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Book Review

Sorry I Don't Dance: Why Men Refuse to Move

By Maxine Leeds Craig
Oxford University Press. 2014. 230 pages. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer: Denise Bielby, *University of California, Santa Barbara*

Motivated by the lack of evidence in the sociology of masculinity and in histories of American masculinity about men who participate in everyday dancing, Maxine Leeds Craig, a professor of women and gender studies, set out to document the presence of men in this routine social activity. As it turns out, dancing is not widely practiced by men. To account for why music's melody and rhythm fail to motivate men, Craig first constructs an insightful chronology, synthesized from archival sources, of men's involvement, or lack thereof, in popular dance between the start of the twentieth century through the 1970s. This is followed by an exploration through interviews and participant-observation of the presence of dancing within racially, ethnically, and sexually diverse groups of contemporary men. When taken together, these two analytical lenses reveal how intersecting cultural assumptions about the embodiments of men's talent, habits, and stances shape prevailing definitions of masculinity and men's subsequent involvement in the expressive movement of popular dance.

Craig's intriguing historical analysis reveals that dance was the most popular form of mixed-gender recreation among middle-class youth and upper-middle-class adults in the 1910s and 1920s, but that for the most part the ever-present threat of effeminacy and degeneracy lurked in the background, ready to be assigned to men who danced. These attributions were rooted in larger discourses and debates of the time that delineated the boundaries of masculinity—the relationship of industrialization and bureaucratization to men's labor, the emergence of women in the workforce, the social complexities of urban settings, the moral agendas of religious groups, the place of physical education in school curricula, and the influence of popular entertainers on lifestyle. In an interesting, revealing turn of events, World War II reversed this course by binding the unsailable masculinity of the uniformed warrior-soldier who victoriously fought for democracy with the athleticism of the jitterbug. Dance temporarily became an uncontested and patriotic pastime for men and women alike. But this, like so many other societal shifts of the postwar era, was pushed back in the 1950s

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when, once again, dance became an activity of unmarried youth and moved to the socially sanctioned settings of school dances and proms. Even with Elvis, television's popular weekday afternoon and Saturday dance programs, and teenagers of all races dancing as couples to crossover and black musicians, white males were already in retreat because of the skill dancing required and the spectatorship it drew. The music of the 1960s uncoupled white males, in particular, from everyday dancing, and even though disco of the 1970s at first unified racially, ethnically, and sexually diverse groups, the migration of young white males to the "hardness" of hard rock disengaged them from females and older listeners and permanently fractured vernacular dancing along racial, gender, and sexual lines.

Craig's analysis of present-day dancing shifts the focus of the book in order to probe the ways in which contemporary sexual, racial, ethnic, and age boundaries contribute to (mostly) heterosexual white men's avoidance of dance. Is it sex, sexiness, or sexuality that makes public dance performance risky for men? she asks. It depends. Her interviews reveal that if one is gay-identified, appearing sexy as a dancer is not a problem. For married and older men, the prelude to sex that dance settings afford are less relevant to their lives, and this accounts for their relative absence on the dance floor. Race compounds the differential acceptability of men's bodily movement for these groups. For white men of any age, movement needs to be constrained, as it was in the past, but for other racial groups dance is just dance, not a challenge to their masculinity. Racialized masculine competence encompasses the ability to move in dance, and for those who dance as they get older, dance is a transcendent form of play. To account for these differences, Craig relies upon the concept of *habitus*, but one that she broadens to encompass the complexities of race. When men are raised in historical or community-specific settings where dancing is viewed as a social skill, as a facet of social competence for adulthood or for familial recreation, dance is learned and performed unproblematically throughout life. In these contexts, the significance of this skill is strengthened by meaningful cultures, often protected by segregation and patterns of inequality, that equate dancing with authentic cultural status in the community. Her concept of *habitus* applies as well to learning not to move when listening to music. This disconnect may arise from discomfort from exposure or from being seen as a fool because mentors did not move to music or listened in settings where dance could not happen. But, Craig argues, at the crux of this *habitus* is the straitjacket of masculine embodiment: self-containment, bodily inexpressiveness, and the maintenance of physical distance through which men claim authority and control in the gender hierarchy not only over women but over other less-controlled men. Dance is sensual, and because such movement is viewed as something that potentially feminizes the body, it puts masculinity and its never-ending maintenance at risk. Under the present gender regime, since there is no social penalty for not dancing, there is on the one hand nothing for men to lose by refusing to dance, and on the other hand everything to lose if they do. Craig's book is full of insightful gems that I cannot do justice to here about how race, class, gender, and sexuality inform

the “mind/body problem” that masculinity imposes directly on men and indirectly on their dance partners. This is a very interesting book that on its face is a straightforward study of the culture of everyday dancing, but it is one that goes well beyond that to probe how the cultural givens of gender and race advance understanding of the social costs of masculinity.