

*Manopoly: The Documentary*

by

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## ABSTRACT

*Manopoly: The Documentary* details the process of creating a 30 minute documentary-style dance film that highlights the diverse experiences of postsecondary education male dance students. The film provides a glimpse into the rehearsal process of *Manopoly*. This is the third iteration of this creative work and is the emphasis for this document. Several arts-based research methodologies, including narrative inquiry, choreography, and filmmaking are used in the process of creating *Manopoly: The Documentary*. Personal and communal interviews are used to provide insight into the experiences of the dance cast. The choreography seeks to embody, and reflect upon, the lived narratives, perspectives, and experiences of young men participating in postsecondary education dance. The written document serves to also articulate what is witnessed in the culminating dance film, expressed in interviews with the cast, and offer an opportunity to re-think, interrogate, question, and enhance preconceived understandings and values towards gender in dance as well as society.

## DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this document to the courageous, phenomenal, unique men who inspired me throughout my entire graduate journey:

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Every instance in which we fail to articulate the significance of teaching, pedagogy, community awareness and engagement, technology, and research that is made possible through dance education contributes to the marginalization of the field”

(Risner, 2010, p.125)

Many of my dance friends, mentors, and colleagues began their dance training at young ages; most started in dance studios before they could even tie their own ballet and jazz shoes. My background in the performing arts was rooted in band and music, so I consider my experience to be quite different. Music was, and continues to be, a large influence on me and my values as a dance performer, artist, and educator. However, as I transitioned from music to dance during my senior year of high school, I became intrigued by the drastic change in mentorship in terms of gender amongst my teachers who were in positions of power and influence. Men held all of the “director” positions in my band career; however, my dance training was nurtured mostly by women. Growing up in band as a performing artist, I experienced much interaction with my band directors and these experiences were instrumental in the ways that I created, questioned, and framed my own identity as a closeted, yet much respected, student.

Since beginning my formal dance training during my senior year of high school at age 17, then obtaining my undergraduate degree in Dance (BA, 2011) at Ball State University, I have always been curious about the social and cultural experiences of other men and boys participating in dance. My professional experiences as a performer and

educator have heightened my interest in investigating the experiences of men participating in dance and how sharing these experiences might deepen discourse in both dance studies and across disciplines. I have also wanted to articulate the familial, social, and cultural histories and perceptions of dance in terms of gender identity and gender equity for men and boys. For me, finding my love for dance “later” in life has caused me to deeply question, advocate for, and contribute to the stories and lived experiences of men and boys participating in dance and the performing arts. Further, my social, cultural, and intellectual experiences as a secondary educator has informed my inquiry into the topic of men who participate in dance.

By investigating “men in dance,” exploring arts-based research methodologies, and by cultivating performance opportunities for male dance majors and non-majors participating in postsecondary education dance, this document serves as a means to critically reflect on my creative research project, *Manopoly: The Documentary*, a documentary-style dance film featuring 16 male dance performers. The documentary is presented in three parts with a culminating dance piece that was choreographed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Various creative practice tools were used in the exploration of concepts within arts-based research methodologies. The three parts are titled:

1. “Authoritarian meets Inclusivity”
2. “Accessibility vs. Heteronormativity”
3. “Experiences With Gender In Dance”

Arts-based research methods (ABR) were used to explore lived experiences through movement during the construction of “Manopoly.” Narrative inquiry was used to generate ideas, emotions, and stories that were embodied through choreography and

performance. Interview discussions with the cast aided in the oral presentation of these experiences. “The greatest benefit in exploring the ABR paradigm in education is in overcoming the biases inherent within the scientific paradigm for generating new knowledge” (Leavy 2017). As I hoped to contribute to research in dance and across other arts disciplines, I wanted to fuse narrative inquiry within the choreographic choices in the culminating dance piece and also highlight these narratives through interviews with the cast. In this document, I will discuss, from my own perspective, the importance and impact of transformative creative practices through the lens of dance. Because I reconsidered what the role of “choreographer” can look like and facilitated the creative process through verbally cueing the dancers to embody their own experiences, the ways in which this project was produced greatly contrasted the methods that I have used in the past when crafting a dance piece. I will share research that supports my knowledge of this topic as well as the outcomes that the dance cast and I discussed.

## **Context**

This project aims to contribute to the existing scholarship and practices in dance studies, dance education, and arts-based research about postsecondary men participating in dance. I studied literature articulating the experiences of men and boys in dance to gain a more salient understanding of the existing scholarship and perspectives. Men and boys in dance is a very broad topic and much of the existing literature lacked clarity about whether men and boys were participating in dance recreationally, as opposed to professionally, and about the settings in which men and boys danced (in a school, studio,



postsecondary education setting). This caused me to further question how creative practice(s) might have an impact on the retention of men and boys in the performing arts.

In my experience, a strong community can be created when people share the common connection of gender. It became important for me to facilitate a rehearsal environment conducive to discussion, exploration, performance, and reflection about oneself and one's values in regards to gender so that the creative process and presentation were authentic and recognizable. For this project, creative practice can be defined as the creation and craftsmanship of original choreography. The culminating dance piece in the documentary is deeply rooted in the authentic representation of each cast member who constructed and developed choreography based on their unique experience(s) participating in dance and other performing arts.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Male Identity in Dance**

There are a variety of gender identities and sexualities found in dance and across disciplines. The literature review for this project explored the perspectives of men and males participating in dance; however, the outcomes of this research do not explicitly focus on one or the other. There is a lack of distinction between male and men in written scholarship within dance and dance education. This is not an insignificant problem because it becomes exclusionary toward gender equity in performance and literature as gender should be seen as a spectrum to include a variety of identities. Literature needs to be pushed to end the language and logics of gender to be more inclusive and not exclude knowingly or unknowingly. I have chosen to use language that reflects the identities expressed from the dance cast for the project; this decision both supports and limits the research of this project.

The complexity of the experiences of men and boys in Western theatrical dance forms continues to be a recurring concern in dance education. Existing research addresses the stigmatization of being a male in dance, the scarcity of boys and men who participate in dance, and the potential privileges that male students receive. Research by Doug Risner calls for the “need to bridge larger concerns about dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity” (Risner 2002). Though dance has become more popular due to shows such as “So You Think You Can Dance” and “Dancing with the Stars” (Li 2011), Rose asserts that “few adolescent males seriously participate in dance” (as cited in Li, 2011, p.17). Further, research into the experiences of adult men participating in

professional and extracurricular dance is lacking. Competitive studio dance businesses often lack male enrollment, and because of this, boys are often prized and given special opportunities or perceived advantages (Herbert 2017; Schupp 2017). Dance scholar Ramsay Burt explains the social, political, and cultural histories of male representation in dance and concludes that the presence of homophobia is still stigmatizing gay and straight males participating in dance today (1995). Burt argues that males participating in dance are experiencing identity crises. Other existing studies examine male dancers or students only from the physical education perspective (Gard, 2003, 2006, 2008; Gard & Meyenn, 2000) or from the perspective of established male dancers (Burt, 1995; Desmond, 2001; Gard, 2001, 2006, 2008; Keyworth, 2001). Past attitudes about men in dance and the limitations of existing research give an opportunity to investigate ways that postsecondary education male dancers experience their art forms and how these experiences may reinforce, or contradict, the narratives discussed in existing research. Considering the existing research about male identity, there are implications of continued social stigmatization and preconceived notions of maleness. Deconstructing notions of male identity within postsecondary dance institutions could offer an opportunity to reshape how the male dancing body is viewed in the field as well as in society.

### **Movement Enhancement Skills**

In his documentary, *Movement Enhancement Skills for Men*, Vincent E. Thomas, Professor of Dance at Towson University and Artistic Director of VTDance, discusses his teaching methods and ways of creating a one-of-a-kind course; the course is open to male students and the learning outcomes are focused on exploring the world through the body.

Students learn movement exercises that incorporate conditioning, strength training, technique, and improvisational exercises. Thomas expresses that he is interested in researching the “notion of being a male and being in the social construct of masculinity” in today’s world. He also states that power and greater awareness of self can be found when social notions of masculinity are deconstructed and opportunities to explore identity are cultivated. Because of this inquiry that seeks to understand constructions of identity, it becomes important to consider what components contribute to male student identity.

The social climate for postsecondary education male dance students is ever evolving and social media, work, dating, family, and technology are small examples of trends that shape the identities of current postsecondary education students. And, with so many technological tools and applications available, constructions and expressions of gender and identity can be impacted in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, scholarship that considers the body and examines movement can be instrumental in deconstructing notions of maleness.

### **[Racial] Identity in Dance**

Mark Anthony Broomfield discusses the need for the voices of queer black men to be expressed within the research of dance studies curricula in Chapter 2 of his dissertation *Black Male Dancers and the Performance of Masculinity On- and Offstage: Bill T. Jones, Desmond Richardson, Dwight Rhoden, and Ronald K. Brown*. Broomfield poses that the effects of homophobia and the cultural histories of Black men have had profound influence on the ways in which Black, queer men have engaged in their

individual sexuality (both hetero and homosexual preferences) and in the ways that they have come to know themselves. These identifiable ways of investigating somatic relationships of Black queer men and their journeys towards finding identity through dance could further interrogate the powerful ways that dance can create space for investigation, examination, and awareness of self-identity. Broomfield argues that there is opportunity for Black queer men to be taken into account in the fields of both dance and the social sciences. In the advancement of dance studies, it is necessary to forefront research on this topic as there are many men who identify as Black, queer, performing artist. Broomfield states that many artists never come into contact with a mentor or educator who shares similar identities. Literature that analyzes the body and movement as the site for discovery can provide an opportunity for greater representation of individuals and identities towards building more inclusivity and diversity in the field of dance.

### **Men in Dance on Film**

There are existing performances that feature men dancing for film. For one example, Rosemary Lee crafts *Melt Down* that showcases 40 men from both professional and nonprofessional dance backgrounds in an outdoor, sight specific, public space. During this piece, Lee stages the large ensemble of men under a tree as they embody the action of *sinking into the ground* throughout the 10 minute performance. There are no implications of overt gender, sexuality, or identity, aside from the fact that only males perform the work. The choreographic choices made in this dance piece suggest that the body can be a place for investigation and research. This work, however, does not showcase any range of emotional expression and further presents an opportunity to

explore men performing for film through the lens of emotional expression and male identity.

*Men* by Victoria Marks is a site specific dance work that features unique ways of interacting through tactile (hand) methods between men and heteronormative social dance aspects in a 20-minute dance for film. The opening 13 minutes of the piece solely features seven men, who are between the ages of 60-70 years, and concludes with male/female partnering in the latter minutes of the piece. Pedestrian movements are highlighted in the choreography and craftsmanship of the work and because of the music heard during the film, the piece can be described as unconventional. Again, seeing the male dancing body through the lens of an “older” age group, provides inquiry into what can be embodied in the postsecondary education male dancing body and contribute further to the lived experiences of the postsecondary education demographic and beyond; in turn, offering an intergenerational perspective to dance.

### ***Manopoly: The Documentary***

To contribute new ideas related to gender and creative practices to a variety of disciplines my hope for *Manopoly: The Documentary* is to provide relevant insight about the lived experiences of postsecondary education male students participating in dance. Because of the technological advantages that creating a film can have, it was my hope to reach a larger audience, specifically dance educators, parents, and society at large, to encourage understanding and support for male participation in dance and the performing arts. The rehearsal and production processes brought forth a myriad of data about the narratives of the cast and will hopefully advance my goal of articulating the experiences

of young men participating in postsecondary dance and the impacts of social, communal, and familial support and acceptance.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **The original intent**

“Men in dance” is a topic that involves a broad range of individuals with various perspectives, ideologies, and recognition. The original purpose of this project involved looking at my own struggles as an artist, educator, and graduate student to see how I might evoke emotionality, in a male gendered form, to bring attention to, and reaction from, an audience. Men and boys participating in dance on stage inherently means something and I wanted to speak to an audience from a perspective of sincerity, power, entertainment, and innovation.

In my first semester of graduate school, I was immediately thrown into creating work for the Fall Graduate Project Presentations. Being new to the Arizona dance community, I questioned how I might voice my artistic values in the realm of concert dance. Not knowing the dancers who were auditioning to be part of the concert, I decided to cast all of the men who auditioned regardless of ability and experience. For further context, during this time I was also choreographing for the ASU Color Guard, so I made the decision to also cast any men from this group of collegiate performers who were interested in participating in the dance concert. 15 men were involved in the first iteration of “Manopoly” and this began my deeper research interest into the topic of postsecondary education male dancers.



## **Arts-based Research and Narrative Inquiry**

In order to explore my ideas about constructions of male identity, dance, and filmmaking, I drew upon several arts-based research methodologies, including narrative inquiry, choreography, and dance for film. Arts-based research (ABR) can be defined as a “transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that combines the creative arts in research context”; this process of inquiry involves researchers engaging in art making as a way of knowing (Leavy 2018). ABR recognizes that art is able to demonstrate and provide truths or bring about awareness across multiple contexts and also provides opportunities for artists to present their findings in performative ways. Facilitating an environment conducive to allowing the dancers to embody their own stories (research) through movement was an important facet in building the choreographic elements of this project.

“Narrative Inquiry,” or narrative research, is a way of providing story through the lived experience (narrative) of others; it is “the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin 2006). These stories can be learned from individuals, communities, or those belonging to pre-established groups. Narrative research aims to provide the real life, lived experiences and circumstances of others as a means of improving, or shedding light upon, predetermined research situations. Many tools can be used to collect narrative research data including personal journals, photographs, family interviews, stories, and field notes. Documenting the narratives of each of the dance cast became vital in keeping this project authentic and meaningful.

The chapter “Living, Moving, and Dancing: Embodied Ways of Inquiry,” written by Celeste Snowber in the *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, provides perspective on

how “dance and movement embedded in the physicality of our humanness and humility can be a place of inquiry” (Leavy 2017, p. 261). I became very interested in how embodiment would be displayed throughout the creative process of producing *Manopoly*. Snowber poses this question: “what happens if we dance, then write, and let our breath and blood be transformed to ink?” (p. 256). Many times, especially within dance, the true voices of performers can be lost because they only express their ‘voice’ when performing on the stage. Looking at the body as a continual place of inquiry makes this form of ABR effective in producing relevant and inclusive scholarship within the performing arts pageantry. Human experience within dance and movement studies faces the burden of being unable to be reproduced. Inquiry that facilitates narrative allows this unconventional method of gathering data to hold esteem amongst other phenomenological and epistemological discourse.

### **Building the Narrative/Interviews**

When we began creating movement for the culminating dance film, experiences with gender were at the forefront of what I wanted the dancers to illustrate through movement. At the first rehearsal I led the dancers through a writing exercise that had them articulate their unique perspectives and experiences with gender and how their participation in dance in postsecondary educational contexts influenced their constructions of gender. The dancers were limited to one sentence responses to each of the prompts, and they began constructing movement solos based off of the three responses that resonated with them individually. I did not interfere in what material was selected for the dancers as they produced their solo work. The dancers submitted their

one sentence responses and continued to use these responses in rehearsals to develop their solo material.

I used interviews and discussions as part of a mixed methods research approach during the creative and filmmaking process. The interviews section of *Manopoly* serves as an oral response of discoveries that the cast made during the choreographic process and also as an articulation of their experiences with gender in social, communal, and familial contexts. With two cast members at a time, I conducted 10-15 minute discussions about their experiences participating in dance. We talked about dancing at young ages, in social settings, and in the postsecondary educational setting and how each of those experiences affected their values or ideas about male participation in dance. Because of the large cast, including each cast member's responses in the documentary would have been quite excessive. As a result, my position as choreographer for the film became extremely important in the editing process. I listened to each of the conversations with an ear to catch the salient information that offered relevant, 21st century perspectives on the lived experiences of dancers in postsecondary education. I learned that male dancers have a lot to say and that when given the opportunity to take part in a discussion about their experiences participating in dance, rich emotions and reflective thinking manifest in the stories shared.

### **Creative Process**

Beginning "Manopoly" during a pandemic with a large cast, while holding safety at the forefront, was equally stressful and rewarding. On one hand, the ever-changing rules and protocols for rehearsing in a studio space caused me to think outside of the box

in many new ways. I considered the boxes on the floor that were now the barrier of space we were confined to move in to follow safety protocols. I looked at the tall, open space that we were able to rehearse in on campus- FAC 122, the “Dance Laboratory” for the ASU Dance program; the rehearsal space had a balcony where I was able to choreograph dynamic travel patterns for the dancers individually and for the ensemble as a whole. Because I would film our rehearsals from the balcony, which gave me a bird’s eye view, I began to consider the formations and facings of the dancers even more as they transitioned throughout the piece while still trying to reveal a narrative.

The original narrative for *Manopoly* was simply to show “the struggle.” I was unsure what the “struggle” was for myself, so I relied on the dance cast to embody what this word meant for each them. What kinds of emotions did hearing this word bring? What qualities of this word did they seem to find in their movement? Had they ever experienced a “struggle” and what was that experience like? As I began to facilitate these explorations through guided prompts, *Manopoly* began to take shape. One of the prompts asked “How is the male gender viewed in dance?” With this, and other prompts, I would ask the dancers to start creating solo movement that embodied their individual narratives of past experiences. I wanted them to begin embodying experiences with gender and identity and had them reflect on social, familial, and cultural interactions related to these ideas in their movement.

Due to Covid-19 protocols, verbally sharing experiences (without fear of losing the limited rehearsal times) had to be condensed and embodying these narratives proved to be a viable option of expression. I directed the dancers in numerous ways to produce solo choreography that would eventually translate into the transitional phrase work of the

piece. The dancers contributed a large variety of choreography that displayed percussive, staccato dynamics and also elements of stillness and lingering. This caused me to critically think about how I might highlight this movement variety throughout the piece. My beginning phrase work for the ensemble asked that they explore an element of “shaking” to represent a struggle. Even for me, embodying this displayed my own vulnerability through movement. I was unsure if “shaking” might give an audience an initial access point into the narrative of the piece. It was in this moment that I constructed the walking “prologue,” a section of the piece in which the lead dancer embodied such ideas as waking up in the morning, having a dance party on Apple Music, and then embodying what can be experienced in a day: washing laundry, stepping in a puddle, calling a friend or family member.



My experiences with anxiety as a professional dance artist and educator also impacted the construction of this dance piece. It was in my excitement and anxiety for one of the dance rehearsals with the cast that I woke myself up out of bed at 11:23pm in a panic of how I would be able to bring this piece to life. I used this moment to both relax my own soma and consequently ended up adding 11 + 23 together which inspired the 34-

step walking pattern that the dancers execute at the beginning of the piece around the solo dancer to create the opening tension.



When I thought about how I might get away from crafting a dance piece rich with codified movement for the audience, I kept the challenge presented by influential faculty members in mind as I experimented with different approaches to movement generation. I was moved to consider how the ensemble work that I created for the entire cast could be accessible, dynamic, and achievable within a cast of diverse movement styles and histories. These considerations were helpful as I negotiated how to expand my own choreographic approaches and also honor my personal interests and artistic impulses. I found myself wanting to use the ensemble portions of the piece as moments for the audience to begin creating a narrative. Watching each of the dancers individually rise up out of the “shaking” gesture was my interpretation of advancing out into the world, only to be stricken with social objectifications, familial obligations, and cultural expectations that are not always in alignment with individual beliefs or values. The exploration of these ideas was an inspiration and helped me find the message that I wanted to portray in the piece.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA AND DISCOVERIES

#### **Themes**

Several themes emerged as a result of the interviews with the dance cast and were featured in the third portion of the documentary. Overlap in perspectives of “Definitions of Masculinity,” “Postsecondary Dance Education Significance,” and “Dance and Community” were the three resonating themes discovered in the interviews.

**Definitions of Masculinity.** A major theme expressed in the interviews were ideas about masculinity and how it can be defined. Looking at masculinity (and femininity) as a spectrum presents a challenge to societal notions of masculinity that are based in showcasing strength and power. One member of the cast stated that dance gives them freedom to explore the spectrum of masculinity and femininity. Contrasting this argument, another cast member stated that men are so often seen having to support women which can diminish self-expression and exploration of identity in dance.

**Postsecondary Dance Education Significance.** Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the impact of academic dance for male dancers in postsecondary dance education. One member expressed how men and boys participating in dance is still unbalanced with many young men still beginning their journey in dance “later” in life, which often means in the postsecondary educational setting. Another cast member states that postsecondary education dance gives space for the exploration of gender through movement. Consequently, the interviews also reveal that perceptions of participating in “academic dance” can provide validity to the art form for family members and non-dancers who might have preconceptions about what the field can provide.

**Dance and Community.** A final theme that resulted from the interviews was how dance can create a strong community for individuals of varying backgrounds and histories. *Manopoly* connected male-identifying individuals and the creative process created space for cast members to explore gender and identity in dance through movement and discussion. One dancer expressed that *Manopoly* gave an opportunity for the dance cast to speak (through movement) and challenge perceptions of what “men” are. The interviews, creative process, and culminating dance piece showcase the dancers’ exploration of their values and the significance of their individual artistic voices in dance.

### **Discoveries**

I had many discoveries as both an artist and educator when crafting the culminating documentary of *Manopoly*. For one, I learned how impactful it can be to facilitate a space for male voices to be heard both orally and through movement. The interviews gave a variety of perspectives for audience members of all backgrounds to gain a true understanding of the stigmas and preconceptions that are evident when male-identifying individuals participate in dance.

The ways that the creative process can be witnessed was another discovery that I made. My love for narrative as a choreographer was now embodied in the way that I structured the documentary film. The beginning of the film was constructed to capture and sustain the attention of the audience by immediately displaying men performing dance on stage. Dividing the documentary into “parts” was a choice that I made to give an accessible structure to the pace and flow of the film. The culminating dance piece was



unconsciously demonstrating traits of myself, as a choreographer, for film. Each of these discoveries have brought validity to the ways that I see myself as a dance artist.

As an educator, I realize the absolute need for more representation in the literature and discourse about men and boys in dance. As a BIPOC and LGBTIA+ male dancer, the inclusion and representation of the narratives of men and boys of all backgrounds and histories is necessary to gain a true scope of the field; especially within Western concert dance forms. The interviews section of the documentary provided an opportunity for me to contribute to the representation of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ male dancers participating in postsecondary dance. Following the framework of Broomfield's research, my interests remain heightened in the ways that I am able to facilitate deep communal discussions about race in dance and how this discourse can further advance dance studies. Race holds a position and is inevitably inherent in dance and society. Facilitating a space that allowed the dancers to articulate and embody social and communal experience through choreography and interviews was important to me from the onset of creating *Manopoly*.

The creative process of *Manopoly* resonates with me most as I discovered that I could be *more* than a choreographer for the dance cast. I could not have imagined that through facilitating a space for individual and communal exploration, the culminating dance piece would have emerged. Discovering that a true community had been established through the creative process emphasizes that this project was *more* than just "dance."

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS

#### **Did *Manopoly* spark conversation about men and boys participating in dance?**

Was *Manopoly* was successful in offering an opportunity to rethink the ways that we construct ideals and values about gender? From my experience presenting this documentary film in a virtual modality, I would say yes. At the completion of both performances of *Manopoly: The Documentary*, I hosted a 30 minute Q&A session via Zoom. On both nights, critical reflection about men and boys in dance sparked conversation. Re-thinking how society perceives males participating in dance was a major theme that emerged on both nights of the performance.

I took notes during both nights of the Q&A sessions to recall specific ideas and statements shared from those who witnessed the documentary film. One audience member expressed how emotional they felt after seeing and hearing about the experiences of males participating in dance and later witnessing them embody their experiences through movement; they, too, had participated in dance for over 10+ years, yet had never considered the perspective of men and boys. This response to the documentary film proves that dance, through the lens of narrative inquiry, can cause an audience to re-think, question, and deconstruct social and societal stigmatizations about gender and constructions of identity because of the critical reflection and response shared in the Q&A session.

Another member from the audience, who had been involved in the first iteration of *Manopoly*, commented their appreciation for the “representation amongst the cast.” They acknowledged the equality in costuming, time “on stage,” and space created for all

of the cast members involved in the film. Having a viewer comment about seeing values of community throughout the film supports the conversation that can be sparked after experiencing dance choreographed with arts-based research methodologies.

### **Performer success**

The cast members expressed many thoughts and praises that support the success of this documentary film. The ability to be expressive in ways that are unique to each individual was a theme shared from many of the performers. For me, this was the greatest affirmation of this project. During one of the Q&A sessions, there was a comment about the commitment and high level of performance that was demonstrated by each of the performers during the culminating dance piece. This statement aids in the support of this project; it is exciting for any performer to receive praise and accolade for the effort, time, and artistry that they contribute to a new work. I am continually in awe of the growth and success that I have witnessed in each of the performers, and within myself, throughout each iteration of *Manopoly*.

The cast members themselves expressed their appreciation and unforeseen dedication to a project that gave them a unique opportunity for real ownership during the production process. During the interviews shown in the dance film, “Tanner” offers the analogy that in the first iteration the cast acted as a pack of “lions” fighting to show their dominance amongst themselves; however, in reflection of the final dance piece, he discusses the community and commitment that he was able to experience during the creative process and performance of this work.

## Personal Success

I reflect on my personal growth as an educator, artist, and male-identifying person during the course of creating *Manopoly: The Documentary*. Acknowledging the pandemic, which left many artists unable to create work, the opportunity to remain an art-maker and produce work was truly a genuine experience that causes me to view this project as a success. As an artist, I was able to grow in my ways of constructing a dance piece. Spatially, I had to keep the dancers “distanced” due to following the ever-changing COVID protocols. Physically, I was able to guide the dance cast through somatic prompting that helped each member find their unique movement vocabulary informed by their lived experiences participating in dance. This, in turn, helped me steer clear of movements that were overchoreographed and therefore not relevant to my approach to creating the culminating dance piece and also helped me to distill my ideas. Musically, I leaned on my musical background to help in the pacing and phrasing of the dance piece.

As an educator, I have been able really honor (and showcase) my values of community, diversity, and inclusivity facilitating the opportunity for these postsecondary education dancers to move and interact with one another. The process of creating *Manopoly* was much more than simply a space for the cast to ‘dance’ in my experience and this was truly rewarding for me as an educator.

As a male-identifying person, I have gained so much more knowledge, understanding, and empathy towards others like myself who participate in dance. As a Black and queer male dancer, I have learned the importance of sharing my experience in dance in order to advance the field. Again, sharing this experience with male dancers in postsecondary education caused me to develop and identify my values related to own

gender and identity. It is without a doubt that this experience helped me re-think my own constructions of male identity in dance and society.

### **Research Success**

There are a variety of dimensions and perspectives to consider when talking about men in boys participating in dance. I did have to edit and limit some of the ways that I looked at taking on this project; however I feel that the data that was discovered throughout the process supported the success of this project. As this project evolved from beginning to end, I was able to see the accessibility that it might be able to provide to an audience outside of the “normal” proscenium concert theatre. This was the greatest success for my personal artistic journey because it allowed audience members to take part in discussions and meaningful ways to reflect about the ways that gender has been, and continues to be, perceived within society, community, and family.

A strength of this project was deconstructing gender from a theoretical perspective and also in performance. Looking back at how arts-based research methodology, specifically narrative inquiry, can be used within a dance context, I see success in how I used the interviews to create the culminating dance piece. Having each of the dancers share their experiences, both verbally and physically, supports the relevancy of transformative creative practices including arts-based research approaches. Authenticity and individuality in a communal setting led the research for this project and both contributed to the success of the documentary film.

I now consider the implications that social, familial, and communal assumptions have on the lived experiences of men and young boys participating in dance. This has

broadened the ways that I advocate for and support other males participating in dance. Because of the themes that arose from the research and data of this project, I remain interested in more exploration on the topic of postsecondary education male dance experiences.

### **Limitations and Challenges**

A limitation of this project was time. The choreography created for this piece required development and genuine care from the cast. I am extremely pleased with what resulted from the 60-75 minute rehearsals each week but I consider what could have resulted from a deeper exploration of movement and experience during the creative process. The time frame for completing this project caused me to push the progress of the piece forward at each rehearsal and took away a small portion of “play” as the piece developed.

Further, scheduling a time to shoot the film with such a large cast and filmmaker to adhere to everyone’s schedules caused all of the filming to take place in two days. We spent two hours recording all of the interviews on one day. A week later, we recorded the culminating dance film in three hours. Working with a master filmmaker was truly inspirational but required a large portion of the budget for this project. This limited the amount of time that we had to capture all of the content of the dance film; one dancer from the cast is not featured in the “interviews” section of the film due to conflicts in schedules.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*Manopoly: The Documentary* investigated the lived experiences of male dance performers in postsecondary education. The 30-minute documentary film is shown in 3 parts and reflects on social, familial, and communal experiences with gender and how participating in dance has supported constructions of gender. Part I addressed how I, through dance, was able to lay the foundations of my own pedagogical and choreographic process to highlight inclusivity in dance and the value of non-authoritarian dance practices. Part II discussed the implications of heteronormativity and accessibility that I have encountered in dance and how these implications present a variety of opportunities for discussion about the need to re-think how gender roles are viewed in dance. Part III reflected upon the experiences with male gender in dance directly from the cast. As I began investigating how a dance cast might embody the narratives revealed from each of the cast members, the documentary culminates with a dance for film made to question, advocate, and contribute to the stories of the lived experiences of men and boys participating in dance while facilitating a space for an audience to have meaningful discussion about the topic.

Considering my role as the director of this project and the ways in which I could build and support a community of men in dance through the process of *Manopoly*, I have been able to find the value in sharing my lived experience, and the narratives of others, as gender continues to propel conversation within the field. Men in Dance has gained a lot of attention and this project has provided a perspective that gives equal opportunity for lessons to be learned to not only dancers and dance scholars, but also across disciplines

and in society. I understand that I must allow gendered language to distinguish between embodied knowledge and what is socially assumed. This will expand the language barrier that is so often found in social, communal, and familial settings. Moving forward I think about how I might be able to push the context and content of my choreography to include, embody, and represent different kinds of gender in both performance as well as written scholarship.

*Manopoly: The Documentary* can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/if65vLHunUs>





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