

2009

## Architects of the identity of dance: Gender inequity in achievement and acknowledgment in Australian contemporary dance

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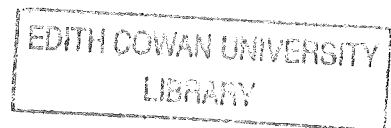
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Architects of the Identity of Dance: Gender Inequity in Achievement and  
Acknowledgment in Australian Contemporary Dance



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The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that males receive more opportunities, awards and dominate the dance scene in terms of artistic directorship of high visibility, large budget contemporary dance companies within Australia. This research investigates why and how males have come to be the architects of the identity of dance and the factors which may inhibit a counterpart female's likelihood of assuming the same role. Much of this paper deals with constructing hypotheses for how gender disparities in contemporary dance may have come about. In order to devise informed hypotheses, I have gathered data on government funding and national dance awards. In addition interviews were carried out with various dance artists to provide further insight. This information appears throughout this paper combined with findings from previous studies and articles from organisations such as The Gender Project. My research reveals that various factors can contribute to a male/female dance artist's career progression. Factors such as the attention and opportunities given to male dancers during their training, socialisation processes, the pressure and/or desire to fill traditional roles and the different ways males and females can be portrayed and perceived. In response to these findings a series of 'suggested solutions' have been explored in order to achieve greater gender balance. These 'solutions' involve recommendations for dance educators, choreographers, training and supporting organisations, presenters and the dance community which, in turn, reflect on the greater society. Although these 'solutions' are beneficial guidance points, in my opinion, it will still take some time before equality is achieved as change involves shifting society's overall attitudes towards dance and gender.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Gary Barnes, Bridgette Van Leuven, Nick Hughes, Cassandra Lake, Marni Hentschke, Philip Channells, Pam Lee and Agnes Michelet for their knowledge and assistance when compiling funding figures.

To the three interviewees for their time, patience and insight.

To Joanna Mendl Shaw and The Gender Project for providing their invaluable research articles which have contributed significantly to my research.

To Maggi Phillips for her continual guidance and support throughout this daunting endeavour.

To my parents for their support, patience and IT facilities.

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## **Chapter 1: Introducing the Issue**

Evidence suggests that males receive more opportunities, awards and dominate the dance scene in terms of artistic directorship of high visibility, large budget contemporary dance companies within Australia. Therefore they are the individuals with the “power in terms of the identity of dance in Australia ... the work we’re sending out is currently most often male generated, which does not reflect the body of the workers” (A personal communication, June 15, 2009). Through my research, I have been investigating why and how males have come to be the architects of the identity of dance and the factors which may inhibit a counterpart female’s likelihood of assuming the same role. Much of this paper deals with constructing hypotheses for how gender disparities in contemporary dance may have come about. In doing so, I make generalisations and feel it is important to acknowledge that I by no means assume that every individual within a gender group is exposed to the same set of experiences. Also, in taking into consideration the many factors that influence the career paths of males and females in dance, I note that it is not always a simple matter of bias or sexism toward one gender or the other that influences a particular situation.

### **Complexity of Gender Balance**

Gender balance is a highly complex issue with many factors influencing and contributing to how gender operates in the contemporary dance field. We must take into account factors such as the limited positions available to all dancers when they move from training to employment, the difficulties of parents sending their young boys off to dance schools, the appeal of physical prowess and the tendency for many young women to comply with gender stereotypes and later there is, of course, childbearing. Furthermore, the point is not to advocate that females outnumber males in the professional scene as they do in the amateur environment but rather to interrogate the equity of acknowledgment and opportunities as there are available from the evidence. While equal opportunities and treatment for both genders is preferable, I do accept that many factors must be taken into account when trying to achieve this ideal. For example, males often start dancing later in

life and therefore are usually at a lower technical standard to the females in the initial stages of development. They, consequently, require different treatment from the teacher. If we were to treat male dancers the same as their female counterparts, would we be giving them the same opportunity to succeed? Therefore, it is not just the promotion of female artists that I am concerned with but, rather, how the endeavour of equality might be achieved.

### Necessity for Gender Balance

Gender disparities, in any field, show imbalance and, in some cases, hint towards strong biases people may hold towards one gender. Inequity can contribute to feelings of insignificance and reinforces inappropriate models for the treatment of men and women. In some fields of work, the gender imbalance may have occurred due to the different interests men and women hold and one sex may not be drawn to that activity. Unfortunately, this is not the case for women in contemporary dance. There are thousands of aspiring female dancers, choreographers and artistic directors who have not reached the same places as their male counterparts. If art is to reflect society, it is necessary to have each gender substantially represented. Women and men can have different perceptions as well as different movement qualities, so it is important to have the work of both genders produced, seen and recognized. Gender balance, in terms of artistic directors of high profile companies, is important in order to assert the value of the work of both genders and to generate a more accurate representation of the Australian contemporary dance scene and society in general.

### Gender Inequality

In a field where the ratio of women to men is close to twenty to one, it seems it is the males who are more likely to achieve ideal success in the form of artist directorship of a high profile company (Board of Studies, 2008). Although this may be the case, it is important to recognize that even though men may be leading the major contemporary companies, women hold strong positions in the fields of dance education and independent

dance. While women may not hold the 'top jobs' and therefore have less direct influence on the identity of Australian culture, they still yield considerable power and influence within the contemporary dance scene. When I refer to women and men assuming the position of artistic directorship of a high visibility dance company, I acknowledge that they may come to fill this job description through appointment (Garry Stewart, Australian Dance Theatre) or because a company they are currently directing receives a considerable funding boost (Stephen Page, Bangarra). Although these are considerably different pathways, the results are the same, and for those who head these companies success can be seen as a reflection on whose work society substantially values, acknowledges and rewards. The success of males in the dance field has been attributed to several factors. The ones that will be focused on for this paper come under the headings of accumulation of advantage, socialisation processes, traditional roles and perceptions and portrayals. In order to formulate these categories and the ideas presented within them, past studies and writings on the topic of gender inequality in dance have been sourced.

### Research Methodology

In order to gain more information relevant to gender in dance within Australia, I have collected statistics on company funding and award recipients. To determine who is receiving recognition in the form of financial support and if in fact there are fewer women in charge of major dance companies, I have sourced figures from the Australia Council and state arts funding bodies i.e. Arts SA, Arts NSW and so forth. I have used data from the financial year 2007-08 as these were the most recent statistics available at the time of research. However, this does mean that several new artistic directors have been appointed and the landscape of Australian dance has changed somewhat since the timeframe driving these statistics. As another means by which to identify who is receiving recognition, I have sourced information from Ausdance to determine who has been a recipient of a national dance award. This information has proved an indication of what acknowledgment men and women are receiving in dance and the roles that they most often assume. This information gathered from the Australia Council, state arts organisations and Ausdance has provided an adequate yet limited depiction of the Australian dance scene. I do not show the funding

companies receive from private, corporate and other sources or discuss further awards and sources of recognition. Also, I have only looked at *companies* which receive funding from the Australia Council and affiliated State arts body, exceeding \$100,000. However, other organisations such as Dancehouse and Strut are highly active within the dance scene. Due to the fact that I have chosen to focus on these companies, the data I present would seem to indicate that men outnumber women in the role of artistic director. However, female artistic directors are highly prevalent in lower budget organisations.

In order to further extend my research and understanding, I conducted interviews with three different dance artists: who are referred to as A, B and C. These individuals were selected due to their different backgrounds and the variety of roles they have and currently do assume in the dance field. I do acknowledge that there is a limitation on this research in terms of the small number of interview candidates (with only one male), which only provides a degree of insight into this topic and cannot account for everyone's experiences in dance. However, as these artists are at different stages in their careers, I feel this increases the scope of our discussions and provides perspectives from different viewpoints. In order to identify why females may be less likely to head high visibility dance companies I have combined information gathered from these interviews and referenced existing articles and studies from America and England that offer various theories on this subject.

### Existing Research

Unfortunately I have been unable to find direct research on the subject of gender inequity in dance within Australia, so within that limitation, I feel the American model for contemporary dance is similar enough to the Australian situation to suggest that their concerns resonate with our own. Therefore I have referenced research material from America. I do acknowledge that the statistics from these studies by no means speak for the Australian contemporary dance scene; however discussions generated by these studies raise issues and questions that hold common relevance. The beginning of this line of research can be identified as a study on gender inequities in dance conceived by Wendy Perron and Stephanie Woodard. Together, they wrote an article published in *The Village*

Voice in 1976 entitled "When a Woman Dances, Nobody Cares". This article has provided crucial information on the subject of gender inequities and has formed the key stone for following research articles. Writer, Apollinaire Scherr, references the work of Perron and Woodard in an article entitled "Dance; Making a Career with one eye on a Gender gap". She describes their Village Voice article as presenting a "...statistical comparison of men and women in dance. While women constituted the majority of choreographers, dancers, administrators, teachers and students, men reaped a disconcerting proportion of prizes and opportunities" (Scherr, 2001, para. 12).

Continuing along this line of research, New York City based dancer/choreographers Joanna Mendl Shaw and Janis Brenner founded the Gender Project in 1998. It was formed in order to "...facilitate constructive dialogue about gender and explore career strategies for women as artists" (Dance/NYC(A), para. 1). The project "conducted statistical research on gender representation on major dance series, college teaching faculties, choreographic commissions, artistic directorships and the ratio of men to women in college dance departments" (Dance/NYC(A), para. 3). The Gender Project also generates "panel discussions on gender issues" and "presents facilitated discussions on gender issues" at various college campuses and several American College Dance Festivals (Dance/NYC(A), para. 4). Their research revealed that:

If you look at the vast majority of artistic directors of major companies, they are men. And this boils down to money. If you're looking at an annual budget of \$100,000 or under, there are plenty of women. Any time you're looking over \$500,000 to \$1 million, you're definitively looking at a male artistic director. (Joanna Mendl Shaw in Meeks, n.d. para. 8)

In addition to their statistical findings, the Gender Project raised discussion and formulated answers to the questions of: why more funding goes to men; why male choreography is more likely to be presented; and what roles men and women take on in the dance field. Having answered these questions, the group formulated a series of 'solutions', suggesting ways in which to achieve greater gender equality. In 2001, the group produced a work

entitled “Women Hitting the Wall featuring soloists whose work is framed by a narrator who reads the statistics on gender disparity in the dance field and grapples with the questions those statistics provoke” (Dance/NYC(A), para. 5).

Also in 2001, Apollinaire Scherr wrote an extensive article for the *New York Times* entitled “Dance; Making a Career with One Eye on a Gender Gap”. As part of the article Scherr reviews Ellis Wood’s new work “Funktionslust Slut” which presents a “homage to modern dance’s early pioneers and a deliberate if elliptical response to the endemic humiliations of women in today’s modern dance” (2001, para. 5). The article incorporates an interview with Ellis Wood (the choreographer) and observations of the work which reflects the topic of gender inequity in dance. Scherr further delves into this topic employing statistical information to display the financial inequity that exists for females in the American dance scene. She states that men:

...Receive substantially more financial backing than women. In 2000, 18 modern-dance choreographers, ages 35 to 50, received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts...Thirteen of the 18 recipients were men. The men received a total of \$200,000, with a typical grant of \$10,000; the women received a total of \$45,000, with a typical grant of \$5,000. Grant recipients are also the choreographers whom the nationally known performance spaces present and produce: if one has the financing, it’s easier to get produced, and vice versa. (Scherr, para. 14)

Also contributing to this field of knowledge is head of Research and Information at Dance/USA, John Munger, who compiled information on gender ratios in the professional dance scene within America. In his study, Munger “cited figures gleaned from 2002 census data and tax forms revealing that among 59 major ballet and modern dance companies, 45 were led by men; ten by women and four by mixed partnerships” (Daeko, K, 2004, para. 4). His research also shows a strong correlation between finances and gender:



Companies with budgets of under \$100,000 have/employ equal numbers of male and female dancers. For companies with budgets over \$100,000 the numbers begin to shift; and with budgets of over \$500,000 and the number of female directors become sparse. Companies with budgets over a million and you can count the female directors on one hand. (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication, March 8, 2009)

Munger's data has been utilised by The Gender Project to further increase the industry's awareness of gender inequality. Munger, Mendl Shaw and Brenner have offered theories as to how and why this slant in gender ratios has occurred, this being some of the more relevant and insightful information in terms of my studies within the Australian scene.

More recently, in May of 2009, Charlotte Higgins penned an article for *The Guardian* entitled "Dance world 'Failing to Celebrate Women'". Her article looks at how the success of women in dance may be affected by factors such as society's admiration of men, the possible lack of assertiveness of women, the choice by females to start a family and the media's positive portrayal of men in dance. Just after this article was published, Laura Collins-Hughes wrote an article entitled "Why the 'Best' are so Often Male" (2009). Although, both articles raise the concern that the dance world is promoting and celebrating men over women, Collins-Hughes chooses to focus on equality of treatment and opportunity provided to both genders within the dance field. She raises a number of interesting questions in order to highlight the possible discrepancies that may exist:

Are women given a fair shake along the way? Do they get those early commissions? Do experienced choreographers take them under their wing? Are artistic directors, male and female, willing to show a little faith in them? Or is that just for the guys? It's not that women require special treatment; it's that they frequently don't get the same treatment that men do -- not even in the arts, an area perceived by the culture at large as feminine. (Collins-Hughes, para 9)

These questions and many others raised by the above researchers and writers have been intrinsically link to my research and represent some of the more relevant and insightful information in terms of my studies within the Australian scene.

**Chapter 2: Gender Inequality within Australia**

**Funding**

In terms of the Australian scene, statistically, results of the 2008 funding rounds (Australia Council and state arts bodies) show a correlation with John Munger and the Gender Project’s findings within the USA. Companies with funding exceeding one million were all headed by men and only when funding amounts drop between \$1million but above \$250,000 do we see the number of female and male artistic directors balance out. Interestingly enough, when it comes to companies receiving funding on the lower end of the scale, between \$100,000 and \$250,000, the list is dominated by female artistic directors.

These amounts are a combination of funds received by companies within 2008 from the Australia Council (overall company funding and project specific) and the state specific government funding bodies (overall funding only) but does not include private, corporate or other funding.

Table 1. Companies to receive funding exceeding \$1 million.

Company	Funding Received	Director	Gender
Sydney Dance Company	\$4,017,111	Graeme Murphy	Male
Bangarra Dance Theatre	\$1,702,317	Stephen Page	Male
Australian Dance Theatre	\$1,286,290	Garry Stewart	Male
Chunky Move	\$1,201,017	Gideon Obarzanek	Male

Table 2. Companies to receive funding between \$500, 000 and \$1 million.

Dancenorth	\$777,565	Gavin Webber	Male
Expressions Dance Company	\$588,995	Maggi Sietsma	Female
Leigh Warren and Dancers	\$549,363	Leigh Warren	Male

Table 3. Companies to receive funding between \$250,000 and \$500,000.

Buzz Dance Theatre	\$470,780	Felicity Bott	Female
Tracks	\$449,650	Tim Newth and David McMicken	Male
Tasdance	\$370,000	Annie Greig	Female
Lucy Guerin	\$291,483	Lucy Guerin	Female
QL2	\$267,025	Mark Gordon	Male
BalletLab	\$259,626	Phillip Adams	Male
Force Majeure	\$250,000	Kate Champion	Female

Table 4. Companies to receive funding between \$100,000 and \$250,000

Stompin Youth Dance Co.	\$233,398	Becky Hilton	Female
Restless Dance Company	\$194,285	Ingrid Voorendt	Female
Kage Physical Theatre	\$150,000	Kate Denborough and Gerard Van Dyck	Mixed
De Quincey Company	\$127,200	Tess De Quincey	Female

These tables have been tabulated from reports generated by State arts bodies and the Australia Council for 2008.

(Australia Council, 2008, Arts SA, Arts NSW, Arts ACT, Arts Vic, Arts Queensland, Arts Tasmania, Arts NT, QL2, Australian Dance Theatre, Restless Dance Theatre, Leigh Warren and Dancers, Buzz Dance Theatre, Steps Youth Dance Company)

The five companies to receive the highest funding from government sources in 2008, all had male artistic directors at the time of application review. In terms of ratios, women account for just under half of artistic directors of companies to receive funding exceeding \$100,000. However, although this would indicate an approximate balance, in terms of total funding allocated, male artistic directors received four times as much as their female counterparts. Companies headed by men were allocated \$10, 509, 964, while the companies headed by women received a total of \$2,526,141. Funding allocation can provide an indication of how much recognition and value is placed on a company and, by association, on its artistic directorship.

### Artistic Directors and their Relationship to Funding

It is important to acknowledge the relationship between an artistic director and the receipt of funding. How do these companies come to receive this financial support? Do males produce better work, do they write better submissions or are they more assertive? There are many factors that can affect the amount of funding an organisation receives and, in large companies although the artistic director forms the face and identity of the organization, they may not have as much direct contact with the financial dealings. In many situations it is administrative managers who investigate and pursue funding opportunities. The gender distribution in these influential but less visible roles tends to represent an inversion of the gender allocation in artistic directorship. In cases such as Chunky Move and Australian Dance Theatre the positions of finance and marketing managers are held by women and this is not an unusual occurrence. Therefore, the actual receipt of funding can have less to do with the artistic director than we would imagine.

Also, I have only highlighted major overall company funding from state arts bodies and Australia Council funding, as they are responsible for the bulk of funding and, as government entities, can be held accountable for inequities. However, many companies receive considerable financial support from private, corporate and other sponsorship. In terms of gender, private sponsors have less of a responsibility to promote equality in funding and it is unrealistic to hold separate organisations liable for a wide spread concern. Organisations such as Qantas and JCDecaux who are sponsors of both Sydney Dance Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre could not be expected to equally sponsor all the dance companies in Australia. How these organisations came to partner these companies is also less predictable. It could have been the result of marketing and publicity and therefore been driven by a female administrator or a preference for the work these companies produce which bears a direct relation to the male artistic directors. Therefore, although the tabulated funding amounts are an indication of the power and influence of a company and the value being placed on the company's standing, these amounts do not account for the many intrinsic factors that contribute to the amount of funds available to a company.

Therefore to ascertain a more comprehensive understanding of artist recognition and value to the dance community, I have looked into other means of visible acknowledgment.

Awards

A clear indicator of who is receiving recognition and acknowledgment are the national dance awards. The results for recipients of Australian Dance Awards show a concerning leaning towards the recognition of male artists over females. The Ausdance awards are a result of nominations made by the public to formulate a list of candidates which is then reviewed by a national panel of industry professionals. Since its inception in 1997, the award for Outstanding Achievement in Choreography has gone to males nine out of the twelve times it has been awarded. Only twice has it been awarded to a female, the remaining occasion it was awarded to a mix- gendered group of artists. For the award, Outstanding Performance by a Company, the award has gone to male recipients seven out of the nine times it has been awarded.

This information has been sourced from the Ausdance website.

Table 5. Recipients of Outstanding Achievement in Choreography: first awarded in 1997

Year	Choreographer/s	Work title	Company	Gender
1997	Stephen Page	-	Bangarra	Male
1997	Gideon Obarzanek	-	Chunky Move	Male
1998	Dein Perry and Stephen Baynes	-	-	Male

1999	Leigh Warren	Shimmer	Leigh Warren and Dancers	Male
2000	Ted Bransden	Carmen	WA Ballet	Male
2001	Graeme Murphy	Tivoli	Sydney Dance Company and Australian Ballet	Male
2002	Garry Stewart	Age of Unbeauty	Australian Dance Theatre	Male
2003	Graeme Murphy	Swan Lake	Sydney Dance Company	Male
2004	Frances Rings	Unaipon	Bangarra Dance Theatre	Female
2005	Wendy Houstoun, Narelle Benjamin, Brian Carbee, Julie-Anne Long, Michael Whaites	In The Dark	-	Mixed
2006	Tanja Liedtke	Twelfth Floor	-	Female
2008	Garry Stewart	Honour Bound	-	Male



Table 6. Recipients of Outstanding Performance by a Company: first awarded in 1999

Year	Choreographer	Work title	Company	Gender
1999	Leigh Warren	Masterpieces of the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century and Shimmer	Leigh Warren and Dancers	Male
2000	William Forsythe	In the Middle Somewhat Elevated	The Australian Ballet	Male
2001	Graeme Murphy	Tivoli	The Australian Ballet and Sydney Dance Company	Male
2002	Garry Stewart	The Age of Unbeauty	Australian Dance Theatre	Male
2003	Graeme Murphy	Underland	Sydney Dance Company	Male
2004	Garry Stewart	Held	Australian Dance Theatre	Male
2005	Kate Champion	Already Elsewhere	Force Majeure	Female
2006	Garry Stewart	Devolution	Australian Dance Theatre	Male
2008	Lucy Guerin	Structure and Sadness	Lucy Guerin Inc	Female

For Outstanding Achievement in Independent Dance, the award has mainly been received by females. Although it has only been awarded five times and the sample group is not therefore large, three out of five times it has gone to female artists and once to a co-gendered pair. Also, Outstanding Achievement in Dance Education has been award 10 out of 12 times to women. This possibly indicates where the roles for women lie in dance, not so much as artistic directors of large companies but as individuals and groups independently producing their own works and nurturing the next generation in the form of dance educators. It is within the field of independent dance that many women are forging new pathways for the art form generating more innovative productions. If, as this paper seeks to prove, women are less likely to direct high profile companies then more opportunities may be available to them in independent dance.

Table 7. Recipients of Outstanding Achievement in Independent Dance: first awarded 2003

Year	Name	Work	Gender
2003	Helen Herbetson and Ben Cobham	Morphia Series	Mixed
2004	Kate Denborough	Nowhere Man	Female
2005	Julie-Anne Long	The Nun's Picnic	Female
2006	Clare Dyson	Churchill's Black Dog	Female
2008	Shaun Parker	This Show Is About People	Male

Table 8. Recipients of Outstanding Achievement in Dance Education: first awarded 1997

Year	Name	Gender
1997	Anne Roberts	Female
1997	Shirley McKechnie	Female
1998	Joan Halliday	Female
1998	Monica Halliday	Female
1999	Susan Street	Female
2000	Martin Rubenstein	Male
2001	Margaret Markham	Female
2002	Nanette Hassall	Female
2003	Keith Bain	Male
2004	Michelle Saunders	Female
2005	Jenny Kinder	Female

2006	Buzz Dance Theatre (Artistic Director Felicity Bott)	Female
2008	Helen Cameron	Female

We can look at the above statistics of both the funding rounds and dance awards and conclude that there is a gender imbalance within the contemporary dance field, but what would we call a balance? Since there are 20 girls for every boy in a dance class, should there be 20 female dancers in a company and one male, or should all artistic directors bar one be female? Some people would say yes, that would show a true representation of the sexes due to their involvement in the field. However, overall this is not a gender balance. The point is not to have females outnumber males in the professional scene as they do in the amateur but rather to interrogate the equity of acknowledgment and opportunities that occurs within the profession.

The Australian Dance Award results do raise concerns in terms of the recognition of female choreographers and directors. The high proportion of males to receive awards in these areas is undoubtedly influenced by the high number of males in charge of companies. Hence, the circle begins. Males receive more accolades which bolsters their resumes making them more likely to gain an artistic director position. Artistic directors running high profile companies and established choreographers have more resources at their disposal, high quality dancers, and good quality production; hence, these are the companies receiving the awards. This is true for both the Australian and American dance scene (see table 4 And 5) (J. Mendl Shaw personal communication, March 8, 2009). Considering how drastically females outnumber males in most dance classes measured against the number of professional male dance artists, it is possible to deduce that males have a much higher success rate in the field of dance. This leads to the other topic of my research, how and why do these inequities occur? What factors can influence the likelihood or otherwise of a female achieving the same success as a male.

### Beginning the Explanation

In terms of male artistic directors and how they have come to fill those positions, one interviewee suggests that “[Garry and Gideon] were the kind of really up and coming young things that everybody was talking about, so in that instance it’s not necessarily, I think, gender specific” (B personal communication, June 17, 2009) and the idea that maybe “women often don’t apply for those sorts of jobs, they don’t see themselves necessarily as running Sydney Dance” (B personal communication). Although these hypotheses are highly plausible and perhaps these men were the best in the field at the time, it is important to take into consideration the idea that “sometimes elusive factors -- such as encouragement, mentoring, and hostility real or perceived -- have a substantial and direct bearing on both an individual’s decision to pursue a field and his or her success in it.” (Collins-Hughes, 2009, para. 6). Here is where many of the discrepancies between the experiences of males and females in dance may lie. Factors such as the amount of attention and emphasis given to males in the dance class and the opportunities given or not given to females shapes each gender’s experience. An ideal career trajectory for dance artists usually involves the individual training as a dancer, working in a company, beginning choreographing and then, sometimes, becoming an artistic director. Therefore, any discrepancy in the treatment given to dancers along the trajectory may have a direct effect on their likelihood of ultimately achieving ideal success and being appointed artistic director of a major company. The inequity of treatment and thus the root source of gender disparities in terms of funding and recognition in dance could possibly have begun when an increased emphasis was placed on bringing males into the field.

### Bringing Males into Dance

In the last few decades in Australia, there has been an increased awareness and concern for the number of boys involved in dance. Programs within schools and youth dance companies have been established exclusively for males in order to increase boys’ participation (Steps Youth Dance Company-*Boys Can Dance*, John Curtin College-*Boys Break*, and Quantum Leap-*Licence to Move* and *Kick Back*). Teachers, choreographers and

companies have worked to make dance appealing for boys and less threatening to their sense of masculinity which generally is thought to inhibit participation. Dance artists and teachers are still in the process of encouraging boys to participate as the ratio of males to females participating in dance remains in a state of imbalance. In 2008, in NSW, 646 girls enrolled in HSC dance while only 35 boys undertook the subject (Board of Studies, 2008). While perhaps an extreme example, the figures indicate the depth of the problem. In the article “The Balancing Act of Boys in Dance” Peter Cook speculates that:

The flip side of the boys’ issue is the responsibility towards the many females who have been involved in dance for a long time and are at times more competent than their male colleagues, who at times, are promoted for other reasons. (n.d, para. 9)

Cook’s comment articulates accurately the issues of gender partiality that the dance community is negotiating. Although, an increased emphasis on boys in dance is required, it is important that this does not create too much of an imbalance in treatment and opportunities given to the females.

### **Chapter 3: Accumulation of Advantage**

In the Gender Project article “Is Dance an Equal-Opportunity Profession?” Joanna Mendl Shaw references the phrase “accumulation of disadvantage” (personal communication, March 8, 2009). This phrase was coined by Virginia Valian “to describe the cumulative effects that this complex matrix of inequities in mentoring, career advancement, and recognition has [produced] on women and men” (J. Mendl Shaw personal communication). Mendl Shaw goes on to expand this idea describing how for males an accumulation of advantage can work to guide their career path:

As the only man in class, the male dancer, unsurprisingly gets lots of attention. Although perhaps a late starter, frequently the male dancer has an appealing, though raw, physicality that draws the eye. If he has chosen to dance, most likely he is not afraid of being different and is eager to make up for his late start. He stands right in front of class. He asks lots of questions. Student choreographers need men in their pieces so he is cast in numerous works. He gets to work with the guest choreographer, who might spend extra time working with him. In class he is encouraged to invest in his strengths/talents and what he does well rather than scrutinize what he cannot do. In composition, his quirky ideas are praised and his choreographic talent is nurtured. He takes risks. He is mentored and he is given chances to present his work. He has begun his career with a sense of confidence, with opportunity and career possibilities. He is visible and seen. (J. Mendl Shaw personal communication)

#### **The Inexperienced Male**

Mendl Shaw's scenario refers to the ways in which males who start dance later in life can receive more attention and time from teachers and choreographers. Even though there may be a certain unrefined quality to a male dancer and a common accompaniment of lack of technique, this can work to the male's benefit. As Mendl Shaw puts it “...the male dancer has an appealing, though raw, physicality” (personal communication, March 8, 2009). Therefore, it is common to focus attention on the males, adjust and give feedback while

still encouraging and supporting them. Choreographers, with little choice of males, will find it is necessary to work with what is available. Often this is an inexperienced newcomer to the dance field. The need for males remains, so if the late starting dancer cannot grasp the steps, the choreographer may spend extra time working with him. Through this 'mentorship', young men may build up a strong relationship and understanding and thus the male dancers are already visible and seen, effectively launching their careers with attention and opportunity. However, it is not only this "rawness" of an inexperienced newcomer that can attract attention and work to the male dancer's advantage.

### Male Physicality

Male dancers can possess a particular physicality which also has a significant part to play in how people view and treat them. Male dancers are exciting. Generally, they are stronger than their female counterparts and have a robust energy which at times can be misdirected, particularly with inexperienced dancers, yet this feature can add to their uninhibited force and vigor. As one interviewee points out:

Sometimes guys come with very strong physical backgrounds, much stronger sometimes than women . . . some of them have done ballroom dance, but some of them have done long histories of gymnastics, or football or swimming. Or something that's actually made them both strong physically but also conscious of their bodies in a way. And women often at the same period of their life, as teenagers often dismiss that. (B personal communication, June 17, 2009)

Just by itself, a masculine physicality can influence a dancer's career pathway from the beginning. The predisposition associated with this physicality garnered from a wide range of physical activity usually remains as the dancer progresses to the professional level. When you watch a dancer who can execute grand high jumps and seemingly throw themselves onto the floor then rebound from it a second later, it is hard not to find this appealing and impressive. What we have termed as the 'rawness' of an emerging male dancer is often eclipsed by this strength and power. Who really cares about a well pointed



foot and stretched legs when the dancers can elevate themselves right into the air from lying flat on the floor? The skills that males bring to dance are often awe-inspiring. The abilities male dancers possess, as attributed to them by nature and pathways of experience, can give them a certain advantage over females. As interviewee B points out many female teenagers tend to opt out of physically challenging activities and so do not have the same pathways of experience as the males and therefore, often they don't develop the same strength and power. With dance companies fighting for funding, larger audiences are obviously preferable. Making strong, energetic physical pieces can be a way to ensure a decent audience size. These works often require the strength and power of males either to execute the movement or alternatively to lift and throw the females. However, if there are not many males around and a predisposition to this type of physicality still exists then the male dancer will of course be in high demand.

### Rarity and Demand

Being the only male in a dance class can mean not only more attention but less competition. While the females are competing against 20 others for a solo, the males are almost guaranteed parts. As writer/dancer, Wendy Perron, states: "millions more girls than boys take dance classes, so the very few boys (or young men) who train seriously are treated like precious commodities" (2005, para. 4). Therefore, it is also likely that if a male is cast in a piece and he is an individual in high demand he would not be cast in a minor corps role. Mendl Shaw mentions how "student choreographers need men in their pieces so he [the male dancer] is cast in numerous works". The choreographer, particularly in student works, may feel that they must fully utilize the opportunity and privilege of having a male in the piece, rewarding them with substantial and/or challenging parts. Often when working with young dancers and trying to get boys interested in dance, if the boy is given a solo, or special part in the piece he will feel a responsibility and a sense of success and achievement when it comes to performance. Therefore, the male's confidence in his dancing abilities is continually reinforced through performance opportunities, and, consequently, his interest and persistence in and with dance is frequently rewarded.

## Confidence

Through the process of accumulating advantage and continual encouragement, the male dancer builds confidence. As Stoner Winslett, artistic director of Richmond Ballet, puts it “men are often scholarshipped (sic) as soon they as they come in the door. Because they are treated differently, they develop more confidence” (Felciano, 2005, para. 8). With plentiful opportunities, a wealth of performance experience, special mentoring and encouragement to back them up, it would be hard not to advance with a sense of self-assurance. Wendy Perron says that male dancers “build confidence more easily and, as adults, they get the jobs more quickly. This is true not only for temporary work or corps work, but also at higher levels—for instance, artistic directors of ballet companies” (2005, para. 4). For the females, however, having not been subject to the same phenomena “often their careers begin with dreams and hope but far less confidence” (J. Mendl Shaw personal communication, March 8, 2009). Confidence is an integral part of dance, often the belief that you can execute a step well is the most important factor in performing a routine. As the dancers step in front of an audience, confidence becomes even more essential as nerves and anxiety can take over. Female dancers will often leave institutional training and enter the dance world without this self confidence so often cultivated in males, while facing the fact that they will no doubt be “a dime-a-dozen” (Scherr, 2001, para. 19) amongst all the other female dancers. As illustrated, factors such as a lack of training, strength and power, being a rarity and given continual encouragement and support can accumulate to elevate the male dancer’s confidence and put him at an advantage to his female counterparts. These are of course not the only factors that can affect a dancer’s career trajectory. In combination with the potential to be subject to these ‘advantages,’ socialisation processes active within Australian society inherently affect male and female attitudes towards dance and consequently their career pathways.

## Chapter 4: Socialisation Factors

There are certain socialisation processes that hold particular significance when discussing the gender inequities within the contemporary dance field. Socialisation is defined as “the modification from infancy of an individual’s behavior to conform with the demands of social life” (Wilkes, 1979, p. 1380). Socialisation processes active both internally and externally to the dance studio can have an effect on how dancers approach their practice and career progression. The first of these socialisation processes to take active form occurs before we have even ventured into the dance studio. On a wider scale from a very young age, males are socialised not to partake in dance as freely as females.

### Socialising Males not to Dance

Unfortunately, there is still a strong stigma attached to the idea of boys and dance and therefore for a male to choose to dance it could be assumed that he would be comfortable standing out from the crowd and going against the norm. As Toni Pimble, who runs both Eugene Ballet and Ballet Idaho suggests “boys who enter ballet already have an independent streak since they are going against peer expectations” (Felciano, 2005, para. 14). This independence and boldness that is likely to exist in young male dancers potentially aids their training and development. One interviewee suggests that, boys are more likely to take risks and have a stronger awareness of presence because “normally they’ve had to work out a lot of self stuff before they come” to a training institution (A personal communication, June 15, 2009). Interviewee A goes on, saying:

[Boys] are happy to sort of expose their flaws and then, most of the time have a laugh and then often advance really quickly from a level 0 to something that’s quite interesting because they can pay attention to their own interest and awareness and responses to their desire to move. (A personal communication)

Perhaps, looking at comments like these, it is about having a certain level of confidence from the very beginning. Confidence (or defiance) to begin dancing in the first place is then sustained by socialisation processes within the dance studio.

### Socialisation within the Dance Class

#### Males

Once in the dance class, the male dancer can be subjected to an entirely separate set of behavioral norms to his female counterparts. Perhaps, as a means to engage males or to play on their strengths, teachers encourage boys simply to move, to take the space and jump. Stephanie Skura, a choreographer/teacher, reflects on her experience of this phenomenon: “when I was in training, the men were allowed to dance more freely--just get off the ground and leap and who cares where your arms are” (Carman, Perron and Sucato, 2005, para. 9). Mendl Shaw shares this belief stating that “men are taught to jump and be bold” (Dance universe, 2008, para. 22). It is particularly interesting to consider that it is the female role models, who have been subject to this subtle discrimination themselves, that continue the tradition as they “communicate a different set of implicit messages to their male students: Be bold. Take chances. Seize opportunities. Demand attention” (J. Mendl Shaw personal communication, March 8, 2009). This socialisation of males in dance has an effect not only on their confidence and boldness while training but can lead through into their careers as professionals. An article in Dance Universe presents the idea that “the subterranean message we get is that men are expected to be bold and courageous, and ...that’s what advances – and as a choreographer, surely a bold voice is more likely to get noticed. Women are not brought up to fight for what they want” (J. Mendl Shaw cited in Dance universe, para. 22). Through these processes, we begin to see the shaping of the male dance artists as bold, independent spirits while the females in dance are socialised to behave in an entirely different manner, compliant and accommodating.

## Females

For young girls, dancing is not only a socially acceptable activity, it is almost expected that every girl will engage in it at some point. Which female didn't grow up with the dream of being a ballerina at some point or other? Therefore, the females in a dance class are coming from an entirely different approach, going *with* the flow while the males have been going against it. Once they are in the dance class, which is often ballet as contemporary classes for younger students are less common, the principles of compliance that they entered dance with, are reinforced. Mendl Shaw observes that:

As in other educational situations, girls and young women in dance classes are encouraged to be obedient, compliant, graceful, and quiet... the young women might find ways of disappearing, assuming they should ask for less. Far outnumbering the men they become accustomed to receiving less attention.  
(personal communication, March 8, 2009)

Toni Pimble also comments on the issue saying that "for girls, ballet training reinforces societal expectations to be graceful, demure, and disciplined. It's difficult to come out of this situation as a person with your own mind" (Felciano, 2005, para. 14). Therefore once these girls reach the institutional level they often don't enter with the same boldness and self awareness as the boys. They haven't addressed, as one interviewee puts it "...any self stuff because they are hidden by the 5,6,7,8 of their local ballet school" (A personal communication, June 15, 2009). Mendl Shaw speaks of the same role models that pushed the boys forward as conveying entirely different ideals to the females:

Through their lives and actions...[they] communicate a body of silent values and an implicit code of behavior which young girls and women hear throughout their lives in many different contexts: Work hard. Don't draw attention to yourself. Make do. Ask for less. (personal communication)

So the girls go through their training quietly, obediently, with less attention and no real need to develop their independent voice. Once out in the competitive dance world, one of hundreds of hopeful female dancers, are they are equipped for this situation?

### Effects on the Professional Scene

The effects of these socialisation processes can filter through to a dancer's professional career. The males are bold and confident as they enter the professional scene, while the females supposedly lack boldness which can severely affect what roles become available to them. As articulated in one article, "differential treatment of boys and girls in ballet starts at an early age and seems another reason men and women take on different roles later in life" (Dance Universe, 2008, para. 19). Alistair Spalding, the artistic director of contemporary-dance temple Sadler's Wells was asked why no female choreographers were among the "raft of commissions" he's just announced for the coming season (Collins-Hughes, 2009, para. 2). Another commentator records Spalding's response as he states "'it is something to do with women not being as assertive in that field,' said Spalding. 'It's not that I don't want to commission them.'" (Higgins, 2009, para. 3). From this comment we could assume that women are or the perception of them in the dance field is that they are less self assured and less forceful. Due to their years of obedience and compliance during the in training, when they move to the professional scene these qualities can remain. Lopez Ochoa speaks of her choreographic experience saying:

What I notice as a choreographer when working with 100 people [is that] I am trying to make everyone happy. Men care that the business works well, not so much whether everyone is happy...As long as the business is good and things look good, then for them things are good." (Dance universe, para. 18)

And so we see the accommodating, compliant nature cultivated in young female dancers carrying through to their professional careers. If we accept these socialisation processes as the norm then it is easy to see how and why female dance artists are represented as obedient and accommodating while males are seen as daring, bold and exciting.

## **Chapter 5: Perceptions and Portrayals**

Through-out this process various observations concerning the ‘qualities’ of male and female dancers, choreographers and directors have proved prominent in the researched material. These observations have shaped a vivid image of how society can perceive male and female dance artists. The male is attributed with being daring, bold, exciting, clever, charismatic, muscular, a leader, an organizer, an individual suited to being an artistic director. On the other hand, the female becomes obedient, accommodating, personal, impractical, the one who looks to make everyone else happy. It is this portrayal of female dance artists that can be highly detrimental to their careers. Whether it is generated by the media, the public or the dance artists themselves as a way of acknowledging their predicament, it creates a bleak picture. However, it is beneficial to acknowledge this representation as it begins to identify the problems and factors that contribute to gender imbalance and bias in the dance field. One of the most significant contributors to the way society perceives a company, choreographer or director is how the person or entity is portrayed by the media.

### **Media**

The media has the power to shape the identity of a choreographer and director. In this way, male artistic directors may have quite a different relationship with the media and therefore public. As Julie Carruthers from the Akram Khan Company states “we all know that the press respond quite differently to men and women, particularly ... dance critics and writers. Men are clever, sexy, and charismatic; women don't seem to be” (Higgins, 2009, para. 10). Some of the most high profile companies in Australia have been led by males who can and have (to a certain extent) been marketed in this way. Raphael Bonachela, Graeme Murphy (Sydney Dance Company), Garry Stewart (Australian Dance Theatre), Gavin Webber (Dancenorth) and Gideon Obarzanek (Chunky Move). The buzz around Bonachela had him being deemed by the media as “the hottest of international talent” (*ID magazine* quoted in the *Sydney Arts Journo*, 2008). Garry Stewart’s work was said to demonstrate a “lively and challenging intellect that the dance world can well do with” (*The*

Age quoted in IMG-artists, n.d). Interviewee A agrees, saying she is “convinced when it gets to that high level, it seems to be the men that get the press; I think that’s quite interesting, they get the media attention. Dancenorth, ADT, and Chunky Move” (personal communication, June 15, 2009). Interviewee C affirms this theory, “I think the media loves to market the male directors in a really positive light... as being a great thing” (personal communication, August 10, 2009). As interviewee A proposes “Dancenorth, ADT, and Chunky Move do get the press but also it’s the kind of work they’re making that highly physical smash bang” (personal communication). This is definitely something to consider as these types of works do have mass audience appeal. However Sydney Dance Company has never been known for this style of choreography but has received probably more media attention than any other group perhaps because Murphy has always been careful to promote the company as sexy, bold and definitely featuring the beauty of youth. Hence, the type of work these companies produce may have an effect on the media attention they receive but it can also have something to do with the marketability of the director.

In many cases female artistic directors of the same confederacy as the males mentioned above, aren’t seen and/or portrayed in the same way as their male counterparts or don’t receive any media coverage. How often do we hear about the work of Natalie Weir (Expressions) or Annie Grieg (Tasdance), both artistic directors of major contemporary companies? This is not to say that all female choreographers and directors are subject to a lack of media attention but often their relationship with the media and hence how they are portrayed is very different to their male counterparts. The exception that comes to mind is Lucy Guerin, who has been subject to considerable media attention and praise dubbed as “Australia’s hottest export of post modern dance” (*The Oregonian* quoted in *Australian Stage*, n.d). However, media coverage is a complex issue and although I have chosen to look at it in relation to artistic directors and choreographers, marketing and publicity managers (often women) have considerable influence over this area. Also interesting to note is the possibility of an increasing awareness of this phenomenon. If female choreographers and artistic directors aren’t getting the media attention and have acknowledged this, are they formulating ways in which to circumnavigate the issue?



Interviewee C comments on the possibility of Kage physical theatre representing a strategic marketing move:

Kate Denborough and Gerard, have created Kage together, as a team, but when you work with them Kate is the director and Gerard is a dancer...but they still maintain [in] marketing that they are co-directors of Kage physical theatre....and I think it's worked in their favour actually for her, to have her and Gerard as a team. (Personal communication, August 10, 2009)

Although this may be one way in which to respond to the marketing and media issue, it doesn't leave sole female choreographers with a lot of options and we are left with the same concerns. It is not simply the idea of a male choreographer but the notion that the media and society at large seem to have of him in terms of the kind of work these artists make. In this way the media's portrayal of male choreographers and directors is both affected by and shapes society's perception of males.

### Society

The success of a female in obtaining the position of artistic director can also be affected by our society's residual preference for males in head directorial and managerial roles. There has been a long history of males assuming leadership roles and our society is still in the process of shifting the stigma associated with this. Janis Brenner discusses how "our society is still more confident with men being in managerial positions – it's our culture...It's a societal thing and the dance world is simply a micro-cosmos for the way the larger world works" (Dance universe, 2008, para. 15). Unfortunately evidence suggests that Brenner's statement is quite true in many areas. Currently 15 females are acting in "world leader" roles as presidents or prime ministers as compared to the 100 or so males in the same positions (n.a, 2009, world presidents db, 2009). In terms of the business sector "only 25% of managers are women and less than 9% of board positions in Australian companies are held by women" (Burrow, 2004, para. 22). The general underlying belief seems to be that that men "... 'manage' companies differently than women, and overall,

their way of management is still seen as ‘better’ – more practical, less personal” (Dance universe, para. 16). This idea that men are better suited to leadership and managerial roles, has a direct affect on what positions females assume in the dance world. Although many women are in charge of training institutes and manage a great number of people, this trend does not seem to carry through to the professional dance world. On a grander scale it may not simply be a preference for men in leadership roles but a *general* predilection for men.

### Male Admiration

There is a tendency from both men and women to appreciate the work, words and contributions of males over females. Recently, more attention has been drawn to this issue in terms of the contemporary dance world. One writer summed the situation up recently saying the contemporary dance world had been “accused of ‘fawning over’ athletic, powerful images of masculinity as projected by artists such as Wayne McGregor and Hofesh Shechter, at the expense of promoting female choreographers” (Higgins, 2009, para 1). The issue, according to choreographer Charlotte Vincent, is that “we [female artists] are not bold, muscular creatures fawned over by the women who run the dance world. I am not suggesting there is sexism but there is something that does not celebrate women in the way men are celebrated.” (Higgins, para. 6). Unfortunately, this idea that males are more valuable and/or superior is deep seated for females. As Gender Project co-founder Joanna Mendl Shaw states in an interview with Edith Meeks:

Gender prejudice exists deeply in women...women listen to other women differently than they listen to men.... It’s a sort of self-effacing acceptance of a secondary role...And [when they] fight it, many women have found that their behavior is interpreted as pushy or abrasive, while the same behavior in a man would simply be ambitious and inspiring. (n.d, para. 13)

This acceptance by women of their ‘mediocrity’ can prove highly damaging to their confidence in the workplace. As choreographer Ellis Wood articulates: “women's chronic awareness of their inferior market value ‘seeps into the rest of our careers’” (Scherr, 2001,

para. 15) further hindering the female dance artist's confidence and career perspectives. This constant battle against 'inferiority' can lead to career fatigue for females. As Mendl Shaw observes "with that career fatigue comes the large questions. What about having a child? Is this really worth it? They begin to entertain thoughts of life beyond dance" (personal communication, March 8, 2009).

## **Chapter 6: Filling Traditional Roles**

### **Mother**

Intrinsically linked to the issue of gender in dance are the factors associated with having and looking after a family. Largely, our society still conforms to traditional gender roles, seeing the mother looking after the family while the father operates as bread-winner in the workplace. One interviewee comments on this issue stating that:

Women have children so it gets to the point where you cannot travel...they can't be as nomadic as their company dancing days. I think women make choices based on this, and men are much freer, so they can still have children and a partner but come and go...Most women are the support structure, so when they go the support structure collapses, and generally you don't want your children to collapse. (A personal communication, June 15, 2009)

Society's view of gender roles has come a long way and maybe it is that women are not so much restricted to staying and looking after the children but, as Betsy Graham, artistic director of the contemporary dance festival Dance Umbrella puts it, they have "other creative drives in their lives, like family" (Higgins, 2009, para. 7). Although women have more freedom in the roles they assume, it doesn't mean that choosing to become a mother exerts any less impact on a female dance artist's career. The time period in which many people choose to start a family, bears a direct relation to the career trajectory of a dance artist. Ideally the "typical progression might be from dancing in one's 20s to choreographing in one's 30s, which usually means setting up a company and spending time on the road" (Betsy Graham in Higgins, para. 7). It is at this point:

In which people make that turning point into being artistic director of a company [which] often collides with child rearing. You look at the average age of the artistic directors in the country and they're probably between 35-45. And that is the classic, for dancers, time to have children. (A personal communication)

This creates a number of problems career wise, considering the drop out of visibility, financial ramifications and time demands. In many cases, dance artists simply can't financially support a family. Will Tuckett of the Royal Ballet Company said "if you are a woman having kids and trying to run a young dance company, the chances are you just can't afford childcare" (Higgins, para. 9). Due to these factors it seems, in many cases women still have to make a choice between having a family or a successful and lengthy career in dance. However, it seems men may be facing similar issues when it comes to raising a family and, most markedly, it can mean additional pressure on them to assume a traditional role as provider.

### Male Provider

Just as society still has a tendency to situate the females with the family at home, it also has a predisposition to position men as bread winners. Therefore, when a male dance artist becomes responsible for the financial survival of the family, it can have serious implications on their dance careers. Interviewee A comments on this saying:

On the other hand, I see men who are in mid 30s, who are in the same position as I, where their partners are working and have the baby and all of a sudden the man, as artist is forced to provide and fulfill a traditional stereotype, one that they've never had to fulfill before. Because they've been seen as artist and they've done project work like I've done, except there's no fall back. So they often go out of dance. (A personal communication, June 15, 2009)

It would be ignorant to assume that the female is the only one whose career may change when family comes into question. Men face some of the same issues as women when it comes to children. One interviewee revealed that a male dance associate had asked the question "How would I have time to have children?" with another declaring "I could never afford to have one [a child], because I couldn't do the practice and have one" (A personal communication). As this interviewee suggests, men may face similar problems to women when it comes to family and while both genders are no doubt aware of these issues the

women with their “other creative drive” may be more likely to still choose to have children (Betsy Graham in Higgins, 2009, para. 9). Perhaps this is why, as we have seen, there are fewer females in the position of artistic directorship. If you look at the artistic directors of high budget companies within Australia, most of them don’t have children, both men and women (A personal communication).

### Women and Education

Within the contemporary dance scene, there is a strong relationship between women and education, whether at a training or company level. This could be attributed to society’s approval of women as teachers, or perhaps it is seen as an extension of the mothering role, to look after other children during their training. Nevertheless, women have a strong presence within schools and training institutes, as Joanna Mendl Shaw proposes “women are the architects of organisations in which they often become the under-recognized labor force. They are the backbone of schools that nurture and launch male dancers’ careers” (personal communication, March 8, 2009). From the small private dance schools to public dance programs and institutional courses, it is the females who teach and run these organisations. Three of the main institutions with dance performance courses, VCA, QUT and WAAPA have their dance departments headed by women (A personal communication, June 15, 2009). Perhaps women are drawn to academia as a way to still stay present and in contact with the form they love, if their career as a dancer or choreographer has concluded. However, as interviewee A points out:

A lot of the approaches by the men that I have been working with have a very academic approach, but for some reason they don’t feel the need to locate it within a university structure. And maybe that’s because they’re supported outside of that structure and for some reason the equivalent of them are not. (personal communication)

Therefore, maybe it is more that other positions and support in the dance field are not available and as a result women turn to teaching or academic pursuits. However, even at a

professional dance company level, when the positions we are talking about are those of the highly valued artistic directorship, the relationship between women and education remains.

Contemporary companies with educational objectives are often run by women. Interviewee A raises this phenomena saying “Buzz has been traditionally always run by a woman...that’s quite telling in that Buzz is a dance and education company. Tasdance is run by a woman and has a dance and education aspect as well” (personal communication, June 15, 2009). This bears true for Expressions dance company (Natalie Weir) also a professional contemporary company with a strong educational aspect and youth companies such as Steps Youth Dance Company, now directed by Alice Lee Holland and traditionally run by women, QL2 with Ruth Osbourne and Stompin currently directed by Becky Hilton. The only company with a youth aspect not to follow this trend is Tracks directed by David McMicken and Tim Newth. Interestingly enough, Tracks also receives the most government funding for a youth company, with almost double that of QL2, Stompin’ and Steps. In saying this, many factors influence the funding Tracks receives and considering they are the only contemporary dance company in the Northern Territory it follows that they would receive funding in line with the main companies. However, in terms of women and dance education/youth companies, perhaps it is a matter of artistic worth; often people can assume that companies with a strong youth focus compromise on artistic quality. Therefore the confident, bold males with their career drive may be less interested in these organisations or possibly the connection between women and children simply remains, even at this level.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions and Suggestions**

### **Correcting the Imbalance**

Throughout the research process a number of different methods have been identified for balancing the gender roles and ratios of acknowledgement within contemporary dance. In most cases, a shift is seen to be required, may it be within the individual artist, the dance education system, amongst presenters or from society as a whole. As a Gender Project article states, “dance educators, choreographers, presenters, company directors, audience members and arts administrators must address the imbalances that currently exist, and actively seek alternative models for the training, mentoring, and honoring of dancers and choreographers” (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication, March 8, 2009). One of the most influential groups within those listed is that of the dance educators and choreographers who have an effect on the treatment and opportunities given to males and females from the very beginning.

### **Dance Educators/Choreographers**

Firstly, in order to equalise the gender balance, an acknowledgement and continual effort to minimise factors that may contribute to the male dancers’ accumulation of advantage is needed. If we recognize how factors such as being a rarity and in demand and how a male physicality (both the rawness and the strength) and confidence can affect the male dancer’s progression, we can design more appropriate models for education. By aiming for more equality in teaching practices, we are giving all young dancers the same foundation and an equal opportunity to succeed. In the article “Is Dance an Equal Opportunity Profession?” Joanna Mendl Shaw suggests that dance educators could “encourage women in dance classes to take risks and not just choose obedience” (personal communication, March 8, 2009). Mendl Shaw also recommends “investigating and supporting the teaching of dance so that it nurtures equally both the young men and women. In teaching composition, there should be encouragement of both sexes to be risk-takers, to find and nurture their own unique, even idiosyncratic voices” (personal communication). By encouraging these



qualities in all young dancers, we will be cultivating a new generation of bold, daring artists. Mendl Shaw also proposes “encouraging the student to access his or her own kinesthetic awareness and connection with an inner reality rather than competitive comparison, by teaching without a mirror, changing front, encouraging students to change their place in the studio” (personal communication). Encouraging students to engage with an “inner reality” will discourage competitive comparisons creating a healthier studio environment where students will not be as concerned with what they lack, thus cultivating more kinesthetically aware and confident dancers all round.

Dance educators and choreographers should have an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of all dancers and encourage and reward these equally in terms of performance opportunities. It is also important to encourage work that showcases the strengths of both genders and “that does not just favor the lone male” (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication, March 8, 2009). If choreographers begin by giving all dancers equal stage opportunities and not rewarding the few male dancers with solos, a more equal foundation for the professional scene could possibly be created. More equality in rewards and opportunities for young dancers promotes confidence and in many cases less competition. Dance educators and choreographers should consider what individual qualities all dancers possess and not focus the majority of their attention on a young male dancer because of his lack of technique or because of his impressive physicality and abilities. Females should be encouraged to build strength and practice lifting as much, if not more than their male counterparts. By developing strong female dancers, the dance world will not have to rely so heavily on the male dancer. This is yet again an aim, however considering as discussed earlier, the tendency young women have to opt out of physically challenging activities strategies to negotiate this behaviour would need to be formulated.

### Supporting and Training Organisations

On a larger scale within the dance education sphere, steps can be undertaken to broaden all dance artists’ skills, awareness and confidence. Mendl Shaw recommends “classes/workshops in career realities, self-promotion and PR, business and interpersonal

skills” (personal communication, March 8, 2009). By promoting an awareness of career realities, artists can better prepare themselves for the steps they may need to take to achieve their goals. By providing workshops for all dancers, focused on self promotion, PR, business and interpersonal skills, we are working toward changing current perceptions of males as “aggressive self-promoters” (Samuels, 2001, para. 4) and women as not assertive enough to survive in the dance world (Higgins, 2009, para. 3). Mendl Shaw notes that “many [women] have a hard time selling themselves aggressively, or being self-promoters” (personal communication). Therefore, even if socialisation processes have already had an effect on these dance artists shaping the males as bold and assertive and the women as accommodating and obedient, these workshops can help raise the confidence and public profile of the female artists. If organisations such as Ausdance, mentoring groups in the vein of Scope, institutions such as the Victorian College of the Arts, high school dance courses and even private studios begin to offer these types of workshops to artists of both genders, we will start to see a change in the way dance artists approach their careers. Through the development of this awareness and these skills, preexisting perceptions associated with specific genders may begin to change.

### Presenters

Presenters, as curators, have the ability to shape the dance scene through the type of works they present and the scale of venues they offer. Some of the steps they can take in order to help promote the work of female choreographers include presenting:

Work that speaks to the myriad of aesthetics and dance works being made by a great diversity of both men and women. Bring work that speaks to the quiet as well as the large, “spectacular” physical energy output that often seems to dominate our stages. Presenters should seek out smaller venues to look for potential companies to present. Women are often not being produced in the high visibility venues. It might seem contradictory to assert that to better represent women, presenters should look for smaller venues, but that is where many women are presenting their work. (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication, March 8, 2009)

Currently society seems to value the “spectacular” over the less vigorous and subtle. By presenting a diverse range of works, presenters can not only give all artists an opportunity but can contribute to changing society’s value judgments. If a work by Australian Dance Theatre is presented in the same setting as a much less energetic, more metaphoric work of Clare Dyson’s we are giving them equal value and thus encouraging the audience to do so as well. However, in reality these works demand different venues and different marketing; even so continual support for diversity in the works presented at high visibility venues should also be encouraged. Mendl Shaw mentions how women are often not “produced in high visibility venues” and so it follows that, to represent them better, presenters should seek smaller venues (personal communication). This may seem to contradict the earlier statement regarding adjusting value judgments. However, although it is desirable to place equal importance on the works of both genders, if female artists simply do not have the resources and funding to present their work in a large scale venue, presenters who only deal with “high visibility venues” are completely boxing these artists out. Therefore, by seeking out smaller venues we are providing female artists with more opportunity to present their work.

### Dance Community

An additional method to provide equal opportunity and acknowledgment for both genders is to try and “...give more visible acknowledgment to women” (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication, March 8, 2009). Within Australia, women tend to dominate the recipients’ list in terms of awards for dance education or achievement in independent dance and are those who have received the majority of the lifetime achievement awards and are equally represented in the awards list for services to dance. However, it is male choreographers and artistic directors who have received the majority of Ausdance awards for achievements in choreography and performances by a company as mentioned in Chapter 2. To counteract gender inequality within Australia, boards such as that involved in the Ausdance awards might consider creating a category focused on smaller scale and/or lower budget works. If as Mendl Shaw suggests, women are presenting their work in smaller venues, an award designed specifically for smaller scale works will allow more female choreographers an

opportunity of public acknowledgment. Alternatively, by regulating award nominations so that it is not just large scale, well known companies that are being selected might have a constructive effect. By creating more equality in acknowledgment of choreography within Australia, both genders may obtain a more equal opportunity to succeed in their careers and be appointed to direct major companies.

### Social Shift

One interviewee, when asked how they thought a greater gender balance could be achieved replied that “I think it would take a massive social shift on a wider scale from a young age” (A personal communication, June 15, 2009). Joanna Mendl Shaw thinks this shift could be instigated from within the dance community. She has stated “it is from within the populations of risk takers that change begins. Dance therefore seems the perfect place to initiate change and forge new models for greater gender equality” (personal communication, March 8, 2009). With this social shift we could expect to see a change in gender expectations and stereotypical roles. Hopefully bringing about:

- More boys in dance and “thus making them less of the ‘endangered species’ who receive preferential treatment” (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication).
- Greater support and understanding for artists choosing to start a family.
- More males taking on the role of dance educator.
- More encouragement and support for women taking on leadership and managerial roles.
- Less pressure for women to fill the traditional role of ‘stay at home mum’ and less pressure for men to act as provider and/or leader.
- Appreciation of diversity in dance with less emphasis on the virtuosic.

Striving for gender equality within the Australian contemporary dance field will, in my opinion, feedback on itself and create greater equality within the field itself. If dance educators, choreographers, and directors begin to take note of the gender imbalance and take steps such as those previously aforementioned we could expect to see more equality in the next few years. In the mean time, we need to continue "...looking towards new models that encourage the creation of a more level playing field for male and female dancers." (J. Mendl Shaw, personal communication).

### Further Research

Gender imbalance in dance is an extremely complex issue and to fully understand where and why gender imbalance occurs and possible strategies for its correction requires more extensive research. This paper has merely highlighted some of the many factors that can contribute to the success and recognition of male and females. Therefore, more investigation is needed to identify specifically what roles men and women could take on in the dance world to address where women may be under represented. By identifying these roles more specifically we can further understand why and how gender advantage or disadvantage may accumulate in one area of the field or another. More research into the hiring processes in place at large scale companies such as Australian Dance Theatre and Sydney Dance Company is necessary along with, where possible, identifying who applied for the role of artistic director of such companies. Also investigating the funding programs available within Australia and the processes they use to allocate monies and who applies for funding. By gathering more quantitative data concerning who applied for the top jobs and what funding artists are applying for and obtaining, we will be able to identify more specifically where the gender biases may lie. While this paper has theorised about why these inequities have occurred, further research is needed to establish how widespread and impactful the factors I have highlighted are on people's careers in the Australian dance field. Surveys across the dance field would be recommended in order to ascertain how influential these factors are and thus establish the specific experience people have had with gender biases throughout their careers.

## Conclusion

If we look at the funding statistics and awards for choreography and performance, we could deduce that gender inequality exists in the Australian contemporary dance field. This paper has hypothesised about why this may have occurred. However, I have by no means discussed all the factors that can influence this issue. What I have presented is a highly generalised view of this issue. This was done in order to specifically highlight and raise awareness of the career negotiations for female dance artists. This research has shown that there may be disparities in terms of the treatment and opportunities for women in dance. Although equity should be strived for I feel there is still some time before it will truly be achieved. The 'shifts' discussed in the chapter, Correcting the imbalance, are ideals to work toward. Those leaders within the dance field can adjust how we approach the issues of gender disparities, offering equality in treatment and opportunities for both genders. However, adjusting the attitudes of the wider society is something we have less control over and, without changing attitudes such as the stigma attached to boys dancing and society's preference for male leaders, true equity for female artists will not be achieved. In addition, without altering the societal perception of dance as virtuosic and physically awe-inspiring, the dance scene will remain in a context of inequity.

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