So You Think You Can Dance: More than Entertainment

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Abstract

Reality dance shows contain embedded gender norms, however, how women relate to these gender norms have gone unexplored. Literature suggests that popular culture is the place where most people receive their information and that it is a source of socialization that competes with other socializing agents to provide role models and information that affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In this exploratory study, a content analysis of 5 clips from the last season of *So You Think You Can Dance* is used to identify what gender norms are embedded in reoccurring themes concerning costuming, body image, movement vocabulary, and narrative. Surveys are used in order to get a general idea of how women may relate to the show and to discover the various reasons why women are attracted to the show. These surveys also helped form the appropriate questions for my interviews which explore how women interpret, use, and negotiate the gender norms embedded in the show. I argue that the way in which women receive the embedded gender norms of the show can be affected by various factors. Once these gender norms are received, women may interpret, use, or negotiate the gender norms in different ways which can lead female fans to accept the traditional gender norms and use them in their personal lives, allowing dominant ideologies to be reinforced and contribute to gender inequalities within society.

Introduction

Today, there is a growing dance craze as the number of reality dance shows continue to increase with shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance, America's Best Dance Crew, Dancing With the Stars, Dance War, Superstars of Dance,* and *Step It Up and Dance.* While watching some of these shows, I continued to wonder why reality dance shows have become so popular. Some believe that America has a fascination with urban styles while others believe it's just part of the latest reality television phenomenon. Network executives and popular culture experts argue that it's a combination of both forces in addition to America's obsession with body image and fitness. With this, dance shows have taken on the competitive nature of other reality shows and dance can be just plain fun to watch (Dorsey 2008). It is clear that many people watch these shows as a source of entertainment; however, I believe that there is more to reality dance shows and that reality dance shows can be analyzed from a sociological perspective.

While reflecting on my personal reasons for watching the show *So You Think You Can Dance,* I realized that I was attracted to the love-stories displayed through dance and the roles of men and women in these love stories which reminded me of *Reading the Romance: Women Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* by Janice Radway. In this book, Radway explores the various reasons why women read romance novels and the different ways in which they relate to the novels. Her results show that the storyline used in the romance novels usually embodied "a simple recapitulation and recommendation of patriarchy and its constituent social practices of ideologies. That is to say, they advocated marriage, family, duty, and heterosexuality as valued social goals" (Smith, 172). The romance novels also allowed women to find an escape which could be perceived as emerging from the discontent of their own lives which were different from the stories told in the book (Smith 2001).

Radway's findings have shown how women can relate to popular culture and how popular culture can be a reflection of society. Radway, alone with other researchers have also shown that viewers actively use text, which is defined as "something, such as a literary work or other cultural product, regarded as an object of critical analysis" (Mifflin, 2006), and continue to adapt it for their own uses and pleasures (1984; Willis 2000). The way in which we receive text may be influenced by factors such as race, class, gender, and life experiences (Press 1991; Joyrich 1996). As a result of all this, this exploratory study aims to explore what gender norms are embedded in reoccurring themes concerning costuming, body image, movement vocabulary, and narrative of the show *So You Think You Can Dance* and how women interpret, use, and negotiate these gender norms. For the purpose of this study, "interpret" is defined as the way in which participants give meaning and understand the gender norms of the show. The term "use" is defined as the way in which participants apply the gender norms for their own purposes and the term "negotiate" refers to the way in which the participants pick and choose the gender norms that they are willing to accept, reject, and use in their personal lives. The way in which women receive the embedded gender norms of the show can be affected by various factors. Once these norms are received, women interpret, use, and negotiate the gender norms in different ways which include accepting, rejecting, analyzing and deconstructing, or using the norms as food for thought in their personal lives. As female fans accept and use the embedded gender norms in their personal lives, dominant ideologies continue to be reinforced and contribute to gender inequalities within society.

Although reality television is a recent phenomenon, there is research available which focuses on how women relate to the media and popular culture. Previous research has shown the different ways in which women have used popular culture and the media. Research has also

shown the various ways in which women are influenced by the media in their everyday life which includes consumerism, defining women culture, and the formation of one's self image (Spigel, 1992; Brown, 1990; Press 1991). Despite this available research, there is a lack of research which focuses on the genre of reality dance shows and how women may relate to them. Focusing on reality dance shows can contribute to our understanding of reality television and the role it plays in society as well as if there are any similarities and differences in how women relate to reality dance shows and other forms of media. We can also see how reality dance shows reflect or affect society. In addition, the study of reality dance shows can inform us about the changes that are going on in society as dance has always been an unappreciated art form in our culture. Studying the increase of reality dance shows can help us find out what is going on in society that has allowed reality dance shows to become popular and for society to find a new appreciation for dance.

Role of Television in Society

Reality dance shows take place on television. As a result, it is important to understand how television became popular and the role it plays in society. Since its arrival, television has tried to attract female viewers in particular as they are assumed to be the primary consumers of the household. According to Lynn Spigel, more than half of all Americans installed a television set into their homes during the postwar era (1992:3). The construction of a new suburbia during the 1950s helped bring rise to the popularity of television in the home as institutions such as middle-class home magazines, advertisements, films, and television sitcoms idealized a middle-class lifestyle. These institutions also converged and intersected around the issue of television's place in the home (1992:4). According to Press, television is now one of society's most powerful cultural institutions. It is hard to deny television's symbolic power seeing that we live in a world

where there are more people with televisions than indoor plumbing and where children spend more time watching television than participating in any other activity (1991:8).

Television is a site where popular culture can be experienced. According to Gamman and Marshment, popular culture is the place where most people receive their entertainment and information. Popular culture is also a site of struggle where dominate ideologies are determined and debated as well as a site where dominate meanings can be contested and disturbed (1989:2). Television has transformed the social, political, and economic organization of society. With this, television has begun to alter our ways of seeing and knowing which has crucial consequences for every aspect of society. Included in these crucial consequences is the way in which we construct gender differences (Joyrich 1996). How we construct gender difference will affect our ideas about gender as well as how we view ourselves as men and women.

Socialization

As noted above, television can alter the ways in which we construct gender. Television has the power to affect our constructions of gender because it is also an agent of socialization. Henslin defines socialization as the process by which people learn the characteristics of their group - the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and actions thought appropriate for them (2004:61). Gender socialization is the way in which society sets children onto different courses in life because they are male and female (Henslin 2004). Gender messages can be found all around us starting in the family and are later reinforce in other institution such as school, church, and the mass media. As a result of gender messages, we learn the meanings that our society associates with males and females. These messages and images are also integrated into our

world, creating a picture of "how" males and females "are", and forcing an interpretation of the world in terms of gender (Henslin 2004).

Gender and Gender Norms

In order to know how to identify gender norms it is important to know what gender norms are. It is also important to know how gender differs from sex, how sex influences our perception of gender, and how gender is institutionalized. Sex is the biological characteristics that distinguish females and males, which consist of primary and secondary sex characteristics (Henslin, 2004). Gender is the behaviors and attitudes that a society considers proper for its males and females (Henslin 2004). According to Connell, reproductive differences are usually assumed to be directly reflective of other differences such as bodily strength, speed, physical skills, sexual desires, recreational interests, character, intellect, and so on. As a result of these difference, gender stereotypes and gender norms are formed and it is believed that men are stronger and faster, men have mechanical skills while women are good at domestic work, men love sports while women love to gossip, men are aggressive while women are nurturers, and men are rational while women are intuitive (2002: 30).

Although sex and gender are different, socialization theory conveys the strong message that gender is clearly fixed, unvarying and static like sex (West 2002). Candace West and Don Zimmerman argue that the "doing" of gender is accepted by women and men as a result of socialization. The individual can "do" gender, however, gender is not a set of traits, a variable, a role, but a product of social situations. West and Zimmerman define doing gender as "creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological" (2002:13). After the differences have been formalized, they are used to

reinforce the "essentialness" of gender which the physical features of social settings provide the resources for according to Goffman (1977). In his account of the arrangement between differences, he finds that there are various institutionalized frameworks through which our "natural, normal sexedness" can be enacted. An example of this institutional framework can be seen in the case of the sex segregation of public bathrooms. Women and men achieve the same ends through the same means in terms of waste products and their elimination, however, public bathrooms are furnished with different dimorphic equipment which shows that the functioning of sex-differentiated organs is present, but there is nothing in this functioning that biologically needs segregation. Because of this institutionalization of sex-differentiated organs, toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence between sex-classes when in fact it can be seen as a means for honoring or producing this difference (West 2002).

The Role of Gender in Dance

Gender plays a significant role in the art of dance. According to Ann Daly dance is inextricably rooted in the belief that gender differences are natural or inborn. Beginning with ballet, gender differences have been ingrained in every level of dance which includes costuming, body image, movement vocabulary, training, technique, and narrative (1999: 313). Various theatrical dance performances in the U.S include works that presents bodies that can be identified as biologically "male" or "female". The convention of the "appropriate" body for a dancer has changed over time as the current trend is now based on the popularity of fitness and a streamlined athleticism for women. In addition, one may find convention in movement vocabularies and choreography to be coded as masculine, feminine, or neutral. Each convention, in addition to costuming, makeup, sound scoring, lighting, and spoken text may also imply a gendered or sexuality-inflected frame that shapes meaning for the audience (Desmond 1999).

In addition to gender influencing dance, dance also has the power to affect how we perceive dance. According to Cynthia Novack, a dance performance is also a cultural performance. Dance is a form of meaning and action and is "multivoiced" and flexible like all cultures. It has the ability to shape part of our definition of physical virtuosity, our concept of beauty, or our perception of meaning in movement. Dance also has the ability to affect our sense of time and space, our understanding of the construction and relationships of the body, and our ideas of what men and women are. Dance is unique to other forms of art as it is situated in the human body. In addition, this art form always uses the image of a person, which can be the person in relation to others or in relation to an idea, allowing social references to remain implicitly ever present, even in dances that claim to be purely formal or solely personally expressed (Novack 1990).

The Production of Culture

Culture can be defined in various ways, however, it tends to be studied as it is manifested in tangible products such as artwork, books, and broadcast. According to Smith, tangible products can be measured, experienced directly, and have a specific spatial location or temporal duration. Some examples of these tangle products can be found in Diana Crane's use of the term "recorded culture" and Wendy Griswold's use of the term "cultural object" (2001:167). When using this definition of culture, culture is also something that is akin to messages that are produced, transmitted, and received. This theoretical interest in the production and reception of culture can be traced back to the middle decades of the twentieth century research on communication as communication tends to be seen as a process involving a sender, a receiver, and a message. Today, mass media research continues to explore the relationship between these three elements as there have been various debates about the power of the sender and the receiver to determine the meaning of messages (Smith 2001).

Wendy Griswold's cultural diamond has made significant contributions to our understanding of media and reception studies. According to Griswold, the cultural diamond is not a theory; however, cultural analysis must investigate the four points of the cultural diamond in order to receive a complete cultural analysis. The four points of this diamond include social world, creator, receiver, and cultural object which must be considered in order to receive a thorough explanation of some cultural phenomenon. When examining the "social world", one must try to understand how the values that we take for granted and the macro-level characteristics of a society shape how people understand the world. When trying to understand the "creator" point, it is important to figure out how cultural meaning is shaped by the organizations, institutions, and process that create cultural objects. When focusing on the "receiver" point of the diamond, one must understand the processes by which people receive and interpret cultural messages. Lastly, it is important to comprehend that the characteristics of a cultural object itself has significant effects in the generation. In this project, I will do a small exploration of the importance of the "social world", the "receiver, and the "cultural object", however, I will not explore the importance of the "creator" in the project although is need in order to get a full understand of my cultural analysis (Griswold 1994).

After reviewing existing literature, it has become clear that television plays a crucial role in our society and that it is an agent of socialization that affects our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Popular culture can be experienced on television and it is a site of struggle where dominant ideologies such as traditional gender norms can be determined, debate, contested, and disturbed. Once these dominant ideologies are presented, factors such as race, class, age, and life experiences can affect how we receive these ideologies. After receiving these ideologies through text, one can adapt the text for their own uses and pleasures. With this, the uses and pleasures

will come as a result of our social world. We now have a general understanding of media reception and how it relates to my research question. Now, it is important to know what is *So You Think You Can Dance.*

So You Think You Can Dance

So You Think You Can Dance is an American reality dance show that is broadcast all over the world. Created by American Idol's Simon Fuller and Nigel Lythgoe, the show first premiered in July of 2005. So You Think You Can Dance finished its third season in 2007 as the # 1 show in its period among key demographics. Ratings continue to soar as 7.9 million viewers tuned in to watch the show on August 6, 2008 with 8.4 million tuning in on the next night (Dorsey 2008). The popularity of the show has lead to spinoff versions of the show in New Zealand, Turkey, Israel, Canada, Germany, Greece, Poland, Malaysia, Norway, Norway, South Africa, Austria, with other countries in the works (SYTYCD 2008).

As each season begins, producers travel across the country in search of various contestants ranging from unknown street dancers to winners of national championships. Those who catch the judge's interest during auditions will be invited back to call-backs where they will work their way through an intensive audition process lead by top choreographers. During the week of call-backs, the judges choose the Top 20 dancers who will continue on to the performance round. In the performance round, the 20 finalist receive partners of the opposite sex and perform different dance styles in order to test their versatility as they dance for America's votes. Six contestants comprise the three bottom couples each week and are given the chance to perform a solo in order to encourage viewers to keep them on the show. After the solos are performed, the judges decide which dancers will remain on the show and which two dancers are eliminated. This process continues until the series is down to its Top 10 finalist and the decision of who remains in the

competition is solely up to the viewers. The winner of the show walks away with a cash prize, the title of America's Best Dancer, and the opportunity to embark on a 50 city performance tour (SYTYCD 2008).

Methodology

The methodology of this project is a multi-method approach which uses content analysis, surveys, and interviews. The use of content analysis allowed me to study the show and identify embedded gender norms systematically. Surveys were used in order to get a general idea of how women are relating to the show and what influences their liking of the show. This method was appropriate for collecting this data because it allowed me to collect the same data from all members of the sample and analyzed it statistically in order to find trends and patterns as well as things that did not fall into these trends or patterns. The last method used in this study was interviews which allowed me to discover the viewers' relationships to the embedded gender norms. I found this method to be appropriate for gathering this data as one of the best ways to figure out how the audience is relating to the show is to ask them personally. It is also essential to ask the audience members because advance media reception theory has shown that viewers can interpret media messages in different ways instead of accepting the messages as is.

 Sampling Techniques

For the purpose of my interviews, I used convenience sampling as well as snowball sampling as a means of finding my informants. In convenience sampling, I used friends that I knew to be fans of the show as well as dancers who I believed might be fans of the show. In snowball sampling, I started with a fan of the show and asked that person for someone that they watch the show with or someone who they knew to be fans of the show. The use of these two

sampling techniques resulted in this study not including a representative sample of women as the sample was chosen in a way that did not give every member of my target population a good chance of being selected. With this, the number of participants used for the purpose of my interviews is too small for me to consider this a representative sample.

For the purpose of my surveys, I choose to use female fans who attended the *So You Think You Can Dance* tour in Columbus, Ohio during October. In addition to trying to get a general idea of how women were relating to the show, it was impractical for me to try to do depth interviews with audience members at the show, so I replaced interviews with surveys. I found my survey participants during intermission and after the show. My original plan was to use 20 participants in order to conduct 10 surveys and 10 interviews. Despite this original plan, I ended up having 22 participants with 14 surveys and 8 interviews. I receive more surveys because many of the fans were willing to fill out the surveys, especially if their friends agreed to fill out the survey. I was only able to conduct 8 interviews as a result of scheduling and time conflicts. I also sent out an allstu in order to find participants at Kenyon who are fans of the show; however, I didn't receive any responses which may have come as a result of many students blocking allstu emails and people not willing to give up an hour of their day to conduct the interview.

Methodological Techniques

In order to identify the gender norms embedded in the show, I decided to do a content analysis of 5 clips of the show. The 5 clips are performance clips found on *YouTube* from season 4, which was the last season of the show. I decided to focus on season 4 as it is the most recent season causing it to be the season that the participants were most likely to remember. Each clip displayed a different genre of dance which included hip hop, contemporary, ballroom, jazz, and

broadway. Other genres of dance are presented on the show; however, most of these genres are fairly new to the show or are not seen as often as the five genres that I selected for this project.

During this content analysis, I focused on patterns and trends concerning costuming, body image, movement vocabulary, and narrative. In focusing on the costumes, I paid close attention to what the male and female dancers were wearing, how the costumes changed depending on the style of dance, and how the costumes contributed to the narrative being told. The costumes worn during the show also brought up the issue of body image. While focusing on body image, I paid close attention to the body types portrayed on the show and how the female and male body was displayed on the show. I also focused on the movement vocabulary that is used in each clip which refers to the type of movement being used in each performance. This movement can vary in style, quality, function, and meaning. Centering on the movement vocabulary allowed me see what movement vocabulary was performed by the men and the women and how this movement vocabulary is used to tell a narrative. The choice to focus on the narratives of the show allowed me to see how gender norms were portrayed through the storylines of the pieces and what storyline seemed to be most common throughout the show.

The survey used in this study was a short survey that took participants 10-15 minutes to complete. Included in this survey were 13 closed-ended questions that asked the participants general information about their experience with the show, what they liked most about the show, the importance of a romantic storyline, and how women and men are presented on the show (See Appendix A). While waiting for the participants to complete the surveys, I noticed that some of the participants found it difficult to select one answer as the survey allowed them to select all that applied. A few women also wrote in answers that were not available on the survey and the

completion of the surveys became a bonding experience for some as they asked their friend to help them answer a certain question or how their friend answered a question.

The interviews used in this project lasted for at least an hour while some interviews took longer. The interviews were taped and later transcribed. In addition, I took notes during these interviews. I began the interview with questions that focused on background information of their experience with the show and other types of dance shows. Next, I moved on to questions that focused on the differences and similarities between *So You Think You Can Dance* and romance novel/soap operas in order to compare my results to Radway's findings. These questions led me to questions that focused on the gender norms embedded in the show and women perceptions of these gender norms. I ended the interview by focusing on how the women interpreted, negotiated, and used the embedded gender norm in their everyday life as well as their oppositions to the gender norms displayed on the show (See Appendix B).

Most of the women answered the interview questions with ease. Others found it difficult to answer as they needed more time to reflect on certain questions. Despite the extra time needed to answer some of these questions, it appeared as if some women found it difficult to answer the questions because they unconsciously received the messages that were presented to them without taking time to think about how these messages impacted their lives. According to Press, "the study of media reception, therefore, like the study of all complex processes of thought and action, to be complete must involve considerations of both conscious and unconscious thought process, of creative and resistant impulses as well as determined and controlled responses" (1991: 171).

Each woman found it easy to talk about messages that did not fall into the norm. As a result, it may be possible that the difficulty of answering the questions came as a result of the messages

falling into the norm. There were various times where the women would start responding to a question, then take a while to reflect on the question. After reflecting on the question, some women would change their answer or contradict what they said before reflecting on the question. Overall, the interviews flowed like a normal conversation and most of the women had a lot to say. The atmosphere felt very relaxed and the interviewees really enjoy talking about this topic. This became very obvious as the women would light up when discussing their favorite dancer, their favorite piece, and watching the show with their friends and families.

The Women

The participants included in this project are women. I excluded men because I am particularly interested in how women relate to the show *So You Think You Can Dance* and how my findings may relate to Radway's findings as well as other studies done on women and their relationship to the media. With this, dominant ideologies are created by elite men. By focusing on women, feminist theorists may use this research as a source to support their argument for the need to make women's meaning part of our cultural life.

I do not know any personal information about my survey participants because these participants were asked to remain anonymous. Despite not knowing any personal information results show that my survey participants are big fans of the show as 7 of them have been fans since the first season. These women also watch the show with their family and female friends. 6 out of the 8 participants used to conduct my interviews are student of Kenyon College. 1 interviewee is an employee of Kenyon College while the other is a professional dancer from Chicago. All of these women are well educated women who are familiar with gender analysis making them more likely to analyze gender norms when called upon to do so. The use of all

educated women also plays a role in my sample not being representative as the show's broader audience may have a different relationship to the show. 2 of my participants are mothers, 2 of my participants are basketball players, and 3 of my participants are dancers. 5 of these participants are African American and 3 are white. I found it important to note this information as the race, education level, roles, and life experience of these women can play a role in how they perceive the show and use it in their everyday life. This information also allowed me to see the similarities and differences in the perception of the show between dancers and non-dancers, mothers and women without children, and blacks and whites. 7 out of the 8 women are big fans of the show while 1 woman watches the show occasionally when asked by a friend. Women who consider themselves to be big fans of the show tune in week to week in order to watch the shows, watch the marathons, records the shows, or watch the show on *YouTube*. Each woman reported that they also watch the show with their friends and family which are always other females. Some even reported watching the show on the phone with another female friend if they are alone.

Results/ Discussion

In order to identify the gender norm of the show, I began my data collection with a content analysis. The first thing that became obvious to me was the fact that each clip used costumes in order to differentiate the male dancer from the female dancers. Each of the five clips also used costumes that are usually associated with gender norms. This became clear as the males of each clip were either dressed in pants and a collared shirt, some type of suit, or just pants with their shirts off. The women shown in each clip were dressed in some type of dress and the dress worn in the ballroom piece was very form fitting and more revealing. Dresses used in other works tended to be more flowy, however, these dresses are also form fitting and short.

Hip hop is the only genre that allowed the female dancer to wear pants. Despite this fact, the costume designer dressed the female differently from the male in order to differentiate the female dancer from the male dancer. The costume used in the *Bleeding Love* hip hop clip also stayed true to gender norms as the male dancer is dressed in a business suit in order to add to his character of a husband/boyfriend who puts his job before his family. The female dancer in this piece is dressed in pants which are very common and appropriate for this style of dance, however, she is also wearing a pink and blue top that is flowery and flowy.

While reviewing the 5 clips in terms of body image, I discovered that there is a lack of diversity in terms of body image. All of the female dancers were small and petite with athletic figures. The male dancers are also very thin with some being more muscular than others. Out of each of the 5 clips, there was only 1 clip that included a male dancer who would not be considered thin. This dancer was more muscular then the rest of the men allowing him to display hyper-masculinity which came as a result of him being a former football player. At the same time, it is important to note that this same dancer has lost a lot of weight since the show which I noticed while attending the SYTYCD tour. This weight lost may have come as a result of his intense dance schedule; however, this weight lost also may have come as a result of him feeling the pressure to fit in with the other men of the show in order to look like a the traditional male dancer.

Movement vocabulary is another area where gender differences are displayed. My results show that the men and women in each clip were given different dance vocabulary at various points in the dance works. If lifts are performed in the piece, the male dancer is the one who performs the lift while the woman is the one to be lifted. The male dancer in each clip are also given more aggressive movement vocabulary as well as movement vocabulary that allow them to

manipulate or control what the female dancers are doing. Female dancers are more emotional, needy, and vulnerable, which was noted by a survey participant. The men are constructed as cool, emotionally disengaged or not as engaged as the woman, and love-'em and-leave'em types who are emotionally unaffected by women which is also seen in the *Bleeding Love* clip. During this piece the women is crying throughout as she tried to get her man to stay home. Although the women is crying, the man continues to keep a calm expression on his face as he performs movements that control what the female is doing and manipulates her body. In addition, the women included in the 5 clips were limited to playing the sexy, sassy, character or the damsel in distress. This sexy, sassy character is seen in the ballroom piece as the woman performs sensual movement in order to tease the man and make him want her.

Narrative is another area where gender differences were presented. The woman chasing after the man or left broken-hearted is a common theme and each performance clip incorporates the element of romance or a relationship in which a man and a woman have to relate to each other. The element of romance becomes enhanced as certain music and lighting is used in order to set up the romantic scene of each piece. As an example, the contemporary piece used in my content analysis is based on a man and women who are in love. The fact that they are in love becomes clear because of the music choice which is a slow song entitled "*Lost"* and the lighting of the piece which is dim in order to set up a romantic scene and give a sense of intimacy. Romance plays a significant role in the show as 8 survey participants believe that a romantic storyline really impacts their liking of a piece. Survey results also show that 12 women find dance works that include a partnership between a man and a woman most enjoyable. Here, we see a similarity between these findings and Radway's finding as the male and female partnering also promotes duty, marriage, and heterosexual relationships.

While interviewing my participants, I discovered that they were very aware of the gender differences reflected through the costumes. 5 participants accepted how the costumes portrayed gender norms because they believed that the costumes were part of the dance norm. This became clear as one participant talked about the costumes that was most memorable for her. "The costumes that I remember most is the costumes used in the Adam and Eve piece. They were basically naked and you could see their muscles, especially on the man. I was fine with the costumes of that piece because the piece is physical and you can see the body". Another participant claimed that the costumes used on the show were very revealing; however, she accepted them because they are worn for the sake of dancing. Some claimed that there were revealing costumes worn on the show; however, they accepted the costumes because of the common belief that certain costumes are appropriate for dance. "In dance you have to move, but your clothes shouldn't look like you got attacked by a bear. If I saw them on the street I would say something, but I guess its ok because its dance". Although many participants believed that the costumes used on the show were too revealing at times, one participant stated that "the costumes are not too revealing. Their costumes are appropriate because its dance".

Some participants accepted the costumes as a result of believing that they are appropriate for dance while others analyzed and deconstructed the use of costumes in the show. According to one woman," it is obvious that the costumes are based on gender norms as you never see a man wearing a skirt. The women are usually in a dress and the female tends to wear outfits that are more revealing. The dresses are usually light and flowy which can add to her feminine appeal and gracefulness". Another participant claimed that "the ballroom costumes are more revealing. Sometimes the women may have on a half a dress, but I always say that the dance wouldn't change if she had the other half. The costumes are really based on gender norms

with the girls in the dresses and the men in pants. Ballroom is the genre that seems to be the most strict about the costumes as it must be obvious who is the man and who is the woman".

After analyzing my body image results, I discovered that one participant interpreted the show as reinforcement for conventional body ideals and that body image is also a struggle for other female dancers as one of my participants stated that "watching the show has definitely made me more conscious about my body. As a dancer, I know that I have to be in shape. You want to resemble perfection, so I always worry about my weight because I am constantly performing and displaying my body. Two dancers chose to reject the body images presented in the show as one participant states that "the female dancers are small and petite; however, I know that it is unrealistic to be that size. I go against the norm of being small because you don't have to look like that to dance". Another dancer chose to reject this norm which she believes comes as a result of her being self- assured. "As a dancer, I constantly see those body types around me, but I hope or believe that I am self-assured enough to not worry about my body image".

The body images presented in the show have the potential to make women more self conscious, however, becoming more self conscious has brought about positive changes for some women as one participant talks about the ways in which the show has helped her in her personal life."I am very conscious about what my body look like; however, I have been able to find a happy medium. I now think about the ways in which I would like to improve myself. I have begun to call into question certain aspects of my identity that are not just physical and do some soul searching. I am now going to the gym more to stay healthy and be physically fit. The small women are motivation, but I keep it real". Four participants noted that the show hasn't affect the way they view themselves in terms of body image, but they are aware that one has to be small in order to dance. This becomes clear as one woman says "when I see the small women on the show,

I'm not going to cry about it. If you want to dance you have to have a particular body type. Otherwise you shouldn't be doing it". After analyzing these findings, I noticed that there seems to be a divide between the dancers and the non-dancers. In this case, the non-dancers accepted the body images displayed on the show because of the belief that those body types are necessary in order to dance. Dancers, on the other hand, either rejected the norms or accept them and used them in their everyday life. It is possible that this divide takes place as a result of the dancers being more likely to experience the pressure of having a dancer's body. Another interesting finding is the fact that the Kenyon employer, which is the oldest participant, was the only participant to use the body images for personal growth. As we look at these two divides, one could argue that these divides come as a result of life experiences and age.

Out of all the dance vocabulary used throughout the show, the female interviewees analyzed and deconstructed on the significance of the men lifting the women as they believed the lifts were a representation of strength and control. "The dance vocabulary definitely shows that the man has to be strong. They are always performing the lifts and do a good job". The participants also believed that the lift also helped defined the masculinity of the male dancers which became clear as one woman as she stated "if you are a man, you have to take the lead, support, and be strong. If you can't pick her up or turn her around, then you are not going to make it on the show". Another participant perceived the lifts performed in the works as the choreographers' way of saying that the woman should obey and trust the man as she believed that "the Adam and Eve piece is telling the woman to love and obey the man. It's not the woman lifting the woman. Through the lifts the woman is being told to trust the man and reciprocate and receive through love". This woman then went on to discuss how her interpretation of the lifts has affected her personal life. "It has taught me that I don't always have to be independent. It has also taught me

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not to always take so much control. Being independent becomes a problem when dealing with relationships and can take away from the relationship. Both parties matter. There is always someone more dominant, but it doesn't matter what gender". After reflecting on how this woman used the gender norms presented through movement vocabulary, it became clear that this participant actually uses her interpretation of the lift to help her follow the conventional gender role of maintaining a relationship by adjusting herself. Like women's magazines, the show has the potential to send the message that maintaining a relationship is the job of the woman and she must do whatever needs to be done in order to keep her man.

Many women love the romantic aspect of the show because it is something they can relate to and can see themselves in some of the female characters. "I really love the *Bleeding Love* piece because I could relate to that piece and I saw myself in the female character. I actually felt her pain while watching the piece and it felt so real. The participants also liked the romantic element of the pieces because they enjoyed seeing the men dancing and performing romantic roles because it helps challenge societies ideals about masculinity. "I think that it is good to see men do something that is usually associated with being feminine or gay in order to challenge our ideas about masculinity". Another interviewee agreed that the show does challenge some ideas masculinity; however, it has not broken some of the stereotypes associated with black male dancers. "It's good to see male dancers perform; however, I do find it interesting that the black men are always hip hop dancers. It's ok for black men to be hip hop dancers, however, black men who are trained in other styles will be labeled as gay".

Although these interview participants agreed that the narrative plays a role in challenging society's ideas about masculinity, black women tended to look at the differences in how men were presented in terms of race. With this, it may be possible that race affected the way in which

these women interpreted the gender norms displayed through narrative. In addition, there are various conventional gender roles presented, however, some women were able to relate to the show and see the show as a reflection of their life experiences which is different from Radway's findings where the women used the romance novels in order to escape into hopeful stories that did not reflect their reality. It is true that the show allows us to see men doing something outside of hegemonic masculinity; however, this hegemonic masculinity is also reinforced as the masculine male dancers can be viewed as the romantic heroes that are seen in romance novels who sweep the women off their feet and take them on a journey of love.

Despite liking the romantic storylines of each dance work, many women reported that they would like to see more diversity in the relationships between the man and the woman and to see women play new roles. "I would love to see more females perform hip hop. One of my favorite pieces of the last season was a crumping piece because I got to see the woman play a character that was hard and rough". The women also reported that they really enjoyed the partnering between the men and women; however, this was another area where they would like to see more diversity for various reasons. One interviewee stated that "we are now living in a society where things have continue to change and relationships are not always just between the man and the woman. It would be interesting to see a romance between two men or two women. There can also be pieces about friends, sisters, mother and daughter, brother, father and son and so forth". Another woman claimed that partnering between men and women is also important to see how talented the dancers are. "I think it's fairly easy to play the man and the woman in a piece that has partnering between a man and a woman. The real challenge comes when you put a woman against a woman or a man against a man because you really get to see how good a dancer is and who is better than who".

Conclusion

The way in which female fans receive the embedded gender norms of the show can be affected by various factors which include race, gender, age, class, and life experiences. Once these embedded gender norms were received, women used, interpreted and negotiated the norms of the show. Some rejected the gender norms while many accepted the gender norms because they take place in the art of dance. Some women used them to reinforced conventional gender norms while others used them as food for thought in their personal lives and for personal growth. All of the interview participants were well educated women which also played a significant role in how these women analyzed and deconstructed the norms.

Majority of the participants claimed that they would like to see more diversity in the show. Despite this, the female participants of this study really embraced the gender norms. After examining the show, one can see how gender is embedded in every aspect of dance. One can also see how the show portray gender stereotypes and reinforce dominant ideologies of what it means to be a woman or man, which one of my participants noted could have harmful effects for others. "If I could change anything it would be to incorporate different types of partnering in order to see more diversity of characters as well as romantic love. Luckily for me, I am more established in my life and self assured; however, I do wonder how younger women who are still finding their identity might interpret the dances. The messages embedded in the show have the potential to be dangerous, especially for younger women". Like this participant, I do believe that the message presented in the show could have harmful effects on young women who are in the process of finding their identity and are not as self-assured as older women. Young women may accept the idea that revealing clothing is necessary for dance as well as to get attention. They may also believe that it is the woman's duty to chase after the man and that heterosexual relationships are

superior to other forms of relationships. The reinforcement of dominant ideologies also allows

the power structure to remain the same and for gender inequalities to increase. As a result of

these possible effects, I think it would be interesting to do the same project on women under the

age of 18.

Please circle all that applies in each question.

1. When did you first start watching the show?

    a. First season of So You Think You Can Dance
    b. Second season of So You Think You Can Dance
    c. Third season of So You Think You Can Dance
    d. Fourth season of So You Think You Can Dance

2. Who do you watch the show with?

    a. I watch the show with my family
    b. I watch the show with my female friends
    c. I watch the show with my male friends
    d. I watch the show alone
    e. I watch the show with my significant other

3. How often do you discuss So You Think You Can Dance with others?

    a. never
    b. rarely
    c. sometimes
    d. often

4. Why do you watch the show?

    a. I enjoy the competitive nature of the show.
    b. I am a dancer
    c. I watch the show for entertainment
    d. I enjoy learning about different genres of dance
    e. I use the show as a source of inspiration
    f. I enjoy the romantic storyline of the different dance works
    g. Other_____

5. If you circle (f), how has the show been inspiring for you?

    a. Inspire me to dance
    b. Inspire me to follow my dreams
    c. Inspire me to change something about myself
    d. Inspire me to lose weight

e. Other _____

6. Which genre do you enjoy the **most**?

   a. contemporary
   b. hip hop
   c. jazz
   d. ballroom
   e. bollywood
   f. broadway

7. Which dance genre do you enjoy the **least?**
   a. contemporary
   b. hip hop
   c. jazz
   d. ballroom
   e. bollywood
   f. broadway

8. What pieces do you enjoy the **most**?

   a. solo pieces
   b. group pieces
   c. male partnering pieces
   d. female partnering pieces
   e. male/female partnering pieces
   f. Other_____

9. How much does a romantic storyline affect your enjoyment of a piece?
   a. It does not affect my enjoyment at all
   b. It affects my enjoyment somewhat
   c. It really affects my enjoyment
   d. Other_____

10. How do you feel about the way female dancers are portrayed on the show?
   a. I don't care how women are portrayed on the show

   b. I care about how women are portrayed on the show somewhat

   c. I really care about how women are portrayed on the show

   d. Other _____

11. How do you feel about the way male dancers are portrayed on the show?
   a. I don't care how men are portrayed on the show
   b. I care about how men are portrayed on the show somewhat
   c. I really care about how men are portrayed on the show
   d. Other _____

12. How are female dancers portrayed on the show?
     a. Women are portrayed as equal to men
     b. Women are portrayed as unequal to men
     c. Other_____

13. What other dance shows do you enjoy watching?

     a. I enjoy watching Dancing With the Stars
     b. I enjoy watching America's Best Dance Crew
     c. I enjoy watching Shut Up and Dance
     d. I enjoy watching Your Mama Don't Dance
     e. Other_____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Why do you watch the show *So You Think You Can Dance?*

How long have you been a fan of the show*?*

How often do you watch the show?

Who do you watch the show with?

How often do you discuss the show with others?

Who do you discuss the show with?

Which season of the show have you enjoyed the most? Why?

What other dance shows do you enjoy watching? Why?

What dance genres of the show do you enjoy most? Why?

How would you describe the female dancers of the show?

How would you describe the male dancers of the show?

What makes reality dance show different from other reality show such as American Idol?

What trends or patterns do you notice in terms of the female dancers of the show?

What trends or patterns do you notice in terms of the male dancers of the show?

What gender norms do you identify in terms of costumes?

What gender norms do you identify in terms of body image?

What gender norms do you identify in terms of movement vocabulary?

What gender norms do you identify in terms of narrative?

In what ways have you used these gender norms in your personal life?

What ideas do you believe the show portray in terms of what it means to be a woman?

What ideas do you believe the show portray in terms of what it means to be a man?

What opposition do you have in terms of how women/ men are portrayed in the show?

Is there anything that you would change in terms of how women/men were portrayed in the show?

Appendix C: Survey Results

1. When did you first start watching the show?

First season	7
Second season	3
Third season	2
Fourth season	2

2. Who do you watch the show with?

Family	9
Female friends	5
Male friends	0
Alone	1
Significant other	0

3. How often do you discuss So You Think You Can Dance with others?

Never	0
Rarely	0
Sometimes	5
Often	9

4. Why do you watch the show?

I enjoy the competitive nature of the show.	5
I am a dancer	1

I watch the show for entertainment	9
I enjoy learning about different genres of dance	8
I use the show as a source of inspiration	7
I enjoy the romantic storyline of the different dance works	4
Other	3

5. If you circle (f), how has the show been inspiring for you?

Inspire me to dance	1
Inspire me to follow my dreams	2
Inspire me to change something about myself	2
Inspire me to lose weight	0
Other	2

6. Which genre do you enjoy the **most**?

contemporary	10
hip hop	7
jazz	2
ballroom	2
broadway	0
bollywood	3

7. Which dance genre do you enjoy the **least?**

contemporary	2
hip hop	1

jazz	8
ballroom	0
broadway	0
bollywood	1
N/A	2

8. What pieces do you enjoy the most?

Solo pieces	3
Group pieces	6
Male partnering pieces	4
Female partnering pieces	2
Male/female partnering pieces	12
Other	0

9. How much does a romantic storyline affect your enjoyment of a piece?

It does not affect my enjoyment at all	1
It affects my enjoyment somewhat	5
It really affects my enjoyment	8
Other	0

10. How do you feel about the way female dancers are portrayed on the show?

I don't care how women are portrayed	2
It care how women are portrayed somewhat	8
It really care how women are portrayed	4

Other	0

11. How do you feel about the way male dancers are portrayed on the show?

I don't care how the men are portrayed	2
It care about how the men are portrayed somewhat	8
It really care how the men are portrayed	4
Other	0

12. How are female dancers portrayed on the show?

Women are portrayed as equal to men	12
Women are portrayed as unequal to men	1
Other	1

13. What other dance shows do you enjoy watching?

I enjoy watching Dancing With the Stars	6
I enjoy watching America's Best Dance Crew	8
I enjoy watching Shut Up and Dance	0
I enjoy watching Your Mama Don't Dance	0
I only watch SYTYCD	2

Appendix D: Coding sheet for interviews

Costumes

Accept Because of Dance	Analyze and Deconstruct
-Costumes are needed to show off the body (1) -Costumes are part of the dance norm (2) -Costumes are revealing but appropriate for dance (2)	-Costumes are based on societal norms (2) - Costumes must display man/woman (1)

Body Image

Accept Because of Dance	Reject	Use in Personal Life
-Body types are appropriate/ required for dance (4)	-Don't have to be small to be a dancer (1) -Comfortable with own body (1)	-Want to resemble body images presented on show (1) -Body images have inspire one to be healthy and stay in shape (1)

Movement Vocabulary

Analyze and Deconstruct	Use in personal life
Lift are used to depict masculinity (8)	-help in relationships (2)

Narrative

Embrace but want more diversity	Use in Personal Life
-Good to see men challenge gender norms, but want to see different roles for men/women (6)	-Can relate to women on the show (1) -Teach women what not to do (1)

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