I go here [to the Ballet Academy]. So I guess I appreciate my body more.

Law's experience of coming to dance relatively late, compared with many of his female classmates and all of the dancers of the Opera House, was by no means unique for the cohort from the Ballet Academy; nor was his unprompted discussion about his body and the embodied experience of dance. The theme of embodiment emerged as an area of research largely thanks to my time at the Ballet Academy and discussions and teaching that I participated in and observed.

In a similar vein Rikard, a second year student, came to dance late and through theatre education.

> I've sung a lot in boys' choir and then music school for six years. My choir teacher found that I had a voice, so she gave me a lot of soloist parts which then led me to my first theatre role… After that, I continued because I loved it. I made a bunch of different musicals and for the musicals we were dancing and kind of that was my way into dancing. So I [came into] contact with these choreographers. That was very inspiring. And that further on lead to this last year when I was working with choreographer Benke Rydman and my part was all about dance. So I danced for the whole [of the production] and then I realised that this is what I would like to do. So in [secondary education] I was in music school and the theatre thing has been progressing since then. But when it went to [further education] I started traveling from Uppsala to Stockholm in order to go to a special theatre program and my class was divided into those who were into theatre and those who danced. So I had a connection with the dancers, and that was also a way for me to dance. And there were boys [dancing], but as always, there was like two boys out of sixty. And when it comes to theatre, the same. We were three boys out of eighteen. So in total, we were five boys out of thirty-two people in my class doing aesthetic things.

That Rikard's experience of theatre and dance education was and continues to be female dominated reflects the stark gender disparity that exists in much of dance education, though for him and his

colleagues at the Ballet Academy such issues seem to have little impact. Indeed, the fact that the dancers at the Ballet Academy had made it that far meant they had already passed through various educational stages as part of a small minority. I asked Rikard if his long term minority position in theatre and dance was something that he ever wondered about.

> Yeah sure, but it wasn't an issue. I guess it wasn't that I felt like I was not normal, or that it was strange what I would do, because I know why I love to do it. And it wasn't a problem either because there are other boys as well that do what I do. But in the [theatre school] class, you could notice the atmosphere, the group dynamic, especially when it comes to the class I went to, the group dynamic was affected a lot… We played theatre parts as well. There were a lot of females that got to play boys and did them in a very masculine, stereotypical way and we boys, we just play boys. We never got to play the opposite gender… It wasn't that I felt that was necessary for me, but it affected the group dynamic. And I think that's the interesting part when it comes to dance, because in general I've felt like there's another interaction when it comes to dance. There's another sense of the people dancing and how we work together and it doesn't feel the same with the group dynamic that I've got in my class right now. It's totally different, although we're less boys. And I think that has to do with the art form, with dance actually… It's another way of working together. Like another way of creating together… [In theatre] it's easier to fall into those stereotypical ways of behaviour, so although I think a lot of people have the image of theatre as more allowing [sic] for boys, I feel like the atmosphere [here] is more accepting.

Rikard's reflections about theatre school are illustrative of the general level of engagement with gender issues across all of my interviewees at the Ballet Academy. Whether due to the culture of the Ballet Academy, which takes a critical stance towards the particularly gendered nature of dance and the challenges that it presents, or because of greater exposure to a wider range of gendered challenges in their lives prior to dance is impossible to say, though a combination of both is not unlikely.

Special Treatment or Special Consideration?

One of the most engaging moments of my time at the Ballet Academy came during a male-only class. I heard about it through my discussions with the students and it quickly became apparent that it was a controversial topic amongst some of them. The position of the Ballet Academy was that, due to the very few male students in dance education, a men's class was necessary to take seriously the role and place of men in the dance world and give attention to the particular challenges for male dance students, both from a technical/anatomical perspective and a social/professional one, that the Ballet Academy felt were not being addressed in mixed classes dominated both in faculty and student body by female dancers. For Rikard and others the inclusion of male-only dance classes seemed a useful

addition to their education, given the pronounced gender imbalance in each year group and the expectation that they would encounter and work with many more male dancers once out in the workforce. However, for the likes of Fredrik, a long time dance student, such accommodations made to them as male students flew in the face of strongly held societal and contemporary dance ideology of gender equality.

> The idea [of a male-only class] makes me uncomfortable for several reasons. Personally, I'm like: OK, I'm going to have another class, that's just nice having other classes. It is always interesting to dance with people that you haven't danced with before. But the first thing that I react to is that it's not equal in any way and what is that telling the rest of my classmates…? And also they're [the Ballet Academy] forcing me into that. Like: You are a man. OK, sure, I have to admit that I'm getting perks for being a guy… But it's not something that I have to think about because I'm not always put into that group. But now that I have been, just the thought has been kind of uncomfortable, but then in class it's just like a [normal] class, because most of the other guys are also kind of uncomfortable with the idea and we're in it together [thinking] what the fuck is happening? So it hasn't been a problem that the teacher has been talking about creating this male competitiveness, because again, "men are more competitive" and we can do things that girls can't and you have to be able to compete with other guys [for work]. I'm like, well, I'm going to be competing with dancers [of all kinds] and coming into the dance world we will be creating the world that we are going to work in and I'd rather not create a dance world where it's about us guys and the girls can do whatever they want… But then I started thinking about why I felt that way and wondering is it that we're scared to fail, or that we won't get the part? Or is it because they are judging us based on this? When you're the only guy out of a bunch of girls you are judged based on a different criteria compared to when you are put up against a bunch of other guys… And that's obviously something that I think none of us dare to say, but that is in our minds, because that's something that they look at, rather than our performance.

As in my discussions with Rikard, Fredrik's perspective on the male-only classes reflects the generally high level of engagement amongst everyone I spoke to at the Ballet Academy with questions around gender normativity and the demands of living under hegemonic masculinity. Whether the male dancers' resistance to gender divided classes was helpful to their education, or the cause of gender equality more generally is debatable. The Ballet Academy is charged with producing skilled and versatile dancers for the competitive world of professional dance and they are clearly interested in resolving the gender disparity in their part of the industry. However, they had a clear challenge from students like Fredrik as to whether preparing their students for the world as it exists under hegemonic masculinity is the correct course of action, or if they should be opposing the norms that govern the society around them. For my own part, I remain uncertain as to the correct course of action in this case. Being fully cognisant of the world as it is, is necessary to successfully change it and shying away from those harsh realities seems counterproductive, however we all have a responsibility to

help create the world as we wish it were and not only be reactive to the way it is. Ultimately, due to pressure from the male student body the Ballet Academy dropped the men only class from their curriculum before the end of the academic year and decided to incorporate more male focused work into their regular classes.

While Fredrik and others had their concerns about hegemonic masculine ideals like competitiveness, my perception of the male only class was quite different. The students were learning a duet between two men which seemed to address directly hegemonic masculine norms. Coming, as I do, from a position of relative comfort with hegemonic masculinity and with little experience in dance, I found the simple notion of a duet between two men worthy of remark all by itself, though they are not uncommon in the world of contemporary dance. The class was led by a tall and broad shouldered former ballet dancer, with a shaven head and numerous tattoos, some of which he had done himself in his post dance career as a tattoo artist. He was a very imposing figure in the studio and in describing the choreography to the students emphasised greatly the masculine, competitive nature of the piece, at one time describing it as like a "murder scene." While that may have been an appropriate direction, as a viewer I was struck most by the tender aspects of the choreography. The students were required to lift, hold and drag one another using a range of contact styles, from aggressive pushes to soft caresses. One particularly memorable moment saw one dancer lay on the floor as their partner languidly dragged their foot over their recumbent torso. The movement appeared to me as lingering and sensuous and this moment was one of many which led me to the perception of dance as a more-than-verbal form of communication. Despite homoeroticism being a well established theme in male duets, this tender moment between two men, however removed from any genuine affection held between the dancers by the disciplining power of the studio and overall educational setting, had a powerful effect on me. Using the more-than-verbal communicative power of dance in a small and intimate way, the dancers were able to impart — or perhaps summon within me — a great deal of ideas and emotions; as well as raise urgent and important questions related to society, politics and identity that would take much longer and be more difficult to do using the spoken or written word. For the dancers' part, they never expressed any great engagement with the class, apart from the aforementioned moral, philosophic distancing from the whole endeavour. If any such powerful reaction existed for them it was subsumed into the professional attitude of the working dancer, itself a curious construction which I address further below.

The Complexity of Dance and the Male

In terms of thinking through the experience of the male dancer and his place in relation to hegemonic masculinity, one of my key informants was Kristoffer a freelance contemporary dancer and choreographer and teacher at the Ballet Academy. While my research focused to a great degree on classical ballet dancers and their world, many of my most fruitful conversations were had with dancers who worked in, or focused their training on, contemporary dance. Kristoffer in particular had a prior engagement with the issues I was seeking to investigate, thanks to a dance Master qualification from the Stockholm University of the Arts. Through his extensive experience as a dancer (active professionally since 1998) and high level of engagement with the intellectual and philosophical dimensions of dance and embodied experience we were able to interrogate the relationship between dance and hegemonic masculinity to a greater degree than in any of my other interviews. Like the dancers at the Opera House, Kristoffer was educated at the Royal Swedish Ballet School, but towards the end of his education decided that ballet was not for him and was interested in moving into painting instead. However, due to the intervention of his parents, he continued to dance, but moved into the contemporary stream offered by the Royal Swedish Ballet School and "found something in the contemporary world." The "something" that contemporary dance offered to Kristoffer was certainly not stability. As with all the students and teachers at the Ballet Academy, Kristoffer's chief concern regarding the dance world was the lack of consistent work and the overall low level of remuneration available to freelance dancers in Sweden.

> [Dance is] not valued as real work. I mean, it has a value, but it's still culture and it's for people to enjoy and I think it could get a bit more money and it can get a bit more credit for its craft…Everyone is fighting for the same money… It can be that one who just came from school and one who worked for 50 years are all fighting for the same. [money] I think it could be divided into categories [but] there's not enough money to divide… I think that's a big problem. That's actually the only one, [problem with dance] because all the rest are because of the economics, more or less.

Despite this constant and pervasive problem, Kristoffer and all my other collaborators at the Ballet Academy persevere with their dancer careers; even among the pre-professional student dancers, there are no illusions when it comes to their career prospects. I repeatedly received the impression that there is, in spite of and in addition to, the widely acknowledged social pressure on boys and men to seek alternative employment, an overabundance of performers in comparison to the amount of jobs and commissions available. So why keep dancing?

> I've [done quite a few] co-productions and productions and I like the whole thing. It's something with: OK, I got an idea. Let's see, can this become something? And then you kind of struggle and you're trying to find ways and usually [there] comes some images and maybe a movement. Then maybe you have some kind of narratives [or themes] that you want to bounce off from. So it's something with the whole path of first that. And then you have to find the people you think can do it [the project]. Can you collaborate with them? Do you have a generative relationship with them? So then you have to be building something and then it's the performing and that's usually very short. I mean, in the freelance world you have two, three [performances] from the whole work and if you're lucky, you can tour. But then what I like is that if you tour, then you go somewhere and you have your jokes and then you come to — usually we have stuff, or props, or sometimes it's just an empty stage, but I usually use stuff — so then you have to prepare and build and so that's like opening a restaurant before the people come and then they come and that's the performance. And then they go and you put on music and you tear things down and you pack it all away. So I think it's the whole journey that I'm in for, for now. And if you're very lucky in that journey, you have a collaboration with someone that's gold, that's super. So it's something with the whole, it's not just the result. It's like everything around it, which for me then becomes the work… So then the work kind of spreads. So I think it's also spreading of context and that the context doesn't need to be maybe in one place… and then it has to do more with people.

Kristoffer's explanation of the process of creating, staging and performing dance goes some way to explain why those few who get into dance have such passion and persistence in the face of negative social pressure. To use Kristoffer's words, the generative, creative process is evidently totalising, engaging not just the body, but also the mind and demanding integrated and coherent action between and encompassing both. The collaborative, embodied, creative process of dance, that demands so much, but evidently gives a great deal too — enough to off-set financial hardship and societal diminishment — is an activity that, in the world of hegemonic masculinity, is rarely, if ever, available for men to partake in. In discussion with Kristoffer I was reminded of a discussion I had had with one of the other teachers at the Ballet Academy, a former senior dancer at the Opera House, about what he missed most from his dance career, which was the duet, working closely, physically with another human being to create a performance. I reflected that, from a hegemonic masculine perspective, collaboration, dependence and sharing materially and emotionally in the work — all vital parts of successful duets — are not considered as valuable as the ability to stand alone and display individual strength.

> But that's a super nice paradox, because it's like: I don't share. I stand on my own and then I become a real man and then I become loved. So it's a paradox, no? It's something with standing here [apart from others] in order for it also to be: You're very good. You're the boss. But it also has to do with love, for me, but it's such a weird way of getting it.

I supposed that in order to be praised as a man and to be valued as a man one has to be alone in some way. One must isolate oneself in order to become loved, at which point Dan added a further layer to the complexity of the issue.

> For me it's connected to sexuality too. When you're working you can't — if you're dealing with a theme of it, [sexuality] you're dealing with a theme — ever deal with it [directly]. In your normal life you can shift away, or [work out] how you say no or yes from within you. But when you're in the studio, that is something that you do outside. I would say. And that has to do with masculinity or an old notion of what a man is, or does, or wants, or whatever.

I replied that sexuality was an interesting subject because it's not something that I had been able to speak about much with my interviewees. Referencing a conversation I had had only the day before with one of Kristoffer's Ballet Academy colleagues, I described how they had met and fallen in love with their wife while creating a joint choreography, which was the first (and only) example of something like that that I had found. During that conversation I had struggled to phrase a meaningful question around whether dance had played a role in their attraction. My conversation with Kristoffer continued with me still struggling to artfully frame the issue.

> Dancers are working very hard. They're sweating. They usually are good looking, physically. And, you know, you're, in a technical sense, in a state of arousal. Your body is energised in some way. So there can be an attraction, which is based on the biological side as much as you just liking that person, but actually talking about it and working through it, I have found quite difficult to do with dancers.
>
> Absolutely. Yeah because it's kind of an unspoken rule. But if it happens it happens [attraction and romance], I think this is something... If you feel that kind of stuff. I mean in these kind of studios, like the Ballet Academy, they are strictly working, so they're very technical. And they work with the idea of cool, or sexy, but it's only surface. But then you have people doing more experimental things, rolling around on each other in piles and stuff and then it's like, OK, stuff can happen here, you know? And either you can do that, or you can't. I think masculinity would benefit from dancing and allowing yourself to… It's like: moving can be geeky, or funny, or happy and that's not [inherently] male… And also this narcissism that is there. It's good if you're not high on that [narcissism] scale, I would say, but it's like wanting to become better, which is everywhere in society. But here it's about your body, which is very ego [centric]. So that's also a complex discussion.

This passage with Kristoffer points towards the depth of complexity in the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and dance. From a question about the sharing, collaborative nature of duet dancing we very quickly spun off into deeper questions about love, romance, sexuality, the character of

the working professional dancer and the embodied ego and communication that are evoked when doing and thinking about, dance.

Participant Observation

After interviewing a number of male dancers across my two field sites and watching classes, studio practice and performance rehearsals, the only thing left to do was to try dance training for myself. I have always enjoyed recreational dancing. I was raised in a household where parties and dancing were highly valued events that took place on a semi-regular basis during my childhood, however despite my relatively open minded upbringing regarding social dance, theatrical dance education was neither widely available in my small home town or considered especially desirable as an activity for me to do. As for most boys and men living under hegemonic masculinity my strongest engagement with physical activity, outside of manual labour, has been with sport. I played rugby to a high level at school and more recently worked as a gym-based personal trainer and I have both trained in and taught Olympic style weight lifting and track-and-field short sprinting. With this background in mind I approached my entry into formal dance training with a small measure of trepidation, but also an open mind and a keen desire to learn all I could.

I was unsurprised to find that there was only ever a maximum of three men, including myself, in a class of between 15 and 20, though non-the-less a little disappointed. With my background in physical training and having observed several professional and pre-professional classes, practice sessions and rehearsals, I had some familiarity with the lesson format and had a prior acquaintance with the teacher from earlier field work encounters. Consequently, I felt relatively comfortable in the dance studio space, though a common refrain amongst new trainees of having “used muscles I didn’t know I had” bubbled up in my mind in the days after my class. While I was prepared for the challenge of a new training modality, I found ballet to be more fun than expected. Moving explicitly in time with music and attempting to create a certain aesthetic form conjured in me a complex emotional reaction that had as much to do with my cultural understanding of where ballet comes from as from the simple enjoyment of rhythmic movement. I found myself not only trying to execute movements correctly for their own sake, but to be the ballet prince, however rudimentarily.

In addition to and tied up in, my personal reaction to ballet training, there are other salient differences compared to the sports based training I am used to. The fundamentally social character of dance training is something which stood out to me immediately. The practical and economic realities of

teaching dance mean that studios are typically as full as possible, with my class up to 20 strong. While this is not in and of itself unusual, such a training mode is in stark contrast to many types typically undertaken by men. Unless one is taking part in a team sport, which is admittedly very common, other typical male training forms, such as running, weightlifting, or bodybuilding can and are often conducted solitarily, drawing on the prevalent stereotype of the stoical, lone man of strength. Dance on the other hand is an unavoidably collective activity. It requires repeated instruction that, as I have discussed, can require communication that goes beyond the merely verbal. There are specific forms and movements that demand high amounts of repetition and reward long term engagement with not only technical mastery, but deeply embodied self knowledge. Even in comparison to team sports, the character of dance is quite different. I will pursue this point further in the next chapter, but it was noteworthy to me that the focus of the dancer in training is on oneself, via visual and embodied muscular/neurological feedback. In other words, the primary focus is endogenous: on the self and its interactions with other human bodies. During dance training one is required to not only be conscious of one's own body, but actively and deeply engaged with the specifics of its shape, posture, flexibility, tension, strength, endurance and proprioceptive position. Such a wide array of foci offers a significant coordinative challenge that only increased my already high regard for the students and professional dancers I had met during my research. In contrast, team sports such as football, or rugby, while possessing their own physical and mental challenges, place little or no demand on the players to be so keenly aware of one's own self. Their focus is exogenous. The ball and point scoring, the other players, while deeply entangled with their opposition, are a secondary concern. In the hegemonic masculine world the only pro-social sport, the only arena that in some way mirrors the dance world is that of combat sports. I postulate that the differences between masculine sport and dance — and the consequences for social behaviour that grow from them — underlies much of the challenge that dance poses to hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter Three. Comparing Dance and Sport: Hegemonic Masculine Norms and Challenges

After two months spent in the company of professional dancers, choreographers, dance teachers and students, watching them work and taking part in novice ballet lessons myself, what knowledge have I generated? I entered into this research with an underlying assumption that within Swedish society there is a strong bias against male dancing within hegemonic masculinity and I believe my data supports this view. However, the possible reasons why this is the case are complex, ranging from large scale societal norms that steer male behaviour in various ways away from theatre dance, to small scale, individual experiences of dance and dance spectatorship which challenge hegemonic masculine modes of being in and interacting with the world.

> To understand the nature of the connection between dance and society one has to be aware of the fact that dance, and even single movements, are always shaped by culture… "Posture, gesture, basic movements and physical tension vary in different societies, and are quite resistant to change" (Birdwhistell 1970). Society creates dance, thus turning dance into "the metaphysics of culture" (Polhemus 1993:8). Therefore, dance is a tool "most appropriate to the study of any specific situation or society" (Spencer 1986:38). (Wieschiolek in Dyck & Archetti 2003:115)

If Wieschiolek is correct and dance speaks to deep qualities of culture and society, what can be said of a society where males are hugely underrepresented in dance education and the men who make it to the rank of professional dancer are acutely aware that society at large considers their chosen path to be of low status and even some dancers themselves consider their careers to be of low value? If dance is largely absent from the lives of half a society's population, what other activity replaces it as "the metaphysics of culture"?

Throughout my conversations while in the field, the subject of sport was rarely far away. Many of my collaborators were keen and talented sportsmen during their school careers, even to the extent that when pressure arose to choose a career focus between sport and dance the decision over which to pursue often came down to seemingly marginal differences in talent or enjoyment. But more than that, we often used sport as a reference point when discussing dance, both in terms of the dancers' inspiration and approach to their work, as exemplified by my conversation with Henrik at the Opera House and as a general comparator through which to discuss the characteristics of dance. During my own personal reflections too, sport become one of my chief reference points for thinking about the

relationship between hegemonic masculinity and dance. In the first instance, I have a sporting background, both in participation and coaching and so my previous interactions with people possessed of a high level of physical competence at least somewhat coloured my thoughts and interactions towards my collaborators during this research. In addition to the clear influence of sport on both researcher and interlocutors, the stark gender imbalance in the classrooms of the Ballet Academy prompted the question: if there is a relative lack of men taking up dance as a career, or even as a hobby, what kinds of physical culture do they take part in? Sport was the obvious answer. Perhaps a fruitful discussion of why and how men come to sport, as opposed to dance and the effect that has on hegemonic gender norms could be had in reference to the data collected during this research?

As I mentioned in the introduction, the anthropology of sport is, like the anthropology of dance, a somewhat niche interest in the wider discipline, however unlike dance, which has been seen as relevant to anthropology since its earliest days, sport was definitively placed outside its purview early on. Since those times, the world of sport and that of anthropology, has changed immeasurably and sport now plays a huge roll in the construction of identities, not just of individuals, but of villages, towns, cities, nations and continents.

While the dance world may not be able to match the industrial and political gravity of modern sport, the two arenas bear resemblance in other ways. Dyck and Archetti's *Sport, Dance and Embodied Identities* (2003) collects material on both fields to "[Bring] together sport and dance as ethnographically distinctive but analytically commensurate forms of body culture and social practice." (Dyck & Archetti 2003:1) In this chapter, I too seek to address dance and sport as "analytically commensurate" forms of social practice, however my interest lies in the apparent stark gender imbalance between the two, an analytical approach which is so far rare in the literature. It appears from my fieldwork that the interaction between hegemonic gender norms and the particular characters of dance and sport seems to cause an almost mutual exclusivity, at least amongst the male participants of each practice. There is something profoundly gendered that is happening in dance and sport, and while there are many seemingly more important fields of research and though it is easy to dismiss leisure activities as "inconsequential aspect[s] of our lives, on closer inspection [they] emerge as a microcosm of what life is about." (Brownell et al. 2017)

Superficially sport and dance share many characteristics. Both sport and dance encourage and reward bodily competence, an engagement with one's physical capabilities and at their highest levels showcase people who, both individually and collectively, possess superlative strength, power, endurance and coordination. Both are profoundly social activities that require a superfluity of participants to

retain their full meaning and power. As Kristoffer from the Ballet Academy told me: “In order for dance to exist, it needs an observer” and sport is similarly dependent on its social context for it to retain its meaning. However, there are some signal differences between them that, despite their similarly technical demands and apparent social characters, mean that access to and societal valuation of dance and sport are far from equitable.

This is not to say that with either dance or sport we can realistically speak of them as monolithic phenomena, not all sports, or all dance forms, have equal regard within society as a whole, or within their specific categories. Sports have their own complicated relationships with hegemonic social norms which are ripe for investigation and analysis, (Hognestad 2003, Broch 2012) however, based upon my conversations with professional and aspiring professional dancers, as well as my own experiences learning ballet, it is clear to me that the stratifying tendency of hegemonic masculinity places dance and dancers below the category of sport and sports people in the firmament of worthwhile (masculine) endeavour.

> One of the things [that is most problematic about dance] is that it’s not valued as real work. I mean, it has value, but it’s still culture… This is usually a joke, but everyone says it: “Oh you're a dancer?! But what do you do for real?” And it's the materialistic [way of looking at the world] because it [dance] is not there… It doesn't exist. (Kristoffer, the Ballet Academy)

Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Dance and Sport

To paraphrase Connell, (1995) it is not possible to understand one gender without reference to the other and so the historic exclusion of and hostility towards women in sport is an important factor in our understanding of the lack of men in theatre dance.

Despite concerted efforts in recent years to diversify all levels of popular sport, on the field of play, in its administration and amongst the spectatorship, sport remains a fundamentally masculine gendered arena. The widely reported pay disparity between the men’s and women’s football teams of both Sweden and the United States, despite greater success consistently accruing to them both, is just one of the most recent examples of clear gender bias in sport. From within the field of anthropology scholars have investigated the powerful ways in which sport and exercise are shaped by and in turn help to shape male identities over the last twenty years, (Alter 2004, 2006; Foster 2006, MacAloon 2006) showing that hegemonic masculine ideals form the foundation of many sporting and sports

related identities. Susan Brownell et al. confronts the hegemonic masculine ideology that defines much of global sport in *The Anthropology of Sport: Bodies, Borders, Biopolitics.* (2017) In the broad, historical context provided by Brownell, modern sport can be seen as a product of a profoundly sexist, homophobic and transphobic nineteenth century patriarchal culture whose values and norms, despite dramatic and fundamental societal changes in the intervening century and a half, echo down to us today in the sports world. In the chapter, "Sport and Sex, Gender and Sexuality" Brownell details the varied ways in which the cultures of organised sports have consistently sought to define and uphold sex and gender binaries through many generations of invasive sex testing intended to enforce a false gender dichotomy. However, "rather than pinpointing the biological basis of sex, the new science of sex testing unwittingly demonstrated that the insistence on separating men and women is grounded in ideology rather than science." (Brownell et al. 2017:157)

While the ills of global sport are worthy of investigation in their own right the purpose of my highlighting one of them here is by way of illustrating how deeply embedded heteronormative ideals regarding sex and gender are in some of the world's most widely enjoyed sports, in spite of continued and consistent scientific and societal developments that undermine such ideas. With this background in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that on the whole men do not value or take part in dance, when the most common masculine body cultures so consistently enforce heteronormative sex and gender ideology at the most fundamental levels of their structure.

Dance on the other hand, despite having a history tied intimately to patriarchal values has, perhaps in part due to the hostility of sport to female participation, evolved as a field of female resistance to masculine hegemony. (Oliver & Risner 2017) This is not to say that sport does not possess such transformative power, however around questions of gender and sexuality, dance is a field which is much more comfortable and successful at confronting such important social themes directly. It is perhaps ironic that sport, characterisable as strongly rule bound with the goal of creating clear and unambiguous outcomes is the worse when it comes to clearly and unambiguously addressing the social questions which interweave with it.

My experience of watching the male class at the Ballet Academy reminded me of Ramsay Burt's claim referenced in my introduction that: "There was no acknowledged distinction between ballet as aesthetic experience and ballet as erotic spectacle. To enjoy the spectacle of men dancing was, therefore, to be interested in men, but that was socially proscribed." (Burt 1995:27) While Burt is speaking of a time well over 100 years ago, one does not have to look far to find examples of this view both explicit and more insidious. I believe my spontaneous and unexpected reaction to the immediate

communicative power of sexually ambiguous male intimacy that I watched at the Ballet Academy is indicative of the wider implications of male dance aversion. Helena Wulff experienced something of the other side of the reaction I felt and the lack of distinction between aesthetic experience and erotic spectacle when discussing her research in the ballet world with academic colleagues:

> A middle-aged America male anthropologist was unable to relate to my topic of research, so he got out of the situation through a joke: "Do you want help with observations?" … A middle-aged male European anthropologist warned me: "They're all gay, you know that, don't you?" (Wulff 1998:7)

In both interactions the lack of distinction between aesthetic experience and erotic spectacle articulates the unconscious way that hegemonic masculine ideals regarding sex and sexuality underpin assumptions about dancers, whether male or female. The personal histories of many of the dancers I met included some amount of conflict, related to their choice of dance as a career, with their male relatives, even to the extent, as with Francois, of secretly attempting to sabotage their entry into the dance world. That an underlying homophobia is affecting male dance participation is perhaps not surprising, given its prevalence in both hegemonic masculinity in general and sports culture in particular. While Swedish society at large valorises gay pride and public statements that value the contributions of gay and other counter-hegemonic people are part of public discourse, in the words of Connell: "Homophobia is not just an attitude, straight men's hostility to gay men involves real social practice." (Connell 1995:40) Is it then fair to say that the small number of men engaged in theatre dance training is constitutive of widespread homophobic practice of men in Swedish society? If it is the case that male dancers are automatically considered to be gay by many of their gender peers, as all of my participants have experienced to one degree or another, and therefore implicitly lacking in proper hegemonic masculine traits, then what can aversion to dance be, other than a real social practice of homophobia? While I would answer that dance aversion may well have homophobia entwined with it, I believe it is both unfair and unrealistic to ascribe dance aversion to only homophobic practices.

Dance, Sport and Complex Communication

> The most important part of [football] is to win matches — playing together! (Ronsbo in Dyck & Archetti 2003:157)

> I really loved judo. I was competed in it for many years and I was on quite a good level. But when I started with dancing it was very musical and very visual. It's like a visual language. [Dance] is also both visual and body and I think that was a landscape I hadn't encountered before, because in Judo it's like: Yeah, you win. Or in football: You win. Or in whatever it's like, the goal is very simple, but this [dance] was more, it had many things to offer. (Kristoffer, the Ballet Academy)

At the start of this piece of research I introduced the idea, by way of Judith Hanna (1979) that dance is to a great degree about communication. It is, perhaps, fair to say that all social phenomena are. Of course, dance and sport too are *about* a lot of things, at different time and in different places, however in spite of their many embodied, technical similarities, the capabilities of dance and sport are very different. At this point I would like to reintroduce the idea of dance as a more-than-verbal language. Sport is not a language, there is no common reference to "the language of sport" in the way that there is to "the language of dance". Sport can stand for things. In a semiotic kind of way it speaks of things and people, but the signs and symbols that sport generates are emergent from the rules and moment by moment interactions of its participants. It is rare, if at all possible, for sport and sports people to intentional speak to issues beyond the immediate moment, through their actions in competition. During my time watching and practicing dance I became aware of the way in which dancers speak directly to their audience; not only that, they do so with intention. They want you to know something specific that is in some sense beyond what can be said with words alone. I felt this communicative potential when taking part in ballet classes. Although we practiced basic ballet steps and movements, I could feel myself communicating something about myself in those moments. The steps of ballet have specific meanings that I felt able to implicitly understand and to some degree reproduce. Dance is *about* communication in a way that sport is not. Sport has a capacity to communicate, but it is a blunt instrument by comparison. Great change can come about because of the events on the field of play, (Brownell, 1995, Richards, 1997) but such changes are an interpretation of sporting outcomes. Sport did not intentionally seek change, it merely provided semiotic ground from which people — most often men — derived change from. It is my postulation that this difference in communicative potential between dance and sport underlies and is interwoven with the stark gender disparity between the two.

As I have experienced and some of my interviewees described, theatre dance is a complex and deeply embodied practice that can cause an awareness of the unity of mind and body, which is contrary to

common conceptions of the self as a divided being, the body a vehicle for the mind, as strongly influenced by Cartesian dualism, itself deeply embedded in hegemonic masculine norms. (Crossley, 2007) My discussions with Kristoffer at the Ballet Academy and Johan at the Opera House, both classically trained but with divergent dance careers, indicated the depth of challenge that dance can present to all individuals, but certainly to men who are strongly entangled with hegemonic masculinity and I was reminded of Allegranti's (2011) reference to "putting the organism back together" and the ways dance seems to demand a particular type of engagement. Both Kristoffer and Johan spoke of the dual internal and external knowledge and ability that is the demand of dance at a high level of competency. It is not enough to simply execute a movement, or series of movements, one must engage with the dance on an internal, psycho-social level. Such internal engagement inevitably raises fundamental questions about oneself that are entangled with the form and movements of one's corporeal self. The dancer then must process their personal experience and embodied knowledge with the supposed audience reaction and aims of the performance. "It's a personal thing, but this inner work and outer work, you can't be stuck in one. You need to feel what you're doing in order to know yourself somehow." (Kristoffer, the Ballet Academy) Learning, performing and watching dance are profoundly complex activities which have the capacity, like during my observation of the male only class at the Ballet Academy, to cause unexpected or even unwelcome thoughts, sensations and emotions to arise all at once and not under the conscious control of the participant or watcher.

Conclusions

In the planning of this research my intention was to derive some understanding of why it seemed that, in Swedish society (and other parts of Western society too), dance as a form of body culture has a gender divide, to think through the consequences of that divide and if possible, ruminate on approaches that could be taken by those who would seek to rectify this division. My time spent with the male dancers of the Royal Swedish Opera House and the students and faculty of the Ballet Academy has suggested that in order to be become, or seek to become, a professional male dancer in Sweden one must be particular in some way. Outstanding talent (the most important quality of an Opera House dancer) and a passion for dance as an art form that outstrips the influence of negative social pressure (the most important quality of a Ballet Academy student) are prerequisites for a career in dance in Sweden. It is not possible to be hired as a dancer at the Opera House without possessing superlative physical talent and mental drive and it is not possible to be accepted at the Ballet Academy without displaying a talent for performance and a strong desire to focus that talent into dance. Male dancers

are a rare breed, combining several different mental and physical capabilities in such a way that could be considered of low utility in a contemporary capitalist society with a focus on productive work of a clearly quantifiable monetary value — increasingly mediated by machinery of some sort or another. Such specific demands could be said to be a powerful limiting factor on the possible number of professional male dancers, however similarly rare capabilities are also a demand of many sports and yet the popular engagement with sport has no such shortfall in male participation.

Hegemonic masculinity, with its inherent sexism and homophobia has a powerful disciplining effect on the behaviour of men, driving them away from activities conceived of under that rubric as feminine. That sport sits comfortably within and is in some sense constitutive of, hegemonic masculinity means that it acts as a potent driver of hegemonic norms of behaviour and values, to which dance literally and figuratively stands in opposition. Although the two are not obviously in conflict, they exemplify gender divergent body cultures and social practice that demonstrate the still strong sexism and homophobia emanating from hegemonic Swedish masculinity. While this gender division can be construed as part of the overall negative social force of hegemonic masculinity, it is my postulation that the effects on the behaviour of men and the consequences of those effects for their ability to engage meaningfully with complex, embodied emotion and non-competitive body culture, as exemplified by theatre dance, not only demands redress for the health of individual men, but that the larger societal issues of sexism and homophobia emanating from current hegemonic masculine norms will not be satisfactorily resolved unless and until the gender divide in dance and other female coded social activities is curtailed and some measure of balance instituted. All of my collaborators had an implicit understanding of what might otherwise be called “mainstream masculinity” and their relative position to it. Though the dialectical mutability of hegemonic masculinity was never addressed directly during my research, implicitly each collaborator understood that change to the dominant form was both possible and desirable.

This research has been necessarily limited to a relatively narrow field of interest. The ballet and contemporary dance worlds are but two sub-genres in a wider dance context that is truly global. In the words of Judith Lynne Hanna: to dance is human — and practically every culture has its own dance form. While theatre dance forms like ballet may be seen as problematic, from the perspective of hegemonic masculine involvement, there are many dance forms around the world which are admissible for men to seriously engage with. Were this research to be followed up, a comparative study of a wider variety of dance styles, as they relate to hegemonic masculine participation, could provide valuable insights into male dancing norms and the characteristics that makes one acceptable and another not. In addition, I believe the sports/dance/masculinities intersection merits further study, which

could prove valuable not only for scholars of those fields, but also for those with an interest in themes related to the body and embodiment. Fieldwork undertaken in both a dance and a sport setting, under the same rubric, is a natural extension to the work I have undertaken in this thesis and one which could offer deep knowledge related to embodied male experience and the vexed question of hegemonic male behaviour.

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Appendix

What follows are the lists of questions I used during my collaborator interviews. There are two versions that differ only slightly, one for the professionals at the Opera House and the teachers at the Ballet Academy, that reflects their greater age and experience and the other for the students of the Ballet Academy who were typically still within the orbit of teenagedom. Due to the semi-structured approach that I took during interview not all the questions were always asked, or answered, with digressions a common feature amongst many of my interviewees, but which often led to new insights.

Male Dancer Interview Questions — The Opera House

1. Name

2. What year were you born?

3. Where did you grow up? City, country?

4. Gender identity

5. Nationality

6. Are you religious?

7. Educational background. What school did you go to?

8. Family background: Are/were your parents interested in ballet? What do/did your parents work with?

9. Do you have a family? A partner? If so, what does your spouse/partner do?

10. Can you describe an ordinary weekday? A Sunday?

11. Do you have a hobby? What do you do in your free time?

12. Why did you become a dancer?

13. What is it like to be a male dancer? Is it particular in any way?

14. What is it about ballet dancing that you enjoy the most? What has been the most memorable moment for you as a dancer thus far?

15. Is there anything about ballet dancing that you find problematic?

16. Did you face any hurdles to your dance career? Were any of them specifically tied to your gender?

17. Have there been times in your life when you seriously considered quitting dance? If so, when were they and what were the reasons?

18. Do you ever think about what you are going to do when you retire from dancing?

19. If you were to have had a different career, what would it be?

Male Student Dancer Interview Questions — The Ballet Academy

1. Name

2. What year were you born?

3. Where did you grow up? City, country?

4. Gender identity

5. Nationality

6. Are you religious?

7. Educational background. What school did you go to?

8. Family background: Are/were your parents interested in (ballet) dance? What do/did your parents work with?

9. Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend? If so, what do they do?

10. Can you describe an ordinary weekday? A Sunday?

11. Do you have a hobby? What do you do in your free time?

12. Why did you choose to become a dancer?

13. What is it like to be a male dance student? Is it particular in any way?

14. What is it about (ballet) dancing that you enjoy the most? What has been the most memorable moment for you as a dancer thus far?

15. Is there anything about (ballet) dancing that you find problematic?

16. Have you faced any hurdles to your dance education? Were any of them specifically tied to your gender?

17. Have there been times in your life when you seriously considered quitting dance? If so, when were they and what were the reasons?

18. Do you ever think about what you would do after a dance career?

19. If you were to pursue a different career, what would it be?