

Dance and Gender

- In this session we are looking at the relationship between dance, sex and gender
- Dance itself has played important roles in various **ceremonies and celebrations** for as long as humans have been around e.g. think of the first dance in wedding celebrations
- **Control over body**
- The body is an **arena of control** - particularly in everyday life
- Dance is no exception
- There are rules for how to move in all styles of dance
- **Self control, dominance**
- An individual through dance **training and practice**, marshals the power to discipline the body and to gain **control** over the body
- **Dance as communication**
- Dance is also about **communication**
- Sending a message to an audience who **interpret** meaning from the dance
- Part of this message includes **displays** of masculinity and femininity
- Images that could convey a whole host of gender and sexual motifs and images
- Female dancers often diverge from the typical female
- Often they have more **testosterone, muscle and angularity** and narrower hips

The body in dance

- Dance is an activity that **flaunts the body**
- It focuses awareness on the body and its associations
- Perceptions of dance are influenced by **knowledge of past and present** ideas of the **body, sex, gender and dance** in society
- Dance is potent because it is **language like**
- Dance is a **non verbal language** – a form of communication
- highlighted in the dance **assembles** (the **steps and gestures** in dance), dance **grammar** (the **rules for putting** the vocabulary together) and the **meanings associated** with the dance (the **interpretations**)
- Just as speakers use a language, dancers can embed symbolism and signifiers in dance
- **Partners and dance**
- During the Victorian period, physical contact with the opposite gender was considered to be the **height of intimacy**
- And therefore was **closely monitored** by society

- One of the most popular forms of contact was dancing
- Dancing was controlled by etiquette
- Refusing to dance with someone was not considered proper unless the man had behaved badly or paid too much attention to another woman
- A proper young lady never danced more than two dances with any one man unless they were courting
- These evolved into tea dances
- It is suggested that we hardly notice how much dance trades in popular traditional gender stereotypes

Feminism and dance

- Dance viewing has increased
- Television appears to validate dance and promotes live performances
- Dance is then looked at through the eye of the camera
- There are strict limits on the body shape and size for girl and women dancers
- Which reinforces a denial of the female body in favour of an ideal boyish prettiness
- The incidence of eating disorders is far higher in ballerinas and would be ballerinas than in the general population
- Often dance reflects the conservative traditions of classical ballet
- Where women are sex objects or workers and are directed by men
- Modern and contemporary dance have transformed the type of movement seen on stage
- It also challenges the roles that male and female dancers play

Slide 5 Politics and subversive dance

- The power of dance to move and persuade is well recognised
- Dance, it could be argued can be subversive when it questions and exposes the stereotypes associated with the roles and behaviours taken on by particular genders
- For example, who supports and leads a dance can be challenged by changing the dynamics of female and male dancers
- Postmodern dance was a reaction to the constraints of modern dance
- It used everyday movement as valid dance and advocated novel methods of dance composition
- It also claimed that any movement is dance and that any person is a dancer
- These images however, may be interpreted differently and instead of challenging may reinforce gender stereotypes
- And may still identify women with the body
- Assuming an unchanging, per-given essence of the female and male

Breakdancing

- The style of street dancer which originated as part of hip hop culture in New York city is break dancing
- This style consists of toprock, downrock, power moves and freezes
- Typically danced to hip hop music
- A practitioner of this dance is called b-boy or b-girl or breaker
- Breakdancing is looked down upon by those immersed in hip hop culture
- It includes acrobatic moves and turn based dance competitions between two individuals or dance crews
- Uprock is an aggressive dance that involves two dancers who mimic ways of fighting each other using mimed weaponry in rhythm with music
- Toprock refers to a string of steps performed from a standing position – and this can draw on other styles – including tap dancing
- Downrock (footwork or floorwork) describes movements on the floor with hands supporting the dancer as much as the feet
- Power moves are acrobatic moves that require momentum, speed, endurance, strength and control e.g. headspin!
- Freezes are stylish poses and emphasise the strong beats in the music
- Suicides are used to highlight a strong beat in the music and signal the end to a routine
- Breakdancing tends to be dominated by males
- Women in breakdancing are often seen as outsiders in most dance groups
- So we could argue that the battles that are mimicked in this style of dance also reinforce the normalisation of aggression with masculinity

Slide 7 Tango

- In the Tango, the man is male and macho
- It comes from Argentine culture
- The dance started between men and then moved to brothels where the women would dance to attract customers
- The man in Tango, has to be certain of where he stands and where he is going
- He is in charge, reliable, and accepts responsibility
- And cares for the well being, safety and happiness of the woman
- His arm is across her shoulder to show he is in charge of her needs
- He acts with conviction, pose and certainty
- He initiates the embrace and allows her to decide how close she wants to be and is always in charge
 - Tango highlights some traditional stereotypes
 - Man as assertive and aggressive, women as passive and sensual

- There are clearly defined gender roles
- The gender structure of tangos is such that it upholds much of the traditional aspects of masculinity
- Tango as a hypermasculinised dance becomes acceptable for men who may participate without being suspected of being homosexual or effeminate

Other partner styles of dance

- Social dance forms have a long history of same-sex and role-crossing partnerships
- There have been changes to the strict gendering of partner dances in some competition or performance contexts
- An example is the Queer Tango movement which encourages same sex Tangoing, men dance with men, women dance with women
- And men dance with women but change the lead/follower role

Men who Dance: The Impact on Masculine Ideologies

- The origins of dance were largely associated with women, and so being a male dancer puts one's masculinity into question
- Tango – is considered hyper-masculine
- So it could be argued that there is a correlation between dancing tango and an increase in masculine ideologies
- Men dancing a male dominated dance such as tango would experience relatively little shift from hegemonic masculinity
- African American men are already in a marginalised group and therefore black male dancers may not be as impacted as much when comparing themselves to hegemonic masculinity

Male ballet dancers

- Male ballet dancers have control over their body, but use it to express feelings, desires and affections
- Male ballet dancers in 1700s were common and not considered feminine
- It was in the 19th century that women became more strongly associated with ballet
- And also the notion that men are supposed to conceal and hide their emotions – to be tough and strong
- Showing emotions through dance is not masculine
- And perhaps this is one reason why there are still less males involved in ballet