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Understanding the Gender Dynamics and Representation in Dancing: The Case of Male Ballet Dancers in Cebu

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Abstract

The male population that lives in this “female-dominated world” is one of the main contributors to this diversity in each respective locality specifically within Ballet Center Cebu. This research assessed and addressed the stereotypes, cultural challenges, and stigmas that they faced. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants who were at least 18 years old and had at least two years of experience in ballet, which was then analyzed through a cross-case analysis. Results revealed that masculinity in ballet is highly valued and expected. Therefore, male performers must execute lifts, demonstrate a masculine front, maintain fitness and confidence, and support their female counterparts. However, stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudices toward the male dancers have led to a lack of appreciation for the male dancers, which impacts their emotional and professional well-being negatively. In response, the community provides a facilitative environment which is supportive through mentorship programs and scholarships to encourage participation which allows aspiring male ballet dancers to pursue the activity without discouragement. The researchers concluded that although stereotypes are unfounded gender roles are still heavily anticipated. Male ballet dancers are perceived traditionally as a masculine feature in the ballet industry. One's identity should not restrain one's participation in ballet instead it should set on the physicality and artistry of the dance itself.

Keywords: ballet, male ballet dancers, gender dynamics, standards, stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

Ballet is often regarded as an inappropriate career for men, given its feminine nature which is largely populated mostly by women (Fisher, 2009). The fact that male dancers live within a “female

world” is a huge variable that causes them to have challenging experiences that often provoke and affect their gender identities (Mennesson, 2009). Ballet has evolved in distinct ways, with

various schools around the world incorporating their own cultures. As a result, ballet has become influential globally and has defined the foundational techniques used in many other dance genres. As it creates waves worldwide, it brings about new emerging issues as time passes by. According to Ha (2017), classical ballet has historically limited male dancers in expressing themselves with strict gender norms, leading to suspicions of sexuality. The history of ballet, particularly how it evolved from being perceived as a manly pastime to a feminine profession, is a major contributing factor to the perception that male ballet performers are homosexual. As it exists today, ballet is fundamentally a creative kind of dance that is choreographed with predetermined movements and steps to convey a story to music (Francis et.al., 2022).

Male dancers' genders have been influenced by the typical Western notions of masculinity; however, it also differs from these standards because ballet has come to be seen as a female-dominated profession where dancers are valued for their feminine qualities like grace and elegance (Phillips, 2008). Men described their experiences in the context of male ballet culture in terms of gendered rules as well as the management techniques within male ballet culture (Haltom and Worthen, 2014). Male ballet dancers specifically pointed out gendered actions and approaches; for instance, they were called “good bases” with the strength to elevate others. Moreover, the male ballet dancer was perceived as an auxiliary on stage, only serving to support the ballerina. Despite this male ballet dancers remain to be commonly stereotyped as homosexual due to the unmoving fact that ballet is primarily a feminine profession controlled by women (Risner, 2009).

In the dance world, male dancers often face misconceptions such as being perceived as artsy, effeminate, or weak, which can lead to challenges in defending their identities (Cook, 2020). Despite these stereotypes, the benefits of ballet for male dancers, including physical and mental fitness, career opportunities, and personal development, outweigh these injustices (Eight Reasons Why Boys Should Get Into Ballet, 2020). Issues of mental health in dance, exacerbated by recent reports of abuse in European ballet institutions, highlight the importance of understanding how prejudices impact male dancers' well-being and careers (Henley, 2019). Male dancers navigate a delicate balance of challenging traditional masculinity norms while seeking acceptance in a profession that values qualities like softness and flexibility (Risner, 2014 & Wright, 2013). This creates a complex situation where male ballet dancers challenge traditional notions of masculinity, as they are marginalized in broader society but enjoy privileges within their profession due to their scarcity. Despite this, the dance world is slowly evolving to be more inclusive and welcoming to male dancers, offering them opportunities to express a wider range of gender identities and roles.

Cultural norms and expectations can impact dancers' experiences (Schwarz, 2000), societal factors can affect dancers' access to resources, and opportunities, and local traditions and values shape dancers' experiences (Henderson, 2023). Therefore it's clear that studying the varying cases dancers undergo in different regions is important for understanding cultural diversity, shared and distinct challenges (Anttila et al., 2019), cross-cultural learning (*From the Faculty: The Importance of Different Dance Techniques*, n.d.), transferable learning (Payne & Costas, 2020), and diverse global perspectives. At present there is limited comprehensive research specifically focused on male ballet dancers in the Philippines much

more so one that focuses on its development in Cebu. A lack of detailed, quantitative data on the prevalence and impact of stereotypes and stigmas on male ballet dancers as well as Insufficient data for exploration of the unique experiences and perspectives of male ballet dancers from specific unnoticed locals such as Cebu makes it difficult to differentiate and study their experiences from those of male dancers in other regions and countries. This Inadequate comparison and examination of the similarities and distinctions of the long-term effects of stereotypes and stigma within teasing, bullying, and homophobic remarks on male ballet dancers' would hinder their abilities towards the development of their mental health and career trajectories. Furthermore, a study on the effectiveness of male-specific training initiatives and their impact on the inclusion and support of male ballet dancers is required.

The localization of ballet in different places has led to the transformation and adaptation of this art form to fit within specific cultural contexts (Jacinto, 2020). Ballet dancers play an important role in creating waves within each respective locality and the evolution of ballet, but such roles are challenging to fulfill when we can't ensure that everyone or a group of individuals is free from experiencing issues that could hinder their activities within the industry. Dance is a potent vehicle for expressing one's ideals, ideas, and goals, it can be a useful instrument for contemplation and introspection about the world we live in. Moreover, dance is acknowledged as a kind of physical exercise, a social activity, a therapeutic practice, a part of cultural legacy, and an artistic medium. The organization honors the historical diversity of dance traditions as well as the achievements of dancers and choreographers (*Dance Education*, n.d.).

The male population that lives in this “female world” is one of the main contributors to this diversity in each respective locality specifically within Balletcenter Cebu, Philippines, and is necessary for this art of dance which is why the researchers must study, investigate, and explore ways to improve the quality of their experience within the industry free from bias, stereotypes, and stigmas so that the communities in Cebu can collectively work together in the preservation, promotion, and development of ballet among the populace and future generations especially with male dancers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to assess and address the stereotypes, cultural challenges, and stigmas faced by male ballet dancers within Balletcenter Cebu. Specifically, it answers the questions:

- A1. What are the stereotypes and cultural challenges or stigmas faced by male ballet dancers in Cebu, Philippines?
- A2. How do these challenges impact their decision to pursue a career in ballet?
- A3. What initiatives and strategies can the local ballet community work to contribute or improve inclusivity and support for male ballet dancers and to encourage boys to join the ballet industry in Cebu, Philippines?

METHODOLOGY

This includes the process of investigating the stereotypes of masculinity in the ballet industry. It includes the research design, informants and sampling design, locale, instrumentation, data

gathering procedure, data analysis, rigor of the study, and ethical consideration.

Design

The researcher used a Multiple Case Study Research Design. A case study was one of the most used strategies of qualitative research in terms of the detailed study of a particular individual life in which it investigates an in-depth phenomenon in a real-life context (Priya, 2020). Qualitative case study sources included observation and participation interviews, and questionnaires. It was a research method that enabled a complex phenomenon to be explored through the identification of different factors interacting with each other (Debout, 2016). The case study was used in investigating the Male Ballet Dancers in combating stereotypes and it helped the researchers to have an in-depth investigation about the case being studied.

Informants and Sampling Design

The research study focused on Cebuano male ballet dancers. Four (4) prospective participants were specifically selected to participate in the study from Balletcenter Cebu, a local ballet school. The researchers realized that the sample size of the study was on a small scale, however, the researchers hoped that this study would influence and inspire future researchers to navigate it on a larger sample size to better understand the experiences and challenges faced by male ballet dancers at a wider scope. The individuals involved in the study were specifically chosen using a purposive sampling method. This approach as defined by Nikolopoulou (2022), included a number of non-probability sampling techniques where participants are selected based on particular attributes, such as skills, experience or relevance to the study. In purposive sampling the participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) had been involved in ballet for a minimum of 2 years (b) were resident of Cebu, (c) were at least 18 years old and above (d) were able to express their thoughts clearly. Consistent with the principles of purposive sampling, it involved the selection of individuals who possessed specific expertise, unique viewpoints or profound insights that were crucial for the study (Ghosal, 2023).

Locale

The investigation was specifically carried out at Balletcenter Cebu located at Suite 302, 3rd Level at Ayala Center Cebu, Philippines. Balletcenter Cebu was specifically chosen among other schools since all of them had the desired number of participants and met the conditions required to answer the research objectives, It was chosen with the condition that the researcher had previous connections with the school. Moreover, it focused on Male Ballet Dancers who lived in Cebu. Cebu is a province of the Philippines, in the country's Central Visayas region, comprising Cebu island and more than 150 smaller surrounding islands and islets.



Fig 1: The map of Cebu

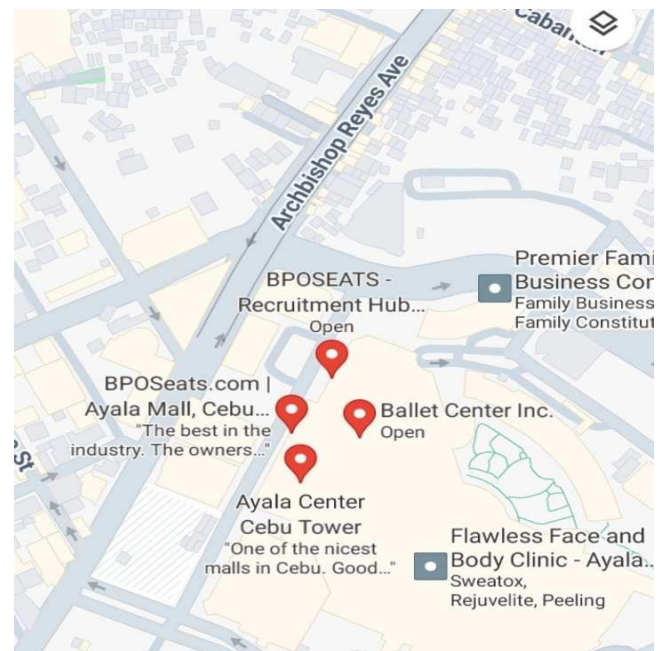


Fig 2: Map of Ballet Center Ayala Cebu

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for this study was the researchers (Creswell, 2007). Utilizing a semi-structured interview with guided questions served as the secondary method for data collection. Semi-structured interviews involved participants providing detailed responses to predetermined open-ended questions (H, 2024). The interviews, lasting approximately 1 hour on average, aimed to capture in-depth insights into the perspectives of Male Ballet dancers in Cebu. To enhance the data collection process, cell phones, and recording applications were employed to capture audio responses from the participants during the interviews.

Data Gathering Procedure

Pre-interview. The university's research ethics council provided ethical clearance to the researchers before they began this investigation. After, in order to obtain authorization to carry out the study, the researchers wrote to the college deans. Additionally, the consent letters, if any, were given to the male ballet dancers by the researchers, who also provided them directly to the participants so they could read them in advance of the planned interview. The participants were interviewed in-person or virtually to collect data. This allowed them to speak with the researchers in-depth, in the language of their choosing, and in a way that truly reflected their unique personalities. At this point, the researcher was reminded that any further inquiries and explanations would be based on the participant's remarks rather than the researcher's personal opinions. In addition, to protect their privacy, the study's participants were referred to as participant (s). Additional guidelines regarding confidentiality were provided, along with a comprehensive explanation.

Interview Proper. The researcher expressed gratitude to the participants prior to the interview. By inspecting the camera and microphone, the researcher ensured that the participants could see and hear clearly. The researcher then introduced himself and clarified the goal of the investigation. It was emphasized how crucial their participation was to the research paper's accomplishment. In order for the researcher to authenticate the participants' involvement, they are then asked to verbally affirm it. After obtaining their consent, the researcher disclosed to the

significant participants that the interview or conversation would be recorded. Following the recording's flip. The researcher provided the participant's explanation of the procedure and guidelines for deleting and conserving data.

Post Interview. After the interview, the researchers expressed their gratitude to the participants. There were contact details available in case the participants needed clarifications regarding the nature of the study, how the data was utilized, or whether or not recordings should be kept or deleted. Similarly, in case there were any queries, worries, or clarifications, the researcher requested the relevant participants' contact information. The participants were also given the researcher's word that the information would be kept confidential and secure, with only the researcher having access to the recordings.

Data Analysis

In this study, a cross-case analysis was conducted. As defined by Khan and VanWynsberghe (2018), cross-case analysis is a research technique that can mobilize and compile case knowledge from individual case studies to generate new data. Moreover, it used a variety of sources, that include an in-depth exploration of testimonies, interviews, case studies and to examine narratives on the specific case being made in the same place, in an organized and systematic manner. Furthermore, it allowed researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study by comparing and contrasting the findings across the cases (Vohra, 2014).

Rigor of the Study

Highlighted the experiences and common obstacles that the male ballet dancers in Cebu faced throughout their careers. All information was acquired solely from participant responses. Following transcription of the recordings, the researchers ensured that the information collected was confirmed by the subjects. All follow-ups were predicated only on the participant's responses to a single, open-ended inquiry. The panel of research professionals evaluated the question in order to ensure its legitimacy. For additional confirmation of the phenomenon under study, an expert evaluated the data analysis findings. The four crucial steps of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability that Guba and Lincoln (2020) recommended were followed to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility- (Maher et al., 2022) trustworthiness was a key factor in collecting data that illustrated the environment of participants as close to reality. This also ensured the study was conducted properly, as planned, and with the proper participation of the subjects. This credibility was achieved through building a trustworthy relationship and rapport with participants before data collection. Researchers invited the participants to explain the study's purpose, and deepened their understanding of the participants to facilitate rapport building during interviews. Additionally, researchers evaluated the participants to ensure they met predetermined criteria and used a purposive technique to select participants who met the study's requirements.

In the study focusing on the stigmas and challenges faced by male ballet dancers in Cebu, the researchers recorded, transcribed, gathered, and analyzed responses with the assistance of experts to ensure the accuracy of the participants' inputs. Transcriptions were validated by experts, and techniques like Epoche or journaling were employed to minimize biases.

Dependability. The research method was detailed in order to ensure that proper research practices had been followed and that it enabled

other future researchers to replicate the study (Johnson et al., 2020). In this study, researchers explored a case study about male ballet dancers in Cebu: experiences and stereotypes. All collected information was only based on participants' responses. The researchers verified that all the data gathered were validated by the relevant informants after transcribing the interview tapes. Open-ended questions were posed and follow-ups were decided upon based on the participants' response. Researchers specialist evaluate the questions to ensure validity. The research expert verified the data that had been examined to provide further confirmation of evidence for the studied phenomenon.

Confirmability. This data analysis approach evaluated the process to assure rigor and trustworthiness. The data analysis in this study clearly stated to guarantee the validity of the findings and interpretation, it was done through a process from direct information collection to data analysis. It was reviewed, and verified, and the details will be double-checked before it undergoes thematic analysis. Furthermore, it allows researchers to properly analyze and understand without biases.

Transferability. To determine whether the study is transferable by comparing its capabilities to those of other studies. The study focused on Male ballet dancers' experiences and stereotypes. The researcher served as an instrument for gathering information. Thick description was employed to let researchers contextualize the data gathered which consisted of the recorded information from the participants. The study clarified the number and qualifications for selecting the participants. The researchers allowed other researchers to determine whether or not the study could be applied to their own research.

Ethical Consideration

The study was approved after a comprehensive evaluation of its adherence to the ethical standards. The Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the university was assessed thoroughly with the research ethical standing. Informed consent was obtained to the participants prior to the collection of the data, it also outlined their withdrawal without consequences. The real names of the participants remained anonymously to ensure privacy and anonymity. Possible risks and discomfort. The researchers listed the possible issues that ought to be foreseen during the data collection. Moreover, an honorarium gift was given to each participant as a sign of appreciation for their time and effort.

Results and Discussion

Overview

This section of the study contains the findings and discussion. After analyzing the gathered data, four highlights were presented such as defining masculinity in the context of ballet, standards for male ballet dancers, challenges as a male ballet dancer, evaluating community initiatives for male ballet dancers in Cebu. Consequently, the researchers found out about the prevalence of gender dynamics, stereotypes and standards among male ballet dancers.

About the Participant

The researchers investigated the cases of four (4) Male Ballet Dancers at Balletcenter Cebu. All of the informants were males within an age range of 21- 70 years old. The average number of years spent doing ballet was about 7- 60 years. Moreover, the participants are composed of teachers, students, and directors with experience and exposure in Ballet.

Participants	Description
Case 1	This participant is a ballet teacher who also trains as a pre-professional dancer.
Case 2	This participant serves as a ballet teacher and holds the title of Dance Master.
Case 3	This participant is a ballet student
Case 4	This participant is both a ballet teacher and an artistic director.

Table. About the Participants

Table 1: Defining Masculinity in the Context of Ballet

Case 1	Masculinity is manifested by lifting females and in performance disparities
Case 2	Male ballet dancers were less visible but are gradually improving
Case 3	It's often received to the line and strong power.
Case 4	You need to be a man in the studio

The first table explores the definition of masculinity in the context of ballet.

Case 1:

In the context of ballet, masculinity significantly contributes to supporting female dancers. Hence, doing a stag, lifting the female dancers, giving her a solid base as she does several twirls, that a male dancer should make look easy. In addition, it can project masculinity and power through actual strength in order for them to appear confident.

According to Participant 1: *“Because as a stereotype, females cannot lift males in the ballet world, so of course it has to be the males who will lift the females through performances.”*

The participant describes masculinity in terms of partnering with female dancers as well as the body movements of men. On the other hand, the collaborative nature of performance, but also some more specific ways in which male dancers contribute to an art form. The participant 1 then added,

“So just basically when you take classes as a dancer, there's only very little difference with the way you move compared to the female. So it really is a matter of, like, in the performance aspect, that's where there really is a great difference.”

In the ballet world, males negotiate their gender identities as men while performing. According to Haltom and Worthern (2014), male ballet dancers should identify themselves as male while performing a dance. The behaviors of male ballet dancers are challenged, emphasized, and managed among them. Moreover, Ebersole (2019) also claims that male ballet dancers perform

through the expectations of masculinity through dance movement. The stereotypes of movement in male ballet dancers negatively affect their individual explorations and to replace one kind of movement that would represent their masculinity.

Case 2:

Male ballet dancers face challenges such as stereotypes and they still fight less than real men who do not pursue classical ballet. Despite this, the world is gradually accepting male ballet dancers though teasing and bullying still remain issues.

As Participant 2 stated: *“So before, male ballet dancers were not widely spread, not as wide as today's generation”.*

Participant 2 highlights how ballet culture recognizes male ballet dancers. Furthermore, ballet is also driven by determination and passion, something which can be identified as an art. Participant 2 also added,

“Most of the generation are open-minded. Everybody knows that it's part of an art. So for me, I think it's gradually, gradually getting better.”

Male ballet dancers use dance as a means of self-expression. Burt (2022) stated in his study that masculinity is less of an issue today since various expressions of masculinity are now widely accepted. Through this, more opportunities for young men to pursue their careers in dance. In addition, male ballet dancers proudly see themselves as a dance artist and they are also interested in creative and artistic aspects. According to another study from Stadnyk (2019), in today's dance community, male dancers are becoming more and more accepted. When it comes to men dancing, some people are more accepting, and it gives the impression that the boy dancers are welcome.

Case 3:

The male ballet dancers viewed themselves to be manly in terms of dancing. They are expected to have a powerful and strong appearance on stage. In addition, male ballet dancers are expected to be capable of supporting partners and performing demanding routines and poise.

According to Participant 3: *“It's often received to the line and strong power.”*

The participant highlights masculinity to maintain balance and deliver powerful performance while executing movements. The blend of strength and expertise give emphasis on the respected position they hold within the ballet world.

Participant 3 also added:

“For me, facility in ballet is a fascinating and complex topic.”

According to Jackson (2024), male ballet dancers' roles are limited in the context of ballet such as playing as real men who fit into hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, the story of male ballet dancers remains unchanged. Men are being criticized in the ballet world since the culture views them as too feminine and expects them to be powerful. Moreover, (Feltham, 2020) noted that ballet is an art form that calls for a great deal of physical strength, endurance, flexibility, and tenacity. They are accepted in creative roles more because they are perceived as being less structured and more inventive.

Case 4:

In the field of ballet, males are expected to represent masculinity in the studio. Male ballet dancers convey strength and confidence when partnering with female dancers; their roles should align to traditional masculinity ideas.

As Participant 4 stated: *“You need to be a man in the studio”*

Male dancers in the ballet industry frequently encounter particular expectations and constraints as a result of persistent prejudices and misunderstandings. Ballet dancers who are male are strong and muscular, and those who are female are delicate and elegant.

Participant 4 also added: *“It was very clear that there had to be more and females had to be females. So, it's like out in the world when you would see, you would see a man and you would see, you knew that you would act like that. It's gonna act differently.”*

Within this statement, the gendered structure of the ballet curriculum perpetuates ideas about gendered movement that idealizes robust men and delicate women (Alterowitz, 2014). The ballet curriculum is often cited to justify the physical performance distinctions between boys' and girls' performance and divide the development of strength in each group. According to Risner (2014) cited by Clegg et. al (2018), girls are better at performing while boys are at performing femininity. Thus, it limits boys and girls in their manifestation and ability to express ballet dance movements. These attitudes are also present within the dance studio in specific forms.

Table 2: Standards for Male Ballet Dancers

Case 1	Expected to be physically and mentally prepared to lift their female partners gracefully
Case 2	High standards influence male ballet dancer roles and opportunities
Case 3	Strong and Powerful
Case 4	Must convincingly portray masculine roles on stage.

The second table highlights the Standards faced by Male Ballet Dancers

Case 1:

Male dancers in the ballet profession are held to high standards, especially when it comes to their ability to gracefully and precisely lift their female partners. In addition, it is used to convey the appearance of grace and weightlessness, which is crucial to ballet's artistry. To perform lifts with ease and safety, this job requires extreme upper body strength and control, which calls for major training. In addition to physicality, male dancers must maintain immense mental attention and communication with their partners, anticipating their movements to guarantee precision and safety.

As stated by the first participant: *“Yeah, of course there is. when your main job or task in delivering a great performance is to lift women, then, of course, you're expected to be strong, you are expected to prepare yourself to really be able to lift your partner and to deliver because ballet really depends on how magical a performance looks”*

Participant 1 emphasized how relevant the role of male dancers is in ballet and the demands that should be executed in partner dances. Male dancers are expected to be attuned to their partner's movements and communicate seamlessly to ensure a smooth performance. Moreover, it is one of the highlights during ballet performances which in ballet is called a “pas deux”. Participant 1 added:

“You're really expected to prepare yourself mentally and physically so that you're able to perform what is expected from you, which is that of lifting your partners and being able to be an ornament to the female dancers.”

The study by Johnson (2019) supported Participant 1's claims that male dancers have a fundamental role to play in producing a visually captivating performance during pas de deux (duets). This is particularly true in ballet, where male dancers must support their partners and prolong the moment of suspension during leaps and lifts. Furthermore, male dancers are required to do more than just perform the technical elements of the ballet; male dancers are also expected to enhance the female dancers' performances and add to the production's overall beauty and elegance (Williams, 2021). Furthermore, it is important to remember the mental side of preparation. In order to perform well under pressure and stay in rhythm with their partners, male dancers need to develop their confidence and attention. It is essential to be both mentally and physically prepared in order to give an engaging performance.

Case 2:

In the competitive world of ballet, male dancers face high standards that significantly influence their roles and opportunities within the industry. These standards can vary depending on whether a dancer aims to pursue a professional career or transition into teaching. For dancers seeking professional status, their physical characteristics and technical abilities to meet the high-performance standards are the main criteria of assessment; on the other hand, dancers entering the teaching profession are evaluated according to their ballet educational qualifications and capacity to instruct and motivate a wide variety of students.

Participant 2 asserts that: *“It depends on whether you're going to pursue a career as a dancer. Or you're just mainly doing it as a means to go into a more Like a teacher. If you're going to pursue more on the dancing part or become one of the company's main dancers, then standard, yes, it's a really high standard when we get there.”*

The following statement from Participant 2 highlights the expectations that male dancers must meet to secure lead roles. In most ballet companies, the importance of meeting strict standards is necessary to excel in the field. According to participant 2:

“The lead part is like the principal dancers, like the Prince, like all the Prince parts. I may only get some supporting parts because of my height. Especially in Ballet, tall people are meant especially for guys. We should be taller than the girls, especially the girls when they go on pointe we should still remain tall.”

In ballet, it is generally expected that male dancers are taller than their female partners, particularly when the latter is on pointe. Shorter male dancers may find it difficult to obtain key roles, like the Prince in traditional ballets, due to this height criterion. Studies back up the idea that height plays a big part in the ballet hierarchy. Male dancers are often anticipated to be between 5'8" and 6'2",

with taller dancers usually preferred for major roles, according to a Dance Dimensions (n.d) survey. This preference stems from classic ballet aesthetics, where height draws attention to the performance's visual lines and makes more spectacular lifts and choreography attainable. Furthermore, it's also important for male dancers to satisfy high standards in the profession since, according to a McCormack et al. (2018) survey, ballet companies give priority to physical features when casting major roles. Male dancers who have overcome the odds have shown that skill and creativity can surpass physical characteristics, despite the seemingly restrictive nature of these expectations. Male dancers come in a wide variety of body shapes and heights, and as the ballet world develops, it is important to acknowledge and promote this diversity to make sure that dancers of all sizes have the chance to flourish and get the best training possible.

Case 3:

This concept is rooted in the demands of ballet as a performance art, whereas male dancers are often required to demonstrate exceptional strength and agility. This notion is rooted in the demands of ballet as a performance art, whereas male dancers are often required to demonstrate exceptional strength and agility. Male dancers must possess a great degree of physical strength and endurance because they are frequently required to lift their female counterparts, and perform precise turns, and jumps. In traditional ballet, this physicality is not only necessary but also a trait that sets masculine positions apart.

As Participant 3 expressed: *“The expectation and standard of ballet, most ballets are strong and powerful”*

Male ballet dancers are expected to be strong and powerful in the ballet world. A study by Hoover (2024) supports the claim of Participant 3, emphasizing the importance of strength for male dancers. The study shows that male ballet dancers need to have significant physical strength, agility, and flexibility to perform powerful movements. The study demonstrates that it is crucial for male Dancers to have significant muscular strength, and strength training is essential to enhance the performance results. In addition, Witkoś and Wróbel(2019) found that the emphasis on strength and fitness is vital as male ballet dancers have specific issues with physicality. Strength training enhances the performance capabilities of dancers and reduces the likelihood of injury. For male dancers, to achieve excellence in their performances, there is a need to put a lot of effort into the dancers’ strength and fitness, demonstrating the crucial harmony between physicality and artistry in ballet.

Case 4:

The traditional view that male dancers must embody the characteristics associated with their roles, such as strength, authority, and nobility. When it comes to their ability to accurately embody masculine characters on stage, male ballet dancers have high criteria to meet. The public looks on these dancers to truly capture the spirit of masculine roles, which maintains gender standards in the ballet world.

Based on Participant 4: *“If you're given the role of a prince, you have to act like a princely male man. You can't act like a girl. You can't dance like a girl. You have to be able to act like you're going to be the father or a king.”*

Participant 4's statement emphasizes how male dancers are under artistic and societal pressure to adhere to traditional views of gender, which may be tough and constricting. Although the

demands placed on male ballet dancers to authentically interpret masculine roles can improve the caliber of the dancers' performance and authenticity, it also presents significant challenges in terms of acceptance, identity, and expression. Participant 4 then added:

“And that's expected of you that you have to be able to fulfill that role and you have to show it in front of thousands of people who are going to believe that you are that character. “

As male dancers manage the complexity of their identities while trying to meet external demands, the pressure to perform these roles in front of an audience can intensify feelings of anxiety and self-doubt (Risner, 2024). There are strict rules for both male and female ballet dancers' conduct and performance. Male dancers' capacity to express themselves artistically may be constrained by these rules, which frequently force them to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity. Likewise, male ballet dancers frequently find their artistic freedom restricted by gender norms and cultural expectations that shape how masculinity is portrayed in the art form. Ballet has historically been associated with femininity, which has resulted in stereotypes portraying male dancers as weak or feminine (Haltom & Worthen, 2014). Because of this stigma, male dancers may be driven to stick to a restrictive definition of masculinity that prioritizes strength and authority, which could hinder the desire to explore a wider spectrum of artistic expressions. Because of this, a lot of male dancers struggle with regard to identities as male dancers tend to balance the demands of society and the ballet community with the dancer’s individual artistic goals (Haltom & Worthen, 2014). Nonetheless, the ballet community is becoming more and more conscious of the significance of rethinking these established standards.

Table 3: Challenges as a Male Ballet Dancer

Case 1	Unsupported desire to perform solo, difficulty with lifts, pressured performing with a partner, need to embody a distinct confidence, maintaining physical fitness
Case 2	Perceived as gay, lack of support and understanding from family
Case 3	Experienced being bullied, inequality of social status
Case 4	Criticize wearing tights, bullied or teased by peers

The third table enumerates the challenges faced by Male Ballet dancers.

Case 1:

Challenges honed ballet dancers to be better and to succeed in their desired goals in the field of ballet, but in spite of those challenges, it takes a valuable lesson to learn more about the field of ballet on how to be stronger and capable. One of the challenges being faced by male ballet dancers is wanting to be a star soloist rather than being partnered but somehow realizing how diverse ballet could be in a way that approaches can help develop the skills.

According to Participant 1: *“When I entered the realm of ballet, I wanted to be the center of the star rather than being in a partnered dance or a partnered performance. However, reflecting back on*

that experience, I felt like it was my lack of understanding of the art of ballet that pushed me or allowed me to think that way. ”

The participant shared about his struggles with lifting and the significance of physical strength and fitness, particularly in ballet, when it comes to lifting.

“I started out very weak and I couldn't lift as much as what was expected of me to be able to lift.”

The participant's struggle in lifting did not mark the end of his challenges; rather, it was just the beginning in terms of carefully doing his role as a partner to a female ballet dancer.

The participant stated: *“And what was most traumatic about it was that I had to do it with a girl, which it added pressure because aside from the fact that I didn't understand how to do the step or how to execute the lift, I also have to be mindful that I don't hurt my partner and of course that I don't touch parts of her that shouldn't be touched.”*

Male ballet dancers face unique confidence challenges related to stereotyping and the physical demands of ballet, their passion for the art form and the satisfaction of performing help build self-confidence over time. The participant added:

“you have to be a certain kind of a male dancer, you have to exude this distinct quality or like a distinct confidence that is very different when you see female dancers dancing.”

Maintaining a specific image and physical fitness is crucial for male ballet dancers to effectively perform routines, execute dance forms, and manage lifts and stances. The participant then added:

“I am very busy, but still I have to be able to prepare myself, especially for upcoming events or upcoming shows and performances. ”

In ballet, biological sex plays an important role in how dancers will be trained, future careers, and the expectations of their bodies (Henderson, 2019). Dancers are still heavily marked by their biological sex, and ballet specifically has strict standards of physical appearance that dancers are expected to strive to meet and maintain; this is especially true for women (Henderson, 2019). It is not uncommon for men and women in dance to be trained separately with the focus on muscle development and specific movements to be divided along gender lines. Women are meant to be gazed at, while men may not physically present or display their bodies without a purpose. In other words, men should not display their bodies unless they are being used to ‘achieve a physical goal’ (such as during a competition, building something with tools, or carrying something heavy demonstrating his strength), and not be used for simply ‘artistic expression’ (Richardson 2018).

Case 2:

Pursuing ballet as a male dancer presents several obstacles or challenges, primarily rooted in societal stereotypes and cultural challenges. Being a male ballet dancer there has always been a misconception in terms of gender. It is perceived that male ballet dancers are gay, especially when they know that it is more incorporated with soft actions than mostly female dancers.

According to Participant 2: *“It's not new. It's not new, especially not old people, like old school people. It's always when you say ballet it's only for females.”*

The participant encountered this challenge, but despite other people's opinions and perceptions, it didn't stop him from continuing to practice ballet. These viewpoints are not novel and are rather typical, particularly for those who are new to the dance industry. The participant then added:

“So when you say ballet, it's more incorporated for the female part. And, well, I can't say it, but there are others who would say that's for gay or something. So when you start ballet, they say you're gay and all.”

The participant stated that he has been affected by the stereotypes and stigmas, especially when he grew up in a very different environment and didn't have the support he wanted. The participant shared:

“So I think, maybe, if challenges, maybe them It's hard to convince when it's your family member.”

A male ballet dancer performing a ‘feminine movement’ is seen as ‘insulting’ to the male body because it challenges the gendered hierarchy that puts men above women (Richardson, 2018). Dancers have the unique ability to be aware of the multiple bodily potentials and challenges and to oppose habitual gendered practices (Ravn, 2017). It is important to note that even though ballet has been deemed to be extremely feminized, we can also observe that ballet has a strong patriarchal structure, making women's movement, bodies, and career advancement the reflection of what men believe women should aspire to on and off stage (Clegg, Owton, & Allen-Collinson, 2018).

Case 3:

Following one's passion for ballet can occasionally result in bullying and social injustice. Dancers from underprivileged origins or those who experience discrimination because of their social standing may confront obstacles along the way. Nonetheless, persistence and self-belief are typically the sources of strength for those who persist.

According to what participant 3 mentioned: *“I will stay strong and fight because I'm proud of myself. I'll just keep in mind that they are just a bully and I'm a fighter.”*

This mindset places a strong emphasis on the value of confidence and self-acceptance in the face of difficulty. People can overcome the hostility and negativity they encounter by accepting who they are as dancers and acknowledging their own values. As the participant added:

“Through time they'll stop if they get to know you.”

The statement made by the participant also implies that bullying frequently results from a lack of understanding and that, over time, forming connections can assist in resolving these problems. The premise that a dancer's success and well-being can be greatly impacted by creating a sense of community and belonging is supported by research. According to a 2019 study by Jones and Smith, dancers who experienced acceptance and encouragement from their mentors and peers were more likely to stick with their training and succeed in their objectives. Furthermore, Doug Risner's study reveals that only 32% of male dancers have father support, highlighting the substantial obstacles boys encounter when showing interest in ballet. Boys who are passionate about dancing may be discouraged from pursuing their interests due to prevailing beliefs on masculinity and masculinity.

Case 4:

When male ballet dancers wear tights, their peers often make fun of them, bully them, and criticize them. Making fun of their attire choices and desire to learn dance is a common issue for young boys, this may be upsetting and depressing. As the participant stated:

"I'm talking about if people would find out you're a ballet dancer, they would tease you, they would berate you, they would bully you."

The statement highlights the harsh reality that male ballet dancers frequently face: they will frequently face judgment and hostility from others who lack knowledge of or appreciation for the art form because of their love and dedication.

To face these kinds of challenges, male dancers must develop a strong sense of resilience and self-confidence. By embracing their identities as dancers and feeling proud of their accomplishments, they may withstand bullying and criticism. According to a study by Haltom and Worthen (2014), male ballet dancers commonly use stigma-management techniques to cope with the challenges of performing in a highly gendered environment. Overcoming negative attitudes and creating a supportive community require resilience. Additionally, research indicates that bullying significantly affects the engagement of male dancers in ballet. According to a recent article in Lewis Magazine by Paul (2023) regarding the challenges experienced by male dancers, many guys give up dancing because they endure harassment because of their masculinity.. Participant 3 then added:

"I don't think it affected me in any way because I was a great star."

Participant 4 stated that achieving success and notoriety as a dancer can mitigate the negative impacts of bullying and criticism. If dancers are able to thrive in their art and get the respect of their peers and the community, bullying might have a less negative impact on them. This is in line with research that demonstrates how support and encouragement from others can boost resilience and self-worth in the face of adversity (Studocu, 2023).

Table 4: Evaluating Community Initiatives for Male Ballet Dancers in Cebu

Case 1	Supportive artistic directors mitigate the lack of formal anti-bias policies at Ballet Center Cebu.
Case 2	Ballet Center Cebu is reviving its outreach programs and or scholarships to attract aspiring dancers and increase ballet participation
Case 3	Support and recruitment for male ballet dancers in Cebu are needed even if it may come from personal initiatives
Case 4	Every ballet community is supportive and passionate about dancers, showing no prejudice.

The fourth table covers the initiatives that the dancers expect to or have observed within the community to enhance inclusivity and support for male ballet dancers

Case 1:

Personal, cultural, and institutional sensitivity is valuable within an artistic environment (Desai, 2021), especially within Ballet Center

Cebu, and how they handle issues related to stereotypes and biases towards male ballet dancers. Support and understanding conveyed through actions and attitudes can overcome the absence of formal documentation or policies. Formal policies might become more pressing as societal expectations and legal frameworks evolve, however, in consideration of the artistic nature of ballet a balance is required between formal regulations and the dynamic, human-centered approaches that foster artistic excellence(Salta et al., 2021).

According to Participant 1: *"We are blessed here with world-class artistic directors who are well assimilated with different cultures and who are really just great individuals in general. So with that, they have always been sensitive to the people, especially their dancers."*

The pursuit of artistic excellence in ballet requires the dancers to adopt different personas, meaning that, while performing, personal identity becomes somewhat irrelevant (Pickard, 2012) making the formulation of such regulation even more unclear or difficult. As such it is reliable to have a leader or an artistic director in this case to play the role of providing a creative environment or a positive space for the male ballet dancers to focus and develop their skills and even their character which is an essential component of performance, irrespective of personal identity (Crabb, 2023). Participant 1 added:

"I think that would be very complicated. Like with acting, you really have to balance yourself. So much of it, much of your thinking should not be on what the audience will feel or what the audience will think, but rather on how you could accomplish your performance."

In performing ballet, The intricate relationship between personal identity and the personas highlighted on stage is highlighted greatly. It is vital to be able to break through the ego in ballet for storytelling purposes. Dancers need to maintain some separation between themselves and the roles they assume. A successful presentation includes taking on roles different from our inner selves which grants individuals license to completely embody their emotional and physical aspects – be it more ruthless or compassionate as required by their role. That separation is not always that simple, however. Dancers are also going to be bringing their own life experiences, emotions, and prejudices with them on stage, which is something that can either add tension to the authenticity of the body or give a constructed house for an audience (Pickard, 2012). The difficulty then becomes having to balance these elements with what is required in ballet.

Case 2:

Outreach programs can develop accessibility to education and essential services for marginalized communities (Admin, 2023). These programs are designed to help students from diverse backgrounds by offering educational support, mentorship, and resources that contribute to their success. The ballet outreach programs are central to Ballet Center Cebu’s efforts to rejuvenate the activity, enabling young men to rediscover dance. Outreach programs have a long history of enabling access to ballet, and the example of demographically popular outreach in Bogo exhibits high interest among men. Thus, scholarships and outreach enable barrier removal and provision of opportunities for those who would otherwise feel excluded.

According to Participant 2: *"Like what happened in Bogo we have a lot of male dancers from Bogo so that was an outreach program*

as well so I think scholarships and outreach programs would help to pull more aspiring dancers to do it.”

Boys are typically discouraged from participating in ballet because of prevalent prejudices, which make it difficult to encourage male dancers (Theiler, 2023). However, following one's passions is crucial to both artistic development and personal fulfillment. Participant 2 added:

“Just do it, don't do it because of the people around you or because yeah the people around you do it for yourself. If you really want to do it or if you really want to go into specifically ballet then do it now rather than regretting it in the future.”

The idea of immediate full scholarships for male applicants to ballet schools is a standout concept. While this practice is not the ultimate solution, it does help break down financial barriers and sends a strong message that male participation is important in ballet. In addition, the Participant mentioned that:

“I myself started this school as a scholar. I didn't pay any penny on that. I just tried and then you know I'm here now so it's small, but I think it's easier if they do it especially I think in the Ballet Center”

Young male dancers particularly draw a great deal of inspiration from the presence of male teachers at Ballet Center Cebu. In order for more people to see themselves as part of the ballet scene, whether that be a young dancer dreaming of being on stage or a potential audience member who could spend countless hours at NYCB performances in years future — representation matters, this change in representation will allow for another layer of stereotypes to be peeled away and all dancers whether it is their first or second career know that they are truly valued (Klien et al, 2024).

Case 3:

The dance community must break through the boundaries concerning the pressure on dancers to conform to stereotypes (*Challenging Stereotypes in Dance.*, n.d.). Having the lack of programs or initiatives to assist young men in taking up professional dancing without having to face such issues is essential to ensure that male dancers would continue to grow interested in joining the ballet society. The community can begin this step with the help of individuals who are within the dance community who also share or have gone through similar issues.

According to Participant 3: *“I will provide if I can do anything about it, I will recruit people to join ballet and help them because it is nice to join a ballet class. You can do a lot of things in ballet like dancing with piano songs, and can also create a dance drama.”*

Focusing on its joyous and diverse side can open doors for more male dancers to get involved in ballet, as well as shift the way society perceives it generally (Theiler, 2023). Nonetheless, it is obvious that personal innovations are insufficient to solve the problems. The ballet establishment needs to apply targeted interventions in favor of its society men. Such as mentorship programs, workshops about male representation in ballet, and initiatives at local schools to create an understanding that dance is an equally beneficial exercise for both girls and boys.

Case 4:

Ballet is a beautiful and powerful art form that should not and cannot be limited to one gender, so it is for everyone who wants to

dance. However, the ballet community is confronted with a very important issue of how to get young boys to embrace dancing without being considered gay (Author, 2024). A good approach towards the elimination of these stereotypes is the male dancer role models. This brings a positive signal to young boys that ballet dancing is not for the female gender only but also for the male gender (Theiler, 2023). There are not many male dancers, and this makes role models very important as they can motivate young males to dance without the fear of being laughed at. Ballet Center has been helpful in availing these role models and a clear indication that the institution has embraced the issue of diversity in the dancers' community for quite some time.

According to Participant 4: *“Of course, we don't exclude people if, if people have a preference and they want to do what they but we tell the new generations the same thing that we were told, that whatever you are, whatever you do. And that's the way that we encourage the next generations.”*

The local ballet culture does not seem to frown upon the idea of male dancers, which is important in fostering their practice. Many studios and companies including the CCP and PBT have shown their support for all dancers and their acceptance of everyone. This shared goal creates a healthy environment that promotes engagement and embraces the dancers' multicultural environment (Roberts et al, 2022). Participant 4 added:

“We want the dancers to come in the environment they're in so that they can do this beautiful craft that we treasure so much. I've seen it everywhere I go, everybody seems to be very supportive of all the male dancers.”

The increase in resources and programs promoting boys in ballet means that there are increasing numbers of people who believe that ballet can be for everyone. The growth of the upcoming male ballet dancers needs to have an environment that will not judge them harshly. In this way, the community can open up to art and enlighten people about the artistic value of ballet, make more boys embrace their passion, and promote the importance of community in supporting such talents.

Conclusion

Gender stereotypes, bias and attacks towards the masculinity of the male ballet dancers are present within the industry but are unfounded within Balletcenter Cebu, however, gender roles are still heavily anticipated. They are perceived traditionally and employed for their masculine features during performance. One's identity and participation in ballet will not be hindered as the community continues to actively support, offer opportunities, increase awareness for male dancers and to emphasize that the profession requires focus towards the physicality and artistry of the dance itself.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the male ballet dancers community to increase awareness and be actively supported in overcoming prejudices and biases. Implement outreach programs and offer scholarships to attract aspiring dancers and promote participation in ballet. Thus, this initiative provides inclusivity and a diverse society in the ballet industry. Gender development and sustainability should be included or implemented within the curriculum to create awareness and educate individuals regarding how to deal, manage, or react towards stereotypes and biases

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