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Dance as self, culture, and community : the construction of personal and collective meaning and identity in competitive ballroom and salsa dancing

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Dance as Self, Culture, and Community:

The Construction of Personal and Collective Meaning and  
Identity in Competitive Ballroom and Salsa Dancing

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Jonathan Saul Marion

Committee in charge:

Professor Steven Parish, Chair  
Professor Roy D'Andrade  
Professor Valerie Hartouni  
Professor George Lipsitz  
Professor Joel Robbins  
Professor Melford Spiro

2006



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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2006

For Karine, without whom I never would have started to dance.

For Janelle, who made dancing a joy.

For Anna, for all of her love, support, and encouragement.

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### EDUCATION

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### GRANTS & AWARDS

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## RESEARCH INTERESTS

Meaning and Identity Construction; Embodiment; Gender; Sexuality; Globalization; Activity-based Anthropology; Performance; Physical Culture; Ritual; Translocality; Virtual Communities; Social Systems and Power Structures; Person-centered Ethnography; Qualitative Research Methodology; Psychological Anthropology; Visual Anthropology

## PUBLICATIONS

- **2000.** *Deep Meaning: The Nexus of Lived Lives.* M.A. Thesis: Department of Anthropology; University of California, San Diego
- **2005.** “‘Where’ is ‘There’?: Towards a Translocal Anthropology in Competitive Ballroom Dancing.” IN *Anthropology News* 46(5):18-19, May.
- **2005.** “Why ‘Ballroom’ is Bigger than the Studio Floor.” IN *Anthropology News* 46(9): 20, December.
- **2006.** “From-the-Ballroom-Floor.” IN *From-the-Field.* Society for Visual Anthropology website: <<http://www.societyforvisualanthropology.org/ballroomfff.html>>

- **In press.** “Beyond Ballroom: Activity as Performance, Embodiment, and Identity.” IN *Human Mosaic* 36(2): 7-16.
- **In press.** 15 Ethnographic Photos IN *Glamour Addiction: Inside the American Ballroom Dance Industry*. Juliet McMains. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- **Forthcoming.** “Creating DanceSport Champions.” Co-authored with Caroline S. Picart. IN *Inside Edge: Creating Dancesport Champions*. Caroline S. Picart.

#### PANELS (ORGANIZED)

- *When the “Where?” isn’t “There”:* Steps Towards Addressing Activity Based “Sites” of Anthropological Inquiry. Organizer & Chair. April 9, 2005, SPA/AES Joint Meetings.
- *Globalization, Embodiment, and Identity*. Organizer. November 30, 2005, AAA Annual Meetings.
- *Exploring Activity as Culture, Community, and Identity*: Organizer & Co-chair. 2006 AAA Annual Meetings. [**Pending**]

#### LECTURES/TALKS

- *Life on Kibbutz*. Invited address, Jameson Center for the Study of Religion and Ethics, University of Redlands. April 1996.
- *Social Organization and Formation as Revealed by the Case of the Israeli Kibbutz*. Guest Lecture, San Diego State University, “Introduction to Cultural Anthropology” (Dr. L. Gamble). May 1997.
- *Growth of Government and Constitutionalism: The Two Thomases—Hobbes and Aquinas*. Guest Lecture, UCSD undergraduate course, “New Ideas and the Clash of Cultures,” (Dr. S. Chodorow). Nov. 2000.
- *What is Psychological Anthropology? – An Introduction Using Ballroom and Salsa Dancing as Ethnographic Cases*. Invited address, Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology, School of Human Service Professions, Widener University. July 2001.
- *Performing Identity: Some Observations from the World of Ballroom Dance*.
  - Poster presentation at the biennial meeting of the Society for Psychological Anthropology. April 2003.
  - Paper presentation at the Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities. Jan. 2003.
- *Participation, Motivation, and Performance: The Case of Competition in Ballroom and Beyond*. Guest Lecture, UCSD undergraduate course, “The Social Psychology of Sport” (Dr. N. Christenfeld). July 2004.
- *When the ‘Where?’ isn’t ‘There’: Competitive Ballroom Dancing and Steps Towards Translocal Anthropology*
  - Society for Psychological Anthropology biennial meetings. April 2005.
  - 5<sup>th</sup> Annual All-Grad Research Symposium, UCSD. Jan. 2005.

- *Presenting the Visual: Considerations from the World of Competitive Ballroom Dancing*. Featured presentation in the 21st Annual Visual Research Conference, Nov. 2005.
- *Globalization, Embodiment, and Identity in International Competitive Ballroom Dancing*. Nov. 2005, AAA.
- *Beyond the Ballroom: Translocality in Competitive Ballroom Dancing*. July 2006, WDA Global Assembly.
- *Viewing Aesthetics and Values: Seeing Salsa*. Featured presentation in the 22nd Annual Visual Research Conference, Nov. 2006.
- *Competitive Ballroom Dancing as Culture, Community, and Identity*. Nov. 2006, AAA. [**Pending**]

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# **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Dance as Self, Culture, and Community:

The Construction of Personal and Collective Meaning and  
Identity in Competitive Ballroom and Salsa Dancing

by

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This dissertation uses salsa and competitive ballroom dancing as case studies to explore the role of chosen activities and commitment systems in shaping personal and collective meaning and identity in modern, urbanized society. Embedded in the wider social phenomena of leisure, these dance forms constitute chosen cultural arenas where people often find meaning, identity, and community. Participation is voluntary, and people are not compelled to engage in these activities. Yet these leisure activities have personal significance that both express and generate a sense of self.

One of the reasons that ballroom and salsa serve as powerful “sites” of inquiry regarding chosen participations—relative to personal and collective meanings and identities—is their lack of wider social prestige or remuneration; for the same effort

and dedication (in both time and money) there are numerous other forms of art and athletics that receive far greater social recognition, status, and monetary compensation. This does not mean that these rewards are never received by or are unimportant to ballroom or salsa dancers. What it does mean, however, is that wider social recognition, status, or monetary compensation cannot suffice to understand the dedication and investment typical of many dancers. As such, these dance forms are particularly rich sites for unpacking the interrelationships of chosen activities and activity systems with personal and collective meanings and identities within the circumstances of modern living. Precisely because “dance reflects powerful social forces,” and “largely uncharted” ones (Brinson 1985:212), the data and findings of this dissertation contribute to a number of fields.

Beyond these general contributions, however, this dissertation has foregrounded the utility and productivity of focusing on dance *as dance*. While never separate or explicable save in relation to its sociocultural context, neither can dance be reduced to nothing more than its sociocultural context. Whether as part of a ritual or as a ritualized activity in its own right, dance is more than what it partakes of; it is a specific means of being in the world and, given its cross-cultural scope, deserves careful anthropological attention.



# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand how, in modern society, dance mobilizes cultural meanings and how these meanings articulate personal and social identities. Embedded in the wider social phenomena of leisure, dance constitutes a chosen cultural arena wherein and whereby people often find meaning, identity, and community. This is a voluntary participation; people are not compelled to engage in these activities. Rather, their leisure activities have personal significance that are both expressive and generative of a sense of self. This project thus offers the opportunity to understand how people attempt to integrate meaning, identity, and community by way of a leisure activity that is voluntary, participatory, and ritualized in contemporary industrial societies.

Within the larger framework of leisure this dissertation examines dance in general, and specific forms of partnered dance in particular. So why “dance”? While I take up this question more completely in Chapter Two, let me offer some preliminary answers. If for no other reason dance is worth studying based on its almost universal cultural manifestation. While it is true that some might read shifting models and understandings of what constitutes culture as suggesting that dance is not a universal element, I would argue that such readings are in error. Conceived of or performed as recreation, ritual, or religious observance, whether as theatre or art or as having some utilitarian efficacy, people have always danced. If the project of anthropology remains the understanding of humans—as I believe it must—then the very prevalence of dance within the corpus of human history is, itself, reason enough to focus on dance. Going one step further, however, I also think it important to focus on dance *as*

dance. Relegating dance to one element of religion, or ceremony, or theatre (or whatever else) obfuscates the significance of dance. Why dance shows up in certain ways and in certain places, how it is viewed, used, and understood within different sociocultural milieus is a compelling question, and one worthy of much future scholarship. That there is immense variation in the forms and uses of dance is, however, a far different proposition than neglecting the constancy of dance itself.

Beyond a general focus on dance, however, this dissertation concerns itself with particular kinds of partner dancing: salsa and competitive ballroom dancing. In the first instance these two forms are distinct from many other genres of dance in that they are partner dances. Note, *partner* dances and not just “partnered” ones. This distinction is an important one, as it sets specifically *partner-based* dances and dancing (such as ballroom, salsa, tango, and swing) apart from other dance forms (such as ballet, jazz, and modern just to use the most common Western examples) that may use a partner, at times, but are in no way contingent, as dance forms, on this dynamic. While this project most closely explores competitive ballroom dance, or “dancesport,” the inclusion of salsa provides a deliberate and important counterpoint, allowing for insights into what dynamics may be more general to partner dancing overall versus which elements seem to be ballroom (or salsa) specific. This internally comparative dynamic is especially useful when looking at the dance-based values and aesthetics of each form, providing contrasting frames of reference from *within* the context of partner dancing.<sup>1</sup>

Their lack of wider social prestige or remuneration (especially in the United States) is one of the reasons that ballroom and salsa dancing serve as powerful “sites” of inquiry regarding chosen participations relative to personal and collective meanings and identities. What I mean by this is that for the same effort and dedication—in time and money—there are

numerous other forms of art and athletics that receive far greater social recognition, status, and financial compensation. This does not mean that these rewards are never received by ballroom or salsa dancers, or that these elements are unimportant to ballroom or salsa dancers. What it does mean, however, is that wider social recognition, status, and monetary compensation alone cannot suffice to understand the dedication and investment typical of many dancers.<sup>2</sup> As such, these dance forms are particularly rich sites for unpacking the interrelationships of chosen activities and activity systems with personal and collective meanings and identities within the circumstances of modern living.

The multiplex nature of dance being asserted is especially significant, given that “individual tastes are bound up in complex personal histories that cannot be reduced to single causal cultural factors” (Murray 1999:170). Lorraine Nencel mirrors this point in recognizing that “the continual motion between discourse and subjectivity produces differences” between persons (1996:78), and this conceptualization is particularly important in understanding public and private meanings as intercontextualizing of one another (Obeyesekere 1981; Shore 1991, 1998; Stromberg 1986). Through the practices of ballroom and salsa dancing, then, this dissertation examines what meanings and symbols these forms of partner dancing recruit and mobilize, exploring both how these dances mobilize meaningful personal and cultural symbols and associations and how these elements articulate with both personal and social identities.

This research is significant for three main reasons. The first is that dance is a performative activity that generates meaning. One of the intriguing dynamics I have noticed in dance is that, unlike religious ritual and similar practices, dance often generates meanings unintentionally—it operates as an unintentional meaning system. I do not mean to suggest that the meanings typically generated within religion always (or even often) match the ones intended, but whereas religion, philosophy, and other

codified frames of reference all intend to generate meanings, dance typically does so as a byproduct. Again, the point is not that people do not find meanings in dance—indeed if they did not, why would they dance?—but, rather, that few people start dancing in an effort to find such meanings.

Certainly people often look to religion, or spirituality, or philosophy to find meanings. Typically such looking is about some bigger “Meaning,” yet no one is surprised when religion or philosophy comment on or cascade across other facets of peoples understandings and formulations. This is where dance, like many other chosen participations I would assert, is different: the cascade of meanings and identifications is neither sought out nor anticipated. One typically dances *to* dance, not to change their evaluative frames for non-dance related living. The unintended generation of meaning via social activity and process thus emerges as an important ramification of participation in chosen activity systems, in this case dancing. This dynamic is also significant in understanding how unintended meanings—as conceptual, emotional, and motivational background—can function as particularly strong and durable meanings and points of identification in people’s lives.<sup>3</sup>

The second point of significance regarding this research is that dance helps constitute both identity and community in the circumstances of modern, industrial society. Dance is not just a small scale, relatively isolated activity but, rather, a sizable field of activity that is evolving and flourishing largely without notice in our very midst.<sup>4</sup> Between seven competitive circuits and numerous independent competitions—in addition to dozens of dance camps—the United States alone plays host to a total of

over 90 officially sanctioned competitions per year.<sup>5</sup> In the U.S., there are over 2,100 professional, registered instructors, and this number that does not count the far more numerous unaffiliated independent instructors. There are also over 20,000 amateurs registered with the United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association, again not counting the far more numerous social and studio amateurs who never register. And these numbers are small relative to many other places in the world where dancesport has a greater base and following. On the worldwide scale the World Dance and Dancesport Council (WD&DSC), the governing body for professionals, currently represents over 50 countries around the globe while the International Dancesport Federation (IDSF), the governing body for amateurs, is composed of 82 member organizations, 56 recognized by their own National Olympic Committees, and representing over four million athletes.<sup>6</sup>

The third point of significance regarding this research is that contemporary partner dancing can be seen as serving an important process of re-embodiment (a key focus of Chapter Ten), allowing people to experience their bodies in a way that gives meaningfulness to those bodies in a manner unavailable in, and to, much of modern life. The same body that is mechanically maintained sitting behind a desk, working at the computer, and speaking on the phone is allowed, asked, and forced to actively express and be something in dance. In this respect I find it telling, and of no surprise, that dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster recognizes the most significant twentieth century dance theorists to be Suzanne Langer, John Martin, and Curt Sachs, all of

whom “locate the origins of dance in early human gestural attempts to communicate” (1986:xvi, e.g. Langer 1953, 1957; Martin 1946, 1968; and Sachs 1963).

It is precisely because “dance reflects powerful social forces,” and “largely uncharted” ones at that (Brinson 1985:212), that the data and findings of this project contribute to a number of fields. Perhaps most obviously, it contributes to theories of performance and the role of performance in the construction of meaning and identity, but it also speaks to forms of chosen identity and community in contemporary industrial society and provides insight into the manner in which the body and the self mutually constitute one another, contributing to a theory of the body that explores the overdetermined meanings of the body. Undergirding my project then are several interconnected threads: (1) what dancing means to people, (2) how such meanings come to be held and become salient, (3) the articulations between personality and culture inherent in such meanings, (4) the importance of and role played by physical experience (e.g. Bourdieu 1977:15; Stromberg 1986:65), and (5) The linking of emotional force to cognitive content (e.g. Stromberg 1986) that give salience to meanings.

Certainly my own experiences and perspectives—especially given the central role that dance currently holds in my life—have had, and continue to exert, an impact on the materials gathered and presented. Of this there can be no doubt. But as others have already pointed out (e.g. Bernard 1995; Lofland and Lofland 1995), much excellent social research finds its instigation amidst researchers’ personal experiences

and interests,<sup>7</sup> and it is from this frame of reference that I present the following analyses and assessments.

One final and related point I wish to make in this regard, and before laying out the structure of what is to come, concerns self-reflexivity. As with anyone, my own perspectives, understandings, and positioning colored my experiences, perceptions, and analyses of the people and performances I encountered, interacted with, and watched. Yet as Steven Parish has noted, “that there is inevitably a good part of ourselves in our work, however, does not mean there is nothing of others in it” (1996:ix). Dancers told me what they wanted to tell me for their own reasons. Those who did not want to talk with me did not; some who talked with me did so but only at a more superficial level. Other dancers chose to share more deeply and more personally. In each instance the dancers’ own agency, initiative, and agenda was at least as implicated in the ethnographic process as my own. It is following along these lines that I must agree with Parish’s contention that “while we need always to strive to understand the ways the ethnographer shapes the ethnography, I do not think we should exaggerate the role of the ethnographer or minimize the contributions of the natives to the process of doing ethnography” (1996:xv).

In introduction to the rest of my materials, Section I, comprised of Chapters One and Two, serves as an introductory section, which sketches in the background, issues, and settings for my research. In Chapter One I explain how I came to be interested in this research, sketch in the ethnographic settings and situations wherein and whereby my research was conducted. In Chapter Two I survey the literature on the

uses and effects of dance in both general terms and situated contexts, look at the importance of dance as a venue for social research, including its role as social reflection, show how it can productively be situated within the field of leisure, look at what, in fact, dance is, how it actually exists as a “place” where dancers’ lives are lived and negotiated, look at the question of what “ballroom” and “salsa” are, examine why ballroom and salsa are useful “sites” for research including what specific truths they can illuminate, and note what utility exists in studying them together, Section II is comprised of Chapters Three, Four, and Five and deals with the communities of people involved, focusing on the societies of competitive ballroom and salsa dance. Chapter Three addresses the larger questions of community membership, examining who belongs, how, and why. Also at stake are notions of complex, translocal communities consisting of overlapping co-extant social networks, and participant life cycles. Chapter Four then turns to the political facets of ballroom dancing, bringing to light and examining the relationships of power and authority within and in relation to which other dynamics of ballroom life unfold. In Chapter Five I explore how dance is packaged, marketed, and sold as examples of politics in action; especially within the structure of franchise studios.

With the social structure and dynamics laid out in Section II, Section III shifts its focus to discussions of culture, looking at the values and norms associated with dancing and the dance community. In Chapter Six I address competitive ballroom dancing as a “metagenre,” (MacAloon 1984) comprised of overlapping dynamics including those of spectacle, art, and sport, while in Chapter Seven I look specifically



at ballroom competitions as occasions of festival, celebration, and ritual within the ballroom world. Chapters Eight and Nine then turn to the aesthetics inherent to competitive ballroom dancing. Chapter Eight includes a discussion of judging (and its component values) in competitive ballroom dancing and uses this as a basis for examining the aesthetic values of the ballroom culture, focusing both on the visual performance of ballroom identity and the dynamics by which such values are perpetuated and transmitted. Chapter Nine continues on this topic but focusing specifically on ballroom costuming.

In Section IV I look at the dancers who live the social and cultural lives described in Sections II and III. Following out of the discussion on aesthetics and costuming introduced in Chapters Eight and Nine, Chapter Ten deals with the medium of the dancers' pursuit—their bodies. More specifically, I focus on the re-embodiment inherent to contemporary dance and the (en)gendered identity of partnered dancing. Chapter Eleven maintains this focus on the dancers themselves, in this case via case study materials of both “everyday” and elite ballroom and salsa dancers, and using data from short structured interviews, unstructured interview-discussions, and self narrative. In Chapter Twelve I examine dancers' psychological involvements with competitive dance, including the multi-sensory appeal of dance and the contingent egoism intrinsic to partner dancing.

Finally, in Section V I conclude by reassembling the dynamics of self, culture, and community since, of course, these groupings are neither natural nor distinct but, rather, represent useful conceptual distinctions to provide both landmarks and means

of understanding the “hows” and “whys” of human actions, beliefs, and behaviors. My concluding section therefore reintegrates these considerations and presents a synthetic assessment that highlights how issues of self, culture, and community are all mutually constitutive and intercontextualizing elements of being human. Indeed, closely mirroring Karl Popper’s notion that “the main task of the social sciences,” is to explain and understand “the unintended social repercussions of intentional human actions” (1966:95), D’Andrade suggests that the reason and need for a general theory is that “social, cultural, and psychological aspects of life interact in ways that create effects that one would not have anticipated looking at each aspect separately” (2000:4). “Our assumption” D’Andrade goes on to note, “is that interaction effects are quite strong and need to be taken into account in the basic fabric of the conceptual framework one begins with” (2000:4). This is clearly the case with the salsa and ballroom dance communities.

Overall then, the order of materials I present in this dissertation starts wide, at the level of community parameters and membership, and continue to narrow through the progressing sections and chapters. This structure achieves several complimentary and interrelated purposes. Each chapter provides contextualizing background for the chapters that follow; each successive chapter thus narrows in focus, looking at ever more personal facets of dancers’ lived lives. This same structure also provides the reader with a perspective and insight that parallels that of an outsider as they transition into becoming a dancer. At first, as in Section I, what even counts as different types of dances and as the appropriate and regular locations for each style may be entirely new

information. Second, as in Section II, the dance newcomer encounters what often seems to be a sometimes confusing and almost overwhelming set of names, locations, social values and parameters, practices, and classifications. As the new dancer begins to “get a handle” on this information they also start to assume a place within the various power structures of dance, including a growing awareness of the different markets, and marketing, of dance.

Next, as in Section III, the student of dance starts to learn about dance-specific values and practices, first gaining in familiarity and getting the “feel” of the dance genre, which, in the case of competitive ballroom, primarily consists of dance as (1) spectacle, (2) art, and (3) sport; all in relationship to and in interaction with each other. Following on this, the reader, like the progressing dancer, begins to experience the nature of ballroom competitions themselves, from which they also are exposed to and start to recognize and comprehend the aesthetic values of competitive ballroom, building up to more personal concerns and applications of these aesthetics in the form of individual costuming. The personal level application of cultural aesthetic values also serves as a bridge into Section IV, which starts out by describing and discussing the embodied experiences of becoming and being a dancer. The physical practices—and the self-implications of these practices—provide important background information from which to look at specific dancer’s stories and experiences of transitioning from non-dancer to dancer. Now at the level of the dancers’ themselves, dancers’ psychologies of self, self-expression, and competition are explored.

Taken in conjunction with the persons who fill and create them, the structures and values of the dance communities explored in my research are neither easily read nor predictable. Rather, there is an ever-undulating mixture of persons, experiences, events, structures (both social and physical), and locations that constitute the communities in question. As such, to isolate, reify, or privilege any one of these variables—without first establishing empirical grounds for such a maneuver—serves to distort rather than clarify social actions and interactions. This is precisely the reason why a general model is both appropriate and necessary to social scientific inquiry. Certainly not every question or every project needs to be concerned with this level of analysis, yet the ability to articulate with such a general theory is of paramount importance for research that aspires to be anything more than abstract experimentation.

It is important, as Ulric Neiser pointed out over a quarter of a century ago, to take into account the “spatial, temporal, and intermodal continuities of real objects and events” (1976:34; also cited in Cole 1996:225). This text then uses dance to look at people’s lives as they are actually lived—on the ground, by persons, and entailing myriad complex and overlapping personal, social, and cultural dynamics and processes—looking at the depth and meaning with which lives are both replete and constructed on an ongoing basis.

## General Themes

There are many themes that run through this text; some rather explicitly, others more implicitly. Implicit threads should not, however, be dismissed as any less important in constructing or understanding ballroom and salsa. Gender, for example, is fundamental to ballroom and salsa but, by the same token, does not belong as a self-contained topic in Section I (on dance), Section II (on community), Section III (on culture), or section IV (on self). Firmly placing an elaborated discussion of gender in any one of the sections would thus obfuscate the ongoing interactions and feedback between gender and dance, self, culture, and community. As such, the inescapability of gender is best preserved and portrayed as an implicit concern that moves in and out of focus as I unpack the various dynamics of the ballroom and salsa dance worlds.

Linked to but separate from the inherently gendered nature of ballroom and salsa is the topic of mutuality. Ballroom or salsa dancers may make a name for themselves but rarely, if ever, manage to do so sans partner. This is *not* to say that both partners will make equal names for themselves but, rather, that it is almost entirely by dancing with a partner that a partner dancer's social and cultural stock goes up as it were. Beyond even this, however, the day in and day out learning, practice, and performance of these dance forms depends on partnering and, as such, a dancer's overall development is never independent of those with whom they dance.

Another topic woven throughout this dissertation involves a concern for the balance between fairness and competition, with an *orientation* toward meritocracy always in play within the competitive ballroom world. More precisely, there is an

implicit belief that the best dancing should win “in the end” and, indeed, those who do not believe this or cannot reconcile themselves to the “on the ground” and “in practice” realities of competition life rarely stay in the game for long. While there is not a section on meritocracy, then, this topic can be seen underlying various subjects concerning social dynamics, practice-based belonging and values, and personal aspirations and motivations.

Three other themes around which this dissertation revolves are meaning, identity, community, and self. While all of the materials that follow continue to examine and address these topics, I want to briefly orient the reader to the framework I am using. As such, these mini-elaborations should not be read as definitions, but as orientational markers.

### **Meaning**

- Meanings are best understood as linkages between cognition and emotion; as informational evaluations linked to emotional charges.

### **Identity**

- The semi-stable gestalt of a person’s self-conceptualizations, personality, character, and connections in the world.

### **Community**

- More generally a group of people linked and identifiable by commonly shared markers of belonging; here mostly used regarding shared group membership both generated and recognized through shared practices.<sup>8</sup>

## Self

- The core conceptualizations and understandings that differentiate one as being non-synonymous with others.

There are two final points I want to make in regards to the general themes of this dissertation, one concerning dance and one concerning dancers. First, the fact that the importance of the competition element of competitive ballroom should not be mistaken as saying that competition itself ever explains what is going on with these dancers or in this dance world. It is only as an overlay—*on top of the dancing itself*—that the competitive element of ballroom influences and impacts the ballroom world. Second, amidst all of the materials presented here it is important to keep in mind that it is individual person's who choose (or not) to dance, and their thinking and reasons are each their own.

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## Endnotes: Introduction

<sup>1</sup> While not the topic of this project, the pairing of dancesport and salsa also raise interesting questions and contrasts in light of the European-based high society underpinnings of ballroom dancing versus the Afro-Cuban based, lower class, grass roots development and associations of salsa.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers of social salsa dancers and amateur ballroom competitors, for example, far exceeds the numbers of professional ballroom competitors and salsa dancers.

<sup>3</sup> D'Andrade describes the content of such cognitive background as “things people learn which they cannot state and are not aware of, but which they need to know to be conscious of things that they are conscious of” (2000:46). A closely related point made by Hanna—and one that is particularly telling in relation to dance—is that “much culturally patterned nonverbal communication is out-of-awareness” (1988:42).

<sup>4</sup> Many popular movies such as *Saturday Night Fever*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Shall We Dance*, *Scent of a Woman*, *Dance with Me*, *That's the Way I Like It*, *Center Stage*, *Save the Last Dance*, *True Lies*, and *The Wedding Planner*—not to mention countless TV commercials—have all made explicit and deliberate use of partner dancing.

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<sup>5</sup> The two main sanctioning bodies for official ballroom competitions in the United States are the NDCA (National Dance Council of America) for professional competitions and USA Dance (the recent renaming of USABDA, the United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association) for amateur competitions. The events conducted under the auspices of these two organizations—before even taking studio, collegiate, and other non-sanctioned events into account—represents a yearly average of just over three ballroom competitions every two weeks. (For more on the NDCA and USA Dance/USABDA see the “Higher Level Only” section in Chapter 4 as well as Appendix 2.)

<sup>6</sup> For more information about the WD & DSC and the IDSF see Appendix 2.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the works of E. Anderson 1990; Aversa 1990; Davis 1959; DeVires 1985; DiOrio and Nusbaumer 1993; Dobkin de Rios 1981; Ebaugh 1977, 1988; Fantasia 1988; Good 1991; Irwin 1970, 1980, 1985; Marriott 1991; Myerhoff 1978; Robins, Sanders, and Cahill 1991; Romero 1992; Suttles 1990; Vaughan 1990 [1986]; Wiseman 1979; and Zukin 1982.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Three, especially starting on page 131, for more on communities of practice.



## SECTION I: DANCE



**Photo I.1: Gherman Mustuc and Iveta Lukosiute – World Professional 10-dance Finalists**

# CHAPTER ONE:

## First Steps

In this chapter I describe how I was first drawn into the research documented in this dissertation, how I entered into “the field,” and the ethnographic settings of my research. I then explore the nature of dealing with field “sites,” communities, and cultures that are best located in their shared activity rather than specific location. Based on this orientation, I briefly outline the structure of this dissertation, roughly sketching in the contours of the culture and community explored in the remaining chapters.

### **Getting Started**

After completing my undergraduate education in 1994 I spent 14 months working as a volunteer on an Israeli kibbutz and, based on this experience, was planning to write my M.A. thesis, and then my Ph.D. dissertation, on gender relations in contemporary kibbutzim<sup>1</sup> when I entered graduate school at the University of California, San Diego in 1998. At that time I had hardly taken a step of any type of dance in my life and, more to the point, was rather disinterested in dance altogether. As fate had it, however, I happened to have attended a conference in Los Angeles in 1997 where I met a woman from Toronto who I fell in love with and who, at the time, was very “into salsa.” When I first flew up to Toronto to visit her she tried teaching me the basic steps of salsa and, when that proved to be too far beyond my abilities,

she tried to show me the basics of merengue before taking me out to a salsa club later that night. I remember being very impressed by one of the couples dancing there that night. Unlike the many stories of people who fall in love with some type of dancing the first time they are exposed to it, however, this was far from the case in my situation. As I recall, my only “achievement” for that entire night was managing, literally, to stumble my way through one merengue.

Despite my clear lack of either aptitude or genuine interest in dancing I decided that I needed to learn how to salsa in order to impress the young woman in question so, upon returning to San Diego, opened up a phone book and started looking for somewhere that I could take lessons. Several different studios mentioned salsa in their advertisements and so I started calling around to those that did, explaining that I was a complete beginner but interested in learning salsa. I found one studio that seemed relatively close by and seemed to have an attractive introductory offer. The person I spoke to ended up being the studio manager and he said that he could schedule me a lesson with his professional competition partner the very next day. So, that next day, I drove over to the studio following the directions I had been given over the phone and, after finding a parking space, I walked across the street, opened the door, and found myself at the bottom of a wide staircase reaching up to a high second floor<sup>2</sup> and from which I could hear music playing. Little did I know what I was getting myself into.

That initial foray into the studio changed my life. Not because of any instant revelation or through any miraculous transformation, but because that was the first of

many steps that saw me, in later years, become a regular in the San Diego salsa scene, a member of the UCSD Ballroom Club, first a member and then Co-captain of the USCSD DanceSport Team, an amateur ballroom competitor, a ballroom dance photographer, and the site moderator for both the Dance-Forums.com and SalsaForums.com online discussion boards. I also changed the focus of my doctoral research and dissertation. All of that, however, was still far in the future, especially since, while there may be people who are less naturally gifted dancers than I, they are certainly a population quite small in number. While elaborations of my own experiences and learning process are woven throughout this text, it is important to realize that, in 1997, salsa and ballroom were both entirely new to me.

Knowing what I do now, how I chose to start my involvement with dance was far from ideal. People regularly visit and contrast several health clubs before choosing which one to get a membership with for instance, just as people comparison shop for most goods and services (at least when it is easy to do so). Even the brand new video camera buyer or computer purchaser is rather likely to do some background research, be it online, via personal recommendations, or through various review magazines, before making a final selection and purchase. An interesting and odd element of ballroom dancing in particular, at least in the US, is that so many people (and people who would otherwise be cautious in almost any other arena) seem to just take what they are told at face value. The marketing and selling of dance is a subject for later on, but I bring it up at this point just to situate myself, at least initially, as one of those who did not even know what questions to ask.

After six months of lessons I started venturing out to some of the most popular salsa clubs in town, only to realize that what I had been taught in the studio was not the same salsa as what people were dancing in the clubs. Soon thereafter I stopped taking lessons at the studio but, while taking salsa lessons at the ballroom studio, I was exposed to a range of ballroom dances (in this case almost exclusively American style ballroom) and, over time, my interest in dancing just started snowballing. By the time I started my graduate program work at UCSD in the fall of 1998, going out to the salsa clubs at least a couple of times a week had become a regular part of my weekly routine.

During my first quarter of classes I somehow I found myself always thinking and feeling that I could not go out dancing until I completed all of my work or finished all of my reading. Despite never taking the time out to go out dancing that quarter, I still never did quite manage to finish everything, and not getting out dancing left me less than happy as well. Starting my second quarter I made it a point to go out dancing at least once a week, no matter how much of my work I had (or had not) yet completed. Although I cannot put a specific date on it, somewhere along the way dancing had started shifting from being something I was doing to try and impress someone else to something that I felt the need to do for myself. Somewhere along the way my interest in dancing had shifted from being instrumentally and extrinsically motivated to being intrinsically motivated. I continued dancing mostly salsa that year, started taking a couple of group ballroom classes offered on campus and, the next year, tried out for the UCSD DanceSport team, a team primarily focused on formation

routines.<sup>3</sup> First as a member of the Show Team (basically the JV team), and then later as an alternate and finally a member of the Comp team, I began having team practices from 9-11pm every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday night and also started working with two partners<sup>4</sup> on a few different couples routines as well.

By this point I had three team practices each week, practiced with my respective ballroom partners during additional weeknight and weekend hours, and was going out to various salsa clubs on at least two nights each week. Dance was becoming a bigger and bigger part of my life and, as one would expect, was attracting more and more of my interest. Although I was now becoming more involved with ballroom dancing than I had been before, salsa was still my primary focus. Also worth noting is that, while I had started to have some stray thoughts about shifting my research focus to include dance, at the time I still thought that I was going to be pursuing my interest in the gender relations of contemporary kibbutzim for my dissertation.

Around the same time, and before I had started to prepare my dissertation proposal, cultural anthropologist Marco Moskowitz accompanied me to Questions, a club in downtown San Diego on a salsa night.<sup>5</sup> This was his first exposure to salsa dancing and Moskowitz walked away from this experience enthusiastically encouraging me to take on salsa as the subject of my dissertation research. Among the other comments he made was “it’s an entirely different culture, right here under our noses, that most people don’t even know about!” While Moskowitz’s heady enthusiasm was one variable that contributed to my shift in research topics, the more

telling point is that—without being able to identify much of the culture—he recognized that there was a culture there to be recognized.

Not too long thereafter I bumped into another colleague, Laura Stanley, at another local San Diego salsa club, Sport Spot, where she was attending the birthday party of Henrieta, a regular in the San Diego salsa scene and a work colleague of Stanley's. In addition to all of the normal elements involved with the local salsa scene was also the observance of a local (within the public San Diego salsa community) birthday ritual. Stanley, like Moskowitz, was unfamiliar with the salsa society and readily conceded that the birthday celebration she was attending was transpiring within a community with its own cultural identity. Similarly, two other departmental colleagues familiar with salsa scenes in Costa Rica and Chile, Julie Pockrandt and Julie Monteleone respectively, also recognized the reality of a salsa culture—despite the lack of a clearly defined picture of what such a culture entails—when I first mentioned the general idea for this research project.

Around this same time I was working as a teaching assistant for Tanya Luhrmann who thought that the ballroom angle could be a fruitful site of inquiry but who seemed less taken with the idea regarding salsa dancing. Since salsa was still my main personal interest at that time, I somewhat shelved the whole idea in the back of my head—until Sunday, February 13, 2000. On that date Bradd Shore was in town to give a departmental colloquia the next afternoon and, that evening, Luhrmann had a dinner at her home for Shore and the UCSD psychological anthropology students and faculty. At some point later into the evening, after dinner had been finished and we

were all sitting around the living room, Shore was talking with the graduate students and, as one would expect, got around to asking each of us what we had done or were going to do for our fieldwork.

When it was my turn I told Shore about my original kibbutz project, but also told him I had this inkling in the back of my mind that I would like to do something on salsa and ballroom dance. For some reason I really had not thought that the academic community would go for it; that such a project would probably be perceived as a little too “fluffy.” Shore, however, seemed really excited about the idea as we briefly talked about some of the issues that I thought could be involved. It was this reaction that convinced me that such a project was something that might actually have some academic teeth to it as far as the scholarly community would be concerned. So I went back to the drawing board and started doing some background research on dance theory in the social sciences. I found some very rich background materials that, up until that point, I had not been aware even existed. Once I started digging I quickly realized exactly how expansive this project could become, not just in scope but also in more widely theorizing about the intersectionality of person, culture, and society.

In the spring of 2000 I took Christena Turner’s class “Field Research: Methods of Participant Observation” in the Department of Sociology and, as my class research project, designed and conducted some preliminary research in order to confirm my intuition that dance did serve as a source of personally salient deep meanings—meanings that served as filters on other non-dance related aspects of their lived lives (Marion 2000)—for many dancers, and to start identifying some of the issues and



dynamics that more in depth research could follow. Over the course of the following year I also pursued a number of overlapping projects that, in the end, gave rise to the dissertation proposal behind this research project. Aside from my regular fieldwork proposal preparation, a course in General Theory with Roy D'Andrade in the fall of 2000 and followed by several quarters of pre-fieldwork independent study with Steven Parish finished setting the stage for this project. D'Andrade's general theory provided me a framework for starting to sort out the intercontextuality of self, culture, and community that my preliminary research and personal observations had foregrounded, and the independent studies allowed me to start interrogating where lived experiences intersected the theoretical issues at hand.

The preliminary fieldwork I did helped hone the directions of my research as well as sharpen both my focus on the issues at stake, while the general theory class suggested much of the framework I eventually used for re-synthesizing the individual, cultural, and social dynamics of lived life as I do in Chapter Thirteen. I defended my dissertation research proposal on June 15, 2001, and conducted my first official field research starting a mere one week later at the 2001 Colorado Star Ball being held June 22-24 in Denver, Colorado. Over the course of the following four plus years my research took me to various studios, clubs, and competitions throughout the USA, Canada, Denmark, Germany, and Italy as well as into contact, both in person and on line, with other salsa and ballroom dancers from even further abroad.

## **Entering the Field**

As is true of many anthropological endeavors—and especially when dealing with a community that the anthropologist, at least in some measure, considers their own—isolating a point of entry is never an easy task. Indeed, in my own case several such junctures come to mind. Was my first entry into “the field” the first time I ever went to a salsa club? Or was it the first time I took a lesson at a dance studio? Or the first time I danced socially? Was my first entry into “the field” the first time I visited the UCSD dance club on my own? Or was it the first time I tried out for the UCSD ballroom team? Was my first entry into “the field” the first time I saw a ballroom competition? Or was it the first time that I competed?

In some ways the answer to each of the questions posed above is “yes,” as this testifies to the non-dichotomous nature of both culture and community. While it is true that a person may or may not be a member of any given culture or community, this does not mean that persons are necessarily either entirely insiders or outsiders or that all such members are members in the same way. It is in exactly this way that each of the entries noted above are in fact entries into the dance communities of ballroom and salsa. Yet while my first exposure to salsa and then ballroom were cultural entries in their own right, these are still different from my entry into each as an anthropologist. Both sets of entries—as new member and as anthropologist—however, offer insights into both the nature of the communities involved as well as my own perspectives and frames of reference for each.

As is typically the case for most cultural newcomers, my first foray into a salsa club far exceeded my understandings. Now, years later, I still remember the live band, the wooden dance floor, partners dancing with each other, and busy bar of that moderately dark nightclub setting. At the time, however, I could not discern—either in music or dance—between the meringues, the salsas, and the cha cha chas. This experience, or entry as you may, was much akin to, if still different from, my first visit to a ballroom studio. While I only vaguely remember finding the address, getting directions, or driving over for the very first time, I vividly remember opening one of the tall wood double doors and looking up the wide carpeted double set of stairs leading upward. As I reached the top of the stairs I could see a large reception counter directly in front of me and the hardwood ballroom floor and fully mirrored long wall just to my left. Similarly, while I no longer remember my initial introduction to my very first ballroom dance teacher, I do know that she quickly became a regular fixture in my daily life and, indeed, set the stage for much of my ongoing experience of, and perceptions about, partner dancing.

Looking back, I can recognize that I now take for granted many of the most basic and fundamental concepts and techniques which, at the time I was first starting, struck me as being either incomprehensible or near super human. My own early attempts at learning how to dance involved seemingly ceaseless struggles with even the most rudimentary issues of timing and transitions of weight. For over two months, my ear could not hear the beats of music for the dances I was being taught—or, more precisely, I did not yet understand even the basic structure of the music I was hearing.

Similarly, it was beyond my grasp how I could be doing anything but standing over my foot. It was only over time that I began to understand what “standing over your foot” really meant, or the related difference between standing on the inside or outside edges of my feet. The basic issues of timing, weight distribution, and weight transfer are just a few of the more commonplace thresholds of understanding that distinguish and differentiate the dancer from the non-dancer. As such, these experiences all represented thresholds and entries into the culture, community, and practice of dance as they testify to the very values, norms, and skills constituting their sociocultural surround.

Other points of cultural entry, each with its own experiences and understandings, could also be sketched out for my first visit to a salsa club, to a ballroom dance, or to a try out for the UCSD ballroom team. For the purposes of this particular project, however, my entries into the field as an ethnographic researcher and anthropologist were, in many ways, at least as important as my various earlier points of entry as a still fledgling dancer. My first “official” visit to a ballroom competition, after advancing to doctoral candidacy, was to the 2001 Colorado Star Ball in Denver, where I also conducted my first official “dissertation research” interview with Sam Sodano, a ballroom judge and the organizer of several ballroom competitions including the Ohio Star Ball—the site of the long time PBS series *Championship Ballroom Dancing*. Still new to both my research and the competition circuit, some of my questions to Sam, at the time, included:

1. How have dance and dancers changed since you’ve been involved?

2. What differences, if any, do you perceive between Standard, Smooth, Latin, and Rhythm dancers?
3. How do you feel and what do you think about the inclusion of DanceSport in the Olympics?
4. What events do you, as a judge, most enjoy working at and why?
5. How would you evaluate the state of DanceSport in the United States today? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses?

The next competition I attended as part of this research project was the 2001 USABDA National Championships which, that year, were held in Salt Lake City, Utah. As I was still quite new to the larger national circuit, I knew few of the names of the many competitors, let alone their respective skills, statuses, and ranking. Tellingly, my own knowledge and understanding of dance was still (at that time) sufficiently under-informed to pick out repeating multiple-time national champions as the clear winners in their respective fields.

The third competition venue I visited for this project and, in many ways, the one which marked my real point of entry as an anthropologist into the ballroom world was the 2001 United States Dancesport Championship (USDSC) held in Miami, Florida. The 2001 USDSC was the first really large and international competition I had ever been to. As such, not only the size and breadth of the field of competitors, but also the depth of this field, far exceeded anything I had been exposed to before. Still only learning who was who, and not yet recognizing many of these people face to face, I was also still new enough to both ballroom, and my own status as an anthropologist, to be unsure—and, honestly, even intimidated—to directly approach any of the dancers and coaches I wished to interview. What ended up happening for many of the interviews that I was trying to get was that, with competition director Tom Murdoch's permission, Pat Traymore, the head registrar, asked various

competitors (whom I had specified), as they were checking in, if they would be willing to do an interview with me. While I did not manage to interview everyone I had hoped to, or, indeed, even everyone who had agreed to be interviewed, that scale and scope of the event (the 2001 USDSC) and the participants—both competitors and adjudicators—marked my full entry as a social scientist into the ballroom world in many ways.

My first research visit to London and then Blackpool England in May 2002, and my visit to the German Open Championships in Mannheim in August 2002 represented new points of significant entry, as they signaled transitions in my fieldwork and my research into the larger, European-based, world scene of competitive ballroom dancing. One point I want to make here, is that the transition in my research to the broader world circuit was predicated on both my own dance experiences and the research I had been conducting up to that point. My own more local dance and competition practices and my interviews, with lower level amateurs through higher level coaches and judges, often pointed to a wider scope and scale of activity in referencing exemplars of top dancers, coaches, and competitions. My own local teachers might, for examples, reference national finalists as examples, but these same finalists would then reference world finalists in exactly the same way. What quickly became apparent to me, and what mandated an expanded more global focus, was the simple truth that it was the world-class dancers, coaches, adjudicators, and competitions which, ultimately, contextualized competitive ballroom dancing for dancers from all localities.

In practice my first visit to the elite competitive studios in the week leading up to Blackpool, as well as my first experience of Blackpool itself, thus marked an entry into the international, “world circuit” of competitive ballroom in a way that my previous research had not. Still, cultural entry and participation is never an all or nothing proposition—no one, for instance, fully participates in the entirety of any given cultural system—and my entry into the world-level scene was not discontinuous with my existing dance and dance research experiences. Contacts from people in the US facilitated parts of my overseas research, the practices and rules of ballroom studios and dancing overseas made sense within the context of my US experiences and knowledge, and many of the people I had encountered in the US were also participants in the international scene as well. Thus, while the adjustments to the scope and scale of the international scene and the most prestigious ballroom event in the world represented a chronologically new point of entry for me, it was as a point of deeper or more expansive entry and not of categorically new entry.

A final point I want to make about my entry into the field actually concerns an unanticipated outcome from my first trip to London in May 2002. While at the 2002 Desert Classic, held in Palm Desert, California, Zack, a widely traveled ballroom coach, related to me how one of his couples had told him that, while at a competition in London in the week leading up to Blackpool, they had walked around a corner, seen me standing down the hallway, and “freaked out, and turned around, and went back the way they had come.” As Zack related to me, “they just don’t understand who you are or what you are doing, and it weirded them out to keep seeing you everywhere.” It

was in response to this that I took two steps: 1) I had a brief blurb published in *Dance Beat* explaining who I was and what my research project was; and 2) I started to more actively pursue my photography of ballroom competitions. As the most widely read ballroom publication in the US, I hoped that a brief entry in *Dance Beat* would help increase many dancers' familiarity with me and with what I was doing, and hence mitigate the apprehension of couples such as the one Zack had mentioned to me. The topic of my photography within the ballroom context is a bit more complex, however, deserving its own introduction and treatment.

## **Photography**

Before traveling to Blackpool my first time, I realized that, eventually, I would end up writing a book on my research and that, given the nature of the culture and community that I was dealing with, I would want and need pictures for such a book. Having briefly worked in a commercial portrait studio before starting graduate school, and having developed an interest in photography at that time, I had camera equipment that had been sitting in my closet for a few years and decided that it would probably be easier to take my own photos than to have to track down photos and get permissions from others down the line. Knowing that I was about to go to Blackpool, and especially not knowing at that time that this would not be my only such visit, I dug my cameras out of my closet for the 2002 Emerald Ball and started shooting ballroom—for the first time ever—just two weeks before leaving for England. As Barbara Anderson points out, however, “if there is an axiom applicable to fieldwork in general



it is that the worst troubles will arise in the least problematic contexts” (1990:110), and my experience was no different, with both of my camera bodies breaking immediately after my arrival in England and my fully equipped camera bag thus serving as nothing but a useless 50 pound weight that I then needed to lug around airports and train stations. That one experience aside, photography proved to be an invaluable passport to fieldwork for me.

In any cultural fieldwork the anthropologist is faced with (the sometimes daunting task of) trying to find some way to “fit in” with the people he or she is trying to interact with, and this process is often far from straightforward as it is, of course, “impossible to separate the observer from the observed in the initiation of contact into one another’s worlds” (Anderson 1990:9). In my case, my own involvement with my university’s dancesport team and as an amateur competitor provided an obvious point of entry into some facets of the culture and community of competitive ballroom dancing. At the same time, however, this avenue of access also presented some concomitant complications. Especially given widespread insinuations, innuendos, and accusations about political marking and results (invited by the subjective nature of ballroom judging<sup>6</sup>), it was important for me to avoid contributing even any appearance of impropriety. As such, even though I could have made sure not to interview any judges who would be judging my events at a given competition until after I had danced, I was still cognizant of the possible misimpressions that could have easily unfolded. What might it have looked like to one of my competitors, for instance, if, after we had competed, they saw me spend an hour or more conversing with one of

adjudicators who had been deciding between us just hours before? Wishing to avoid even the appearance of impropriety that such a scenario could have invited, I limited my competitions to select, local events, where I never conducted any interviews.

It was at the far more numerous events where I was not competing, then, that photography came to serve as a sociocultural passport, providing me with a role and status that was already part and parcel of the dancesport culture and community. With my 35mm camera rig<sup>7</sup> in hand, it “made sense” to dancers to see me in attendance throughout the competitive circuit. Beyond this, providing photos to those dancers who had interviewed with me provided me with a currency, of value to them, with which I could repay their time. As the number of competitors I had interviewed continued to grow, however, this model was no longer feasible as it conflicted with and undercut the value of the services provided by the official event photographers contracted for each event. Indeed, I had had to explain to the various photographers on the circuit who I was and what I was doing to make sure that it was alright with them for me to shoot “their” events. I experienced mixed degrees of acceptance from the different photography companies but all allowed me to shoot which, in turn, continued to facilitate my “belonging”—the central topic of Chapter Three.

### **Ethnographic Settings**

The various ethnographic settings of my research can be broken up in several ways, and these assorted formulations both suggest and offer different analytical perspectives. While there are several formulations available, I wish to start off by

providing brief sketches to introduce the reader to the types of studios, camps, clubs, congresses, and competitions that underpin my observations and analysis. One point I want to make before proceeding, however, is that while each specific location I visited certainly had its own unique nuances and character, there were just as certainly consistencies of structure and operation across the different settings (and types of settings) where I conducted my fieldwork and research. No two studios, clubs or competitions are identical, for example, yet even the rank newcomer would not mistake a club for a competition or vice a versa. As such, there are distinct characteristics which constitute the various settings for both salsa and ballroom dancing; characteristics that differentiate one setting from another at the same time as they are constitutive elements of the larger salsa and ballroom scenes. The following descriptions are therefore intended to be read as representative of the most common features and characteristics of their respective settings and not as absolute definitions or all-inclusive descriptions.

## **Studios**

The key physical ingredients of a ballroom studio are: a decently sized<sup>8</sup> hardwood floor, and ballroom music; and almost all also having at least one quite sizable mirror. Such fundamental elements aside, a reception desk or counter, seating (at least for changing shoes, although usually also sufficient for a certain modicum of social interaction as well) are also regular physical features of the ballroom studio. Beyond the physical structure of the studio are the personnel typical of most: receptionist, manager, owner, and dance instructors. In the smallest of studios all of

these positions might be filled by just one person but, even here, each of the roles mentioned—each with different objectives and primary responsibilities—is somehow met. Additionally, beyond physical and personnel considerations, studios have regular cycles and rhythms of student traffic. Sometimes these patterns are daily, with the morning and early afternoon hours seeing only a few of the most dedicated dancers on the floor, more social and recreational dancers trickling in and starting to fill the studio floor as they get off work in the late afternoon and early evening, and only the most serious of competitors left practicing late into the night and even into the early hours of the next morning.

Other patterns emerge in weekly and monthly studio cycles amid schedules of weekly group classes, social dance parties, and competitive practice rounds—each attracting its own core group of (at times overlapping) participants. On an even larger scale there are also annual patterns and cycles of studio based activity. In some more socially based studios these annual cycles are rather closely based on non-dance related annual cycles such as holidays and summer vacations. Such patterning of studio activity contrasts with the annual activity cycles at more competition-based studios which are closely predicated on the scheduling of various competitions. While the structural, communal, and cultural details of ballroom studios and studio life are unpacked in future chapters, it is important to realize that, despite often wide variation in studio practices, there are also great and regular similarities in both physical and social structures between all of the studios I have ever visited (both for fieldwork and for my own dancing). And how could it be otherwise after all, as both the physical and

social structures of all studios (albeit in varying degrees) are geared towards the common purpose of improving dancers' skills in ballroom dance.

## **Camps**

Based on the same physical activity and the same purpose as ballroom studios (improving dancers' ballroom dance skills), dance camps, like studios, require the physical ingredients of a dance floor and some system for playing ballroom music. Unlike ballroom studios, however, where more time is often spent in practice than in lessons, mirrors are seldom present in ballroom camps and the daily schedule is built around schedules of group lessons.<sup>9</sup> Another important difference is that whereas dance studios are, by their very nature, locations dedicated to the activity of dancing, dance camps occur at a variety of venues including some that are far from being dance specific, such as in mainstream hotels. As short term gatherings (most ballroom camps last anywhere from three to five days), there is short term cyclicality at best (typically in the form of similar schedules for each day of the camp) and none of the longer term cycles that emerge from the far more permanent, year-round nature of studios. Similarly, while the studio roles of receptionist, manager, owner, and dance instructors all have their dance camp counterparts, the fleeting nature of dance camps minimizes both the importance and the opportunity of knowing and understanding who these people are and of developing social relationships with them.

## Clubs

The term “dance club” is actually somewhat misleading, since it can refer to both physical structures and to social organizations. Physical dance clubs, like studios, have floor space for dancing and dance music. Unlike dance studios, however, the common purpose of all such establishments is social interaction and dancing (versus the development of dancing skills). This is not to suggest that studios cannot also be sites—even intentionally—of social interaction or that dance clubs cannot also be sites of skill development. Indeed the development of skills is often part and parcel of dance clubs in the form of the introductory lessons offered at many clubs, just as the social parties of many studios are intended to promote social interaction and dancing. Ultimately, however, the underlying purposes of studios and of clubs are different. Where the studio offers mirrors for dancers to observe and correct the technical elements of their movements, the dance club seldom has mirrors and inevitably offers darker lighting in direct contrast to such self-evaluation and adjustment. Similarly, where the largest percentage of time spent at the studio is typically dedicated to lessons and practice, dance clubs are about dancing with other people and not *about* improving one’s own dancing.<sup>10</sup>

Differences in the typical amount of space available to move, and in the density of bodies per square foot are, with rare exceptions, quite different between studios and clubs as well. There can certainly be crowded studios and nearly empty clubs but, most of the time, the greater concentration of physical bodies in a club reflects the interactive social emphasis of the club versus the studio. Similarly,

various “moves” are widely recognized as belonging in a performance or a competition and not on the social floor precisely in so far as their volume and execution exceed the spatial parameters widely recognized as appropriate for dancing in the typically far more crowded club conditions. The difference in primary focus between clubs and studios gives rise to an additional set of roles that are part of the club scene and structure. Personnel and roles typical of the club scene—and which are largely absent, at the least, from the studio setting—include, naming a few of the more prominent: DJs, live bands, security, bartenders, and waiters/waitresses.

Different from the physical dance clubs are the social organizations that go by the same name. As a social organization, the second type of dance club lacks physical elements such as a dance floor. And, building on the social basis of such organizations, such clubs may have meetings and schedule various outings and events at locations that do not even offer facilities amicable to dancing. Such clubs, however, are still dance clubs, and the majority of their activities and meetings are still dance related. Like physical dance clubs, some degree of development in dance related skills are often part of social dance clubs, typically in the form of the introductory lessons, but the majority of the time spent together is most often in social dancing, whether through group outings to various studio social parties or through club sponsored social dances. Whether of the physical or social club variety, however, dance clubs are primarily about social dancing.<sup>11</sup>

## **Congresses**

Generally speaking, dance congresses are roughly to dance camps what dance clubs are to dance studios. Where dance studios are about developing dance skills and dance clubs are about social dancing, so too are dance camps directed toward skill development whereas dance congresses are primarily geared toward social dancing. As with dance camps both a dance floor and a system for dance music are needed, and like dance camps the venues used for dance congresses are seldom dance specific. Hotel ballrooms with temporary dance floors are the common dance surfaces for both camps and congresses but, as already noted however, it is what the congress is about that differs from the camp. Where the daytime group classes attract almost every camp attendee and only some attend the various nightly social activities, the absolute opposite pattern is typical of the congresses, with only some people attending the daytime classes but absolutely everyone showing up for the social dancing that runs late into the night and into the next morning. Much in line with this variance in focus, it is only congresses that have social dancing extending into the wee hours of the morning, not camps.

As a primarily social dance, it should come as no surprise that there are numerous salsa congresses and not camps, whereas there are several regularly scheduled ballroom camps but no ballroom congresses. This difference in salsas and ballroom culture is a topic that takes center stage in Section Three but, for the moment, is important to keep in mind as it relates to the fieldwork and fieldsites upon which this text is built. Before moving on to a final category of field sites,



competitions, I want to point out that the social (versus skill development) focus of dance congresses gives rise to additional personnel and roles (largely) absent from camps, just as it does for clubs versus studios. As with clubs, congresses typically involve and require DJs, musicians, and security persons in a way that camps (and studios) do not.

## **Competitions**

Dance competitions are, by far and away, the most complex field sites that were part of this research project. As social, cultural, and often individual focal points, competitions involve concentrations of personnel, roles, regulations, and values absent from the other research sites and venues. Competitors, audience, adjudicators, scrutineers, runners, deck captains, registrars, chairmen (of judges), dress vendors, shoe vendors, accessory vendors, videographers, photographers, MCs, DJs, and invigilators are all regulars of competitions. Indeed, competitions would not exist in the absence of many of these roles and the people that embody them. Similarly, the set up of dance flooring, tables and seats, an on-deck area, lighting, a registration area, vending booths, and musical equipment (just to name a few such examples) well represents the scale of orchestration required for competitions (even relatively small ones). And, in a like vein, the precise schedule of competitive events—most single dance heats being under two minutes for instance—and judging assignments, and the various rules and regulations for eligibility, costuming, and age categories are just some of the myriad social complexity constituting competitions.

Although brief events—lasting from half a day on the short end to eight days on the longest—competitions are of central importance and significance to competitive ballroom dancing. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Marion 2005b), just as political elections are not the day-to-day events of political life nor the Olympic Games the day-to-day events of sports, elections and the Olympics are still centrally salient and orienting for both politics and sports respectively. Just because elections do not happen daily does not mean that much (if not most) of regular politicking takes place either in relation to or under the umbrella of election related considerations. Indeed, even if nothing else, it is elections that set the slate for those who most are most actively engaged in non-election related day-to-day politics.

The Olympic Games fit the same general model as political elections, serving as a point of orientation while being a rare event in day-to-day athletics. Indeed, the (relative) rareness of elections and the Olympic Games is part of what makes them focal. If elections, for instance, were held every other day, than the stakes involved in who won simply could not be as significant. Similarly, if the Olympic Games were contested every four weeks instead of every four years, the drive, prestige, and importance of being an Olympic champion simply could not be as large or as widely encompassing. It is in exactly this way that the hundreds and thousands of hours of lessons, practice, training, sweat, and effort put in at the studio may be the day-to-day stuff of ballroom life, but that the few minutes of competition on the ballroom floor are still—at least in some ways—what competitive ballroom dancing is all about.

As with political elections or the Olympic Games, the relative scarcity of ballroom competitions—at least as a ratio of the time spent on it as an activity—plays an important role in establishing their social and cultural significance within ballroom dance. As with politics and the Olympics, if ballroom competitions took place on a daily basis, how much could it matter who won a given contestation? It is in exactly this way that ballroom competitions, while far from the day-to-day stuff of ballroom life, need to be recognized as inextricably contextualizing of, and for, every day practices and orientations.

### **“Official” Venues: by Space and by Time**

During the course of my research I visited many studios, competitions, clubs, congresses, workshops, and dance camps. Some of these venues I visited primarily as a dancer, others primarily as an anthropologist. While all serve as parts of the background for my research and analysis, the following lists break down the venues which explicitly facilitated my research in two ways—geographically and temporally. While one of the points I will be arguing throughout this text is that activity based communities—such as that of competitive ballroom dancers—often defy simple geographic explication, this does not mean that particular locations do not matter nor their own local rules, systems, and dynamics. Rather, the point I wish to foreground here is that it is by conducting fieldwork at a variety of locations that I was able first to discern and then to examine the translocal elements and dynamics that constitute the world of competitive ballroom dancing—to see in what ways ballroom dancing (and

salsa for that matter) was more consistent than different across different venues (Marion 2005b).

In much the same way as contrast across location was integral to understanding what was constitutive of the larger ballroom culture, so too was exposure across time. As I have pointed out above, competitions are central—as points of cultural focus—to understanding the larger ballroom culture and community. But going to even a variety of competitions within a very short timeframe would have invited mistaking historical anomalies—such as 9/11 or the 2003 SARS outbreaks—as indicative and representative of ballroom-based social realities. Especially given the brief instantiation of competitions (most lasting but two or three days at most), repeat visits over time as well as space were important in separating out the institutional and cultural wheat from the coincidental chaff. And the same was true, in its own fashion, for studios as well, as the particular configurations of students, teachers, and coaches at a given time—as well as the alignments and relationships between them—might be highly anomalous. I like Barbara Anderson’s turn of phrase in suggesting that “without protracted periods in the field, the understanding of culture—anthropology’s domain—is enfeebled into vicarious speculation” (1990:149), and it is in light of exactly these considerations that I continued to revisit various competitions, over several years, even as some event organizers began to ask “aren’t you done with your school paper yet?”<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1.1: “When” – Official Research Venue by Chronology****2001**

- June
  - Colorado Star Ball: Denver, CO
- August
  - USABDA National Championships: Salt Lake City, UT
- September
  - United States DanceSport Championships: Miami, FL
- October
  - Yankee Classic Dancesport Championships: Boston, MA
- November
  - Ohio Star Ball: Columbus, OH
- December
  - Holiday Classic: Las Vegas, NV

**2002**

- January
  - Intercontinental Dancesport Festival: Daytona, FL
- February
  - California Open: Costa Mesa, CA
- March
  - San Francisco Open: San Francisco, CA
- April
  - Southwest Regional Championship: San Diego, CA
  - Can-Am Dancesport Gala: Toronto, CANADA
- May
  - Emerald Ball: Los Angeles, CA
  - “Blackpool” British Open Championships: Blackpool, ENGLAND
- June
  - Latin Fusion: Center Stage, New York, NY
- July
  - Desert Classic: Palm Desert, CA
- August
  - USABDA National Championships: Saint Paul, MN
  - Empire State Dancesport Championship: New York, NY
  - German Open Championship: Mannheim, GERMANY
- September
  - United States DanceSport Championships: Miami, FL
- October
  - Golden State Challenge: Newport Beach, CA
- November
  - Pacific Dancesport: Los Angeles CA
  - Ohio Star Ball: Columbus, OH

**2003**

- February
  - California Open: Irvine, CA
- March
  - Southern CA Amateur DanceSport Championships: Glendale, CA
- April
  - Southwest Regional Dance Championships: San Diego, CA

**(Table 1.1 continued)**

- Can-Am Dancesport Gala: Toronto, CANADA
  - Emerald Ball: Los Angeles, CA (April 30-May 4)
  - May
    - Crystal Palace DanceSport Cup: Upper Norwood, ENGLAND
    - "Blackpool" British Open Championships: Blackpool, ENGLAND
    - World Ballroom Dancing Congress: Blackpool, ENGLAND
    - Star Championships: Blackpool, ENGLAND
    - UKA (United Kingdom Alliance) Dance Congress, Blackpool
  - June
    - Feinda - Italian Open: Cervia, ITALY
  - July
    - Desert Classic: Palm Desert, CA
    - Unique Dance-O-Rama: Costa Mesa, CA
  - August
    - Embassy Ball: Irvine, CA
  - September
    - United States DanceSport Championships: Hollywood Beach, FL
  - October
    - Golden State Challenge: Newport Beach, CA
  - December
    - Holiday Dance Classic: Las Vegas, NV
- 2004**
- April
    - Emerald Ball: Los Angeles, CA
  - June
    - San Diego Dancesport Championships: San Diego, CA
    - Yankee Classic: Boston, MA
  - August
    - Seattle Star Ball: Seattle, WA
- 2005**
- May
    - Emerald Ball: Los Angeles, CA
  - June
    - "Blackpool" British Open Championships: Blackpool, ENGLAND
  - July
    - Desert Classic: Palm Desert, CA
  - September
    - Embassy Ball: Irvine, CA<sup>13</sup>
    - United States DanceSport Championships: Hollywood Beach, FL
    - Fire and Ice Ball, Tampa, FL (As event photographer)<sup>14</sup>
  - October
    - Golden State Challenge: Universal City, CA
- 2006**
- May
    - Emerald Ball: Los Angeles, CA
    - "Blackpool" British Open Championships: Blackpool, ENGLAND

**Table 1.2: “Where” – Official Research Venue by Geography**USA**California:**

- *Competitions*
  - California Open – Costa Mesa (2002)
  - Desert Classic – Palm Desert (2002)
  - Emerald Ball – Los Angeles (2002)
  - Golden State Challenge – Newport Beach (2002)
  - Pacific Dancesport – Los Angeles (2002)
  - San Francisco Open – San Francisco (2002)
  - Southwest Regional Championship – San Diego (2002)
  - California Open – Costa Mesa (2003)
  - Desert Classic – Palm Desert (2003)
  - Emerald Ball – Los Angeles (2003)
  - Embassy Ball – Irvine (2003)
  - Golden State Challenge – Newport Beach (2003)
  - Southern California Amateur DanceSport Championships – Glendale (2003)
  - Southwest Regional Championship – San Diego (2003)
  - Unique Dance-O-Rama – Costa Mesa (2003)
  - Emerald Ball – Los Angeles (2004)
  - Emerald Ball – Los Angeles (2005)
  - Embassy Ball – Irvine (2005)<sup>15</sup>
  - Golden State Challenge – Universal City (2005)
  - Emerald Ball – Los Angeles (2006)
- *Studios*
  - Champion Ballroom – San Diego
  - Metronome Ballroom – San Francisco

**Colorado:**

- *Competitions*
  - Colorado Star Ball – Denver (2001)

**Florida:**

- *Competitions*
  - United States DanceSport Championships – Miami (2001)
  - United States DanceSport Championships – Miami (2002)
  - Intercontinental Dancesport Festival – Daytona (2002)
  - United States DanceSport Championships – Hollywood Beach (2003)
  - United States DanceSport Championships – Hollywood Beach (2004)
  - United States DanceSport Championships – Hollywood Beach (2005)
  - Fire and Ice Ball (2005) – Tampa<sup>16</sup>

**Massachusetts:**

- *Competitions*
  - Yankee Classic Dancesport Championships – Boston (2001)
  - Yankee Classic Dancesport Championships – Boston (2004)
  - Yankee Classic Dancesport Championships – Boston (2005)

**(Table 1.2 continued)**

- *Studios*
  - Arthur Murray – Boston
  - Fred Astaire Dance Studio – Boston
  - Dancesport Academy of New England – Brookline

**Minnesota:**

- *Competitions*
  - USABDA National Championships – Saint Paul (2002)

**Nevada:**

- *Competitions*
  - Holiday Dance Classic – Las Vegas (2001)
  - Holiday Dance Classic – Las Vegas (2003)

**New York:**

- *Competitions*
  - Empire State Dancesport Championship – New York (2002)
- *Studios*
  - Kaiser’s Dance Academy – Queens
- *Show*
  - Latin Fusion – New York (2002)

**Ohio:**

- *Competitions*
  - Ohio Star Ball – Columbus (2001)
  - Ohio Star Ball – Columbus (2002)

**Pennsylvania:**

- *Studios*
  - Arthur Murray – Paoli

**Utah:**

- *Competitions*
  - USABDA National Championships – Salt Lake City (2001)

**Washington:**

- *Competitions*
  - Seattle Star Ball – Seattle (2004)

**CANADA**

- *Competitions*
  - Can-Am Dancesport Gala – Toronto (2002)
  - Can-Am Dancesport Gala – Toronto (2003)
- *Studios*
  - Viva Dance – Thornhill, Ontario



(Table 1.2 continued)

**EUROPE****Denmark:**

- *Club*
  - ÅS – Århus

**England:**

- *Competitions*
  - "Blackpool" British Open Championships – Blackpool (2002)
  - Crystal Palace DanceSport Cup – Upper Norwood (2003)
  - "Blackpool" British Open Championships – Blackpool (2003)
  - Star Championships – Blackpool (2003)
  - "Blackpool" British Open Championships – Blackpool (2005)
  - "Blackpool" British Open Championships – Blackpool (2006)
- *Studios*
  - Dance Options at Cheam – Cheam
  - The Semley Studio – Norbury
  - Starlight Dance Academy – Streatham
  - Stopford's Dance and Fitness Center – Mitcham
- *Congress*
  - World Ballroom Dancing Congress, Blackpool
  - UKA (United Kingdom Alliance) Dance Congress, Blackpool

**Germany:**

- *Competitions*
  - German Open Championship – Mannheim (2002)

**Italy:**

- *Competitions*
  - Feinda – Italian Open – Cervia (2003)

**Where is “There”?**<sup>17</sup>

I walk in the door. Sometimes I go up a flight of stairs. Sometimes I cross a small lobby. And then I am there: the hardwood floorboards and the full-length mirrors lining the walls. I also see dancers and teachers on the floor, mostly in groups of two or three; some of the women are in shorter skirts and others in longer, ankle-length ones. I also hear a constantly rotating variety of musical rhythms. I have entered the ballroom studio. But where am I? Am I at the Fred Astaire in Boston, MA?

Kaiser's in Brooklyn, NY? Arthur Murray in Paoli, PA? Metronome Ballroom in San Francisco, CA? Or am I outside the US, at Dance Options in Cheam or Stopford's in Mitcham or Semley in Norbury, or Starlight in Streatham, all located in South London?

A couple of days later I find myself walking through a large, double doorway. The ballroom floor is larger, with bright lights shining on it and spectators sitting all around. A string of meticulously coifed competitors—the men in tail suits and the women in heavily rhinestone encrusted ball gowns—take the floor, as the MC reads off a string of numbers from atop an elevated stage on the other side of the floor. Then the music starts and the couples start gliding around the floor, rising and falling in time with the  $\frac{3}{4}$  timing of their waltz. 10-15 minutes later they finish a quickstep and the MC reads a new string of numbers as men with deep tans, in form fitting trousers and tops, accompany equally bronzed women, in open toed high heels, wearing short dresses with an abundance of fringe, rhinestones, and deeply plunging necklines out onto the floor. A cha cha starts and clean, sharp bodylines appear and disappear amid sensually undulating hip rolls and seemingly elastic rib actions. Next comes a samba, followed by a rumba; then a paso doble and finally a jive. But again the question must be asked, where am I? Am I in California, Denver, Florida, Ohio, Nevada, or New York? Or am I in Toronto, Canada; or in London or Blackpool, England; or Mannheim, Germany; or Cervia, Italy? Whichever one, I am watching a ballroom competition.

So *where* do I do my fieldwork? The most typical answer I give is “in the international competitive ballroom circuit” or “with the community of competitive ballroom dancers.” There are physical places that matter within the ballroom community—studios and the competitions in general, but also particular studios and competitions with special importance and significance. There is an annual calendar of ongoing, year-round events, each with different stature and implications. The membership base is ever fluctuating, with a variety of regular roles including competitors, teachers, studio managers, coaches, MC’s, scrutineers, and adjudicators. Who fills each of these roles at any given time or in any given circumstance, however, is highly variable. Thus, while there are regular locations, times, and people involved in the competitive ballroom circuit, none of these either defines or situates the competitive ballroom community. It is not even the activity of ballroom dancing alone that defines membership either, as the majority of people who take ballroom classes, and even enter a competition or two, never become a part of the competitive community. Ultimately it is both chosen participation and commitment that demarcate the membership of the competitive circuit.

Members of the competitive ballroom community share—albeit far from perfectly—goals, purposes, understandings, values, aesthetics, and a wide range of embodied practices. Regardless of any ability to verbally communicate, for instance, dancers from Japan, Germany, Russia, Denmark, England and the U.S. can all easily partner each other. Similarly, the same mental models shape the technique, teaching, performance, competition, grooming, and judging followed internationally. Although

not explicitly self-defined as a community, there is still an implicit awareness of shared distinctions for, although many people note differences in the approaches of dancers of different nationalities, greater commonalities are even more widely recognized. Regardless of any regional variations, ballroom dancing, partnering, instruction, performance, competition, and judging are all quite similar wherever they are found. The physical structures of studios and competitions alike are also quite standardized—in this case predicated on use specific functionality—and no seasoned competitor would ever feel far out of place at a new location. Additionally, the elite coaches and dancers are almost universally recognized and, the further one is embedded within the community, the more familiar one becomes with this veritable “who’s who” of past and present champions, coaches, and judges. Finally, while not necessarily self-identifying as a culture or community, competitive dancers implicitly recognize these exact same dynamics.

When sitting down to do my interviews, for example, I typically need to explain whom I am and what it is that I am doing. Along the way one of the stock explanations I have developed is that, in the same way that an anthropologist might have gone to an island and lived with a tribe for a year or two and studied various elements of the social structure, cultural norms, and personality development within that culture that I am doing the same type of project for the “tribe” of ballroom dancers. Although admittedly something of an oversimplification, this proposition resonated for most ballroom dancers as many commented, “we really are a tribe, aren’t

we” with several even adding “with war paint and everything” in reference to their competition grooming and make up.

Although different, there are also many parallels and points of overlap with the second “site” of my research, salsa dancing. I could be in San Diego, Boston, Las Vegas, or Seattle in the United States. I could be in Toronto, Canada. I could be in Tijuana or Mexico City, Mexico. I could be in Århus, Denmark. No matter which one, I still walk up to the door, pay my cover (unless it is a club where I am on the guest list), pass the bouncers (sometimes with an ID check and sometimes not), and enter the club, already hearing the beat and rhythm of a salsa or a merengue from outside. Once inside I might find the coat check or a spare chair where I can sling my jacket if it is cool enough outside that I brought one with me. To one side I can see the DJ booth, and sometimes an elevated stage with a band in addition. As I make my way to the edge of the dance floor I can feel the rise in both temperature and humidity generated by the tightly packed masses of perpetually moving bodies. Some of those on the floor are clearly new to the salsa scene, still moving in an awkward and disjointed manner and wearing clothing and footwear ill suited to salsa. Other dancers are clearly more experienced, moving with an almost palpable assurance and presence both on and off the floor.

One song comes to an end and, as another starts, pairs of dancers split apart and recombine into new dyads whether to dance to another salsa, a merengue, a cumbia, a cha cha, or a bachata. Sometimes words are exchanged but other times requests to dance are communicated with a look of the eyes or a gesture of the hands.

Sometimes not a word is spoken as a couple takes the floor yet in tandem they respond to the music, entwined and then not, together and then separated, he turns, she turns, never a word being said. The song ends and the couple leave the floor—sometimes together sometimes to go get a drink, return to a table of friends, or retrieve a new partner for the next song. The same process repeats itself throughout the night, and the expanding and contracting number of people on the floor almost provides a visual representation of the heartbeat of the salsa club, an almost organic entity starting the night small, building to a peak of energy and attendance, and ending with the die hard dancers and aficionados.

Salsa dancers visit other cities and attend Salsa Congresses and workshops in different cities and in foreign countries. The more experience one becomes the more you are likely to take workshops, watch videos, and learn from a certain cadre of instructors who are known, travel, and are followed world-wide. The same instructors show up across the globe, and the dancers from across the globe come together at the various congresses.

As my research with the salsa and competitive ballroom communities makes clear than, a lack of set geographical coordinates in no way diminishes dance as a site of both personal and collective identity formation; of cultural norms, values, and transmission; and of social structure, struggle, and contestation. As an institutionalization of action ballroom dance includes who moves, how, when, and with what meanings<sup>18</sup> for instance, and, as such, this project—despite its focus on ballroom dance—is about far more than just dancing. Dances, after all, do not dance

themselves. Just as it is people and not cultures that act,<sup>19</sup> so too is it persons who dance. Dancing is intentional, deliberate<sup>20</sup> and takes work.<sup>21</sup> As such, the performative aspect of dance both reflects and shapes the cultural and psychological meanings that articulate personal and collective identities.

Just as Marta Savigliano recognizes the nomadicism of Argentine Tango dancers (1998:105) so too can ballroom dance communities be described as trans-local, intermittent, recurring, overlapping, floating, drifting, mobile, and migratory. Understanding such communities is of ever growing importance as they testify to the experience(s) of identity in modernity, where the primacy of geographic locality recedes in the face of ever expanding physical and conceptual mobility.<sup>22</sup> Ballroom communities do exist, albeit not in customary geographic or temporal locals. They are social arenas in which community and identity are confirmed. They are “places” where people live lives and forge identities. As complex, hybrid cultures, ballroom communities resist standard models—they exhibit elements of ritual, ceremony, leisure, performance, exhibition, pageant, and competition. Each of these elements is integral to understanding ballroom communities but—especially when considered separately—all fall far short of capturing the flavor of this lived world.

Imagining, as per Benedict Anderson, is generative of communities (1991), and ballroom communities are no exception, yet this is only part of the picture. Dancing, as Savigliano points out, “starts out way before the actual dancing” (1998:105). Even a brief assessment reveals that there are distinct norms, values, action systems, techniques, and patterns of appraisals for ballroom dance classes,

lessons, studios, workshops, competitions, and other such venues. And, despite post-modern emphasis on local explication,<sup>23</sup> it is not by chance that ballroom dancers from different countries, and speaking different languages, can successfully dance with each other at their first meeting. As my observations from the U.S., Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, and Italy clearly illustrate, while always subject to both local and individual variation, there is a ballroom culture—a culture of dance with its own social rules.<sup>24</sup> Ballroom communities also have their own “language”—terms and usages that remain opaque to the “outsider.” So too does it have its own codes and hierarchies<sup>25</sup> as well as its own stars or celebrities.<sup>26</sup> All of this makes sense since ballroom dancing is not a spontaneous activity but, rather, one that needs to be understood—including all of the associated ramifications—as an institutionalization of action.<sup>27</sup>

Peter Stromberg’s notion of a commitment system as a chosen cultural system (1986)—particularly informative for communities often defined by their diversity<sup>28</sup>—well suits the trans-local ballroom community. Going even further than Anderson’s notion of self-generative imagination whereby, based on a shared interest and participation, people imagine themselves to be—and thus create themselves as—a community (1991), Stromberg’s idea of commitment is directly generative of both belief and action (e.g. 1986:90). This dynamic is important in understanding ballroom communities, communities that are simultaneously mobile and nontransient.<sup>29</sup> The individuals present at a given competition or studio, on a given night, are always highly variable yet, over time, the same “faces” appear over and over. Perhaps most telling, however, is that for many people, belonging to these communities matters.



Membership, however conceptualized and defined by both self and others, constitutes, in Fred Bailey's words, "the only valid self" (1993:26).

Perhaps of most significance in this regard is Howard Becker's realization that "people often do not experience their aesthetic beliefs as merely arbitrary and conventional; they feel that they are natural, proper and moral" (2001:75). As such, the models, norms, and values associated with ballroom dancing—despite their lack of grounding in geographical coordinates—are not experienced as separate or disparate from other facets of their lives. This is of particular significance when considering the importance and communicativeness of *physical culture*<sup>30</sup> and, indeed, it is precisely in this way that dance factors into the construction of embodied identifications, such as those of gender<sup>31</sup> as I more fully explore in Chapter 10. For the moment, however, I want to further examine the nature of the ballroom and salsa communities as complex communities, and dispersed social networks, including the relationships of and implications for such communities relative to, and within, the context of globalization.

### **When the "Where" Isn't "There"**

As should come as no surprise, conducting research in such a translocal community—with fluid participation and membership—poses a number of logistical, methodological, and theoretical challenges, perhaps the greatest of which is the need to continuously re-enter the field. Unlike geographically stable communities, there is not *an* arrival. Each new city, each new studio, each new competition, requires new negotiations of issues of access, permission, and belonging. Indeed, it is precisely

insofar as the competitive ballroom circuit *is* a dispersed community that negotiations of access are an ongoing dynamic of such fieldwork. No matter how much time I had spent in the field, no matter how many people I had made contact with, and no matter what degree of rapport I had built with various community members, the next studio owner or competition organizer still needed to be approached and negotiated with anew. Over time various contacts may have facilitated some of these negotiations but, even in such cases, I still had to secure access.

This same dynamic also proved to be a significant logistical challenge, as I always needed to be planning and scheduling new travel and housing arrangements. Unlike typical fieldwork scenarios with a set geographic location, travel and living arrangements are not simply arranged and then settled but, rather, continuously need to be explored and scheduled. Logistically the ongoing negotiations of travel, access, and lodgings take time away from fieldwork. Methodologically than, more time is needed in order to complete the same amount of traditional field time. Additionally, the constant travel and the regular use of hotels provides for a much more expensive financial component to such fieldwork.

One important theoretical ramification arising from these considerations is that traditional understandings and definitions of “the field” and of fieldwork must be re-examined and redefined. The ongoing logistics of doing fieldwork with the competitive ballroom community involve participating in the same dynamics that define the lived reality, experiences, and circumstances of the members of the competitive ballroom circuit. While continuous travel and living out of suitcases is not

the prototypical model of fieldwork it is certainly participant observation when this is the exact lifestyle of the community in question. Widespread travel is theoretically central—and thus methodologically imperative—to doing research with dispersed and translocal communities, especially as these very features are fundamentally constitutive elements of the group in question. Indeed, it is in only in their translocality that the social networks, action systems, and embodied identities of the competitive ballroom scene can really be appreciated.

While Frederik has suggested that a tighter geographic focus would reveal how “studio communities are often very different and require their own rites of passage” (2005:19), I think she misses the mark, and quite widely at that. Certainly there are differences between studio communities and even between the sub cultures of different studios. The point remains, however, that all such differences transpire under a wider umbrella of ballroom culture (Marion 2005b). Even if a studio newcomer is, as Frederik suggests, not automatically accepted as a community insider, his or her dancing will still be recognized for what it is, and mark them as a dancer of a given proficiency level. Similarly, widespread circulation of students and instructors to various dance camps and competitions are part of a wider circuit, as are instructional manuals, videos, and DVDs that are circulated internationally and are in no way local products.

Frederik also suggests that ballroom competitions are “not the main hub of the ballroom dancing culture,” (2005:20), an assessment in which I think she is entirely mistaken. Ballroom competitions are certainly *not* where the majority of ballroom life

and living take place; that is the studio. Hundreds and thousands of hours are spent at the studio for each hour at a competition and for each minute actually competing on the ballroom floor. But that is exactly the point. If the daily stuff of ballroom life takes place at the studio, the purpose of that time, preparation, and training is still directed towards the competition floor; and it is in exactly this way that ballroom competitions are, in fact, the hub of competitive ballroom culture.

As all of this makes clear, there is not always a “where?” to fieldwork, and that the very question most typically faced by any anthropologist “where do you do your fieldwork?” overly prioritizes physical place as the emphasis of anthropological inquiry. In this same vein, and even among those familiar with the nature of my fieldwork, were the comments and questions I regularly heard from various student and faculty colleagues amounting to “are you back yet?” or “when are you going?” or “I’m never sure whether you’re here or not.” Continuing to overlook and under-theorize “locations” of fieldwork that do not fit traditional models of place unfortunately—and unnecessarily—leaves open some of the most critical methodological concerns of today which, in turn, undermines both the empirical and theoretical contributions possible from such research.

As in any circumstance, values and identities are contextual but, as such, ballroom competitors, coaches, studios, adjudicators, clubs, and competitions are all contingent upon their place within a field of activity—with all of its constituent practices, values, negotiations of agency and power, and constructions of meaning and identity—that transcends geographic positioning. Section II unpacks these dynamics,

first in Chapter Three which focuses on both who, and how, members belong to their (in this case dance) community, and then in Chapters Four and Five which both examine the sociopolitical landscape within which ballroom life unfolds and transpires.

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## Endnotes: Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> “Kibbutzim” is the plural form for kibbutz as transliterated from the Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> The area was a commercial one with numerous shops and eateries on the ground floors meaning that the first story was actually quite high.

<sup>3</sup> Ballroom formation dancing was once described to me as a cross between ballroom dancing and synchronized swimming, with up to eight couples dancing as the entire formation constantly shifts between various lines and geometric shapes. I should also add in that, while the USCD team is still predominantly formation based and driven, the individual couples component is stronger now than it was at the time when I was on the team.

<sup>4</sup> Dancing with multiple partners—particularly doing different dances in different divisions with each—is fairly common within the collegiate circuit in the US, especially at lower levels and especially for men who are usually in short supply for the more numerous women.

<sup>5</sup> Most “salsa clubs” are really mainstream clubs or restaurants that have designated salsa nights one or more nights a week.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter Four is dedicated to assessing the various political considerations “in play” within the social systems and structures involved, while Chapter Eight discusses the values being evaluated and judged in ballroom competitions.

<sup>7</sup> Although a lower model, my 35mm camera and vertical grip, flash bracket, shoe mounted flash, and external battery pack closely resembled the equipment of the official professional event photographers. (For most of my fieldwork I was still shooting film, using a Cannon A2 with a VG-10 grip and a 540EZ flash. Just prior to Blackpool in 2005 I made the switch to digital, in the form of a Cannon 20D with a BG-E2 grip and a 580EX flash with a Quantum Turbo battery pack.)

<sup>8</sup> What constitutes “decently sized” is rather relative, especially given the vastly different amounts of space typically utilized between stationary Latin dances such as the Rumba as compared to progressive, space intensive Ballroom dances such as the quickstep. Also worth recognizing in this regard is the vastly different amount of floor space required for the volume and shape generated by elite competitors (relative to that required and utilized by lower level dancers’ versions of the exact same figures).

<sup>9</sup> While it is true that ballroom camps offer the option of private lessons with the various instructors, and while many camp attendees avail his or her self of this option, it is still the case that the overall camp schedule is still built around the group class schedule and activities.

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest that individual dancers may not prioritize the improvement of their own dancing when at a club, but does highlight that such self-development is generally understood to be the purpose of studios and not of clubs.

<sup>11</sup> I should point out that while I have encountered numerous social and physical clubs dedicated salsa dancing, I have only encountered social ballroom clubs in the US, never physical ones. Also important to note in this regard is that the nomenclature I am using suits the US usages of these terms, as many European countries—at least as far as ballroom dancing is concerned—reference “studios” as the places where people learn to social dance and “clubs” as the places where more gifted and dedicated dancers go to work on competitive style dancing (as in competitive sports clubs).

<sup>12</sup> The fact that this particular phrasing was used, casting an ethnographic dissertation as a simple “school paper,” suggests just one of the problems I faced in conducting my research. While situating one’s self amidst non-anthropologists is an issue common to most fieldwork, the complex nature of the ballroom community (and as delineated in this chapter and the next) made this an ongoing hurdle for my research.

<sup>13</sup> As per endnote 14 above, I attended the 2005 Embassy Ball as an official photographer for *Dance Beat*/Dance Beat International.

<sup>14</sup> As per endnote 15 above, I attended the 2005 Fire & Ice Ball as the official competition photographer.

<sup>15</sup> I attended this event as an official photographer for *Dance Beat*/Dance Beat International.

<sup>16</sup> I attended this competition as the official event photographer.

<sup>17</sup> This section of Chapter 1 is based on two papers I presented in 2005: “When the ‘Where?’ isn’t ‘There’: Competitive Ballroom Dancing and Steps Towards Translocal Anthropology” presented on January 28, 2005 at the 5<sup>th</sup> annual All-Grad Research Symposium at UCSD, and “When the ‘Where?’ isn’t ‘There’: Competitive Ballroom Dancing and Steps Towards Translocal Anthropology” presented on April, 2005 as part of the “When the ‘Where?’ isn’t ‘There’: Steps Towards Addressing Activity Based ‘Sites’ of Anthropological Inquiry” panel I organized for the Society for Psychological Anthropology’s 2005 biennial meetings in San Diego, “Bridging Anxious Borders” (held in conjunction with the American Ethnological Association).

<sup>18</sup> For several examples see Castro 1991, García Gómez 1993, Mitchell 1994, Savigliano 1995 and 1998, and Steingress 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Geertz 1973a:15; Goodenough 1981:105; Schneider 1968:6; Stromberg 1986:8, 13; also see Wallace 1961:42.

<sup>20</sup> Ward 1993:27.

<sup>21</sup> Savigliano 1998:103.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Anderson 1991 [1983]; Greider 1997; Horn 1998; Mankekar 1999; McKinley 1997.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Clifford 1988, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Fischer and Abedi 1990, Marcus 1992, Marcus and Fischer 1986, Marcus and Myers 1995.

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<sup>24</sup> E.g. Taylor 1998. Also, the efficacy of dance as a socially leveling and formative arena of human activity (P. Spencer 1985:28), while always taking place within larger social contexts—which must themselves be looked at in any analyses of dance—is also generative of its own collectivities (Hanna 1988). This phenomenon is particularly telling in modern ballroom and salsa dance communities, which do not readily fit conventional models and understandings of community.

<sup>25</sup> Savigliano 1998: 105-108.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Sumner 1906:12.

<sup>27</sup> For examples of this phenomena see Chaiklin and Lave 1993; Cole 1996; Engeström 1993; Forman, Minnick, and Stone 1993; Goodnow, Miller, and Kessel 1995; Hutchins 1995; Lave 1988; Lave and Wegner 1991; and Rogoff 1990.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Offen 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Mobile in that they re-coalesces from night to night—in different locations with different permutations—while, simultaneously, being nontransient in that their core constituency remains stable over time, albeit in varying permutations.

<sup>30</sup> Polhemus 1993:4; e.g. Bateson and Mead 1942; Mead and McGregor 1951 regarding Bali.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas 1993; e.g. Geertz 1973; Hanna 1979c, 1988; Radcliffe-Brown 1922.

## CHAPTER TWO: Why “Dance”? What is “Ballroom”? What is “Salsa”?

What are the uses and purposes of studying dance? What exactly do I mean by “ballroom” and “salsa” and, why did I choose these “sites” for my research? The remainder of this chapter will examine these issues, first reviewing the anthropological and related literature on dance, next looking at ballroom and salsa individually, then exploring the utility in looking at them together, and finally in introducing and describing the myriad ethnographic settings in which this research was conducted.

### **Why “Dance”– Meanings Matter**

What does dancing mean to dancers? What do they get out of it? While there are overlapping elements and meanings, dance cannot—as the disjointed perspectives on women’s dance in Africa exemplify<sup>1</sup>—be fully appreciated save in relation to specific societies and persons. The area of experience “that most anthropologists, dancers, and dance scholar find hard to penetrate,” notes Brinson, “is the expression of inner feelings through dance” (1985:208). What is it that, from their own perspectives, people are engaged in while dancing? What are the “conscious intentions of the participants in relation to the situational context” (Brinson 1985:211)?

Even if dance is a form of expressing what cannot be expressed in words (Strathern 1985; e.g. Brinson 1985), what is it that a given dancer is expressing? The dynamic and experience of dance “that most anthropologists, dancers, and dance



scholars find hard to penetrate,” Brinson points out, “is the expression of inner feelings through dance” (1985:208). If different arenas exist for different types of communication (e.g. Basso 1996; Gal 1991), what type of communication is dance? Isadora Duncan’s famous quote along just these lines was “if I could tell you what I meant, there would be no point in dancing it.” Further explicating this idea Bateson suggests that:

If this were the sort of message that could be communicated in words, there would be no point in dancing it. But it is not that sort of message. It is, in fact, precisely the sort of message which would be falsified if communicated in words, because the use of words (other than poetry) would imply that this is a fully conscious and voluntary message, and this would be simply untrue. (2000:137-138)

Part of what this means is that, at least in part, as much as this dissertation examines, describes, explores, and analyzes the social, cultural, and psychological frames of ballroom and salsa, the underlying “messages” of the dance still cannot be distilled into words; indeed to try doing so would do violence to the very messages and meanings that dancers find in dancing. At some level this may be frustrating, as what the meanings and messages of a given dance are never cleanly laid out. At the same time, however, this resistance to easy classification or definition is informative of the nature of the meanings and messages of dance which are often nebulous concentrations of feeling and significance.

### **The Body and Meaning**

Even taking dance as “an active creation of meanings, that is social action dependent upon social relationships at the time” (Brinson 1985:210; e.g. Blacking 1985, Gell 1985), then, what are the actual meanings so involved and why is it these

specific meanings that are entailed? Certainly “the energy of the body and the instincts imbedded therein must be enormous” (Blackmer 1989:9), but why are they directed and expressed in the ways that they are by, for instance, ballroom and salsa dancers? In Blackmer’s words “[a dancer] is not a natural man, but one highly trained; discipline of the body, not denial of it, is his way” (1989:18). What is it that dancing means—to a given person—that instigates such training and, thereafter, what does this training mean within the larger framework of their life? Agents’ frames of reference often (and largely) depend, after all, on their sociocultural positioning (Bourdieu 1984:169).

“Reality” Blackmer contends, “begins with the body, which gives us shape, existence, and boundaries. It is the carrier of our being in the world, the *sine qua non* of living on the earth” (1989:28) and, as he goes on to point out, “the awareness that ‘I’ am this body, ‘I’ am finite and separate from other bodies, forms the skeleton of the ego” (1989:29). “Man, although he creates his culture,” notes Lange, “does not cease to be a biological being” (1975:51). Yet views of the body, including one’s own, are not just about bodies, they arise and find meaning from within particular contexts,<sup>2</sup> (including personal idiosyncratic ones). As Lange goes on to point out, “man is a complex psychophysical entity, and his inner life also participates in his movement actions” (1975:44).

An important and underappreciated concomitant to this is that the ego must change as body changes and vice versa. What ego changes ensue? It is the ego, after all, that “becomes conscious of what ‘I’ am doing and what ‘I’ look like” (Lange

1975:52). And, in a closely related vein, what significance is there to the touch inherent to partner dancing? As an active realm of bodily cultural discourse dance represents the intertwining of bodily and cognitive content and thereby provides ideal conditions for the making of meaning. What does it mean to a dancer, for instance, when physical limitations impinge upon their ability to dance?<sup>3</sup> Western thought has, unfortunately, largely underappreciated the importance of the body in and for experiences and understandings of mental and psychological perspectives (Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

As Roy Rappaport explicated more than three decades ago, “use of the body defines the self of the performer for himself and for others” (1979:200). Yet the very use of the body is not, as is commonly misconceived, a purely natural process—proxemics and physical mannerisms are both elements of social discourse that are culturally variable (e.g. Hall 1988 and Levy 1973, respectively). “In a very important sense,” notes Spencer, “society creates the dance, and it is to society that we must turn to understand it” (1985:38). Dance, after all, “is not something plucked out of the air, nor dreamed from nothing by choreographers, it is a translation of practical consciousness, starting from what is, from what exists” (Brinson 1985:212). As such, the definitions of self—both for those using and those observing such use of the body—are integrally linked to cultural discourses. Even more importantly, perhaps, is that such bodily discourse are often transmitted and enacted below the level of conscious processing.<sup>4</sup> This is of great significance in that while most learning is conscious that which transpires subliminally often involves emotional conditioning

(D'Andrade 2000:64, based on LeDoux, 1996). It is thus that embodied discourses—such as those implicated by dance—often emerge as the most recalcitrant of Weber's "stone walls of habit" and Boas's "shackles of tradition." As Weber, Boas, and (numerous) others have long known, the vast majority of daily operations are organized and operated outside of awareness which can, in turn, lead to the activation of goals and procedures which are, themselves, outside of awareness (D'Andrade 2000:67, based on Mandler 1984).

### **Mirrors and Meanings: Dance as Social Reflection**

The popular appeal of dance has barely touched the imagination of most anthropologists," notes Spencer, and is only found as "fragments in the anthropological literature" (1985:ix). "It is too big to miss" he goes on to say, "and yet we still somehow miss it" (Spencer 1985:ix). This situation represents an unfortunate gap. It is not only dance that is being under-utilized as a valuable facet of social inquiry but also the understandings that dance can offer regarding larger social, cultural, and psychological systems. Studying dance, for example, offers insight into the extensive processes by which cultures influence and work through the body as well as the mind (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Stromberg 1986:13) as different ways of using the body become privileged, accepted, expected, and invested with symbolic meanings.

While the work of several scholars (e.g. Copeland and Cohen 1983:1-102; Hanna 1979a:19, 1979c:19; Lange 1975:39; Royce 1977:8; Sachs 1937:6) suggest that dance be understood as "patterned movement as an end in itself that transcends utility" (Spencer 1985:1), citing examples of the "highly utilitarian purpose" of the

Australian Waramunga fire ceremony “to patch up old quarrels and live in peace” (Spencer 1985:1, based on Spencer and Gillen 1904:375-392 and Durkheim 1915:218) and the North American Ghost Dance (e.g., Mooney 1965), Spencer also notes that, “there is an arbitrariness in confining the term ‘dance’ to nonutilitarian patterned movement” (Spencer 1985:1). No less an anthropologist than Franz Boas contended that “ordinary gestures and actions can become dance if a transformation takes place within the person; a transformation which takes him out of the ordinary world and places him in a world of heightened sensitivity” (quoted in Snyder 1974:221; quoted in Spencer 1985:2).

Treating dance as separate from the rest of culture is purely conceptual, as dance only exists within a larger cultural surround<sup>5</sup> and, as Brinson has observed, “perhaps the gravest problem of dance in modern industrial society is its separation from the generality of other human activity” (Brinson 1985:210).<sup>6</sup> As such, this project—despite its focus on ballroom dancing—is about far more than dancing. Cultural performances such as dance are mirrors, albeit imperfect ones, which are both reflective and reflexive of social reality (Myerhoff 1980:7). Dances do not dance themselves. Just as it is people and not cultures that act (Geertz 1973a:15; Goodenough 1981:105; Schneider 1968:6; Stromberg 1986:8, 13)<sup>7</sup> so too is it persons who dance. Dancing is intentional, deliberate (Ward 1993:27) and takes work (Savigliano 1998:103).

Dance, as Brinson observes, “reflects powerful social forces, albeit still largely uncharted” (Brinson 1985:212). The small body of work that has explicitly focused on

dance is largely confined to folk dance or theater dance, and has typically ignored the important arena of social dance (Ward 1993:20). The frame of reference for these works has proven similarly limiting being almost entirely historic (e.g. Bottomer 1998; Lange 1975:v; Mailing 1992; Stephenson and Iaccarino 1980), instructional (e.g. Bottomer 1998; ISTD 1983 and 1994; Levinson 2000; Stephenson and Iaccarino 1980), or non-academic (e.g. Babitz 1999; Reynolds 1998) in nature.<sup>8</sup> My own research choices are geared, in large part, to help address this dearth in coverage and perspective. By focusing on the participatory dance form of ballroom, and using salsa for contrast, my research will delve into the numerous intersectional variables that color the experiences and meanings of dance.

### **Spencer's Seven Themes**

In his *Society and the Dance: The Social Anthropology of Process and Performance*, Paul Spencer identifies seven thematic perspectives for understanding dance (1985:3-38). The first of Spencer's seven themes is a psychological one—the cathartic theory—viewing dance as a safety valve with therapeutic value (e.g., Bernstein 1979, H. Spencer 1862:234-235). Classic anthropological examples of this dynamic include Evans-Pritchard regarding the Azande beer dance and Mead regarding the informal dances of Samoan children.<sup>9</sup> Yet any exercise can prove cathartic in this manner so, as Spencer duly notes, the cathartic explanation “can never be more than a partial explanation” (1985:5). And, as he goes on to note, “universally shared biological or psychological considerations do not account for the

differences between societies; hence one has to look both at the variety of dance and the variety of its social context in order to arrive at a fuller understanding” (Spencer 1985:5).

While the cathartic model accounts for the spontaneity observable in dancing, it does not account for the formal elements of dance (Spencer 1985:6). Take, for instance, various forms of competitive dancing, “where the act of resolving tension in one context may create it elsewhere” (Spencer 1985:7; e.g. Evans-Prichard 1928:460; Lange 1975:14; Rust 1969:25). In such competitive situations “the cathartic theory tends to emphasize one side of a more complex argument” (Spencer 1985:7).

Still, the cathartic element of dance is well highlighted by the role dancing often takes within religious cults. Lewis (1989) provides several examples of such cases including the tantrism in medieval Italy, voodoo in Haiti, and Tungus shamanism in Siberia and notes how such cases of spirit possession especially appeal to downtrodden elements of society (also see Gluckman 1963:124-125, 133-134). In like manner salsa was originally “low class,” and so too was tango a dance of/for prostitutes. Even doubts about both Lewis’s and Gluckman’s accounts (Beidelman 1966; Norbeck 1963; Rigby 1968; Wilson 1967), are about the impetuses to/of catharsis, not nature of it. And, as Brinson explicates, “every dancer, professional or amateur, has experienced such catharsis, the release of tension, in personal performance” (1985:207).

The performative facet of dance is not, of course, just about individuality; it can also be about enhancement of the collective (Spencer 1985:30). Spencer’s second

and third themes are functional sociological theories focusing on the role(s) dance can play in promoting social solidarity. Spencer's second theme views dance as education and transmission of sentiment, recognizing that dance is more than just dance. Dance, rather, is cast as an active portrayal and demonstration of social graces.<sup>10</sup> And, as Spencer takes note, the links forged between sound and movement (1985:10, also see Kubik 1979:228) are enduring ones that often and easily re-emerge later in life since "like a well-conditioned reflexes, the dance has 'entered' the dancer" (ibid, referencing De Zoete and Spies 1970:262; McPhee 1970:213-214; 1970:311).

But it is not only the dancer whom the dance may enter; it is everyone present. The music, the motion, the rhythm, the patterns, the exertion, the spectacle, and the display—all of these elements (amongst many, many, others) are present for, perceived, and experienced by everyone present. Such experiences, however, are not just had in parallel by each individual. Rather, the experiential dynamic is enhanced, magnified, and transformed by dint of being a shared experience. "In the rapport between performers and infecting their audience," notes Spencer, "it is difficult to separate the unity of their movement from the unity of the music that this movement produces; and they become involved in an experience that is enhanced because it is physically shared" (1985:10-11).<sup>11</sup>

The role of dance in promoting social solidarity can function both for and against the status quo, being "either a conservative or a progressive influence depending on the social context, either reinforcing existing ideas or simulating the imagination" (Brinson 1985:211). On the conservative side dance can be seen "as an



organ of social control”<sup>12</sup> (Brinson 1985:212) serving as “an educator in traditional ways, a transmitter of cultural and social taboos, a conditioner of youthful enthusiasm” (Brinson 1985:207). At the same time, however, “dance and music can be also instruments of social change” (Brinson 1985:207; as per Spencer 1985:26).

Spencer’s third theme focuses on the interactions within dance and the maintenance of sentiments so entailed. Social existence depends, of course, on transmission and maintenance of culturally desirable sentiments (Spencer 1985:11). Dance can be a dynamic force in this regard, serving as a highly efficacious means for actively revitalizing adult sentiments (Radcliffe-Brown 1922:233-234; 1952:124, 157). And, as Radcliffe-Brown took note of, both music and dance have the ability to act as a moral force (1922).<sup>13</sup> Such norms and mores are all the more powerful since they are often transparent in their transmission and many scholars have noted both the importance of non-verbal expression (Birdwhistell 1970:79-99, 218-219; Condon and Ogston 1966:338; Gell 1985:193-194; Langer 1953:32, 174-175, 180; Lomax 1974:199; H. Spencer 1868) and the communicativeness of dance (Evans-Prichard 1928:449; Mead 1928:93; Raum 1940:222; Smith 1954:222; Turnbull 1965:120).

Durkheim (1933:233-2340) and (Radcliffe-Brown 1922:247, 252, 326) are just two of anthropology’s pillars who have recognized the intense social solidarity of dancers via dancing and, as Spencer posits,

In the various ethnographic accounts, dance is seen to bring a closer involvement between people rather than a release from such involvements. It develops, not just within each dancer, but also in the interaction between all those participating. (Spencer 1985:17)

Such considerations make it clear that of *all* shared experiences, dance can be the most valued (e.g. Blacking 1985 regarding the Venda) as individual experiences take place within the collective conscious of the community. And, as such, the efficacy of dance extends beyond the dancer (e.g. Langer 1953:175, 183-184, 190-192; Spencer 1985:15). As Spencer contends, “dancing is a highly social and leveling activity that draws people together in solidarity” (1985:28), a point mirrored by Blacking’s formulation that “dance can help create a climate leading to community action because it helps to generate feelings of strength and can disseminate a collective awareness” (1985:207). And, as Brinson goes on to note, “dancing has a social utility in present-day society far greater than that expressed through the theatrical performances that usually capture the headlines and the attentions of the critics” (1985:212).

Spencer’s fourth theme is the self-generative theory, wherein dance is understood as a cumulative process. This dynamic is readily seen in the words of Radcliffe-Brown: “as the dancer loses himself in the dance, as he becomes absorbed in the unified community, he reaches a state of elation in which he feels himself filled with energy or force immediately beyond his ordinary state” (1922:252-253; also in Spencer 1985:16). Spencer, for instance—working from Durkheim (1915:215)—points out how, for the Warramunga, dancing and/or dance-like movements played a consistent and important role along the path to ceremonial climax (Spencer 1985:16) and goes on to note that, “where dancing is an integral feature of millenarian movements...it may play a role in generating a climax” (Spencer 1985:21; e.g. Brooks 1970; Gluckman 1963; Merton 1957:419; Mooney 1965; Turnbull 1965: 154, 189, 278). Regarding more contemporary cases Brinson provides an updated view of these same dynamics, pointing out that “the experience of dance as stimulator and self-

generator is part of life in any dance company as in many kinds of social dance” (Brinson 1985:207).

Viewing dance as a cumulative process also means that dance either represents a balanced opposition or it will (1) peter out, or (2) erupt in a fight (Schieffelin 1976:172-173 in Spencer 1985:17). This view understands the atmosphere created in dance as “essentially the result of balanced oppositions between complimentary responses of leaders and followers, of the sexes, of dancers and musicians, and of performers and spectators” (Spencer 1985:17). Regarding the Bori spirits (of the Hausa of Nigeria) for instance,

Each spirit was known to have its own characteristic dancing rhythm and guise... For the Hausa, it was the benign presence of the Bori spirits, made manifest in the continuous dancing, that determined the community spirit and success of the market. (Spencer 1985:18-19)

And, as Spencer proceeds to point out, “One cannot disentangle the popular enthusiasm and interest generated by the dancing from the growth of economic confidence necessary to establish the market” (1985:20).

Before wrapping up Spencer’s seven themes, it is important to point out, and as Spencer well understood (1985:19), that dance can, and often does, simultaneously reflect multiple—often interactional—themes. The Bori spirits and dancing, for instance, can be seen both as theme one (Lewis 1971:95-96; Onwuejeogwu 1969:290) and theme three (Onwuejeogwu 1969:283, 289; Smith 1954:222).

Spencer’s fifth theme is the boundary display theory and focuses on the role of competition in dance, a dynamic fore grounded by many anthropological classics on the competitiveness of dance (e.g. Benedict [citing Boas] 1935:66, 145-150; Evans-

Prichard 1928:453; Firth 1936:55, 510; Malinowski 1929:21-213, 292). These texts all recognize the use of dance as confrontations—as an arena for transmitting messages indicating intentions and strength targeted toward intimidation (Spencer 1985:22; using Bailey’s 1969:28-29 model of confrontation). As Spencer points out, “dance is a highly appropriate idiom [for confrontation] because it can display precisely the power, initiative, and coordinated discipline that give strength in the event of an encounter; it can be overbearing” (Spencer 1985:22; e.g. Chagnon 1968:109-111; Rappaport 1967:26-27).

Spencer’s penultimate theme—that of dance as ritual drama—highlights a theory of *communitas* and antistructure. Dance does not just lead to solidarity, notes Spencer, “it is also frequently marginal and anomalous in its own way. It contrasts with normal everyday life, taking the dancers out of their structured routine and into a realm of timeless charm. In their *ecstasy* they literally *stand outside*” (Spencer 1985:28, original emphasis; e.g. Langer 1953:204-205; Turner 1969:126). The distinction being made here is key at two levels since, in addition to highlighting the transformative capacity of ritual drama, it also points out that such transformational efficacy is also grounded in distinction and difference from everyday experience and routine. “Neither structure nor *communitas*,” notes Spencer, “is complete in itself; together they give shape and meaning to human existence” (1985:28). Dance, like all ritual drama, gains personal, cultural, and social impact and salience via complimentary opposition to everyday norms, understandings, and structures.<sup>14</sup>

The theme of dance as ritual drama well highlights the prominence and significance of dance in ritual, myth, and religion. As Langer suggests, “the prehistoric evolution of dancing...is the very process of religious thinking,” that indeed “the dancer’s world is a world transfigured, wakened to a special kind of life” (1953:190 in Spencer 1985:35). “Through dancing,” contends Spencer, “the individual is caught up in a very dynamic way in the powerful forces underlying community life. It is not just his imagination that is stirred, but his whole body” (1985:35), clearly playing into the notion of Durkheimian effervescence, wherein,

feeling himself dominated and carried away by some sort of an external power which makes him think and act differently than in normal times, he naturally has the impression of being himself no longer...everything is just as though he really were transported into a special world, entirely different from the one where he normally lives, and into an environment filled with exceptionally intense forces that take hold of him and metamorphose him. (Durkheim 1915:218 in Spencer 1985:35)

Finally, Spencer’s last theme is what he terms the uncharted deep structures of dance. Clearly a number of different concepts, models, and ideas fit under this rubric but, in essence, all such views revolve around a notion that there are structurally salient elements in dance that matter at some fundamental level and in some fundamental way. One of the most common views to this effect is the structuralist view of dance as closely paralleling language.<sup>15</sup> From a different perspective Gell (1975, 1985) has foregrounded the role of dance in ritual, a point Spencer picks up on in suggesting that “dance may be defined in whatever way seems most appropriate to the study of any specific situation or society. Dance is not an entity in itself, but belongs rightfully to the wider analysis of ritual action” (1985:38). While I would argue that dance deserves study in and of its right I fully agree that separating dance

from its sociocultural context is a conceptual abstraction at best. Spencer's main point is that there is a deeper level of patterning than is revealed at the level of activity alone. "In the final analysis," he suggests, "any underlying pattern of behaviour or belief that is not consciously perceived by the members of a culture may be described as deep structure" (Spencer 1985:37).<sup>16</sup>

### **Situated Meanings**

While Spencer's Seven Themes are largely focused on some of the general dynamics that are both recruited by and enacted in and through dance, it is also important to recognize that particular forms of dance arise in specific social contexts. Certainly many overlapping elements and meanings exist, yet dance cannot be fully appreciated—as the disjointed perspectives on women's dance in Africa exemplify (e.g. Gluckman 1963; Hanna 1977:12-123; Lewis 1989; Norbeck 1963; Rigby 1968; Wilson 1967)—save in relation to specific societies and persons. "In a very important sense, society creates the dance," notes Spencer, "and it is to society that we must turn to understand it" (1985:38). Going even farther than this however, as an integral element and dynamic of society, dance also feeds back into the shaping of that selfsame society.

Indeed, the situatedness and contextuality of various dance forms has been the topic of research from various disciplines and perspectives<sup>17</sup> such as sociological work like Angela McRobbie's "Dance as Social Fantasy" (1984), historical works including Katrina Hazzard-Gordon's *Jookin'* (1990), Jacqui Malone's *Steppin on the Blues*

(1996), and Marshall and June Stearns' *Jazz Dance* (1994 [1968]), cultural studies work like Frances Aparacio's *Listening to Salsa* (1998) and Jose Limon's *Dancing With the Devil* (1994), ethnomusicology like Peter Wade's *Music, Race, and Nation* (2002) and Lise Waxer's *The City of Musical Memory* (2002a) and *Situating Salsa* (2002b), and much dance theory, especially the work of Susan Leigh Foster (e.g. 1986, 1995, 1996a, 1996b). Although written from different frames of reference and with different focuses, all of the authors mentioned above share a common concern in looking at historically specific instantiations of dance as a social practice, a frame that is both useful and necessary in discussing ballroom and salsa and one to which I shall return at greater length in the next chapter. Before forging ahead, however, I would like to briefly outline some of the empirical and theoretical contributions allowed for by inquiries into and examinations of the situated meanings of music and dance.

Delving into the situated nature of dance Jacqui Malone, for instance, in her *Steppin' on the Blues* (1996), traces the history of African American dancing back to styles from central and Western Africa, notes the systematic differences in posture from European based dance forms, points out both the significance of dance and the interrelatedness of music, song, and dance in African American culture, and notes the crucial role dance plays as a mode of cultural survival as still evinced in African American marching bands and step shows. Similarly, in *Jazz Dance* (1994) Marshall and June Stearns detail the history and evolution of jazz dancing pointing, among other things, to the parallels of jazz dance in American with other dance forms from Africa and the West Indies noting, for instance, that "The basic Mambo...was

immediately identified with a Congo step from African and a Shango step from Trinidad”<sup>18</sup> (1994:11-12), and that “Folklorist Harold Courlander has seen dances in South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria which were ‘virtually indistinguishable’ from the Cakewalk, Shuffle, and Strut” (1994:13). In counterpoint to these examples, and like Malone, the Stearns also comment on the systematic differences—even in basic posture—between African and European based forms of dance.

Shifting to South American examples Frances Aparacio’s *Listening to Salsa* (1988) highlights the multiplex nature of salsa music in Puerto Rican culture, including its situated role in negotiations of gender, sex, class, and race, and in linking these overlapping elements to the ongoing construction of identity and day-to-day life. Similarly Peter Wade’s *Music, Race, and Nation* (2000) and Lisa Waxer’s *The City of Musical Memory* (2002a) both serve to illuminate the manner in which popular music in Columbia is both contextual to and contextualizing of constructions of (among other things) sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. As with the African based examples provided by Malone and Stearns and Stearns above, the works of Aparacio, Wade, and Waxer all point to the historically and culturally intertwined and situated constructions of embodiment—a topic examined at length by Susan Leigh Foster (e.g. 1986, 1995, 1996a, and 1996b) who highlights the importance of conceptualizing bodies as culturally rather than naturally experienced.

At the most basic level then, it is crucial to study dance if for no other reason (although I would contend that there *are* many others) than the fact that dance is not actually separate from other facets of human life. As all of the examples above help



make clear, music and dance function both as situated by and situating of racial, sexed, gendered, and national ideologies and are always part and parcel of the culturally mediated nature of embodiment. “Dance,” as Brinson points out after all, “derives from, and maintains, strong continuing links with surrounding circumstances of life” (1985:209) and “is not something plucked out of the air, nor dreamed from nothing by choreographers” (1985:212).

### **Leisure: Learning From and Living Through**

As Brinson points out, “leisure and recreation have become crucial problems in organizing the modern industrial state with important implications for the allocation of time between work and leisure (a distinction that is, or should be, artificial)” (1985:210). By situating ballroom within the field of leisure I do not mean to suggest that dance is less serious than or even discrete from other facets of life, or that people do not also pursue it professionally. Indeed one of the things demonstrated by the case of ballroom—and mirroring Brinson’s admonition—is that leisure cannot divorced from the rest of social living. As Chris Rojek notes, “one cannot separate leisure from the rest of life and claim that it has unique ‘laws’, ‘propensities’ and ‘rhythms’” (1995:1) and that “the further we probe into the matter of what leisure is, the greater is our appreciation of the part played by cultural mores, distinctions, and conflicts in establishing the parameters of debate and also what occurs in leisure time and leisure space” (1995:2). Leisure is *not* “free” time or space –leisure pursuits are never just about or related to their own contexts, but are always also related to a larger,

contextualizing, surround. It is exactly this understanding that Brinson is evoking in “earlier organization of society when time not spent in pursuit of production was spent in other ways, and such activities as ritual, dance, and music were an integral aspect of communal life” (1985:210).

One important element here is that, even taking place outside of the home and workplace—neither of which is necessarily the case regarding ballroom—does not in any way make a situation or event any less cultural. As Sherry Ortner has noted, “it is the nature of cultural encounters...that what goes on...is at least as much a function as what goes on at ‘home’” (Ortner 1999:54). Leisure activities remain situationally and socially located,<sup>19</sup> and any study of leisure can only ensue in relation to “what freedom, choice, flexibility and satisfaction mean in relation to determinate social formations” (Rojek 1995:1).

As with any exploration of leisure it is important to recognize that “specific cultures have centered specific meanings on leisure” (Rojek 1995:2) and that rather than being some discrete phenomena, even “what we understand by the term [leisure] is socially conditioned” (Rojek 1995:1). The point here is that leisure pursuits are always about more than (just) leisure and, indeed, that “the point...is to find something that one cannot find in modern life, that indeed has been lost in modern life” (Rojek 1995:36). Perhaps much of the appeal of dance is that the “body” in dance—as in mountaineering (e.g. Ortner 1999)—is non-modern. Now certainly what is “missing” differs over time and between individuals (Ortner 1999), yet even so

potentially deadly a leisure pursuit as climbing Mt. Everest is defined by those for whom “it is their sport, their game, the enactment of their desires” (Ortner 1999:4).

It is, of course, impossible to address leisure in modern, industrial society while ignoring the “commodification and homogenization of experience” (Rojek 1995:4) within such capitalistic contexts. One impact of this dynamic is that “capitalism is a system with few avenues of escape” (Rojek 1995:4). Perhaps one of the appeals of leisure activities then is that they are felt and experienced as an escape? This is not to suggest that leisure pursuits such as dance are not also subject to some commodifying and homogenizing forces but, rather, to suggest that at least some of their appeal may be in evoking a separation from these forces.

Naturally progressing out of Simmel’s view of the frenetic overload of the metropolis (1971:324-339),

The leisure industry is depicted as a tireless impresario dedicated to the cult of distraction. The notion of leisure as a means of self-improvement is often treated with cynicism. Instead the hypnotic qualities of the distraction industry are underlined and leisure activity is explored as a way of filling in the consumer’s empty time. (Rojek 1995:6)

Citing “the meaninglessness and emptiness of [postmodern] leisure” (Rojek 1995:5) and the “superficiality of postmodern culture” (Rojek 1995:4:10, following Jameson, 1991), wherein “depth is replaced by surface” (Jameson 1991:12 cited in Rojek, 1995:10), Rojek suggests that the essence of modernity is “transitory” (1995:5 citing Baudelaire 1964:13) wherein leisure choices are seen as arbitrary within an ever-expanding set of leisure choices (Rojek 1995:8) and “postmodern leisure is, as it were, existence without commitment” (Rojek 1995:7).

In contrast to this view of leisure as “filler,” however, “leisure is often described as the realm of the authentic – the area in life where we can really be ourselves” (Rojek 1995:9 e.g. Parker 1983; Kelly 1987; Olszweska and Roberts 1989).<sup>20</sup> This framework may be a powerful one indeed—concerning, as it does, issues of identity, expression, and authenticity—suggesting that dance may, in fact, be one field of activity wherein people are the most free to be themselves. One implication of this view is that “leisure and recreation have become crucial problems in organizing the modern industrial state with important implications for the allocation of time between work and leisure (a distinction that is, or should be, artificial)” (Brinson 1985:210). If the rest of modern industrial life is considered as an overabundance of conflicting pressures and influences, then leisure is the realm where one can be free to pursue one’s own initiatives.

In this view, leisure pursuits are not socially coerced. This is not to say that neither prestige nor financial reward are possible but, rather, that in and of themselves these dynamics cannot explain individuals’ leisure pursuits since greater rewards are possible for like effort in other socially viable arenas. The same effort in other arenas of sport or art tend to bring both greater remuneration and prestige at large and, as such, this is one area in which studying ballroom dancers can prove highly illuminating. While the financial and prestige rewards can be significant within the dance “world”—especially for the “elite”—greater rewards are typical of like effort in any number of more socially prominent sports and arts.

An additional consideration regarding dance within the framework of leisure relates to shifting ideas about sport. Now often harnessed to instrumental purposes, dance was originally activity pursued for its own sake. Possibly related to this change has also been a shift between “playing and watching to paying and spectating” (Rojek 1995:4).<sup>21</sup> This difference is just one example of “the changing values and forms of experience,” that Rojek sees as, “the central interest” (1995:9) of leisure studies, and as fundamental to an appropriate focus on “transformation of qualities of experience” (Rojek 1995:9; e.g. Lasch 1979, 1984; Rojek 1995; Schivelbusch 1980, 1988, 1992; and Sennett 1977, 1992).

### **Defining Dance: Dance as a Subject**

The very lack of an adequate language in which to describe dance highlights both its challenge and its value as an under-explored arena of inquiry. As a topic, dance has been both understudied and, more importantly, under theorized. Dance, for all of its ever-present and ever-visible place in society, has long eluded the explicit attention of most social scientists. “It is too big to miss” notes Paul Spencer, “and yet we still somehow miss it” (1985:ix). Jane Desmond makes a like point in noting that “dance remains a greatly undervalued and undertheorized arena of bodily discourse.” She goes on to note that “its practice and its scholarship are, with rare exception, marginalized within the academy” (1997:33). While dance falls far short of being accepted and addressed “as a primary, not secondary, social text,” let alone “one of immense importance and tremendous challenge” (Desmond 1997:57) several scholars—albeit in limited quantity—have taken up this challenge. Historian William

McNeill, for instance, coined the term “muscular bonding” to refer to the “human emotional response to moving together in dance and drill” (1995:vi). McNeill’s proposition, that collective rhythmic movement serves to “consolidate group solidarity by altering human feelings” (1995:viii), is an important one and is supported by data from such disparate locations as Greece (Danforth 1979), the Andaman Islands (Radcliffe-Brown 1922), the Kalahari (Katz 1982), and elsewhere in Africa (Hanna 1977; Kuper 1947).

Some theorists, in assessing the relationship of everyday movement to dance (Boas 1944), have defined dance as the non-utilitarian patterning of movement.<sup>22</sup> But, as Paul Spencer aptly recognizes, “there is an arbitrariness in confining the term ‘dance’ to nonutilitarian patterned movement” (1985:1) and, in point of fact, there are several accounts of dance within the anthropological literature that clearly explicate utilitarian purposes for dancing.<sup>23</sup> More recent approaches recognize a multiplicity of perspectives from which dance can be understood (e.g. P. Spencer 1985:3-38). This contemporary perspective is crucial in understanding dance, since dance—whatever else it may or may not be—is in no way a singular referent. What *counts* as dance in one context need not in another (Thomas 1993:xiv). Dance—as institutionalizations of action, including who moves, how, when, and with what meanings—is indicative of “cultural patterns of and for social life” (Washabaugh 1998:25n3).<sup>24</sup>

Several models and theories for understanding dance, as well as its positioning within culture and society, exist in the anthropological literature. E. Evans-Pritchard’s reflections on the Azande beer dance and Margaret Mead’s observations on the

informal dances of Samoan children are but two of many examples that highlight the therapeutic value of dance,<sup>25</sup> a catharsis which often proves of appeal to downtrodden elements of society (e.g. Lewis 1989; Gluckman 1963:124-125, 133-134).<sup>26</sup> Another model highlighted by many anthropological classics on the competitiveness of dance is that dance serves as a socially and culturally sanctioned arena of boundary display (e.g. Benedict 1935:66 citing Boas, 145-150; Evans-Prichard 1928:453; Firth 1936:55, 510; Malinowski 1929:21-213, 292). And, Spencer suggests, “dance is a highly appropriate idiom [for confrontation] because it can display precisely the power, initiative, and coordinated discipline that give strength in the event of an encounter; it can be overbearing” (1985:22, based on Bailey’s model of confrontation 1969:28-29; e.g. Chagnon 1968:109-111; Rappaport 1967:26-27).

More functionalist perspectives on dance have pointed to its role in transmitting and maintaining social mores and standards<sup>27</sup> as well as challenging such norms (Brinson 1985:207, 211; P. Spencer 1985:26). The significance of dance in elevating social solidarity has also been recognized as an important dynamic in both traditional societies and millenarian movements and contemporary societies.<sup>28</sup> A dynamic also reflected in the role that dances often play in the construction of social, ethnic, and national identities.<sup>29</sup>

The ritualistic and dramatic aspects of dance have given rise to alternative models, that recognize the juxtapositions of *communitas* (Turner 1974; 1987:22) and structure (e.g. Gulliver 1971:354, Langer 1953:204-205; P. Spencer 1985:28, 32; Turner 1969:126) often entailed, and typically recognize the prominence of dancing in

larger social and cultural myths and rituals (P. Spencer 1985:34). It is in this vein that dance and religion are often conceptually linked (e.g. Blackmer 1989:26), with dance being cast as: (1) the epitome of Durkheimian effervescence—concentrations of culturally salient symbols and models (e.g. P. Spencer 1985:35, working from Durkheim 1915:218); (2) “the very process of religious thinking” (Langer 1953:190); (3) physical performance as religious practice (Blackmer 1989:18); and (4) extensive dance training as paralleling shamanistic initiation (Blackmer 1989: 43-44, 50). Analysis of dance has thus been situated by many as a substratum of ritual studies (e.g. Gell 1975, 1985; Lewis 1989; P. Spencer 1985). Other perspectives of dance (usually of a more structuralist bent), however, have focused on its deep parallels to and overlap with language and its myriad communicative functions.<sup>30</sup> And, as even passing familiarity with dance is likely to reveal, dance is quite often an enterprise of “heightened sexualization” (Ortner 1999:170).

While all of these models contribute to understanding dance, as well as its articulation with larger systems and processes, they remain insufficient. Dance, as the anthropological literature regularly depicts, can simultaneously reflect multiple themes. Regarding the Bori spirits of the Nigerian Hausa, for instance, Paul Spencer (1985:19) points to the significance of dance both for psychological catharsis (e.g. Lewis 1971:95-96; Onwuejeogwu 1969:290) and the maintenance of social sentiment (e.g. Onwuejeogwu 1969:283, 289; Smith 1954:222).<sup>31</sup> For those it matters to, ballroom and salsa dancing are similarly multidimensional. Ritual, pageant, performing art, competition, social activity and recreational activity are all aspects of these dance forms. Indeed, these dance communities are interesting in part precisely *because* of their compound nature. Whether dance is conceived of as hybrid,



intersectional, composite, or compound cultural formation, dance communities serve to embody, reflect, and exemplify myriad cultural themes and meanings. Ballroom and salsa dancing bring together a variety of cultural themes and forms important in people's lives—themes and forms which are about much more than dancing.

Just as Savigliano recognizes the nomadicism of Argentine Tango dancers (1998:105) so too can ballroom and salsa dance communities be described as trans-local, intermittent, recurring, overlapping, floating, drifting, mobile, and migratory. Understanding such communities is of ever growing importance as they testify to the experience(s) of identity in modernity, where the primacy of geographic locality recedes in the face of ever expanding physical and conceptual mobility (e.g. Anderson 1991; Greider 1997; Horn 1998; Mankekar 1999; McKinley 1997). Ballroom and salsa dance communities do exist, albeit not in customary geographic or temporal locals. They are social arenas in which community and identity are confirmed. They are “places” where people live lives and forge identities. As complex, hybrid cultures, ballroom and salsa communities resist standard models—they exhibit elements of ritual, ceremony, leisure, performance, exhibition, pageant, and competition. Each of these elements is integral to understanding ballroom and salsa communities but—especially when considered separately—all fall far short of capturing the flavor of these lived worlds. Such communities are best conceived of as “metagenres” (MacAloon 1984), a complex of relations that serves to integrate other, overlapping relational complexes.<sup>32</sup>

Focusing on the modern Olympic movement, John MacAloon points out that metagenres are distinctive in being able to link symbolic actions of spectacle, festival, ritual, and game into new wholes (1984:241-259, 275-278). And, as Turner was quick to realize, such performative genres represent “orchestrations of media” that also color the messages that

they convey (1987:23-24). Ballroom and salsa communities are superb exemplars of such metagenres, exhibiting qualities, dynamics, and systems of spectacle, festival, ritual, and game—and, as noted above, those pertaining to ceremony, leisure, performance, exhibition, pageant, and competition as well. Olympic culture, the “cowboy culture” of rodeos, circus culture (e.g. Offen 2000), and the cultures of ballroom and salsa dancing—all prime exemplars of metagenres—represent loci of social systems, models, and actors, as well as nexuses of experience, meaning, and lived lives.

### **Taking the Floor: Dance as a “Place”**

Dance, as already noted, is often of great significance in the construction of social and national identities.<sup>33</sup> The performative facet of dance (e.g. P. Spencer 1985:29) is not only or always about individuality; it is also often about enhancement of the collective (Spencer 1985: 30), and is always linked to social and ethical standards (Schechner 1987; e.g. Turner 1967, 1974, 1982, 1985, 1987). In this regard it is important to recognize that dance tends to “bring a closer involvement between people rather than a release from such involvements. It develops, not just within each dancer, but also in the interaction between all those participating” (Schechner 1987:17). Such collective involvements also continue over time with important implications for the formation and durability of collective identifications,<sup>34</sup> coalescing into a “constantly changing same” (Gilroy 1993).

In a Durkheimian bent, and as several theorists have duly noted, the ritualization of social processes often comes about through the physical realization of social and cultural identity (e.g. Fernandez 1965; P. Spencer 1985:35; Stromberg

1986), especially in the case of performance based communities—communities where the “doing” (i.e., performing of certain actions) is constitutive of the community (e.g. Offen 2000). It is in this line that Goffman recognizes performance as the basic stuff of everyday life (1959) and Turner suggests that humans should (among other applicable designations) be understood as a self-performing animal, as *Homo performans* (1987:81). Based on exactly such ideas Richard Schechner posits that all social action is staged (based on Goffman) and that social situations are not just dramatic in their “doing,” but are also geared to show others what is being done (based on Turner). All of these points converge in the realization that the “performed-for-an-audience” dynamic of action colors its enactment.

“Physical culture in one form or another,” observes Blackmer, “is pursued with an almost compulsive intensity” (1989:9). The commonality and intensity of dance experiences, as per McNeill’s (1995) theory of muscular bonding, can be of profound significance in the forging of communal identity and identification.<sup>35</sup> Blacking, in reference to the Venda, suggests that of *all* shared experiences, dance can be the most valued (1985), while Savigliano recognizes dancing as an addiction amongst Argentine Milongueros/as (1998:103). The addictive element of dance is not lost on dancers either, as many refer to themselves, for instance, as salsaholics and danceaholics. Perhaps the single most well known salsa dancer and personality in the world today is Edie Lewis, self-titled “The Salsa FREAK,”<sup>36</sup> and rank and file dancers typically speak of needing to get their dancing “fix.”

While I explicitly address the role of embodiment within dance in Chapter Ten, it is important to already recognize the significance of the embodied nature of dance. “Human society,” as Brinson duly notes, “cannot be properly understood without reference to the sociology of human movement within which dance is constitutive and constituting” (1985:212) and “human movement is *the* means of contact between human beings and their environment, the basis of human history” (1985:213, original emphasis). Furthermore, dance needs to be recognized as a “part of human movement, which is a part of human biology, and therefore a manifestation of the interaction between human beings and the external world” (Brinson 1985:213-214).

### **Beyond Geography**

Dance is no less an important place of study despite its lack of set geography. Its lack of geographical coordinates in no way diminishes dance as a site of both personal and collective identity formation; of cultural norms, values, and transmission; and of social structure, struggle, and contestation. Dance is also a key place to study various issues of human agency. “Cultural studies,” for instance, “targets two arenas in which to study agency: The generation of community and the production of pleasure” (McKinley 1997:31)—both arenas powerfully ramified by dance. Brinson clearly has this deeper and enduring efficaciousness of dance in mind when he suggests “dancing has a social utility in present-day society far greater than that expressed through the theatrical performances that usually capture the headlines and the attentions of the critics” (1985:212). Perhaps most telling in this regard is the simple statement posted on one of the more prominent dance discussion forums: “dance is where I live.”

Perhaps it is the near universality of dance, maybe its integration with other social forms and practices, or perhaps it is lack of fluency with dance, but for whatever reasons, dance has rarely received primary consideration. As Spencer lies out:

Dance provides a spectacle in most societies and an obvious topic for anthropological curiosity, yet curiously it remains largely unresearched. It has an elusive quality, which adepts and those who have known it all their lives find easier to demonstrate than to explain in so many words. It has to speak for itself, and although often far from uninviting towards the visiting anthropologist its hidden code remains hidden, and research remains at an impasse. Because we have no initial ideas about dance, we ignore the opportunity that it provides, and because we ignore it the stock of ideas remains low and it continues to be ignored. (Spencer 1985:1)

And, as Spencer also notes, neither the trend of American anthropology to equate dance with culture nor the European/Social anthropology approach of equating dance with social action provides a satisfactory and compelling analysis of either dance or society (1985:ix).

## **Dance as Culture**

As all of the ideas already discussed illustrate, the separation of dance from the rest of culture is, at best, a conceptual abstraction—and a faulty one at that. Dance, as others have long since pointed out (e.g. Kaepler 1978:45-46; Merriam 1974:15-17), not only should not, but indeed cannot, be separated from robust anthropological conceptions of culture. Kaepler, for instance, points out that in Tonga music, words, and movement are conceptually inseparable (1985) and, as pointed out by both Strathern (1985) and Kaepler (1985), “in some languages there is no word for nor particular distinction of dance, so integral is it to the process of living” (Brinson 1985:209). This same point mirrors Brinson’s formulation that “human society cannot be properly understood without reference to the sociology of human movement within

which dance is constitutive and constituting” (1985:212) and, indeed, dance may play roles in the functioning of many social processes including (but not limited to) commercial, political, and propagandist ones (e.g. Strathern 1985). It would not be exaggerating to suggest that, in at least some fundamental ways, dance cannot be understood as anything less than integral to human life.

If I am advocating for the necessary inclusion of dance in any conceptual framework of culture, as I am, is it then paradoxical to assert that there are, and indeed do my research on, cultures of dance? Not really. Unlike earlier models, anthropology has moved forward and now recognizes that culture is a relation. So, while culture (at large)—as a relation—is not separable from dance, there are also dance-based relations, as I will now start to define.

### **What is “Ballroom”?**

The Oxford Dictionary of Dance provides the following entry for “ballroom dance”:

**ballroom dance.** Social dance usually performed by couples in dance halls or at social gatherings. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century these dances can be performed widely in competitions, which flourished in Britain and America following the First World War. In 1929 the Official Board of Ballroom Dancing was founded and by the 1930s standardization of training and levels of expertise had been established. Today Britain leads the world in ballroom dancing, and the annual Open British Championship is the most important competition. Standard ballroom dances include the waltz, Viennese waltz, foxtrot, tango, lindy, Charleston, and the quickstep. Latin American dances such as the rumba, samba, paso doble, and cha-cha-cha are also part of the ballroom repertoire. (Craine and Mackrell 2000:49)

That is it. That is the entry in its entirety. At the very least this is an overly simplifying and reductionistic definition that ignores a wide variety of national, local, and situational uses for and understandings of what constitutes “ballroom.” Some people use the term “ballroom” as a gloss for many varieties of partnered

dancing, for instance, ranging from Waltz, to Foxtrot, to Cha Cha, to Rumba, to Lindy Hop, to Salsa, to Night Club Two Step, to Hustle, to Argentine Tango, to West Coast Swing. Many ballroom schools and studios in the U.S.A. offer classes in these various dances for example. For others, however, “ballroom” has a much tighter meaning, referencing only the dances included in the multi-dance competitive events—American Smooth, American Rhythm, International Modern, International Latin, and Theatre Arts in the United States; International Modern and International Latin throughout Europe; or International Modern, International Latin, and New Vogue in Australia just to provide a few examples. Similarly, few members of the contemporary ballroom community, if any, would classify lindy (short for Lindy Hop) as a ballroom dance despite being aware of its historical role in, and relationship to, American style East Coast swing and International style Jive.

The ballroom dance entry provided in *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* by Craine and Mackrell also ignores the much broader articulations between dance and society. Ballroom dancing’s historical connections between dance, style, class, and social mores are just some of the elements that are being overlooked. In her overview to the Library of Congress collection for western social dance, for instance, Elizabeth Aldrich offers up the following much more contextually complete historical synopsis for ballroom dancing:

For centuries, in Europe and wherever Europeans have settled, the ballroom was the perfect setting for men and women to demonstrate their dancing abilities, to show their awareness of the latest fashions, and to display their mastery of polite behavior--qualities required for acceptance in society. The importance of dance and appropriate conduct was echoed in manuals that date back to the early Renaissance, to a time when courtiers, gentry, and wealthy citizens were fortunate

enough to have a private dancing master or to have taken advantage of the skills of itinerant masters who traveled from one court to another.

The grandeur of the Baroque court of King Louis XIV and his court at the Palace of Versailles set the stage for a new style of dance that would spread to royal courts throughout Europe. With the development of a dance notation system, published in 1700 by dancing master Raoul-Auger Feuillet, French court dance could be taught in every palace and manor house. By the end of the eighteenth century, when ideals of democracy swept through nations, group dances gained popularity, so dance instruction manuals, as well as etiquette books, were published to enlighten a growing middle class of Europeans and European colonists, especially those in the Americas. (1998: Web)

As Aldrich's entry makes clear, ballroom dancing has always been about more than just the ballroom or the dancing.

What is currently considered as ballroom dancing then has its roots in fifteenth century Europe with the rise of chivalry, and especially among the increasing popularity of dance within the French royal court. In particular, the marriage of Catherine de' Medici to Henri, duc d'Orléans in 1533, brought Italian dancing masters into the employ of the French monarchy (Hammond 2000: 144-145) where, as both queen and queen mother, Catherine often held extravagant balls (as well as many other forms of entertainment) as both royal celebrations and political displays. By the early fifteenth century, then, dance masters were recognized as experts and authorities on proper social behavior as well as dance (Hammond 2000: 141-142), and early dance books, such as Arbeau's *Orchesography* (1589), were concerned with providing instruction in both dance technique and social mores.<sup>37</sup> The linking of class and ballroom dancing has proven an enduring image in the collective western psyche, serving as an accepted part of social rearing and development in many parts of Europe and as the foundation for cotillion programs throughout the US; programs which teach both dance and social etiquette. Historical foundations notwithstanding



however, the ballroom dance of years gone by is not the ballroom dancing of today. So what is commonly meant by ballroom dancing today?

Despite their most common contemporary usages as formal meeting and banquet rooms, most larger hotels still have “ballrooms” that are labeled as such and, in the US, these ballrooms currently serve as the locations of most ballroom dance competitions. In contrast to the typical American use of hotel ballrooms, the majority of European ballroom competitions are currently held in various sports halls. Yet while this variation between U.S. and European venues speaks to aesthetic and structural differences—points that I take up in Chapters Six and Seven respectively—there also remains a larger ballroom “world” that transcends such distinctions. The *term* “ballroom,” however, is now typically used to describe a formalized style of partnered dancing, and in specific reference to the dances competed in, in the major divisions at ballroom dance competitions.

When I first started thinking about doing this research I originally intended to cover both the social and the competitive wings of ballroom dancing. Early on, I had made a point of interviewing the more prominent dancers and dance personas I came in contact with, simply because I thought that they would be harder to come by, track down, and arrange to interview down the line than would be social dancers. I readily had access to social dancers at UCSD and at the local dance studios, for example, in a way that I did not have access to many of the more elite competitors. This thinking was, essentially, an informal and imprecise calculus of scarcity as I figured out that I should take advantage of opportunities to interview the most highly placed ballroom

personnel whenever any such opportunity presented themselves. In the end, however, I could not help but recognize the vast differences between the social and competitive ballroom scenes and circuits.

Additionally, and especially as the issue of identity construction is one of my central interests, this issue was more fully explored among competitive ballroom dancers for whom ballroom dancing was often more self-contextualizing and self-definitional. This is not, of course, to say that there are not social ballroom dancers for whom ballroom dancing does not play a key role in their personal and collective identifications nor to suggest that ballroom dancing inevitably or always plays such a role or functions in such a capacity for competitive ballroom dancers. Rather, I simply mean to point out that competitive dancers, at least on average, dedicate more time, energy, resources, and greater personal investment into their dancing than do social dancers and, as such, serve as a more efficacious population for exploring some of my theoretical concerns regarding chosen commitment systems and identity construction.

Yet no one starts out as a competitive dancer. It is for this reason that the variety of ballroom studios where dancers start dancing (including the many social dancers and functions that are typically part of these studios) show up throughout my ventures into the world of ballroom dancing despite my research focus on competitive ballroom dancing. Similarly, my field visits in North America and Western Europe should not be misread as dismissing the very significant, sizable, and active ballroom communities in other locales throughout Eastern Europe, Asia, and Australia.

When I was initially formulating this research project I was unsure of both the geographic scope and the interconnectedness of various elements of the ballroom scene and circuit. During my preliminary research I came to realize that the U.S. ballroom scene could not be fully appreciated and understood save in reference to the European scene. In the same ways that the local student looks to their instructor for a model of good dancing, so too does the local instructor look to a more accomplished dancer, and so on up. It is in exactly this way that the best dancers in the U.S. set the models for students who will never even hear of them. But it is also exactly in this way that the best dancers in the U.S. look to, contest with, and evaluate themselves relative to the best on the worldwide circuit—based in Europe—in order to set their own goals and marks.

Additionally, many of the teachers, coaches, and adjudicators who help mold and direct the competitive U.S. ballroom scene are not products of the U.S. ballroom scene themselves. Similarly, even those leaders of the U.S. ballroom scene who are not transplanted products of other ballroom scenes have almost inevitably still had experiences with, and exposure to, many non-U.S. influences during their own formative periods. As such, the U.S. ballroom scene—including current trends, changing social positioning, aesthetic values, and ongoing politics—cannot be adequately understood nor explicated save in relation to the larger worldwide scene and its Western European base.

## **The Major Divisions of Ballroom**

Starting out as one of the social graces expected of the European upper classes, “Ballroom,” deriving from the Latin *balare* (to dance), is now an umbrella term for a style of lead and follow based partner dancing that is danced both competitively—under the name DanceSport (also seen as Dancesport or dancesport)—and socially. First formalized in Europe, ballroom is still considered part of a well rounded social graces and upbringing throughout Europe and is still regularly offered in schools or as a “cultured” elective alongside musical instruction. While sometimes used to refer to the whole range of partnered dances, including Lindy Hop, Nightclub Two Step, West Coast Swing, Hustle, Merengue, Salsa, and Argentine Tango, this is not the understanding of Ballroom most typical among the competitive ballroom dancers that this project is concerned with and based on. The most common and prominent division within the international circuit of ballroom dancing (both competitive and social) is that between the traditional Ballroom dances—also known as the Standard or Modern dances—of Waltz, Tango, Viennese Waltz, Foxtrot, and Quickstep—and the Latin dances (also sometimes known as Latin American)—of Cha Cha (also known as cha cha cha), Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, and Jive.

Some countries have additional divisions which, like Ballroom and Latin, are also danced both socially and competitively. In Australia, for instance, there are New Vogue and Street Latin categories. The US, by contrast has two divisions corresponding to the International Style Ballroom and Latin divisions, Smooth and Rhythm respectively. The American Smooth dances consist of Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot,

and Viennese Waltz but these dances differ from their International counterparts in slight differences in the musical tempi they are danced to and, far more significantly, in allowing partners to separate from one another while dancing. Indeed, the name “Smooth” is meant to signal the premium placed on smoothly moving in and out of frame in this style. The American Rhythm dances consist of Cha Cha, Rumba, Swing, Bolero, and Mambo. The American Cha Cha and Rumba have traditionally varied in technique and tempi from their International style counterparts, and the American Rumba has also differed in basic timing and figures as well. The differences between the competitive International and the American Cha Cha have been becoming fewer and further between, however, especially as more and more Internationally trained dancers start to cross back and forth and compete in the American Rhythm division.

In Chapter Eight, based on the aesthetics of ballroom culture, I will revisit this topic, looking in greater depth at the differences and distinctions between these different categories and styles as well as the meanings and significance of these for the ballroom community and culture. For the moment, however, I just want to illustrate how the different categories are most typically viewed, compared, and contrasted in relation to each other among active competitors in the United States.<sup>38</sup>

**Table 2.1: Ballroom Styles**

	<i>International Style</i>	<i>American Style</i>
Ballroom	<b>Standard/Modern</b>	<b>Smooth</b>
Latin	<b>Latin</b>	<b>Rhythm</b>

Aside from these larger categorical divisions, however, the ballroom landscape is also shaped—albeit at far smaller scales—by the many various ballroom related organizations, publications, and websites that are all also part of the overall ballroom scene (some of those I encountered or heard mentioned the most often are listed and briefly identified in Appendix 2). Overall then, the ballroom community my research is based on centers on the competitive circuit of American and International dance styles as well as many of the organizations, publications, and websites that are also part and parcel of the competitive circuit. Far from being located in any one place, the ballroom “scene” is best understood as highly interconnected groupings and institutionalizations of people, places, understandings, values, and practices that are relatively stable if still somewhat malleable.

### **What is “Salsa”?**

So what, then, is salsa? As noted by Ed Morales, an author and journalist greatly interested in and concerned with issues of Latin identity:

In some ways it’s obvious what we mean by salsa. Salsa is a style of music that dominates dance floor tastes in Latin music clubs throughout the United States and Latin America, with extravagant, clave-driven, Afro-Cuban-derived songs anchored by piano, horns, and rhythm section and sung by a velvety voiced crooner in a sharkskin suit. On the other hand the definition of salsa is the subject of endless dispute in Latin music circles. If mambo was a constellation of rhythmic tendencies, then, as leading salsa sonero (lead singer) Rubén Blades once said, salsa is a concept, not a particular rhythm. (2003:55)

And, as Morales goes on to note, “although salsa is nothing more than a new spin on the traditional rhythms of Cuban music...it is also at once a modern marketing

concept and the cultural voice of a new generation” (Morales 2003:55). So what exactly is meant by salsa?

### **A Brief History of Salsa: Not Just What You Put On Chips**

Ignacio Pineiro’s 1928 piece “Echale Salsita!” (meaning “spice it up”) was the beginning of what would later be called “Salsa” (Bottomer 1998:34; Ospina 1995:1) a form of music and dance influenced by Latin countries of the Caribbean (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic) as well as Central and South America (especially Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia). Or, in the words of music professor Lisa Waxer, salsa music is “a widespread Spanish Caribbean dance style developed in the 1960s by Puerto Ricans in New York City, based upon Afro-Cuban and (to a lesser extent) Puerto Rican roots” (2002b:1). Indeed, it is only in relation to its “roots in the Cuban and Puerto Rican cultural diaspora of New York City” (Waxer 2002a:3) that salsa can be fully described, understood, or appreciated—historically, musically, and culturally.

While much of the music now referenced under the umbrella of “salsa” can be traced back to the Cuban countryside, economic necessity mandated an infusion into the urban landscape as well; a trend started with the migration into the cities sparked by Cuba’s war of independence from 1868-1878.<sup>39</sup> This trend continued with Son’s blending of Afro-Cuban and Latin Cuban traditions around the time of WWI (Bottomer 1998:34) and, by the 1930’s all kinds of Cuban music had felt the impact of son rhythms (Ospina:27). The original style of Son began to feel the impact of Jazz

during the 1930's and, at the hands of Perez Pedro and Enrique Jorin, evolved into Mambo and Cha Cha<sup>40</sup> respectively (Bottomer:34). It was in New York, however, in the "Spanish Harlem" known simply as "El Barrio" that Salsa came into its own, both with Latinos and non-Hispanics (Bello), as the traditional music of Cuba melded with Puerto Rican variations and American Jazz (Bottomer:34; Ospina:38-43).

While it is certainly true that as a now worldwide phenomenon, "salsa no longer points to just New York, Cuba, and Puerto Rico" (Waxer 2002b:18), it is equally true that salsa cannot be understood save in reference to its New York roots.<sup>41</sup> And no discussion of salsa's New York origins would be complete without acknowledging the pivotal role of the Palladium Ballroom, located at Fifty-Third Street and Broadway. Indeed, Max Salazar—widely heralded as the preeminent historian of Latin music and salsa—contends that the changing of the Dreamland Dancing Academy into the Palladium Ballroom on January 23, 1942 is one of the most important events "in the history of popular Latin dance music" (2002:11). The Palladium, says Salazar, "was the dancer's home away from home" (2002:87),<sup>42</sup> that it "annihilated racial and religious barriers" (2002:87), and that "its success was due to the orchestras of Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez, and Machito. Their music...made the Palladium famous" (2002:90). Indeed, until it closed its doors on May 1, 1966,<sup>43</sup> the Palladium was the heartbeat of Latin music in New York City, "a kind of multicultural haven for dancers from New York's Latin, African-American and European-American communities" (Morales 2003:45). "By the mid 1950s," notes Salazar, "the Palladium's Wednesday night shows and free mambo and cha-cha lessons by dance instructor



Killer Joe Piro were the main magnets for the club” (2002:92). Amateur dance contests, shows with professional dancers,<sup>44</sup> pie eating contests, “most beautiful legs” contests, and “healthiest female chest” contests were all part of the appeal (Salazar 2002:92) but, ultimately, everything was based on the music. If the 1950’s represent a pinnacle in the history of mambo—with “big name” dancers<sup>45</sup> tearing up the floors of “big name” clubs<sup>46</sup>—and if the Palladium had worldwide recognition by 1954 (Salazar 2002:92), “the closing of the palladium in 1966 signaled the official end of the mambo era” (Morales 2003:64).

But if the 1966 closing of the Palladium was the end of the mambo era, 1967 ultimately gave rise of the salsa era. While histories of the development of salsa abound,<sup>47</sup> none can be complete without reference to Fania Records. Indeed, “as a marketing term and social phenomenon,” notes Morales, “salsa is inextricably linked to Fania Records” (Morales 2003:64). Although the term “salsa” was rejected by many of the musicians themselves (Morales 2003:56), by casting and promoting a wide range of musical forms under this designation—of which mambo was only one—Fania was able to generate mass appeal and demand. Fania’s role in crafting and marketing “salsa” cannot be denied.

Despite the myriad musicians who never acknowledged salsa as a style of music—Tito Puente often commenting, for instance, that salsa was what he put on his food; that the music he played was *mambo*—still, “by the early 1970s, salsa had become the standard term of reference throughout Latin America, owing in large part to its use by Fania Records as a commercial label with which to market its music”

(Waxer 2002a:4). As Morales words it, “in 1967 Fania embarked on an aggressive and phenomenally successful program of recording and promotion to push the new music and to corner the market for itself” (2003:64).

Despite some musicians protestations to the contrary, salsa has an identity of its own. Some argue that salsa has its own distinct musical identity (e.g. Waxer 2002a and 2002b). Others argue that salsa has a distinct cultural identity, noting that, “salsa is different from its forebears because it represents the crystallization of Latino identity in New York in the early 1960s” (Morales 2003:55). Similarly, and mirroring the cross-cultural appeal of the mambo in the Palladium days, Waxer notes the cross-national and cross-class appeal of the musical form and lyrics of salsa:

When salsa’s exuberant beat and social message caught on with Latin American leftist intellectuals from the middle and upper-middle classes in the 1970s, salsa music shed its lower-class associations to establish a devoted following not only across national boundaries, but across social ones. (2002a:4)

And salsa also came to have its own social identity, as various musicians and dancers identified what they were performing and producing as salsa. Given this complex background—and as a function of its myriad contributory influences and fueled by its wide-ranging popularity—salsa includes a plethora of styles all under the umbrella of its four-beat music. Within the overarching genre of salsa music, for instance, Waxer identifies five different schools that intersect with four different styles of music (2002a:10-11).

## **What About Salsa Dancing?**

The vast majority of salsa scholarship concerns the origins and development of salsa music, and certainly there would be no salsa dancing without salsa music; indeed there could be no salsa dancing without salsa music. While it is true that various salsa scholars recognize the inextricable links between salsa music and dance (e.g. Wade 2002; Waxer 2002b), the documentation of salsa dancing suffers (and greatly at that) in comparison to the work that has been done on salsa music. I do not make this point as a criticism of the excellent and important salsa scholarship that has been done—each author has their own interests and each project its own focus after all—but, rather, to point out a field of still largely untapped inquiry and exploration. At the same time as first mambo and then salsa music were developing, so too the corresponding dancing. One purpose of this research then, is to add to the scholarship about salsa dancing and, more specifically, about the dancers themselves.

Given the same range of influences that informed the development of the music, the dancing well illustrated (and illustrates) the recombinant nature of culture and its constituent elements. Indeed D’Andrade’s contention that “the particular combination of cultural items institutionalized in a society are usually in a state of change” (2000:52) is readily seen in the variety of dancing that falls under the umbrella of salsa. More importantly, the same labels and distinctions are not used in the same way everywhere salsa is danced. In the United States, for instance, “New York style” is defined by breaking (changing direction) on the “two,” whereas while I was in Denmark “New York style” was simply used as a gloss for “cross body”

dancing. In the first place “on2” timing is not just one thing, including two major variations. The original mambo timing of stepping on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> beats (of an eight beat measure) with “breaks”—steps that change the direction of the bodies motion—coming on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> beats, now widely known as “Power 2” is also known as “Palladium 2” in reference to its adherence to the original mambo timing of the music and dancing at the Palladium Ballroom.

As the popularity of salsa music and dancing spread, however, and especially among westerners less familiar with Afro-Cuban rhythms, the dancing (like much of the music) changed. The original footwork and timing pattern of salsa dancing evolved in two different directions; one version retained the footwork but not the timing of the original mambo while the other retained the timing but not the footwork. What is now most commonly known as “LA style” salsa grew up around the original mambo footwork but shifted down a beat, so that the breaks came on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> beats with steps being taken on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> beats (of the eight beat measure). Stepping on these same beats but still breaking on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> was a style developed in New York by Eddie Torres (so stepping on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> beats while breaking on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> beats). This second version of “on2” timing, widely known as Eddie Torres 2 (or ET2 in print) for its originator is also now known as “New York 2” or NY2.

As Table 2.2 illustrates, ET2/NY2 maintains the breaks on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> beats of music but at the expense of the “break-step-step” footwork pattern while the LA

style maintains the footwork pattern of “break-step-step” but at the expense of keeping the break steps on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> beats:

**Table 2.2: Salsa Dance Timings**

Beat →	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Power/Palladium 2</b>	---	break	step	step	---	break	step	step
<b>ET/NY 2</b>	step	break	step	---	step	break	step	---
<b>Los Angeles</b>	break	step	step	---	break	step	step	---

The differences noted in this table are interesting, as arguments about “authenticity” and “dancing to the music” abound, especially as a critique often made by NY2 dancers of other styles of salsa.<sup>48</sup> Beyond differences in musical interpretation, however, are other distinctions in dance styles. The dancing that evolved in Puerto Rico, for instance, includes breaking on the “one” or the “two” but incorporates lots of intricate footwork.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, separate from timing issues, and in no small part due to the comparative dearth of Cuban émigrés (compared to New York and Miami) early versions of Los Angeles style salsa were more heavily influenced by West Coast Swing and Latin Ballroom and emerged as crossing of these influences with Puerto Rican styling. Often considered “flashier,” LA style salsa typically used less footwork but much faster speeds and more tricks.

Entirely separate from these linear cross-body styles—based on linear forward/backward breaks—Cuban salsa, or Casino, is a far more circular style of salsa that tends to be more physical in its lead and follow connections and, at least in the eyes of some, tends to partake of more “machismo,” especially in the manner in which

the woman's wrists (versus hands) may be grasped (Tores).<sup>50</sup> This scope of dance styles included under the salsa label provides living testimony to the range of influences that have, by way of historical contingency, been blended into Salsa. Clearly the range of salsa dance styles—including the historical development and evolution of each—is a topic in its own right; a topic which, even if highly overlapping, is also different from the histories and scholarship that have focused on salsa music.

### **Why Ballroom *and* Salsa?**

Why should we consider both competitive ballroom and salsa dancing together, particularly in light of the very different histories and instantiations just noted? Comparison can be useful. This comparative perspective proved particularly important when it came to unpacking the social, visual, and embodied aesthetics that are part and parcel of any dance community. Also, while not a topic I take up in the context of this project, the comparison of ballroom and salsa dancing strikes me as particularly fertile ground for exploring issues of racial and class uses of—and meanings in, to, and for—partner dancing given the upper class, European groundings of ballroom dancing versus the lower class, Afro-Cuban and Latino groundings and associations of salsa.

As I have already suggested in the preface, one of the reasons why ballroom and salsa serve as fruitful grounds for this project is that neither have been widely regarded or respected activities. While the recent slew of reality-style TV coverage in

the U.S.—i.e. *Dancing with the Stars*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, and *Ballroom Bootcamp*—has certainly raised the public profile of dancing, being a dancer still receives relatively little by way of financial remuneration or status rewards. This is not to say that society at large disrespects ballroom or salsa dancing (although this is certainly the case in some circumstances and situations), but to point out that investing the same time and in other socially more salient endeavors would provide the possibility of much greater social recognition, status, and monetary rewards.

Social status, prestige, and money do not, of course, matter less to ballroom and salsa dancers than to other people. Instead, this suggests that there is more going on than a simple calculus of potential reward, that dancers' meanings and motivations cannot be explained based on social recognition, reward, and remuneration alone. This makes ballroom and salsa much more useful sites for exploring the role and importance of activity selection and participation in situating and generating personal and collective meanings and identities than many other physical activities, such as baseball, basketball, or tennis, wherein the potential payout may be exceedingly large.

By using salsa alongside and as a counterpoint for ballroom, this project more fully explores the meanings and identities recruited, generated, and mobilized by participating in a non-socially compelled activity, the role that such meanings play in the shaping of personal and collective identifications, and the intercontextualizations of personal and collective meanings (Obeyesekere 1981; Shore 1991, 1998; Stromberg 1986). Ultimately, using salsa as a counterpoint to competitive ballroom allows for the exploration and analysis of truths that can only be illuminated by studying salsa and

ballroom together, as the points of convergence and divergence attest to which elements are common to both milieus—and thus better examined within the larger context of partnered dance—and which elements are unique to either ballroom or salsa—and thus better examined as dance genre specific.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> See, for examples, Gluckman 1963 [1959]; Hanna 1977:12-123; Lewis 1989 [1971]; Norbeck 1963; Rigby 1968; and Wilson 1967.

<sup>2</sup> This point has been made by several authors, in a variety of ways, and in reference to a variety of settings (e.g. Bettelheim 1962 [1954]; Douglas 1966, 1970; Haug 1987; Martin 1987; Ortner 1974; Szekely 1988; Thomas 1993; B. Turner 1984; V. Turner 1967; Vlahos 1979).

<sup>3</sup> As Blackmer relates, “this is a painful and sad transition for a dancer...It requires nothing less than the acceptance of mortality—acknowledging the reality of the body’s death...I do know of one dancer who consciously chose death rather than a life without dancing” (1989:105).

<sup>4</sup> This is because consciousness, far from being a default setting for mental processes, represents an arena of upper level trouble shooting (D’Andrade 2000:66; based on Minsky 1986).

<sup>5</sup> See Kaepler 1978:45-46, Merriam 1974:15-17, Polhemus 1993:9, and Ward 1993:26.

<sup>6</sup> As Brinson also notes, “this, of course, also means losing from the education of children in Western societies the powerful contribution of dance to education [demonstrated in Spencer 1985]” (Brinson 1985:210).

<sup>7</sup> Also see Wallace 1961:42.

<sup>8</sup> For predominantly historic work on dance see, for example, Bottomer 1998, Lange:v, Mailing 1992, and Stephenson and Iaccarino 1980. For examples of instructional works on dance see Bottomer 1998, *ISTD* 1983 [1974] and 1994 [1948], Levinson 2000, and Stephenson and Iaccarino 1980. For non-academic works on dance see Babitz 1999 and Reynolds 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Other examples include Rust (1969:85-86) and Sargant (1957:62).

<sup>10</sup> I.e. Chavanne in Lange 1975:14, Rust 1969:41, Sachs 1937[1933]:400, Spencer 1985:8; Sir Thomas Elyot 1531 in Spencer 1985:8; John Locke 1693 in Spencer 1985:8; Pemberton 1711 in Rust 1969:60; Spencer 1965:245; St. Johnston 1906:142.

<sup>11</sup> This formulation, by Spencer, runs along the same lines as William H. McNeill’s (1995) theory of muscular bonding.

<sup>12</sup> As Brinson points out “the notion of dance as an organ of establishment control is today one of the central problems of classical ballet. Its image is linked with élitist culture” (1985:208).



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<sup>13</sup> As Spencer notes regarding Radcliffe-Brown's account (1922), "the rhythm generated a force that acted on the dancer from without and yet also found a response from within" (Spencer 1985:11).

<sup>14</sup> "If the cathartic theme," writes Spencer, "at its crudest portrays dance as a communal sneeze relaxing the tension that has built up, then Turner's model has a closer affinity with a dream world in which the structure and repressions of everyday existence are upturned in a meaningful symbolic pattern" (1985:34).

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Bellman 1974; Blacking 1973 (passim); Gell 1979; Hanna 1979b and 1979c (passim); Kaepler 1972; Martin and Pesovar 1961; Metheny 1965; Royce 1977:192-211; Singer 1974; Spencer 1985:35; Williams 1978, 1982; Woodward 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Spencer also makes clear, however, that not all structure and patterning should be considered as deep structure. The idea of such deep structure in dance he notes "is not to suggest that every nuance of the basic choreographic pattern of all dances must have some inherent meaning or must in some way relate directly to the wider analysis of ritual leaving no possibility of an independent experience" (Spencer 1985:37). Indeed, "the fact that so often a dance can be exported from one culture to another, albeit with surface adaptations that in themselves may have a deeper meaning," Spencer contends, "suggests that what has actually been transferred may be regarded in a sense of an artifact" (ibid), and it is this element that, perhaps, has also made dance an ideal topic for study of cultural diffusion such as with the North American Ghost dance (ibid).

<sup>17</sup> I will remain forever indebted to George Lipsitz who first steered me towards many of these materials.

<sup>18</sup> The Stearns also parenthetically add, "The Cuban scholar, Fernando Ortiz, is convinced that *mambo* is a Congo word" (1994 [1968]:12).

<sup>19</sup> Such situational and social location of leisure activities includes class composition, i.e. mountaineering as "a sport of the middle class, generally but not entirely of the well-educated upper-middle class" (Ortner, 1999:9). Dance too reflects this dynamic via differences in class (and socioeconomic) background between salsa and ballroom.

<sup>20</sup> Also see Kelly 1987; Olszewska and Roberts 1989; and Parker 1983.

<sup>21</sup> The difference between "playing and watching" versus "paying and spectating" seems to parallel many of the differences in ballroom between Europe—with its more elaborated amateur circuit, single day competitions, and sports hall venues—and the U.S.A., dominated by the Pro/Am circuit, weekend long (and longer) events, and upscale hotel venues.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Copeland and Cohen 1983:1-102; Hanna 1979a:19, 1979b:19; Lange 1975:39; and Royce 1977:8.

<sup>23</sup> See, for several examples, Durkheim 1915 [1912]:218, Mooney 1965 [1892-6], and Spencer and Gillen 1904:375-392. As Lange points out, the "transition from everyday-life movement to 'dance' is blurred" (1975:49). A related point, also worth taking into account, is the early anthropological insight, put forth by Franz Boas, that "ordinary gestures and actions can become dance if a transformation takes place within the person; a transformation which takes him out of the ordinary world and places him in a world of heightened sensitivity" (Boas, quoted in Snyder 1974:221; in P. Spencer 1985:2). Also worth comment is the idea that regardless of whether or not dance is seen as utilitarian it still embodies

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symbolic meanings—much human behavior can be seen as non-utilitarian but still socially significant (Suzanne Brenner, personal communication).

<sup>24</sup> For several examples see Castro 1991, García Gómez 1993, Mitchell 1994, Savigliano 1995 and 1998, and Steingress 1993.

<sup>25</sup> For a number of examples see Bernstein 1979; Brinson 1985:207; Chambers 1986:135; Frith 1983:245; Rust 1969:85-86; Sargant 1957:62; H. Spencer 1862:234-235; and Ward 1993:20. For personal accounts of dance as outlet for energy see Blackmer (1989:103) and Lyle (1977:12, 62, 97) regarding comments by Martine van Hamsel, prima ballerina, American Ballet Theater; Violette Verdy, prima ballerina, New York City Ballet; and Judith Farnison, lead dancer, Alvin Ailey Co.

<sup>26</sup> While some doubts have been raised in regards to Lewis and Gluckman's materials (e.g., Beidelman 1966; Norbeck 1963; Rigby 1968; Wilson 1967) these doubts have been about the proposed impetus to/of catharsis and not the nature of the cathartic experience. Regarding a catharsis based theory of dance, however, Spencer points out "can never be more than a partial explanation" as *any* exercise can prove cathartic in this manner (1985:5). "Universally shared biological or psychological considerations," he goes on to note, "do not account for the differences between societies; hence one has to look both at the variety of dance and the variety of its social context in order to arrive at a fuller understanding" (ibid). While the cathartic model accounts for the spontaneity observable in dancing, it does not account for formal elements of dance (ibid:6) such as competitive dancing, "where the act of resolving tension in one context may create it elsewhere [e.g., Evans-Prichard 1928:460; Lange 1975:14; Rust 1969:25]. In a situation of competition, the cathartic theory tends to emphasize one side of a more complex argument" (P. Spencer 1985:7).

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Brinson 1985:207-212; Chavanne in Lange 1975:14; Sir Thomas Elyot [1531] in P. Spencer 1985:8; John Locke [1693] in P. Spencer 1985:8; Pemberton [1711] in Rust 1969:60; Radcliffe-Brown 1922:233-234; 1952:124, 157; Rust 1969:41; Sachs 1937[1933]:400; P. Spencer 1985:8,11; Spencer 1965:245; St. Johnston 1906:142.

<sup>28</sup> For several examples regarding the efficacy of dance in generating social solidarity in traditional societies see Blacking (1985), Brinson (1985:207), Durkheim (1915 [1912]:215, 1933[1893]:233-234), Grosse (1894), Langer (1953:175, 183-184, 190-192), Radcliffe-Brown (1922:247, 252-253, 326), and P. Spencer (1985:15, 17, 28). Examples of this phenomenon for millenarian movements and contemporary societies can be found in Brinson (1985:207), Brooks (1970), Gluckman (1963[1959]), Merton (1957:419), Mooney (1965[1892-1896]), P. Spencer (1985:21), and Turnbull (1965: 154, 189, 278).

<sup>29</sup> Aside from the sources mentioned in the section on Situated Meanings above, also see Archetti 1999, Azzi 1995, Bass 2000:43-47, Bottomer 1998, Moffat 1997 [1989]: 129, Ospina 1995, Savigliano 1995, and Taylor 1998 for a number of examples based on Tango and other Latino/a dance practices.

<sup>30</sup> The anthropological and related literature that addresses this issue is, to say the least, extensive, and includes the work of Bellman (1974), Birdwhistell (1970:79-99, 218-219), Blacking (1973 *passim*, 1976, 2001[1981]), Brinson (1985), Condon and Ogston (1966:338), Evans-Prichard (1928:449), Gell (1979, 1985:193-194), Hanna (1979b, 1979c *passim*, 1988), Kaeppler (1972), Lange (1975), Langer (1953:32, 174-175, 180), Leach (1972), Livingstone (1973), Lomax (1974:199), Martin and Pesovar (1961), Mead (1928:93), Metheny (1965), Polhemus (1993), Raum (1940:222), Royce (1977:192-211), Sayers (1993), Singer (1974), Smith (1954:222), H. Spencer (1868 [1857]), P. Spencer (1985:35), Strathern (1985), Taylor (1998: 47), Turnbull (1965:120), Williams (1978, 1982), and Woodward (1976).

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<sup>31</sup> Another example of the multiplexing of themes can be found in the work of Havelock Ellis (1923; especially chapter 2) who provides an early account of such juxtaposition of multiple themes—in this particular case those of eroticism and religion—that dance can represent.

<sup>32</sup> Turner also seems to be getting at this same dynamic when he turns his attention to the “great genres”—ritual, carnival, drama, and spectacle—which serve as a “temporal structure which interdigitates constant with variable features” and notes that such genres concomitantly sustain *and* challenge their social and cultural surround (1987:26).

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Archetti 1999; Azzi 1995; Bass 2000:43-47; Bottomer 1998; Ospina 1995; Savigliano 1995; Taylor 1988; Turner 1967, 1974, 1982, 1985, 1987; Washabaugh 1998.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the work of Brinson (1985:207), De Zoete and Spies (1970[1938]:262), McNeill (1995) McPhee (1970[1938]:213-214, 1970[1948]:311), and P. Spencer (1985:10-11).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Lange (1975:59) and Marshall (1969:380) regarding the Ju’/Hoansi

<sup>36</sup> Edie’s self-narrative provides one of the case studies examined in Chapter Eleven.

<sup>37</sup> By late fifteen hundreds, for example, couples dances started and ended with a bow (Hammond 2000: 142).

<sup>38</sup> This division, as presented, is largely specific to the United States because the American Style is seldom taught, let alone competed in, outside the US. This model is slowly changing, however, especially with the expansion of Arthur Murray International franchises into numerous overseas markets.

<sup>39</sup> Even after the war the decimation of the sugar industry continued to force former slaves, creoles, and mulattos into the more urbanized centers (Ospina 1995:19).

<sup>40</sup> According to Jorin, the term “chachacha” was suggested by the sound of the dancers feet as they danced to his composition “Enganadora” (The Cheat), first played in 1948 and first recorded (by Jorin and his Orquesta America) in 1953 (Ospina 1995:30).

<sup>41</sup> Waxer makes this very same point in recognizing “salsa’s primary performance and production nexus in New York City and Puerto Rico” (2002b:1).

<sup>42</sup> Salazar’s history of the Palladium was originally published in *Latin Beat Magazine*, March 1995.

<sup>43</sup> The decline of the Palladium actually started on April 8, 1961, with a police raid which leading to the loss of the Palladium’s Liquor license that September and, although the Palladium stayed open until May 1, 1966, the loss of liquor sales revenue was a harbinger of the end (Salazar 2002:93). As noted by Salazar, the bands playing on the final night of the Palladium were those of Ricardo Ray, Eddie Palmieri, and Orquesta Broadway, and Broadway’s “Pare Cochero” was the last dance number to ever be played there (2002:93).

<sup>44</sup> The Palladium was home to the first mambo dance team, the Mambo Aces: Joe Centeno and Anibal Vásquez (Salazar 2002:92).

<sup>45</sup> The likes of Killer Joe Piro, Cuban Pete and Millie, Lenny Dale, Augie and Margo, Papo Conga, June LaBerta, Andrew Jarrick, and the Mambo Aces amongst others (Bello).

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<sup>46</sup> These included famous dance venues such as the Tropicana, Abelmarle Towers, Basin Street East, Riverside Plaza, Chez Jose, Delira, Hunts Point Palace, Colgate Gardens, 310 ½, and the Palladium (Bello).

<sup>47</sup> For histories of salsa development in New York and Puerto Rico, for instance, Waxer (2002a:11) points to those of Blum 1978, Roberts 1979, Rondón 1980, Arias Satizábal 1981, singer 1982, Duany 1984, Alén 1984, Padilla 1989 and 1990, Gerard 1989, Arteaga 1990, Boggs 1992, Santana 1992, Manuel 1991, 1994, 1995, Quintero Rivera 1998, and Washburne 1999. Similarly, for histories of salsa development in Venezuela and Colombia Waxer (2002a:11) points to those produced by Rondón 1980, Baéz 1989, Arteaga 1990, Ulloa 1992, and Waxer 1998.

<sup>48</sup> More particularly, many on2 dancers argue that dancing “on2” is the “real” or “right” way “to do it” because you have to dance to (or “on”) the clave, the syncopated percussion pattern, produced by two hardwood sticks of the same name, that drives the rhythmic structure of mambo/salsa. Such arguments fall apart on two grounds. First, the syncopation of the clave comes in two varieties, the 2/3 clave (or Son clave) and the 3/2 (or Rumba clave). As such, no particular dance timing will match up with clave structure of every composition. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, whether the 2/3 or 3/2 variety, the clave strikes five times per eight-beat musical measure while the basic footwork pattern calls for six steps for the same eight-beat musical measure. As such, the dancer cannot be dancing “on” the same beat as the clave for half of each eight-beat measure, regardless of which dance timing they utilize.

<sup>49</sup> As home to a large population of Puerto Rican émigrés, New York salsa styles incorporates a lot more of this solo footwork, or “shines,” than do other styles (e.g. LA or Casino).

<sup>50</sup> One of the arguments made here is that the holding of the woman’s wrists restricts her from incorporating her own body styling, and that this control by the man focuses attention on himself rather than on the woman (Tores).

## SECTION II: COMMUNITY

Where Section I sets the stage for the research explored in this dissertation, Section II introduces and situates the actors upon that stage. Chapter One introduced the theoretical project and the ethnographic settings—defining the where, what, who, when, and how—of this dissertation, and also dealt with the issues, complexities, and ramifications of activity based fieldwork. Chapter Two provided contextual background for this project, expanded on the idea of looking at dance as both a subject and a “place,” and introduced both ballroom and salsa. In Chapter Three the questions of where, what, who, when, and how are asked, and responded to, in the context of community membership. Who belongs, how, and why? Building off this framework of who the dancers are, and with the general nature of their dance communities now in place, Chapter Four examines the social structures and political dynamics within which dancers live and act. Finally, Chapter Five examines some of the ways in which ballroom dance is packaged, marketed, and sold. Just by way of clarification, I also want to point out that I use the terms *politics* and *political* in their anthropological sense, of social influence; not the more deliberate form that often seems to be intended or recognized among ballroom dancers, teachers, and judges.

## CHAPTER THREE: Who “Belongs”? How and Why?

### **Families of Strangers**

During my preliminary research for this dissertation, I was standing in line, outside the ballroom doors, waiting to enter a local ballroom competition when someone recognized me from the local salsa scene. After exchanging greetings we both expressed surprise to find out that we each shared an interest in ballroom as well as salsa. As we stood there waiting for the doors to open, we started discussing how funny it was that so many of us knew each other on sight, knew how each person danced, who they “hung out “with, and often knew who they had learned from, yet, at the same time, might not even know each others’ names. “It’s like we’re all part of a family of strangers” she noted.

This analogy is an apt one since, as any numbers of anthropological analyses have long demonstrated, kinship is both conceptual and performative. While ties of birth are rarely ignored, other definitions and understandings of familial relationship can be equally “real.” While a “community of interests” (Skinner 1980:54) does not fit western conceptualization of family, it is no accident that many elite dancers and coaches are considered—both by themselves and by others—to be members of different “families.” There are, in fact, recognized “family trees” of dancers and of dance, each with their own distinct “familial” style, character, and traditions. As with any family, some members are recognized as being in the direct line of decent from

the head of the family while others, less centrally positioned, may be thought of “like the eccentric family uncle.” However conceived, there are real, coherent, distinct, and salient camps within the dance world—camps that show up in a variety of ways—and as with any model of family, issues of association, identification, resemblance, and affinity all come into play.

### **Who “Belongs”? How and Why?**

Imagining is generative of communities (Anderson 1991). Ballroom and salsa communities are no exception. Yet this is only part of the picture. The dance, after all, “starts out way before the actual dancing” (Savigliano 1998:105). Even a brief assessment reveals that there are distinct norms, values, action systems, techniques, and patterns of appraisals for ballroom and salsa dance classes, lessons, studios, workshops, competitions, and venues. Despite post-modern emphasis on local explication,<sup>1</sup> it is not by chance that ballroom and salsa dancers from different countries, speaking different languages, can successfully dance with each other upon their first meeting. While always subject to both local and individual variation, there are cultures of ballroom and salsa dance—cultures of dance with their own social rules (e.g. Taylor 1998).<sup>2</sup> Ballroom and salsa communities—along with their associated culture(s)—serve as metacultures, as do the Olympics (MacAloon 1984), which (differentially) overlay other social patterns and action systems.

Ballroom and salsa both exist as overarching institutions—along with numerous constituent institutions—that serve as systems of orientation.<sup>3</sup> While ballroom and salsa dancers are more than *just* dancers, “who” they are *is* a dancer.

People, after all, are not just who they are—they are also what they do (Bourdieu 1984:23; Geertz 1973; Offen 2000)<sup>4</sup>—and symbolic commitments impact lived reality through both conscious and unconscious processes (Stromberg 1986:61). Community, as these perspectives make clear, arises via both imagination and performance (e.g. Offen 2000, Jackson 2005).

Ballroom and salsa dancing, as potentially mobile lifestyles, not only remove persons from certain cultures, but can also provide other loci of culture through different definitions and circumscriptions of lived lives (Offen 2000:42, 46). Rampant gossip about dancers, dancing, dance events, and venues—usually consisting of comments on skills (Gluckman 1968:32) as well as personal and moral evaluations (Bailey 1971:288)—also provides evidence of, as well as insight into, the norms and values of these communities<sup>5</sup> and, in fact, often serves as a cohesive (Frankenberg 1990; Gluckman 1963) and controlling (Merry 1984) communal force. Membership often involves talking about others and being talked about by others (Offen 2000: 154). Ballroom and salsa communities also have their own “languages”—terms and usages that remain opaque to the “outsider.” So too do they have their own rules, codes, and hierarchies (Savigliano 1998:105-108) as well as their own “star group” or “in-group” (Sumner 1906:12). All of this makes sense since ballroom and salsa dancing are not spontaneous activities but, rather, ones that need to be understood—including all of the associated ramifications—as institutionalizations of action.<sup>6</sup>

Stromberg’s notion of a commitment system as a chosen cultural system (1986)—particularly informative for communities often defined by their diversity (e.g.



Offen 2000)—well suits the trans-local ballroom and salsa communities. Going even further than Anderson’s notion of self-generative imagination whereby, based on a shared interest and participation, people imagine themselves to be—and thus create themselves as—a community (1991), Stromberg’s idea of commitment is directly generative of both belief and action (e.g. 1986:90). These dynamic are important in understanding ballroom and salsa communities, communities that are simultaneously mobile and non-transient.<sup>7</sup> The individuals present at a given club on a given night are always highly variable yet, over time, the same “faces” appear over and over, whether downtown in the Gasslamp district, in La Jolla, or online at the Yahoo™ San Diego salsa club<sup>8,9</sup> and, so too with local, national, and international ballroom circuits. Perhaps most telling, however, is that for many people, belonging to these communities matters. Membership, however conceptualized and defined by both self and others, constitutes “the only valid self” (Bailey 1993:26).

### **Belonging to Collectives**

Collectives—in being more than the sum of the individuals involved—involve a “full-blooded,” robust sense of *we* (Gilbert 1979). Neither a salsa nor a ballroom dance community can be considered a community if it does not conceptualize itself as such. “A group’s existence,” sates Gilbert, “is basically a matter of the members of a set of people being conscious that they are linked by a certain specific tie” (1979: 149 cited in D’Andrade 2000: 12). This argument is, of course, the same one that Benedict Anderson (1991) stresses regarding the constitutive imagining of (for his purposes) national identity. In each case (also see D’Andrade 2000:12-13) agreement is cast as

the key to collective mental states; and upon which feelings of belonging and collective identification ultimately rest and build.

The ballroom and salsa communities—as communities—exist by dint of those who feel and recognize themselves to be members of such a community. Certainly such belonging, let alone participation, is not a binary classification, it is not an all or nothing proposition. People are not entirely (or only) members (or not members) of a ballroom or salsa community—they simultaneously belong to many other communities as well.<sup>10</sup> Yet a very large component of the degree to which persons belong to such communities is the degree to which they (and others) feel they are part of such communities. The extreme examples here are the various dance related on-line communities—i.e., the various bulletin boards at [www.salsaweb.com](http://www.salsaweb.com), the various yahoo salsa clubs, etc.—where members are members solely by dint of deciding to be members and by the degree to which other members accept them as such. It thus becomes clear that agreement is conceptually critical to “collective” mental states. Members of the local San Diego salsa scene are members of the community, at least in large part, because (1) they *believe* that such a community exists and (2) they *believe* that that it is a community to which they belong.

### **Differential Belonging**

Two different members of a dance community can both feel that they are part of the same dance community. Other members of the community might readily agree regarding the membership of both of these persons to that community. This does not

mean, however, that the two members are members of the community in exactly the same way, or that their membership means the same thing to other members of the community, or even that their membership means the same thing to each of them.

Any such assertions would suggest that going salsa dancing in downtown San Diego means the same thing to the competitive ballroom dancer, the Native Cuban, the Puerto Rican on vacation, the Child of Colombian émigrés, the casual observer, and the Caucasian Jewish guy wearing a kippah (Marion 2000:35-36). This is just not the case. Each of these persons might (or might not) be a member of the community—members of the San Diego salsa dancing “we”—but they are also themselves at the same time: *each has an individual identity that colors their experience of, and involvement with, the collective “we.”*

A closely related point made by D’Andrade is that collectivity (in a “full-blooded” sense) is greater than, and requires more than, mere intersubjectivity; that *identification* is also needed. This is, of course, part of the position taken above: that members of the local San Diego salsa scene are members of the community, at least in large part, because they believe that it is a community to which they belong. But identification goes deeper than this, it is more robust than belief in belonging; it also involves an investment of self. Derogatory comparisons of San Diego to Los Angeles salsa dancing do not, for example, necessarily offend many who go salsa dancing in many of the local San Diego clubs. This same comment, however, riles up others in a heartbeat—it is an offense to *their* community and, by direct extension, to them.

Threats or offenses to the collective actually serve as a relatively clear arena for both expressing and assessing group membership. In many ways, and in the model of the Biblical King Solomon's famous test, such situations serve to demarcate those with deep personal investments. It is all well and good, for instance, for Fred to claim membership in the San Diego salsa scene. But, when he then comments on how much better Los Angeles salsa is than San Diego salsa, one begins to question the legitimacy of his (self-avowed) membership in the collective that is the San Diego salsa scene. In contrast to this there are numerous other people in the San Diego salsa scene—people with highly divergent ideas, opinions, and personalities—who have been involved in heated debates and arguments about salsa but, when confronted by less than flattering comments or comparisons by, or to, non-San Diegan dancers, *all* respond with indignation. Within the community there are different cliques, factions, and groupings, but all also belong to the San Diego salsa collective—they are invested in it; being part of it *means* something to them.<sup>11</sup>

## **Dyads and Triads**

People who choose to associate and work with each other often have some level of connection or rapport in the first place, and over the extended periods of time typically spent associating with each other, such connections are likely to become all that much deeper and more enduring. As much as DanceSport is typically conceived as the pinnacle of a two-party relationship—between partners—in many ways and in many circumstances there is actually a triadic relationship between the couple and

their primary coach. In many instances the coach knows more about a couple—both each partner and the relationship between them—than anyone else does; sometime even more than the couple themselves. It is not without good cause that many dance instructors describe a large element of their job as being a relationship counselor. But this familiarity—as is often the case—breeds attachment as well. It is typical, for instance, to chat with one’s coach, and to ask for advice, outside the parameters of one’s lesson. At the more casual level this might be as much as a couple of hours that a teacher spends chatting with students after a group lesson, often times including some dance pointers. Going a step further, a couple may stop by to ask a past coach, whom they trust, a question in regards to some upcoming costuming choices. At the most elite levels this might take the form of going out to lunch with one of a couple’s coaches just to talk over strategy and psychological focus before heading out of town (including out of the country) to prepare, train, practice, and compete for a major title.

The relationships between coaches and dancers are often complex ones. While the person taking an introductory group class probably has little more than an economic relationship with their teacher, over time many teachers will learn and come to care about their regular students. And, for one-on-one coaching (be it of an individual dancer or a couple), the relationship is likely to be deeper seeded, especially as it continues to develop over time. It is in this way that coaches can end up passing along their children’s outgrown baby clothes to their students with younger children (or vice versa in some Pro-Am situations). In other situations coaches and their students have children of similar ages who regularly play together. While it is easy

enough for the outside commentator to suggest that such teacher-student relationships are nothing more than business relationships, any such contention belies the sincerity and significance of the bonds that can develop between coaches and students; bonds that may, of course, cut both ways.

Feeling valued is important to people. Not just “valued” in some abstract sense or by random strangers, however, but valued by those who matter in one’s own estimation. As mentioned above, a successful DanceSport unit is often more than a simple dyad, typically including (at least) one coach who is, in many ways, an inextricable part of the “team.” As their careers progress dancers may switch coaches (just as they may switch partners) but, at any given point, the coach is typically an insider to a couple’s relationship, development, goals, and ambitions. Interestingly, given the switching of partners typical to much of couples competition, a dancer’s longest ballroom relationship may actually be with their coach and few things are more devastating for a dancer than to feel like their coach does not believe in them.

Kevin, for instance, offers the following remarks:

I’m getting very frustrated with my coach. I haven’t competed in almost two years now, but am getting ready to compete again next month. Anyway, the last several times I’ve had lessons (both private and with my current partner) I’ve left feeling very discouraged. I don’t mind being shredded on technical points – heck, that’s what I’m paying for after all, right? But what’s been getting to me is that I don’t feel like my coach believes in me. I know I’m not a gifted dancer and will never be close to what I wish I could be, so it is not like I expect to be thought of as some undiscovered talent. I would, however, like to think that my coach would at least believe in my desire and that I would, indeed, improve.

I’m also getting frustrated because it has felt like I’m being bombarded with input and then being seen as an incompetent when I can’t process it all at once. I am not one of those people who can assimilate body usage/control information rapidly, needing at least a night to sleep on something and let it sink in. What’s irking me is that I’ve been with my coach (off and on) for over three years now, so feel like this is something that should be recognized rather than making me feel incompetent. It is not as if I am not trying after all, I just don’t process such information rapidly.

I do want to say that what I do \*not\* expect is to be told that I am doing things right or any better than I am. If I want to hear how “good” I am, I can go to a ballroom club danced on campus and hang out with a bunch of newbies. I want and expect corrections, feedback, and criticism...I just wanted it from someone who I also feel believes in me.

I’m finding it hard to feel good about myself as a dancer.

Kevin’s experiences are far from unique. Karen relates this similar account:

My most recent coach, whom I love dearly but just left, was an exercise in perpetual frustration for me and others, particularly in smooth dancing. This is the guy who literally, for the first six months of my working with him, *refused* to do any smooth dancing with me at all. My footwork was so bad, he said, that he refused to dance with me. He insisted that I develop my footwork first. All well and good, and I respect the position, particularly since he has some recurrent leg and hip injuries to protect.

But that stance was *death* to my self-confidence in smooth dancing, and contributed in a major way to my loss of joy in the whole thing. I used to love waltz...and now I hate it. Coaches sometimes forget the emotional power they wield.

And Rick, a national finalist, adds that, “I can only say that I believe a coach should not only be the person improving you technically, but also a source of inspiration and motivation.”

Lest these comments be thought of as nothing more than over developed dependencies on one’s coach, I should point out that while the nature of the coach-student relationship is different from each side, the attachments can—and often do—go in both directions. Coaches too may become quite invested in the relationships they have with their students. Some coaches have always been more teacher than performer, even while still actively competing. For other coaches the same artistic and creative drive that inspired them on the floor is now manifested through their coaching as they genuinely invest themselves in the development of their students.

The degree to which some coaches invest themselves in the relationships they have with their long-time students is well illustrated by the case of Jack, Ellen, and Laura. When I first met them, Jack and Ellen had been getting coaching from Laura, rather intensively, for a couple of years already. Jack and Ellen did not feel like they were progressing enough and, in speaking with me, voiced frustration at the lessons they were having with Laura, relating that, although they kept working on things, nothing ever really seemed to get all that much better.

More specifically, Jack and Ellen were exasperated by Laura's comments that she was not sure why they were not placing better in competitions. As Ellen commented to me, they would have been placing better if there was not any reason to place them lower, and the very fact that Laura could no longer see where the gaps were, suggested to Jack and Ellen that it was time to seek another, outside, opinion. While I cannot speak to the analysis of the situation provided to me by Jack and Ellen, how Laura reacted as Jack and Ellen started getting more and more outside coaching tells a story in its own right.

First, I should clarify that many dancers work with more than one coach so the fact that Jack and Ellen were working with someone other than Laura was not, on its own, the problem. Many coaches become known for particular strengths—such as choreography, performance, or technique—and many dancers seek out several coaches for help based on these respective aptitudes. Working with different coaches for different focuses is rarely problematic, although it may take both time and trial and error to find the combination that best suits each couple; especially as certain camps



(both aesthetic and political) do not readily mix. In other circumstances two dancers will each have had a favorite or primary coach that they have been working with for an extended period of time and, when they form a partnership, end up working with both these coaches.

There is also a widely held opinion that, in many cases, it can be useful to at least consult with one coach of each sex, particularly as they can demonstrate things—either visually to the same sex partner or in dance with the opposite sex partner—that a coach of the other sex cannot. Also worth keeping in mind is that the more prestigious the coach, the greater the demand for their time and the less availability they will have. So what does it mean to say that Laura reacted negatively to Jack and Ellen getting outside coaching? That Laura simply objected to Jack and Ellen working with anyone else seems quite unlikely. So what then?

Laura probably considered Jack and Ellen's outside coaching to be problematic because it did not meet any of the normal cross-coaching scenarios. In the first instance, the new coach Jack and Ellen started working with was known for similar qualities as a coach as was Laura. In the second place, neither Jack nor Ellen had ever worked with their new coach before. Third, Jack and Ellen's additional coach is, like Laura, a woman. Finally, Laura had not been unable to schedule Jack and Ellen for any requested lessons. Further compounding the situation, the new coach was from a different camp than was Laura; having trained in a different line of dancers, instruction, and theory. While this situation probably would have collapsed on its own,

how Jack and Ellen went about the matter made the eventual break down all but inevitable.

If Jack and Ellen had, for instance, told Laura that they just wanted to see if trying something totally different might give them a much needed jump start, maybe things would have worked out quite differently. As events transpired, however, Jack and Ellen, claiming to me that they had not wanted to offend Laura, started working with a new coach without saying a word. As various elements from the new coaching started showing up in Jack and Ellen's dancing during their lessons with Laura, it eventually came out what had been going on. At first Laura seemed to try and ignore it but, over time, started saying things like "I don't want to hear her name" and, although Jack and Ellen continued to work with Laura for some time, slowly Laura had less and less lesson time available for them whenever they called to try scheduling their lessons.

It is also important to note that there is no (known) history of conflict between Jack and Ellen's newer coach and Laura, so Laura's eventual outburst regarding hearing the other coach's name being mentioned during lessons was not based on any personal issues Laura might have had with this other coach. Instead, Laura's comment, coupled with the decreasing lesson time she had available for Jack and Ellen, as well as the hurt demeanor Laura exhibited when realizing that Jack and Ellen were working with an outside coach all add up to a different picture; namely that Laura felt betrayed by Jack and Ellen. Ellen now comments that, in retrospect, how she and Jack handled the whole affair was probably far from ideal and that, in a like circumstance, she might

very well feel as Laura had. What is clear here, however, is that the emotional connections between students and coaches are experienced and felt in both directions (even if the number of lanes going in each direction may differ). Indeed, the comments previously noted for both Jonathan and Karen find their counterpart in Laura's and, even if the degree of connection going in each direction may differ, the connections between student and coach are certainly bidirectional.<sup>12</sup>

### **Complex Communities**

As anthropology has long argued, all societies—not just industrialized ones—are complex. As I pointed out in Chapter One, however, there are also different types of complexity involved in working with activity based fieldsites. Working with activity based “sites” poses both methodological and theoretical challenges not true of more traditional and geographically stable fieldsites. Even the idea of multisited ethnography fails to fully account for communities such as those of competitive ballroom and salsa, since the communities involved are not based on even multiple sites but, rather, in the activities shared across any and all such locations. It is true that no island or village—let alone town or city—is so small as to be just one “place,” and physical limitations mandate that one can only be in one specific location—be it a house, market, shop, or theatre—at a time in any research enterprise. At the same time, however, there are differences between multisited and translocal anthropology, as they have been framed so far, and a more explicitly activity-based approach. As much of my work with the competitive international ballroom circuit shows, most of the

dancers, vendors, and officials I talked to do not feel torn between different places, or even like they belong to different places but, rather, feel like they belong to something without locality.

My basic contention here is not that there's anything wrong with the locality-based paradigm so much as pointing out that there are cases where that paradigm does not work. The very fact that "where do you do your fieldwork?" is a more common question (at least within sociocultural anthropology) than "what questions do you ask?" or "what issue or topic do you research?" suggests to me that there is, indeed, an emphasis on locality. I would also argue that, far from ignoring the importance of place, an activity-based position actually strengthens the importance of locality (when appropriate) by backing this up via empirical determination (the work of Basso with the Western Apache jumps quickly to mind) while, at the same time, allowing for the recognition of when place is not as important; or is important in different ways. My position that activity-based "sites" have been under-theorized—not *un*-theorized—rests on four things: (1) a lack of penetration into the various funding structures, (2) a lack of methodological writing concerning such dynamics, (3) a lack of attention to activity-based belonging (although, again, there is some work in this regard), and (4) the dominance of a geographic paradigm that often asks, "where?" even before asking "what and why?"

A final note I want to make in regard to activity-based communities before moving on is that while actual, formal performances certainly do not need to be the focus for an activity-based approach, it is still important to recognize that a

community may be defined by what it does as much as where it is located (again, this should be an empirical determination made on a case by case basis). Community, as the following section on communities of practice makes clear, may be “performed” instead of “located.”

### **Communities of Practice**

No one is a member of a community that they do not participate in. This is the basic conceptualization underlying the idea of communities of practice (Wenger 1998). Not all forms of participation are the same, and some forms of participation are more active and deliberate than others. So what? Not everyone belongs to their various communities to the same extent or in the same ways as everyone else. In all cases, however, some type of social engagement—some practice—must be enacted for belonging. Some communities of practice are deliberate, perhaps joining a particular religious institution, while others are more tacit, such as finding a new enjoyable hobby. In the first instance, joining a new religious institution, one expects to join a community of people with certain practices in common. In the second instance, that of a new hobby, one participates in an activity one enjoys but, as it turns out, is also likely to be engaging in the same activity as many others.

As one comes first to know and then to share this activity, one has again joined into a community of practice. People often do not select to form their communities of practice (although there are certainly exceptions), but rather select a job, a hobby, or a class to attend. The ensuing pursuit of a shared enterprise under shared conditions

(Wenger 1998:45), however, defines shared participation (even if not equally shared by all), and hence a community of practice. As Wenger frames it, communities of practice are exactly this, “a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (1998:45).

Ballroom and salsa fall largely into this scenario of tacitly consensual communities. While it is true that some people may join friends in going to a dance class or a dance club, this, on its own, is unlikely to keep them participating over any significant stretch of time. Whether brought by a friend or starting solely out of personal interest, those who stick with dancing do so because they find something of value in it which may or may not be the community. In all cases, however, those who continue dancing become part of the dance community in some way, shape, or fashion. In dance, as in all other activities in life, newcomers (start to) join the community by participating in it in some way. Indeed, no community can exist without participants. But communities of practice are not just groupings for activities, not simply labels thrown onto various forms of participation. “Participating in a playground clique or in a work team, for instance, is both a kind of action and a form of belonging,” says Wenger, and “such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (1998:4). Dancers (largely) live the same kind of life and, through that, come to hold many of the same understandings and values. Before moving on to look at how such understandings and values are learned with communities of practice, I want to briefly examine the five basic aspects of practice presented by Wegner—practice as meaning; practice as community;

practice as learning; practice as boundary, and practice as locality (1998:49-50; also see chapters one through five)—and quickly look at how each of these aspects plays out in ballroom and salsa.

### **Practice as Meaning**

In looking at practice as meaning, Wenger posits that “the social production of meaning is the relevant label of analysis for talking about practice” (1998: 49, also see Chapter One). Wenger is not talking about meaning as denotative meanings, nor is he talking about existential meanings, but, rather, the day-to-day meanings of actions and interactions of socially lived lives. As Wenger puts it, “*practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life*” (1998:52, original emphasis). What people do, who they do it with, and how they do it are all constitutive elements of practice, and all contribute to shaping the meanings of those practices. The exact same costuming, for instance, does not fit equally well in all settings, as its meaning does not equally suit or fit into all communities of practice. The flashy Latin dance costume without which a ballroom competitor would not be taken seriously on the competition floor is “too much” for the social salsa floor, let alone the outside a dancing environment as the following account my amateur pro-am competitor Lisa Casimer makes clear:

a funny little anecdote about my experience while at the Harvest Moon [competition]...I had to pick up my pro very early in the morning (as the standard heats were early) and he was staying at a rather seedy little hotel out by the airport either to save money or because he didn't get his registration in early enough...anyhow, I got my heavy duty makeup on, complete with the rhinestone encrusted eyelashes and the \$100 swarovski earrings glued onto my ears...threw a work shirt on over my top half...grabbed my fishnets threw them on with a pair of daisy duke shorts...grabbed my gowns and hung them in the car and went to fetch my pro...well, I walk into the hotel lobby and ask for my pro by name and the clerk takes one look at me ...and with disgust I might add, and says Lady, there's no way I am

giving YOU his room number....well, you can figure out what he thought I was there for, and it certainly wasn't dancing...I shall, from this point forward, make a note to myself that if pro or I are staying at a hotel other than the one where the comp is, that I will definitely be doing hair and makeup after I get to the hotel.

Lisa's story is not unique either. One of the professional couples I know decided to just drive home, still in competition make up, to wash up, shower, and change after they finished competing at a local competition. On their way home, however, they got pulled over by a police officer who, after taking one look inside their car, proceeded to remove the male (who was driving) from the car and started verbally harassing him about "the prostitute." The competition costuming—including hair, make up, and accessories—that are so easily taken for granted as appropriate "work attire" within the practice of ballroom dancing, have different meanings outside that practice.

### **Practice as Community**

In looking at practice as community, Wegner argues for "practice as the source of coherence of a community" based on three factors: "mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of ways of doing things" (1998:49; also see Chapter Two). Let me take each of these in turn. First, mutual engagement: people must interact to form a community, practice or no. Dancers regularly interact with each other, especially in partnered genres of dance such as ballroom and salsa where interactivity is intrinsic to the dancing itself. Second, joint enterprise: many people regularly interact in some way with strangers on a daily basis—they engage each other—but there is typically no shared purpose to such interactions. If you ask



someone on the street for directions, for example, this involves mutual engagement but not, if closely scrutinized, a joint enterprise. While it is true that both you and the other person are involved in getting you where you want to go, getting there is your enterprise, not theirs (which may be to be helpful, to be on their own way as quickly as possible, to talk to you as they find you attractive, or anything else). In ballroom and salsa there are many shared enterprises which include learning the various dances, dancing to the music, leading and/or following, and dancing with another person, to name just a few.

Third, and last, a shared repertoire of ways of doing things: here too asking a stranger for directions works as a counter example, as one of you could be intending the fastest route while the other the most direct, or one of you could direct by first, second, or third lefts and rights while the other seeks street names. Contrastingly, salsa and ballroom dancing epitomize the notion of shared repertoires of ways of doing things. The same joint enterprise just noted above—learning the various dances, dancing to the music, leading and/or following, and dancing with another person—all involve a shared repertoire of how they are done. If everyone made up their own steps to the waltz, for example, than there would be no such dance as “the waltz.” The reason that different dancers who have never met before can dance a waltz together is that they share an understanding of what constitutes “the waltz.” They also must share an understanding of how a waltz should be danced to music, what is entailed in each of their roles as leader and follower, and how they should integrated their efforts with each other in order to successfully dance this dance.

As mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires of ways of doing things, (the practice of) ballroom and salsa dancing is generative and constitutive of community. The practice of these dances is inherently interactive, involves shared activity and goals<sup>13</sup>, and depends upon shared understandings for how dancing should be done. It should come as little shock then, when “strangers” from the USA and Germany (to give just one possible permutation) feel like they are both members of a shared community, even when newly met on the dance floor. And it is in exactly this way that the practices of ballroom and salsa dancing are also the practices of the ballroom and salsa dancing communities.

### **Practice as Learning<sup>14</sup>**

Looking at practice as learning, Wegner notes that, “practice must be understood as a learning process and that a community of practice is therefore an emergent structure, neither inherently stable nor randomly changeable” (1998:49, also see Chapter 3). Again, I want to unpack this statement, look at each of the elements, and see how both ballroom and salsa fit into this model. Some type of engagement must be involved in the learning process, so to say that ‘practice must be understood as learning’ is simply to point out that learning always takes place within a participatory framework (Lave and Wenger 1991). But “learning is a remarkably social process,” as Brown and Duguid point out in their text, *The Social Life of Information*, and “social groups provide resources for their members to learn” (2002:137). The participatory practices involved in learning are often practices that

involve interpersonal interaction, and the groups that people come into contact and associate with thus provide models and opportunities for various practices—which also constitutes learning. This interactionist dynamic of learning should not be underestimated however; “we are social beings,” after all, and, “far from being trivially true, this fact is a central aspect of learning” (Wenger 1998:4).

At home much of a young child’s learning takes place via interaction with family, friends, and visitors. Upon starting school instructors and peers provide additional fields of interaction within which learning takes place. When starting a job, it is in the interactions employers and co-workers that one learns the expectations, roles, procedures, character, and climate of their employment. Indeed it is for exactly these reasons that Helena Wulff, based on the professional ballet dancers whom she studied, observes that, “members of occupational communities tend to internalize a particular value system” (1998:101, based on Salaman 1974). So what does Wenger then mean in contending that “a community of practice is therefore an emergent structure, neither inherently stable nor randomly changeable” (1998:49)? Simply this: that people who engage in practices, and learn in so doing, do not replicate their community as automatons—indeed this would be impossible as communities, as aggregates of individuals, always entail (at least some) variation of practice, be it in knowledge, procedures, understandings, or anything else—nor do they haphazardly or arbitrarily discard that which they have been exposed to, practiced, and learned.

So how do ballroom and salsa fit this model? As I noted in the preceding section on practice as community, the interaction, shared endeavor, and shared

understandings involved in ballroom and salsa dancing are both generative and constitutive of, respectively, ballroom and salsa communities. But do all members of these communities interact in identical ways? Do all members of these communities share the same enterprise in exactly the same way and to exactly the same degree? And do all members of these communities perfectly share exactly the same understandings of everything pertaining to their community? The answer to each of these questions is, obviously, of course not. Since community members vary in their participation, the community of practice cannot be seen as inherently stable. At the same time, however, too great a variance in practice removes one from that community of practice. As such it is in the mutual participation and practice among community members that variations and fluctuations ebb and flow but always within a limited range of possible practice; beyond that boundary community ceases to exist.

These dynamics can be seen on any ballroom or salsa floor, as no two people dance exactly alike but, by the same token, anyone dancing too far “out of bounds” is seen as being a newcomer at best; and probably viewed as clueless overall (and obviously not a member of the community unless he or she is deliberately flaunting accepted norms in a setting where that would be permissible). Whether a social dance or a competition, dancers are expected to dance the dance that corresponds to the music being played: not a cha cha to a mambo, or a foxtrot to a waltz. This is the piece that is not “randomly changeable.” Learning to do a waltz, after all, means learning to dance the appropriate figures, with the appropriate technique, synchronized to the appropriate music, not just running around the room flailing your arms as waltz music

is playing. But even a waltz is not “inherently stable” either. As dances evolve over time, changes do happen. The basic structure of the dance certainly stays the same—otherwise it becomes a different dance—but new figures get added, technique develops, and costuming changes<sup>15</sup> (just to name some of the larger scale shifts). Just as ice skating and gymnastics have seen the development of new figures, requiring greater speed and athleticism, so to with ballroom dance.

Just to elaborate a little more, I want to stay with the ice skating analogy. The same ice skating routine that won a gold medal 10 years ago would no longer be competitive, for example, despite its enduring artistry. The degree of difficulty of certain figures and the speeds at which they are done, especially the jumps, has only continued to rise. This closely parallels ballroom, where the variety of figures requiring greater speed and athleticism only continues to evolve and grow. Indeed, most of the coaches I interviewed, when asked about what had changed for the better since they competed, almost all commented on the sheer speed, power, and athleticism of today’s dancing and dancers.<sup>16</sup>

## **Practice as Boundary**

In looking at practice as boundary, Wegner asserts that “boundaries of practice are not simple lines of demarcation between inside and outside but form a complex social landscape of boundaries and peripheries” (1998:50, also see Chapter Four). There is no magical switch, for instance, that gets flicked on to transform someone from a non-dancer into the new world champion. Being a dancer, just like being a teacher or a doctor, is not something that can be reduced to a binary classification.

There are immeasurable gradations of skill, artistry, musicality<sup>17</sup>, and technique possible. Initially, for instance, someone may have a hard time learning the basic pattern of movement and foot positions of a cha cha but, with some practice, they will come to know this pattern—“rock-step-cha-cha-cha.” Then will come the music; can they take these steps on the correct beats and at the correct tempo? This too may take some practice. Once this has been accomplished is this person now a dancer? Most people would probably say “no.” But then this person learns another pattern. Now are they a dancer? After five more patterns? 10? 20? When?

What about how the timing used while taking the steps of these patterns? Do they continue keep dancing their cha cha patterns to the “rock-step-cha-cha-cha” rhythm, or do they come to understand the actual counts, learning that there is a “half-half-whole” timing whereby the first two “cha chas” are syncopated on the half beats and the third “cha” takes a whole beat? If they learn this, and can successfully execute it, now are they a dancer? Even if this rhythm is correct, do they dance it on the appropriate beats the music, and with the appropriate accent: “two-three-four-and-one,” “step-step-half-half-whole,” “rock-step-cha-cha-cha”? Even with correct timing, does this person continue to lift their feet far off the floor in the same manner as most beginners, or do they come to keep constant foot pressure on the inside edges of slightly turned out feet? Have they long since learned to arrive on a straight leg on all of their whole beats, and *always* using a toe lead?<sup>18</sup> And what about the body above the feet? Do the hands and arms hang, or is their proper frame and extension? Are the body, neck, and head all lifted? Do the ribs initiate body actions, arriving over the foot

just as it arrives on beat while the opposite hip is delayed? And to what extent are each of these elements involved? Too little of them leaves our dancer looking stiff and mechanical, while too much of any of them distorts the dancing, leaving our dancer looking like an off balance spastic wet noodle.

None of the factors above speak directly to our dancer's ability at leading or following either, so where does that enter the picture? And what about their floorcraft, their ability to avoid bumping into and being bumped into by others on the floor? What combination of factors—patterns, timing, foot usage, frame, body use, lead/follow, and floorcraft—differentiates the ballroom dancer from the non-dancer? Obviously someone who cannot do any of these elements is not a ballroom dancer, and obviously someone who can do them all superbly is. But where is the actual balance point between the two? This, then, is the dynamic that Wenger is addressing when he notes that “we all belong to communities of practice. At home, at work, at school, in our hobbies – we belong to several communities of practice at any given time” (Wenger 1998:6), and that each person is, of course, a core member of some communities of practice and a more peripheral member in others (Wenger 1998:7).

Communities of practice are as informal as they are pervasive (Wenger 1998: 7), and, as such, while central insiders and clear outsiders are obvious, the idea of a “dividing line” in the boundaries and borders of membership and belonging resists clear demarcation. It is exactly this dynamic that Lave and Wenger (1993) are appealing to in coining and using the term “legitimate *peripheral* participation” [my emphasis]. The problem, after all, is that community participation and membership

cannot be calculated numerically; you cannot say, “Oh, let me introduce you to Joe here, he’s a 57% community member. You should really meet Lisa if you can get the chance though; she’s an 83% member!” It was actually this exact problem and dynamic which lead my project, originally targeting “ballroom dancing,” to more tightly focus on competitive (versus social) ballroom dancers. While there are, of course, some people who enter ballroom competitions just for the fun or experience of it (on a lark if you will), in general, training for and entering competitions demonstrates a certain level of activity and commitment which provided a useful point of demarcation for me in establishing my “community.” One last point I want to make here, is that in this case (and in others like it) is that the distinction between competitive<sup>19</sup> and non-competitive dancers is not one which I, as an anthropologist, came up with but, rather, a widely understood and recognized marker of a certain commitment and participation by the dancers themselves.

### **Practice as Locality**

Finally, in looking at practice as locality, Wegner starts to differentiate between communities of practice and constellations of such communities (1998:50, also see Chapter Five), or what Brown and Duguid differentiates as communities of practice compared to networks of practice (2002:141-143). In making this distinction, Brown and Duguid point out that communities of practice “are relatively tight-knit groups of people who know each other and work together directly. They are usually face-to-face communities that continually negotiate with, communicate with, and coordinate with each other” (2002:143). This is in contrast to networks of practice,



where people have practice in common, “but most of the members are unknown to one another” (Brown and Duguid 2002:141-142). This last definition provided by Brown and Duguid (or Wenger’s constellation of communities of practice) well suits the ballroom and salsa worlds, as most dancers will never come face to face with even a fraction of each other in their lifetimes. The IDSF alone, and as noted in Chapter Two, has over four million registered ballroom competitors after all. This doesn’t include non-registered competitors, professional competitors, and the numerous non-competitive ballroom dancers. The numbers for salsa, although even less easily quantified, are likely to be many times larger.

It is true that there are many (and large) segments of the ballroom and salsa worlds that lack regular face to face interactions. Yet I would still contend that there is a problem in dismissing the larger ballroom and salsa dance scenes *only* as networks (and not communities) of practice. “There is relatively little reciprocity across such network” say Brown and Duguid, “that is, network members don’t interact with one another directly to any significant degree” (2002:142), and herein lays the problem. Certainly there are different communities of practice within both ballroom and salsa (specific ballroom studios or salsa clubs for example) that could—and sometimes should—be designated and understood as separate communities of practice that are each pieces of a larger network of practice. At the same time, however, both ballroom and salsa often exhibit a high degree of reciprocity and interaction as the first two sections of this chapter attested to.

Simply said, the further one progresses with salsa or ballroom dancing, the greater the degree of interaction. At the extreme, all of the top dancers and coaches have known each other for years, having crossed paths over and over across an array of national borders. Just as importantly, however, these dancers and coaches have taught other dancers, who in turn may teach others. This generates the same problem as noted in the section on at practice as boundary above, calling into question where to draw the line. If dancers have both learned most of their dancing from the same instructor, maybe they are only in a network of practice with each other while both simultaneously being in a community of practice with that instructor. But what happens when these two dancers end up dancing at the same event? They still may not have any face to face communications or interaction, but it starts to become harder to argue that they are only in a network and not a community of practice with each other. The distinction, for ballroom and salsa at least, becomes even more blurred in the face of modern mass-communications and the exchange of knowledge and information this entails.

### **Shared Knowledge and Information**

Based on Gilbert Ryle's (1949) distinction between "knowing that" and "knowing how," Brown and Duguid assert that "learning a practice...involves becoming a member of a 'community of practice' and thereby understanding its work and its talk from the inside" (2002:126, citing Lave and Wenger 1993). Psychologist Jerome Bruner also makes this same general distinction when he differentiates

between learning about and learning to be (cited in Brown and Duguid 2002:128), and for which Brown and Duguid provide the following two examples:

Many people learn *about* a lot of things—astrophysics, Australian Rules football, Madagascan lemurs, or baseball statistics...but, picking up information about Madagascan lemurs in the comfort of our home doesn't close the gap between us and Madagascan field zoologists. Learning to be requires more than just information. It requires the ability to engage in the practice in question. (2002:128, original emphasis)

The practice of managing a baseball team, for example, is not the same as the practice of playing on a baseball team. The 'know that' for each job may be fairly similar. Managers and players gather a lot of the same information. But the 'know how' for the two (thus the way each makes use of their 'know that') is quite different. (2002:129)

The baseball analogy provides a good model for ballroom and salsa, where the “know that” for dancers, instructors, and judges are all relatively similar, but the “know how” is quite different. The dancers’ “know that” of dance is used to produce dancing, for examples, while the instructors’ “know that” of dance is used to teach dancing, and the judges’ “know that” of dance is used to evaluate dancing.

The basic point of these examples is that “no amount of explicit knowledge provides you with the implicit” (Brown and Duguid 2002:134). There are step lists available for the various dances, just as there are numerous instructional videos available for a large range of different styles of ballroom and salsa dancing. In the case of dancing, two dimensional representations—whether written on paper or viewed on screen—cannot capture three-dimensional aesthetics or kinesthetics of dance. Is it possible for someone to learn basic patterns, alignments, and foot usage from a book or video? Absolutely. But this information is not so easily translated into proper action. In the case of a medical emergency, for instance, a medical student who has read all of the medical texts available, and watched countless operating procedures, is

certainly a better choice for emergency field surgery than the electrician standing beside him or her. At the same time, however, is there any doubt that a trained surgeon, with real life surgical experience and know how would not be preferable? Information, as Brown and Duguid aptly note, “is on its own not enough to produce actionable knowledge. Practice too is required. And for practice, it’s best to look to a community of practitioners” (2002:135).

Brown and Duguid make three distinctions between knowledge and information. First, they stipulate, “knowledge usually entails a knower” (2002:119). Second, knowledge is harder to “detach,” i.e. to transmit and pass on (2002:120). And third, they argue, “knowledge seems to require more by way of assimilation. Knowledge is something we digest rather than merely hold. It entails the knower’s understanding and some degree of commitment” (2002: 120). Again, let us look at how these understandings play out in dance. Brown and Duguid’s first point is that knowledge usually entails a knower whereas information does not. The listings of competition results common in print (e.g. in *Dance Beat*) or online (on DanceSportInfo.net), for example, is information that is readily available to anyone. But these results, on their own, don’t mean much to most people. Members of the dancesport community, however, understand—that is have the knowledge to understand—the meanings of these results within their community of practice.

The fact that reading an instructional book or watching an instructional video is not sufficient to really learn anything beyond rudimentary skills is also testament to Brown and Duguid’s second point, that knowledge, unlike information, is often

difficult to transmit. It is one thing to tell or even show someone what a particular dance figure should look like, but it is something else again to teach them how to actually produce for themselves. The underlying point here is that information about dancing is not the same thing as knowing how to dance, and “we learn *how* by practice” (Ryle 1949, cited in Brown and Duguid 2002:128).

The third and final point argued by Brown and Duguid (2002:120) is that, unlike information, knowledge cannot simply be transmitted but must be assimilated; it requires understanding and commitment, and not just memorization. I can write for the reader, for instance, that the hip should settle on the “and” between the “two,” “three,” and “one” in an International Style rumba. But this information lacks understanding except from those already familiar with the rumba. I can demonstrate this same thing in person, but here again, even an astute observer, new to dance, is highly unlikely to be able to replicate what I had just shown. Someone cannot merely memorize “oh, the hip settles on the...” and then be able to immediately apply that to their dancing. It takes understanding of what is involved in settling ones hip, and commitment to both understanding and execution to translate this information into actionable knowledge. Similarly, the information of how to properly execute an *alemana* in rumba or a *whisk* in waltz, for instance, is recorded in step charts in various instruction manuals and is demonstrated on a number of instructional videos. Yet if this information alone were sufficient, why do dance students often pay \$50-\$125 *per lesson* (and more) if two or three videos could be had at the same price?

These differences between information and actionable knowledge are the same dynamics underlying Lave and Wenger's (1995) distinction between talking *about* a practice versus talking *within* a practice. Anyone can watch dance and talk about it after all, but they will not be fluent in the jargon of practitioners, nor will they necessarily understand what they are seeing or how such actions are produced. Using the example of competition results again, anyone can talk "about" the placements of the various couples. Only those who know who the couples in question are relative to one another, however, will really be able to understand and discuss the significance of the competition results. "Mistaking knowledge and its sources for information and its sources can, then, be costly" write Brown and Duguid (2002:122), and this is readily seen in many dance newcomers who get enamored with learning new patterns and new tricks but fail to recognize the difference between simply "knowing" these items as they do versus really *knowing* them as advanced dancers do. In ballroom competitors this can be seen in the dancer who can dance their competitive routines, but cannot really lead or follow outside that limited box. In salsa this same thing is blatantly obvious on the nightclub floor as a couple quickly transition from pattern-to-pattern-to-pattern, including several dips, but in no way in time with the music and with little to no actual *dancing* (i.e. use of foot pressure, body rhythms, etcetera) taking place.

A critically important point in distinguishing between knowledge and information is that "While the modern world often appears increasingly impersonal, in those areas where knowledge really counts, people count more than ever" (Brown and Duguid 2002:121). This is a particularly significant point for the highest levels of

ballroom and salsa dancers where these practitioners' lifestyles, as has already been discussed, are typically especially mobile. In other words, while the constant travel and geographic displacement might, on its own, seem both indicative and generative of impersonality, this is not in fact the case. Because dance is so deeply knowledge-based then, the dancers who have this knowledge matter more than ever (a point that I return to shortly in my discussion of dispersed networks and skill-based centers). In many ways then, dance can be classified as a "knowledge economy" as opposed to and "industrial" or even "information" economy (Brown and Duguid 2002:120). This is not to say that regular industrial concerns are not felt or experienced within the ballroom and salsa worlds—indeed they are, and often quite deeply—but, rather, points to the central role and importance of knowledge within these communities of dance.

### **Shared Practice/Shared Identity**

What people do matters to who they are; certainly not in an easily predictable manner, but in a real way none the less. It thus follows that people doing similar things in similar situations will share more experiences in common than those doing dissimilar things, or, in Brown and Duguid's words, "People with similar practices and similar resources develop similar identities" (2002:140). While this framing is somewhat of an oversimplification—there is no guarantee, after all, that people with similar practices and similar resources cannot help but develop similar identities—the general point is still apt since practice "both shapes and supports learning" (Brown and Duguid 2002:129). As the materials introduced above already start to make clear,

however, learning is not just about information; it is also about knowledge and, through shared understandings, shared identity. This is what Brown and Duguid are getting at when they posit that:

Learning needs to be understood in relation to the development of human identity. In learning to be, in becoming a member of a community of practice, an individual is developing a social identity. In turn, the identity under development shapes what that person comes to know, how he or she assimilates knowledge and information. (2002:138)

In learning *to* dance, one comes to *be* a dancer. Furthermore, *as* a dancer one's attention to and understandings of actions, activities, information, and knowledge are all filtered through the lens of *being* a dancer. Finally, the focus "a dancer's" attention, and the corresponding evaluative frame, does not only give rise to shared understandings but—through the sharing of these understandings—generate shared identifications as well.

Let me provide an illustrative scenario to reiterate this in more concrete terms. As a dance student one is taught various figures and techniques. And, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, somewhere *in the process* of learning the various concrete tasks associated with dancing (musical timing, foot placement and usage, frame, leading or following, and so on) one comes to be a dancer. Just as it is not clear when someone transitions from being a person who plays basketball to being a basketball player, so to with any other practice and, in this case, with ballroom and salsa. Part of this transition though, involves a shift in attention and perception. As one watches others dancing one comes to see something different from the non-dancer.

The dancer no longer watches a couple rehearsing their jive and think, "hmmm, somehow that looks too light," but, instead, starts to recognize that there is



not enough foot pressure being used and that the couple is only dancing “down” to the surface of the floor and not pushing into it. Or, watching another couple’s cha cha, the dancer no longer thinks “for some reason that doesn’t look as ‘sharp’ or ‘clean’ as I’ve seen,” but, instead, starts to recognize that the couple’s timing is “fuzzy,” dancing their cha-cha-cha as a triplet across two beats of music instead of the syncopated cha-cha-CHA, or half-half-whole beat, of competitive ballroom. But it does not end there, for as the dancer starts to make such evaluations and realizations they also come to know who shares their new evaluative frame and who does not. And it is in this way that shared practice also generates shared identification. Shared practices thus enable, facilitate, and “allow people to form social networks along which knowledge about that practice can both travel rapidly and be assimilated readily” (Brown and Duguid 2002:141).

A final point to be made concerns the role of commitment in making the shift from being someone who dances, or plays basketball, or anything else, to being a dancer or a basketball player. This does not mean that there needs to be or even that there is often a deliberate conscious commitment to become a “\_\_\_” but, instead, a commitment to the practice (for whatever reasons that may be). Just because someone keeps attending dance classes does not mean that they will become a dancer. Certainly they will become more of a dancer than if they never attended a dance class, but they will never be as much of a dancer as if they choose, for whatever reasons, to try and learn from their classes. The boyfriend or husband who comes to a ballroom studio with his girlfriend or wife but clearly would rather not be there is not an unusual sight

to the social ballroom instructor, just as it is far from uncommon during introductory lessons at a salsa club. This is not to say that these men may not change their minds, or that it is always the men and not the women who are the reluctant participants, but the pattern—at least in North America—is consistent enough to be readily recognizable as such.

### **Practice and Commitment**

As much as the shared focus and understandings are part of the sharing intrinsic to and generative of communities of practice, so to is the implicitly recognized sharing of commitment to that practice. This is easily recognized in the workplace where the office shirker is not seen by others as really belonging. The point is not that everyone else working there loves their jobs (as well they may not), but that everyone else is committed (to varying extents of course) to doing the work they need to do. A new office intern might get less actual work done, but if they demonstrate—through effort—that they are committed to doing their job, they will be viewed far more favorably than the shirker, despite actually accomplishing less.

A vivid example of this dynamic comes from my time working as a volunteer worker on Kibbutz Ketura (September 2004–November 2005). During my first few months at Ketura most of the volunteers were assigned to a variety of agricultural jobs, jobs such as planting onions, planting melons, picking pomelos, picking melons, and working in the packing house. Some of the volunteers were better at certain tasks than others, and some were just all around more suited to these various forms of (largely) physical labor. The point, however, is that how much each person actually got done

was not of very great significance so long as it was clear that they were “doing their best,” while the volunteers who were clearly slacking were socially shunned. Thus, while all of the members had a practice in common, those who demonstrated commitment to that practice were more centrally positioned within our community of practice whereas those who demonstrated less commitment to our practice were more peripherally located within our community of practice.

A parallel example of this same dynamic—of commitment to a practice being both generative and reflective of belonging to a community of practice—comes from my time on the UCSD DanceSport team, first as a member (1999-2002), and then as Co-Captain (2000-2001). The year I was Co-Captain of the team we had an almost entirely new set of students dancing on the competitive formation team, almost all without prior ballroom experience or background. It almost goes without saying that some students had much greater aptitude and picked up the choreography and technique of the routines much more quickly than others. While those who picked up the material at a slower pace did provide their fair share of frustration—both to their dance partners and to the coach and captains of the team—I never saw or heard of any feeling or sentiment of resentment directed towards these students by the others training alongside them.<sup>20</sup> The students who were resented and criticized both by staff members and other team members were those who made mistakes and were otherwise disruptive because they were not putting in the effort or paying attention. So here too, like the volunteers on kibbutz, while everyone on the team had a practice in common, those whose commitment was demonstrated in their efforts were largely centrally

positioned within the community of practice, while those whose lack of commitment was demonstrated through their lack of effort were more located more peripherally in our community of practice.

### **Shared Texts and Information**

Another important element in the linking of shared practice with shared identity concerns shared texts. I am not saying that shared texts are fundamental to shared identity in the same way as is commitment but, as Benedict Anderson (1991) makes clear, shared documents can play a significant role in the “imagining” of shared belonging and membership. Following in Anderson’s conceptual footsteps, Brown and Duguid note that “shared and circulating documents...have long provided interesting social glue” (2002:190). Beyond Anderson’s imagining however, it is because shared information often serves as a proxy for shared interests that “a sense of community arises from reading the same text” (Brown and Duguid 2002:199). When I read *Dance Beat* in the US for example, or *Dance News* in the UK, I know that I am “taking in” practice (in this case dance) specific information and that others who share this practice do the same. And, in a way, such texts relate back to issues of commitment since those perusing this information are already demonstrating some interest and commitment to gleaning the information specific to such sources.

Beyond printed texts, however, “the power of shared documents to bind people together into communities, large and small, creating a common sense of purpose and social identity” (Brown and Duguid 2002:197) also needs to be understood in relation to the World Wide Web where. DanceSportInfo.net, for instance, provides

competition results from around the world and, just as with printed texts, when I look at the latest results (or research older ones) I know that I am looking at texts that only others who share my specific practice are likely to access on any regular basis. So here too, as with the printed page, there is an intrinsic realization that others accessing this same information must share, at least in some measure, the same commitments and interests. Of course the internet does not exist in a vacuum. Many competitors have thus seen—if not met or taken lessons from—many of the top dancers regularly appearing in the listings of event finalists provides for an even easier association of shared identity.

Going even farther, however, in the age of the internet many communities exist almost (or even) entirely *through* shared text. Again, the texts themselves are not generative of community, but the shared interest and commitment represented by texts, coupled with the procedures, policies, and flavor of different internet groups, forums, and bulletin boards highlight common practices and identifications. Dance-Forums.com, for instance, provides separate genre specific forums (Ballroom, Salsa, Swing, Argentine Tango, and Country and Western) as well as more general ones. Most members have a clear interest in dance, so that is something in common, but the frequency and regularity of cross dance genre communication is rarely, if ever, at the levels common on Dance-Forums.com. Thus, while some dance related interest brings most members to the site, the commitment demonstrated by posting, especially in regular postings that engage other members, gives rise to a shared sense of engagement and identification. The feeling of a shared identity is regularly exhibited

on line through regular use of terminology such as “we,” “us,” “all of us here,” as well as “DFers” and “DFites,” and Dance Forums members also go out of their way to try meeting up at the dance events.<sup>21</sup>

## **Shared Stories**

Whether printed, online, or spoken, shared stories play an important role in linking shared practices and shared identities. Some of the value of such stories—and the work they do in linking shared practice with shared identity—lies in the common interests and commitments evoked in their telling and reception. “The value of stories,” as Brown and Duguid point out, “however, lies not just in their telling, but in their retelling. Stories pass on to newcomers what old-timers already know. Stories are thus central to learning and education” (2002:107). Stories thus serve as one of the avenues whereby Lave and Wenger’s (1995) “legitimate peripheral participation” is negotiated. Stories are told and information is both assimilated and passed on to others in retellings; and, as someone becomes more familiar with a practice, new meanings and understanding of old stories may also start to emerge or become clearer.

As with any other texts or discussions, however, “it is not shared stories or shared information so much as shared interpretation that binds people together” (Brown and Duguid 2002: 107). The telling of stories within the ballroom or salsa world are not just random accumulations of facts, but intentionally framed episodes and details that have a meanings understood by other dancers; meanings about performance, partnering, music, practicing, travel, aesthetics, social positioning, or

myriad other such items. And, as Brown and Duguid also note, “stories, moreover, convey not only specific information but also general principles” (2002:107). Thus, while non-dancers are not precluded from understanding or sharing in the information and principles being conveyed in dancers’ stories, it is certainly less likely that non-dancers, lacking the dancers’ frame of reference, will interpret (and hence appreciate) all of the same nuances, meanings, and understandings shared between dancers. Finally, while the content of such stories will be taken up in Section III as part of the ballroom and salsa cultures, the role of such stories in creating and transmitting both information and belonging is an important dynamic in the social structure of these communities as well (and so introduced here, in Chapter Three).

### **Peripheral Practices**

A final topic I want to address regarding the interrelationship between shared practice and shared identity concerns peripheral practices, which are practices not directly germane to the primary practice around which a community of practice evolves, but which still add to the communality of that community of practice none the less. There are obviously many such practices but the one that most readily jumps to mind concerns greeting rituals. The difference in greeting rituals between salsa and ballroom (also marking them as culturally different from one another) was vividly brought home to me one night when Janice, a member of the UCSD DanceSport team showed up at one of my regular salsa clubs. In this particular case Janice was not part of the handful of us who regularly (at least at that time) crossed back and forth between the two groups but, as I was in salsa “mode” at the time, I went to give Janice

a hug and a kiss on the cheek as I would typically greet any salsa I had known for some time. Janice's physical flinch and obvious shock at this greeting—unlike any greeting I had ever extended her in dancesport settings—took me by surprise for an instant, until I realized the dichotomy she was experiencing. My reaction was scene-specific, salsa club equaling hug and kiss greeting, whereas her reaction as a non-salsa, was person-specific, and that was not the norm of the relationship we shared in the dancesport scene. As with stories the details of such cultural practices will be elaborated in Section III, but, for the moment, I just wanted to touch on the importance of peripheral practices, such as greeting rituals, in marking membership, solidarity, community, and belonging.<sup>22</sup>

### **Dispersed Networks**

Although directed toward spatial analyses of regional systems in contemporary China, anthropologist William Skinner's regional system analysis and research approach (e.g. Skinner 1980, 1985) is a productive lens for examining and understanding dispersed community networks. Avoiding the fallacy—logical, methodological, and experientially lived—that the sites" and "places" that matter are always geographically based or bounded, Skinner aptly notes that "regions can be demarcated descriptively *or functionally*" (1980: 1, emphasis added). "A functional region," Skinner goes on to note, "is a territorially based system of human interaction," which "is manifested as *patterned movements* – flows of goods and services, money and credit, messages and symbols, and of persons in their multifarious roles and statuses" (1980:1, emphasis added). The important point being made (both



here and at the end of Chapter Two) is not that local places do not matter but, rather, that how they matter is often influenced, and indeed may even be contingent upon, their placement and role relative to larger and wider social, political, cultural, and economic (just to name a few of the more prominent) considerations and influences. Local systems after all (or regional ones in Skinner's terms), are embedded within and contextualized by larger considerations and surrounds.<sup>23</sup>

Skinner's regional system approach also provides a methodological commitment as well, positing that "time should be periodized and space regionalized by functional rather than arbitrary or mechanical criteria" (1980:3)—a point paralleling my own call for an activity versus location based (e.g. Marion 2006 in press). Again, the point here is not to negate, discount, or discredit the importance of local place but, instead, to root its significance in its how it is conceptualized and utilized rather than in the ground itself. Skinner is also carrying this framing across to time as well, suggesting that ethnographic validity and understanding are compromised if time is not parsed according to its use rather than any abstract model with which the anthropologist may be familiar (no matter how widely held). These concepts, while important in all cases, are particularly significant in dealing with the complex, dispersed communities that I introduced in Chapter Two and which I focus on in this chapter.

### **Ballroom and Skinner's Regional-Systems Approach**

Although primarily geared towards the exchange of goods, Skinner's regional-systems approach also works well in tracing and understanding the interrelationships

between various facets of the dance community. More importantly, it helps unpack these relationships between various social nodes, and thereby illuminating the interconnections, practices, and flows that are constitutive of dispersed communities. “Common goods in heavy demand are available in all centers at whatever level,” notes Skinner, for instance, “whereas more specialized goods are available only at higher-order centers in accordance with the extent of their range. Thus, the set of goods supplied by a more complex center includes all goods supplied by simpler centers plus an increment of different higher-order goods” (Skinner 1980:5). While a simple enough proposition on its own, and easily enough accepted as far as products, the same is also true of intellectual production, services, and skills are concerned as well. London thus emerges as the highest-level center of ballroom dance in the world, because it offers all of the introductory and social lessons of classes available in any town with even a single studio, but a sizable contingent of the most the most refined, skilled, and knowledgeable instructors in the world as well.

“Higher-level centers,” as Skinner also notes, “purvey more specialized goods and consequently have more extensive maximal hinterlands than lower level centers do. The two key concepts here are the *demand threshold* of the supplier and the *range* of a good” (1980: 4, original emphasis). So how does this help explain the complex and dispersed communities of ballroom and salsa dancers? In several ways. First, this formulation accounts for the fact that goods—and services—are not of static value as they must always be understood, appreciated, and assigned value contextually. Second, this formulation highlights how the presence of goods/services not available

in (using Skinner's terminology) lower level centers helps draw interest from further a field to higher level centers.

In noting the roles of demand threshold and range, Skinner's model helps set up quantifiable parameters for understanding levels of belonging, participation, and commitment within a dispersed translocal community. How far, for instance, are dancers willing to travel for lessons? How far for group classes? How far for private lessons, and with whom? How far for elite coaching? Obviously each person's answer will vary based on any number of individual considerations and variables but, in comparing responses, three items begin to sort themselves out. First, and most straightforward, certain destinations—and persons—emerge as “higher-level centers” within the dance community. Second, a general map of lower, middle, and higher level centers starts to emerge. And third, each respondent's relative positioning within the network of centers can also start to be assessed. Before I continue, let me provide a brief example of how this type of analysis can be used to trace some of patterning in the ballroom circuit.

Todd and Karen are considered rather isolated by competitive ballroom standards, despite living in a city of a little over half a million. Why? They quickly surpassed the local instruction available to them, both within their home city or even within 100 miles thereof. So what did Todd and Karen do? Obviously they had to start commuting for lessons if they were serious about developing their dancing and progressing with their competitive careers. But where did they go for lessons, who did they get lessons from, and how did they choose? Given the nature of ballroom

coaching, it can be cheaper for a couple to fly a coach into their local studio than to travel to that coach (e.g. airfare and meals out for one instead of two). This is not always workable, however, as most coaches expect a certain number of paid coaching hours per day and, in Todd and Karen's case, there were not enough other dancers at a high enough level to know who the coaches Todd and Karen wanted to bring in were let alone at a level where they were ready to book coaching with them. For Todd and Karen this meant a couple of different commutes needed to be arranged: (1) to drive the greater than one hundred miles needed to get some "basic" coaching of a level that would suit them; and (2) to fly, when they could make arrangements for it, to get the higher level coaching they were really seeking.

Some of the considerations that can be traced through Todd and Karen's situation include: the absence of higher level coaching in their home city; the location of a "basic" coach that they could work with; and the location of a more elite coach whom they wanted to work with. The very fact that Todd and Karen quickly rose to the top of their local scene also helps explain the lack of sufficient coaching to propel them forward. Without students of a certain caliber a teacher's skills are wasted—economically speaking—in becoming more specialized. The same effort is better applied to gaining more generalized expertise and thereby more favorably positioning one's self as an appropriate teacher for a wider range of clients. Without the economic base to support specialization, generalizing is the only strategy that provides a full economic return on a teacher's own continuing knowledge development. Basic social or wedding dance instruction is thus available almost everywhere that ballroom is

taught whereas higher levels of competitive training are not since, to reiterate Skinner's phrasing formulation noted above, "common goods in heavy demand are available in all centers at whatever level, whereas more specialized goods are available only at higher-order centers" (1980:5).

Following through to the second half of Skinner's point, that "the set of goods supplied by a more complex center includes all goods supplied by simpler centers plus an increment of different higher-order goods" (1980:5), makes sense, as the markets that can support more skilled specialized instructors—that is, those places that have enough economic demand for that level of coaching—are likely to still have demand for the less specialized services as well. Taken together then such dynamics generate different social, economic, and instructional strata within more complex centers that are lacking in the less complex ones. The greater than 100 mile commute for Todd and Karen thus represents the distance that they needed to travel to reach a sufficiently more complex dance "center" to meet some of their deepening instructional needs; but not all of them. Just as none of Todd and Karen's growing coaching needs could be met within their home city, their "drive to" city was only somewhat more complex as far as their growing skills and needs were concerned. The important point here is that there can be no simple division between complex centers and non-complex, or simple ones, but, rather, an ongoing calculus of more versus less complex ones.

An important point to make here is that none of this suggests that Todd and Karen's home city is a less complex center, in any general way, than their "drive to" city, but only that it represents a less complex center *for ballroom dancing*. Just as one

university might offer a much stronger graduate program in anthropology while another university has a much stronger literature department, so too with other goods and services—the complexity (or lack thereof) of a center is always relative to specific goods, networks, and services, and not a uniformly blanketing level of complexity. Certainly the demand threshold of an area (defined by Skinner as the “purchasing power per unit of area”) will vary based on the density of both population and resources, allowing certain areas and places to represent more complex centers for a greater number of goods and services. The larger the base population, for instance, the greater the demand for basic services and the more likely, statistically speaking, the demand for any given specialized good or service. And, similarly, the greater the number of people interested in any specific specialized good or service the higher the base population.

Trends towards greater complexity and specialization based on base population, and adjusting for the resource base of that population, are still only that: trends. Natural, social, and cultural climate, as well as congruencies and accidents of history will all also play a part in the development of different market centers. Despite being several magnitudes larger, for instance, New York City does not represent as strong a center for surfing as does San Diego, and Phoenix does not represent as strong a center for skiing as does Vale. This type of non-base-number based differentiation for specific interests and industries is not, as noted above, limited to differences natural climate alone. Certain industries become dominant in specific places for any number of reasons, so the relatively comparable population sizes for

Todd and Karen's home and "drive to" cities cannot explain, on its own, the differences in the coaching resources available in each. And it is in exactly this way that higher-level and lower-level centers need to be understood as case specific and not more general, "overall" descriptors.

Although Todd and Karen's home and "drive to" cities are of almost comparable population, and although the presence of more specialized coaching available at their "drive to" city sets it as a higher order center for ballroom dancing, the two cities/centers should not be considered and cannot be understood except in relation to each other (and other related centers). "Centers at one level are interdependent with their neighbors at adjacent levels," as Skinner notes, and "the *tributary nature* of the system means that larger centers draw trade from nearby smaller centers and thus restrict their commercial growth" (1980:5, emphasis added). Because of its status as a larger center Todd and Karen's "drive to" city draws dancers from smaller centers but, in so doing, also draws away the demand for greater specialization (in this case in ballroom coaching) from the smaller center of their home city.

As already noted, however, even Todd and Karen's "drive to" city only provided access to "basic" coaching of a level that suited them, and they had to fly to a yet higher-level level center to get the caliber of coaching which they were really seeking. Looking at which centers have the widest draw—Skinner's "more extensive maximal hinterlands" (1980:4)—thus illuminates the level of a center for a specific good or activity even without understanding the levels of specialization involved.

Long before I understand the “who’s who” of the competitive ballroom world-circuit, for instance, I already knew that almost everyone considered London to be *the* place to go for serious competitors. As such, and following on the activity based model of anthropology that I introduced in Chapter Two (also see Marion 2005a, 2005b, 2006), assessing patterns of activity across space provides empirical grounds—rather than *a priori* assumptions—for recognizing the importance of certain places; such as London for the most serious ballroom dance competitors. Place matters precisely because, in so far, and how it matters to people after all.

Looking at where Todd and Karen needed to go in order to find the level of coaching they were seeking thus helps identify an even higher order center of ballroom dancing than their “drive to” city. For Todd and Karen, this place ended up being New York City, the highest order center for ballroom in the US and, by many pertinent people’s estimations, only second to London worldwide.

One of the natural outgrowths of such “centering” is, of course, that not all locations or lower-level centers, and hence people, have equal access to the higher level centers. What this means, effectively, is that “centers at the same level in the hierarchy [of complexity] are differently favored in terms of location in relation to higher-level centers” (Skinner 1980:6), and, as such, that like-level centers are not necessarily functionally like-level nodes in the larger webs of distribution and interconnected ebbs and flows of commerce. If Boston and Seattle represented like-level ballroom centers (which I am not saying that they do), for instance, Boston’s far greater proximity to the higher-level center of New York City would privilege Boston



as a location for ballroom above the (in this scenario) like-leveled center of Seattle. An important caveat to keep in mind here, however, is that favored location cannot accurately be assessed by simple by geographic proximity but, rather, must also take account for ease of access.<sup>24</sup>

Despite living in higher-order center than a Danish dancer for example—and thus having ready access to more specialized training—a dancer in New York is disadvantaged relative to their Danish counterpart as far as access to the highest-level center of London is concerned. It is for exactly such reasons that many European dancers are privileged in a way that even New York based dancers are not, despite living and training in lower-order centers than their New York based counterparts. Ease of access from one center to other, higher-order centers, thus privileges certain centers in a manner not fully calculable on internal specialization alone. Yet ease of access to higher-order centers is not an unmixed bag, as “transport efficiency has an effect on the spacing of centers...that countervails the effect of demand density” (Skinner 1980:14). At the same time as ease of access to London privileges many European dancers, that same ease of access also redirects the actual demand density away from those dancers’ own local centers (except, of course, for those for whom London is home).

While other factors—such as standard of living, base-population, and employment demand (via Pro/am)—certainly factor in as well, the relative access distance between New York and London certainly contributes to New York City’s emergence as a top tier center for ballroom. This is at least partially an outcome of the

distributory pressure applied by ease of access in that, “at any given level of the central place hierarchy, then, peripheral cities will be likely to have fewer firms in the same line of business than core cities, and thus less competition” (Skinner 1980:14), and this is seen throughout the ballroom world, with more remote locations almost always offering fewer options as far as teachers, training, workshops, and studios. And this is indeed the case as illustrated and experienced by Todd and Karen, who need to drive over 100 miles for at least a base level of coaching unavailable to them in their peripheral city, and must fly to New York City for the coaching they most want.

### **Skill-based Centers: People as Mobile Regions**

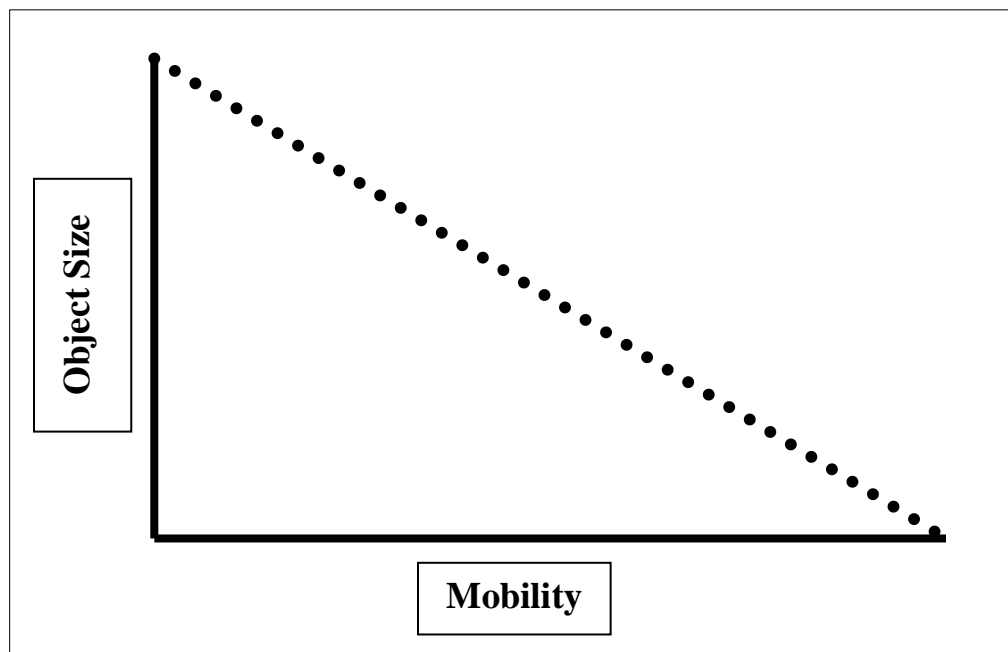
While Skinner’s regional-systems approach does make sense and certainly helps explain and account for much of the distribution of ballroom centers across the landscape, it needs to be adapted to more fully fit and explain the social systems, distributions, and networks of service-based industries like ballroom and salsa dancing. Where Skinner’s model includes services, it is still based on tangible goods. As such, the mobility of services (relative to goods) is not as fully accounted for as it could be and, for certain service sectors, probably ought to be. Note that the base model of regional-systems approach still holds, as certain locations clearly emerge as higher-order centers for certain service industries while other (smaller scale) locations may not even offer such services. London and New York City do, after all, represent highest-order centers for ballroom than do Boston or Seattle, Copenhagen or Madrid. Still, service sectors both represent and allow for a different order of mobility, and this

has important implications in tracing and understanding of service sector based industries such as ballroom and salsa.

The requisite skills for service based industries allow for a mobility of service that is largely unmatched for goods based economies. As such, the points of specialization that demarcate higher-order centers from lower-order ones are not as fixed as would often be true for and as a goods-based model might otherwise suggest. Services are not free floating; they are skill-based and, as such, carried, enacted, and performed by persons. Now certainly many (perhaps most) goods also depend on skills, be it in collection, processing, crafting, distribution, or any other number of ways. Still, the very fact that goods, by their very nature and definition depend not only on skill but also on physical objects provides for a limiting factor. The renowned sculptor is obviously a highly skilled artisan, but these skills cannot be expressed in the absence of the physical objects of his or her craft, be it stone, or metal, or some other substance, as well as the tools appropriate to each. The skills related to goods are thus of a different nature, at least as far as issues of mobility are concerned, than self-contained skills such as those of a therapist, a lawyer, or a dancer,<sup>25</sup> and as illustrated on the plot of Table 3.1 below.

As Table 3.1 illustrates, object size is inversely related to mobility. The larger the physical objects associated with any craft or industry, the lower the (potential) mobility of those involved. Of course this trend needs to be understood not a causative variable, but as a limiting one. Working with small objects, say watch repair specialist, does not, after all, cause those in these industries to travel but, rather, allows them to

in a way that would not be possible for, say a potter or an auto mechanic.<sup>26</sup> Because the entirety of a dance instructor's skill and knowledge is self-contained, the service they offer can be provided where ever they happen to be. What this means for the dance industry (and other, parallel, service industries), is that industry and activity based centers are not entirely fixed and are, at least somewhat, mobile and transitory.



**Figure 3.1: Inverse Relationship of Physical Object Size vs. Potential Mobility**

As noted in the section above, dancers do not always go to coaches; they also bring coaches to them. This means that the points of greatest specialization (Skinner's calculus for higher-order centers) are not fixed for service based industries such as dance. If "a center's level...is determined by the availability in it of specialized goods [or services] not obtainable at a lower level" (Skinner 1980:14), then the location of the most elite (specialized) dance instructors is, by definition, a center the highest

order, and if those instructors can move and travel—as they do—then what defines, counts as, and constitutes the centers of dance move and travel as well.

Far from merely being a theoretical consideration or point of interest, the assertion that specific persons—as repositories of specialized skills—can and do both serve and function as mobile regional cores and centers within the service sector is readily attested to and in evidence within the ballroom and salsa worlds. Various annual events—such as salsa congresses and ballroom dance camps and competitions—are important centers of their respective dance industries precisely (even if not only) in so far as they bring together and represent concentrations of the top dancers and teachers (i.e. those with the most specialized skills). There is an obvious interplay between persons and locations here, as not everyone of a certain skill level always travels to the same locations. Yet the same events attract many of the top dancers and teachers at the same times and for interrelated reasons, which brings up issues of timing, a topic I shall be returning to quite shortly. Before discussing such temporal dispersions though, I want to provide a few dance related cases and examples of how people, as self-contained skill-based centers, can serve as the nexus of mobile regions.

Normally a dancer would travel to New York or London for coaching in order to work with certain top-tier dancers and coaches. And these locations serve as top-order centers for such training precisely in so far as they are home to the top-tier dancers and coaches in question. But these dancers and coaches are not at home year round and, in point of fact, the more elite the person in question the greater the

demand for them to visit other sites on the dance map worldwide, and traveling this circuit is an important piece of the game for both upper level competitors and coaches alike. Competitors build status by competing well but gain recognition and a following by competing widely as well, and doing well in competitions is what brings opportunities to do shows and to teach.<sup>27</sup> And, similarly, coaches build demand by judging both widely and at top-tier events. What this means is that the elite competitors and coaches travel widely as an integral dynamic of their own careers and, as such, are often not at home—thus mobilizing the specialized resource represented by their person and setting it (via themselves) in play as a mobile resource and center of dance.

What good does it do to go to New York to train with the current US champions, for instance, if they are elsewhere (be it in the US or overseas) doing shows and coaching? Similarly, at the times of local salsa congresses or ballroom competitions, or of significant national or international congresses or competitions, many (if not most) of the top-tier dancers will be in attendance and hence not at home, temporarily casting the site of the event in question as a high-order dance center and, in all probability, a much higher order city—at that moment—then the home city where they normally reside. Major competitions in the US, for instance, events such as the Ohio Star Ball, the USDSC, the Embassy Ball, the Emerald Ball, and the Holiday Classic all draw a large percentage of the top professional dancers and coaches from throughout the country. During any of these events (and some others) there is no greater concentration of specialized knowledge anywhere in the country so, at those

times, those locations and, more specifically, those events are, in fact, the highest-order centers of ballroom in the country.

This same dynamic is also at work on the world scale during several major events, the most prominent of which are Blackpool, the International, and the UK (all held in England). During any of these events, there is no place on earth that has more specialized dance knowledge. This same dynamic is at work for major salsa congresses as well, such as the West Coast Salsa Congress (held in Los Angeles) which is the largest such event in the world. Indeed, during the LA congress there is no place on the face of the globe with a greater concentration of specialized salsa skills and knowledge, making that event, temporarily, the highest order-center of salsa dancing in the world. What this means is that even if London is regularly the highest-order center of the ballroom world, and that even if New York is regularly the highest-order center of the salsa world, these are not invariant social truths on a year round basis as a comparison between my first two field visits to London well shows.

My first field visit to London was in May of 2002, during the two weeks leading up to Blackpool while my second field visit to London took place later that summer, in August of 2002. To say that I visited different places would be inaccurate but—separate from inevitable changes across times which are true of any location—any assertion that I visited the same place would be inaccurate as well. Before Blackpool many of the competitors who regularly train and reside elsewhere descend on London for coaching and training. This mass influx of dancers can be understood in two ways. First, for many of the dancers coming to Blackpool this is there only

opportunity to visit England (and London in particular), to get coaching from some of the top specialists who are not otherwise available to them, and to train and practice alongside the best in the world. Since they will already be traveling to England for the Blackpool competition anyway, many dancers from around the globe add a stop in London along their way, in order to take advantage of these opportunities. Indeed several of the couples I observed spent hours waiting at Stopford's (one of the four elite studios located in South London) on the hope of being able to take any open lesson blocks that might end become available.

The influx of dancers to London just prior to Blackpool can also be understood in a second, complimentary capacity as well since, up until 2004, only British Blackpool champions (of any division) judged at Blackpool.<sup>28</sup> As such, taking lessons and training in London also involved being seen—a very important factor further explicated in Chapter Five—by the very same coaches who adjudicate at Blackpool (either that year or another) and numerous other top-tier competitions worldwide. It should come as little surprise then that, during my first field visit to London during this time, I observed lessons being taught by many of the top coaches in the world, and witnessed practice rounds being danced by as many as half of the Blackpool finalists on a given night. While I was able to elicit some brief response and to generate some minor exchanges, with few exceptions what was much harder to do was to arrange for any sit down interviews, especially with the top-tier coaches I was first encountering during this visit. Not to see the energy and effort expended in building up to Blackpool would have left a vital element of the world dancesport scene unaccounted for, but this



scene is also far from representative of the regular, year round, London ballroom scene either.

Compared with my pre-Blackpool visit to London, my second field visit three months later, in August of 2002, presented a distinctly different situation and markedly different impression. If the pre-Blackpool London presented an overloading of instructors and dancers all in London at the same time, the summer presented the opposite, with many of the London regulars being away out of town. As I found out from many of the London-based instructors as I tried to contact them via email in order to set up interviews for my return visit, the summer months are used for personal time off, vacations, and for travel to teach, especially to Japan.<sup>29</sup> The majority of coaches and dancers in London during this time had no problem finding and taking the time to sit down for an interview but, as already mentioned, many were away in direct contrast to my first visit when everyone was "home" but almost no one was available. As the contrast between the "Londons" of my first two field visits reveals, even as a center of ballroom dance, London is not just one place or even a center of only one order (e.g. the highest-order). Rather, London needs to be seen as a center subject to fluctuations as the following figures and descriptions suggest.

**1. London (pre-Blackpool): ~100%**

**2. London (Average): ~100% - X**

**3. London (Summer): ~100% -X -Y**

According to these formulas: (1) London is at its peak as a center for ballroom activity in the pre-Blackpool period; (2) that, on average, London is down X% from its pre-Blackpool peak, as a certain percentage of the London-based coaches and dancers regularly travel to teach, judge, and compete; and (3) that over the summer an additional percentage of the London-based dance population travels as well, sometimes for vacation but often to teach in Japan or elsewhere. This model works as far as demonstrating the ebb and flow of dance specialists in London—and hence London’s status as a center of ballroom dance activity—but it also combines the London and non-London based dancers found in London just prior to Blackpool. While this works as far as understanding the absolute number of dancers in London, it does not provide as nuanced an understanding of the world ballroom circuit as can a more complex formulation, and thus misrepresents—or at least flattens—the nature and texture of the fuller ballroom circuit.

Trying to take exactly these factors into account suggests the following formulations, where **L** is London-based coaches and dancers, **NL** is non-London-based coaches and dancers, **x** is the base number of London-based coaches and dancers in London year-round, **y** is the difference between the base number represented by **x** and the average number of London-based coaches and dancers in London year-round, **z** is the difference between **x + y** and the full contingent of London-based coaches and dancers, **a** is the base number of non-London-based coaches and dancers in London year-round, **b** is the difference between the base number represented by **x** and the average number of non-London-based coaches and

dancers in London year-round,  $c$  is the difference between  $a + b$  and the full contingent of non-London-based coaches and dancers who are typically present pre-Blackpool:

$$1. \text{ London (pre-Blackpool): } L(x + y + z) + NL(a + b + c)$$

$$2. \text{ London (Average): } L(x + y) + NL(a + b)$$

$$3. \text{ London (Summer): } L(x) + NL(a)$$

What this second formulation helps unpack is that there are a certain number of London-based dancers and coaches who are in London year-round, a larger number who are in London most of the time, that the almost full compliment of London-based dancers and coaches are present pre-Blackpool, that there are a certain number of non-London-based dancers and coaches who are in London year-round, a larger number who are in London most of the time, and an even larger contingent of non-London-based dancers and coaches who are present pre-Blackpool. Of course the actual dancers and coaches (both London-based and non-London-based) in London at any govern point are always changing with some coming in as others are going out.

Additionally, the formulations presented so far are only based on the high and low points that I, myself, observed when, in fact, everyone I have spoken with agrees that it is during Blackpool itself that London is at the very lowest numbers of the most specialized elite dancers and coaches. Indeed, someone unfamiliar with the ballroom circuit and calendar, visiting London during Blackpool would not understand how anyone could argue that London was a significant center for ballroom—let alone the

highest-order center of ballroom in the world—since all the specialists who constitute it as such would be absent at that time.

As the proceeding explication demonstrates, as loci of specialization, the more skill-based the center the more mobile it is, and the less wedded to physical place and geography. London, for example, represents a wide and fluctuating range of ballroom specialization ranging from a peak, unmatched throughout the rest of the year, in the couple of weeks leading up to Blackpool to a an equally unmatched trough during Blackpool. Specific cities certainly serve as ballroom centers as all dancers and coaches have somewhere that they spend more time than anywhere else (even if not most of their time). Given that the likelihood of finding a given person is highest—when averaged out across time—in that specific location, that city represents that dancer’s degree of specialization more so than does any other city and, as a result, duly derives recognition as a center where that degree of specialization is available (even if not all the time). Even if the dance population of London is in constant flux, more World and Blackpool champions are based and live there than in any other city in the world and, if someone was to randomly pick any date on the calendar, the odds would be higher for finding more of the highest level coaches and dancers in London than in any other city. In the end, locations can and do represent and serve as centers of ballroom; but such attributions and functional roles still need to be recognized, viewed, and understood as functioning along a continuum, with ongoing, regular and irregular fluctuations of activity across time.

## **Periodicity: Networks and Temporal Dispersion**

As the example of London provided above starts to show, centers are not static across time. Fluctuations across time are rarely random however and, indeed, the periodicity of fluctuations is as much a part of the social structure and network as are the locations involved. This is not to discredit the importance of certain locations—London is London after all—but, instead, highlights the temporal as well as geographic dispersion of networks of specialization: for the ballroom dancer, the pre-Blackpool London is not, and cannot be, the same place as London during Blackpool.<sup>30</sup> As Skinner points out, after all, “there is, of course, no such thing as a steady state in any system; rather one sees continual flux, mutual interaction, and feedback” (Skinner 1985:281). Such fluctuations, interactions, and feedback, however, neither make nor mark social network any less systematic however; they only allow for a more robust consideration and evaluation inclusive of temporality.

Daily conditions are not identical on a year-round basis no matter the group, locations, society, or organization in question. Climates change, be it regular seasonal variations, unseasonably mild or extreme variations, or even natural disasters. In the course of regular human life some babies are born, children grow, some people get married, some people get sick, some people get better, some people become enfeebled, and some people pass away. Economies can shift and economic structures, fortunes, and regulations can adapt or collapse. Technologies, communications, and transportation can all change, whether dealing with international commerce or subsistence level farming. Since no activity or industry is divorced from such shifts in

the circumstances of daily life, the sequences and progressions of day-to-day living reflect forces and circumstances larger than individually lived lives.

As a widely and deeply contextualizing element of both personal and communal living, economic activity—including all the practices, structures, rules, and regulations involved therein—set much of the stage whereon, and circumstance wherewith, lives are crafted and lived. It is in exactly this way that “pulsations of economic activity” give rise to “basic life rhythms” (Skinner 1980:23), and the schedules of salsa congresses and ballroom competitions structure the waxing and waning tides of salsa and ballroom dance activity respectively. Returning to an example used above, Blackpool is a specific, yearly event which, as the pinnacle of the most elite ballroom activity in the world, drives the nature and pattern of ballroom activity in London. What has gone unaddressed in this example, however, is that London is just one of the many, many cities impacted by Blackpool. Many lower-level centers empty out before Blackpool as dancers flock to higher-order centers for “last minute” preparation, practice, and training whereas London receives this pre-Blackpool influx but, during Blackpool, almost all centers of competitive ballroom activity will, like London, be at their lowest levels of the year.

As Figure 3.1 depicts, the ebb and flow of both London-based and non-London-based dancers can be seen as taking place along a continuum based on Blackpool, where the minimum amount of ballroom activity for London takes place during Blackpool and the maximum amount of ballroom activity for London takes place leading up to Blackpool.



**Figure 3.2: Blackpool-based ballroom activity continuum for London**

An important point worth reiterating at this juncture is why I have been using Blackpool and London as my primary examples. Blackpool is the highest-order periodic and transitory center of ballroom activity in the world,<sup>31</sup> just as London is the highest-order “fixed” center of ballroom activity in the world. Blackpool and London thus serve as epitomotic examples for these two types of centers—periodic/transitory and “fixed”—and also help demonstrate the activity-based sociotemporal relationship between them. Similar dynamics, even if on smaller scales, are also in play around other centers. The UK Championships (held in January) and the International (held in October), both located in the greater London area, give rise to the same type of phenomenon as does Blackpool, just on a smaller scale. Peaks and lulls can thus be seen in the London dance scene, with increased local and non-local activity leading up to the UK in January, Blackpool at the end of May, and the International in October, each soon followed by troughs of personnel and activity, with other competitions in other countries (such as the GOC and the USDSC), also serving as comparable higher-order periodic and transitory centers for Ballroom activity.

I have also been using Blackpool and London as my primary examples because, as the highest-order centers, they are the most significant to the overall

ballroom circuit worldwide. Up until quite recently almost all of the more serious competitors had spent considerable time living in London as it was *the* place to get coaching and to train and even today all of the most serious competitors have spent at least some time in London, be it on an extended visit or on more frequent shorter visits.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, as what amounts to the ingathering of the clan, Blackpool is the single most important ballroom event in the world. More than anywhere else on the globe, it is where reputations are made and champions rise and fall. The latest trends and fashions in ballroom costuming always premiere at Blackpool, setting the standards for the year to come, and the schedules of coaches, dancers, studios, and major vendors the world over all orient toward Blackpool.

London and Blackpool both set context and serve as litmus tests for all things ballroom. That being said, these same dynamics exist in other centers as well, albeit to lesser extents (depending on the “height” of the centers in questions), and it is important to remember that all centers (including both London and Blackpool) function in relation to each other. The largest ballroom competition in the US for instance, the Ohio Star Ball (OSB), functions for the American dance scene much the way Blackpool does for the international scene. The activity level of dancers and coaches all gear up heading towards the OSB, new costuming trends and fashions are introduced at the OSB, and the OSB is by far and away the largest periodic and transitory center of ballroom in North America, eclipsing multiple times over any of the “fixed” centers. More dancers attend the OSB than any other ballroom event in North America, and if there is anywhere outside the US National Championships that



there may be a “changing of the guard” it is at the OSB. At the same time, however, even the OSB functions within the larger worldwide ballroom framework, such as when the top two US Professional Standard couples were absent in 2005 because of a scheduling conflict with the 2005 World Professional Standard Championships.

### **Interrelatedness: Networked, Networks, and Networking**

While all communities involve and are comprised of multiple overlapping networks—including social, economic, and political to name a few—the geographic and temporal dispersion of the salsa and ballroom communities elevates the visibility of the networking in each and, just as with any community, higher level persons, events, and centers are more fundamental to the structure of the networks entailed. Using the network networked, networks, and networking dynamics highlighted by the natures of the ballroom and salsa communities thus provides fertile ground for how social networks operate, particularly those of dispersed communities. In many respects the ballroom and salsa communities must be understood as recombinant communities, splitting apart at the end of one event and recombining, in some new permutation, at the next—and so on throughout the year and across the years. Whether it is Blackpool in England, the OSB or the L.A. Salsa Congress in the US, or any other of the myriad events held in those countries or worldwide throughout the year, ballroom competitions and salsa congresses serve as “an ingathering of the clan” for their respective communities and, as such, are particularly potent constellations of networks and networking.

The networks and networking exhibited by ballroom competitions and salsa congresses should not, however, be viewed as self contained; far from it. The networks and networking of such events is implicated in the daily day-to-day lives of the ballroom and salsa community members, as well as in the yearly schedule and organization of competitions and congresses. Just to give a preliminary example, in 2005 the four day LA Salsa Congress, the largest such event in the world, drew 25 thousand dancers from over 42 countries and 235 US cities, included 8 bands, over 50 workshops, and over 150 dance performances. Obviously an event of this magnitude and scale does not come about by happenstance alone, but only through elaborate planning, organization, and coordination of participants living in numerous locations. And with 25 thousand people in attendance, the majority of them were not there as congress instructors or performers. For non-professional dancers, then time away from work or family had to be arranged. For professional dancers, these same considerations were in play but their regular dance classes and students were also implicated. Dance instructors, performers, DJs, and bands participating in the congress had to schedule other commitments around the congress dates. Travel and accommodation arrangements had to be made for all in attendance—whether through the organizer or independently.

Such obvious factors as travel arrangements and scheduling to attend this one event are only the most obvious ramifications for those interested in salsa however, as the ripples throughout the community go both much wider and much deeper. Someone new to the salsa scene, and uninformed about either a local or major congress date,

will probably have no understanding of why the same salsa club that was packed with top notch dancers the entire night last weekend now seems all but deserted. Club management who only see salsa as a cash cow during its current upswing, but who have no personal allegiance to or affiliation with the actual salsa community, may be equally mystified why they seem to do a great business one week and are close to empty the next. A new promoter trying to get their own salsa event running may have checked the locally scheduled events, or even the entire roster of events going on in the country, but be unaware of major international events that all the top local dancers and instructors already have marked off on their schedules. All of these examples point to the complex interlinking and interlocking intrinsic to the dispersed nature of the salsa community.

The ballroom community shares the same dynamics, representing a similarly aligned network of persons, places, and events. A new ballroom student, for instance, might well be uninformed about a local competition or a major competitive event and may therefore think a studio's attendance to be small or erratic when, in fact, that is typically a very active studio that has a large competitive contingent currently attending a competition. Studio managers who have little personal interest or investment in dance quickly learn not to schedule special events on weekends that are already "full" with upcoming competitions, and new competition owners quickly learn the challenges of trying to run an event scheduled against (or close) to a major competition. Just as an informed salsa promoter would not try to schedule a major congress against the LA Salsa Congress, no informed ballroom organizer would try to

schedule a major ballroom competition at the same time as Blackpool. Indeed, it is deeply telling that despite the many similarities in partnering between salsa and ballroom, and the fact that there are many very good dancers who crossover between the two communities, the very reality that the LA Salsa Congress takes place at the same time as Blackpool makes clear that these are two distinct communities with different memberships, values, and priorities—a topic woven throughout the remainder of this text.

Events such as Blackpool, the UK, the International, the LA Salsa Congress, the GOC, and the OSB—which are just some of the largest and most widely attended examples—are the largest nodes in their respective networks but, as I have pointed out above, they are also periodic and transitory, which has important implications for the role they play within their own dispersed and recombinant communities. As far as dance consumers are concerned, the geographic spacing and locations of contests and congresses often serves to bring goods and services to them instead of needing to travel elsewhere for such things. One need not travel to different showrooms or factories of different shoe or dress vendors if these same products will be available at a competition one is going to be attending. Similarly, one need not travel to take lessons if the instructor one wants to work with will be in town at an upcoming event. Why go to New York for salsa or ballroom lessons, after all, if the instructors in question will be in LA for the LA Salsa Congress or the Emerald Ball? “From the point of view of the consumer,” Skinner points out, “the periodicity of markets amounts to a device for reducing the distance he must travel to obtain the required goods and services”

(Skinner 1980:23), and the schedule of congresses and competitions serves exactly such purposes, bringing goods and services to the dancers.

Skinner's observations about markets ring true for the schedule of congresses and competitions in several other respects as well. As Skinner says of expanding market frequency: "doubling is the most advantageous means of increasing market-day frequency, for it requires no disruption of the old schedule: new market days are simply added to the old" (1980: 26), and this is exactly what happens as congresses and competitions grow and expand. Rather than contesting with other events and dates, or even just requiring an extra set of travel on the part of participants, an extra day is added to the existing schedule. Additionally, new "standard" level events tend to be scheduled relative to extant major ones, not relative to other "standard" level events (Skinner 1980: 30-31). Those organizing and scheduling a new competition or congresses on the dance calendar are not overly concerned with other smaller-scale local events, but with major ones. Most weekends of the year have more than one ballroom competition sanctioned by the NDCA in the US, for instance, but these are typically smaller to mid-level events, not the major ones. No organizer wants to conflict with events like the OSB, USDSC, or Embassy Ball when they can be guaranteed a compromised attendance at best. And this same pattern holds true on the world stage as well, both in ballroom and salsa with new competitions and congresses not so much concerned with same-level conflict but, instead, with trying to compete for attention and audience against major events like Blackpool, the UK, the International, or the GOC.

An important element revealed by these dynamics is that smaller systems are typically discrete systems while larger systems are rarely discrete systems (Skinner 1980:28). A local, private, social ballroom studio may be entirely self-contained but major competitive training studios, and even primarily social franchise studios,<sup>33</sup> are extremely unlikely not to have points of articulation with larger, non-local dance institutions, organizations, and systems and, inevitably, the higher up you go, the more overlap there will be between systems (Skinner 1980:29). It is for exactly this reason that a dancer who has never left the US may feel that pro-am drives the entire ballroom structure or that what happens in Europe is irrelevant to ballroom dancing in the US, especially for the American Style dances. Someone more familiar with the world stage, in contrast, well knows that pro-am has far, far less to do with competitive ballroom dancing outside of the US (indeed many other countries have no such category); that the major titles contested in Europe are what the top-American dancer's are striving after themselves, and that almost all of the top American Style dancers all take some of their coaching from International Style coaches.

These differentiations between larger and smaller spheres of orientation are what Skinner terms the "indiscrete stacking of economic systems" (1980: 29), as smaller-scale systems are that much more likely to fall under the wider shadows cast by higher-level systems. This is exactly the situation already noted above, wherein smaller competitions and congresses are more likely to fall on the same weekend, with little effect or impact on either, while it remains unlikely that larger scale competitions and congresses will be scheduled against. Beyond influencing the scheduling of newer

competitions and congresses, however, those that already exist—especially the major ones—also need to be seen as setting the stage for much of what happens between events. Activity peaks do not just influence the structure of other peaks after all, but structure activity lulls as well since obligations, commitments, and arrangements from peak days are often carried out and conducted on off peak days (Skinner 1980:28). Lessons are scheduled, performances booked, and costumes commissioned—all of which are to be fulfilled at a future time.

Skinner's observations regarding market attendance and patronage also speaks to the attendance patterns of elite dancers who, by and large, only participate in higher "level" events. "Everything that set them [the local elite] apart...encouraged their attendance at the intermediate [vs. the standard] market," posits Skinner, as "the intermediate market town offered a range of opportunities...unmatched in their standard market" (1980:31). It is exactly this dynamic that draws more elite competitors to larger and higher caliber events where their skills will be more acutely challenged and tested. There is little appeal for the more elite dancers in dancing uncontested. Is a win a win if it is not won? Maybe to some but, as the comments of Blackpool champion Brad attested to, not to elite competitors: "it didn't mean as much," he says, "since I didn't win it competing against them," referencing several great dancers who had retired before he secured his title. Even when other competitors are on the floor, the more elite dancers can still, effectively, be uncontested in the absence of challengers, and it is in exactly this way that the "needs" of elites can be said not to be met at lower-level events (Skinner 1980:32).

## **Cross-regional Ripples and Ramifications**

As in any network, regional fluctuations and developments within the dispersed communities of ballroom and salsa are not discrete and separate from other regions but, instead, tend to have interregional impact (Skinner 1985:278). There have been significant repercussions as it became easier for dancers of the formerly eastern bloc nations to get exit visas and to emigrate to the west, for instance, and the competitors' listings of many junior, youth, and amateur events in the US now exhibit at least one Slavic-sounding name per couple. Or, as couples from one region or nation turns professional or retires, the competitive playing field is opened up in new ways for other competitors across the globe. When a national amateur champion turns professional, a new opening emerges, and when a World or Blackpool amateur finalist turns professional, a new opening emerges on the world stage. Similarly, when a national professional finalist retires, a finalist position becomes vacant, and when a World or Blackpool professional finalist retires, a new opening emerges on the world stage.

A final point I want to make about the salsa and ballroom communities is that, like any communities, they are subject to external as well as internal pressures and influences. Changing visa and residency restrictions impact which dancers can travel where, be it to take lessons, to compete, for a tryout, or to live; just as changes in international exchange rates impact the spending power—be it for travel, accommodations, lesson fees, shoes, or costuming—of dancers using different currencies. And, especially since causes of economic cycles are rarely purely



economic (Skinner 1985:288), economic shifts in the dance community also originate from and come about in relation and reaction to non-economic forces. The attendance at ballroom competitions post 9/11 took a dramatic hit, with some events losing over one third of their entries, via cancellations, within the two weeks immediately following that tragedy. While such cancellations were readily understood and compensated, the economic impact this had on certain organizers was still significant.

Another “outside” factor that ramified onto the ballroom scene was the SARS outbreak in 2003. Toronto ended up being under a partial quarantine at the time of the Can-Am Dancesport Gala in April of 2003, which impacted the attendance of the scheduled photographer, DJ, more than one judge, and any number of competitors, and the spectator attendance the next month at Blackpool was also noticeably lower. While only two examples—albeit perhaps the two most potent ones—these cases help illustrate how the ripples of macro-systemic, non-dance events and happenings have ramifications that impact micro-systemic, dance events and happenings. And how could it be otherwise, especially for communities constituted within dispersed global networks?

### **Globalization and Community<sup>34</sup>**

At the most basic level, the very dances practiced and performed in competitive ballroom dancing, already testify to its status as a product of globalization, including, as it does, derivative forms of the Afro-Cuban Rumba, Spanish Paso Doble, Brazilian Samba, Argentinean Tango, American Foxtrot, English Waltz, and Austrian Viennese Waltz. Yet competitive ballroom dance is far from only

being a product of globalization; it is also, in itself, a force of globalization. The official governing body for worldwide amateur ballroom competition, the International DanceSport Federation (IDSF), for example, is comprised of 82 national member organizations, 56 recognized by their respective National Olympic Committees, and represents over four million athletes in all.

Long before reaching the levels of national and international governing bodies however, the embodied practices of competitive ballroom dancing help construct globally informed identities and identifications. Assuming a certain basic modicum of skill and training, it is not by random chance, for instance, that ballroom dancers from the world over can all successfully dance with each other, even in the absence of a single word of any spoken language in common. Indeed, from the time one first starts learning ballroom dancing, the dance student is participating in an institutionalized, translocal system wherein “different ways of using the body become privileged, accepted, expected, and meaningful” (Marion: in press). More explicitly, however, the fundamental steps, figures, and techniques of movement and partnering being taught for each dance, say the waltz, are exactly the same in Australia, Denmark, Estonia, Israel, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Thailand, Uganda, and the USA. And, in the same vein, beyond the actual dancing—which, itself, should not be underestimated—issues of clothing, grooming, and costuming, as well as dance studios, lesson structures, competition organization, music, teachers, and videos are all also shared elements. As soon as a dancer starts ballroom dancing they are learning ways of moving, acting, and being that are part of a translocal system of values and

norms. The exemplars of good ballroom dancing are the same people worldwide, just as are the top coaches.

More practically speaking, every dance student has learned from someone who, in turn, has learned from someone else, and so on, all the way up the ladder, with local teachers looking to regional teachers, regional teachers to national teachers, and national teachers to international ones in developing their own ballroom knowledge and skills. Or, looking in the other direction, it is ultimately the world-level coaches and competitors who set the stage, values, and models for all of ballroom dancing. In exactly this same way, and as introduced in the discussion of dispersed networks and centers started above, certain international events set the standards for the rest of the ballroom world, with the many smaller scale competitions serve as “feeders” for the major international events, wherein the best in the world will meet up at a few major championships. And, as has already been noted, all of the top couples only show up to only one event each year: Blackpool. Indeed, the title of “Blackpool Champion” is the most prestigious and coveted in all of ballroom dance, more so than a World Title, and the reason that a Blackpool title is more prestigious than a world title is telling: because only the top two couples from each country are eligible for worlds whereas Blackpool is open to all competitors. In other words, it is precisely insofar as Blackpool is open to all couples<sup>35</sup> in the world that it counts more than the World Title which is not.

The topic of World Championships, however, opens up a different issue, as questions of national representation come into focus. Dancers obviously seek out the

best partners they can find and, the higher they climb up the proficiency ladder, the narrower the pool of eligible partners and the less likely they will find the best partner in their own country. So where then does the couple live and which country do they dance for? Visa and residency restrictions, access to top-tier coaching, ability to make a living, standard of living, possible governmental support, where they would fit into each country's competitive ranks, and each country's rules about national representation all factor into such couples' decisions.

Most European countries let amateurs teach for pay, whereas England does not. But London represents the single greatest concentration of top tier coaching, competitors, and practice rounds in the world. Some countries, Germany and Denmark come to mind, provide governmental support in the form of training, facilities, and large subsidies for their top amateur dancers. The U.S. is the second most restrictive country in allowing amateurs to teach (next to England) but because of its highly elaborated pro-am system—wherein amateurs, often-adults who have come to dancing later in life, compete with their instructors—represents one of the largest professional markets for at least moderately accomplished international dancers in the world.

The point here is not that every country treats ballroom dancing the same—indeed far from it—but, rather, that what happens dance-wise in any one country is not isolated from others. As already pointed out in the previous section, the fall of the former Soviet Union and the opening up of the eastern block, for instance, gave rise to a massive influx of eastern European dancers to the U.S., a wave that has reshaped the ballroom dance scene in the U.S., based in New York and New Jersey. These émigrés

view of ballroom dance as art and culture, at odds with the “unmanly” view of dance typical in much of recent American society, paved the way for the current reshaping of the youth and amateur ranks in the US. In a related but different track, the experience and expertise of these eastern European dancers counts as a valuable commodity, with ads being posted—on line, in dance publications, and in dance studios—offering and inviting trades in financial support, housing, and assistance with visas to these dancers in exchange for dance partnering. As all of these dynamics make clear, “even when lived locally, the practices of ballroom competitors ultimately function within a translocal field of values and commitments” (Marion 2005b:20)

### **Isn't Salsa Latin?**

If my preceding discussion focused on competitive ballroom, this is not because salsa is any less a product or process of globalization. While the lack of formalized and codified training, technique, organizations and structures typical of competitive ballroom make salsa's status as both product and process of globalization somewhat harder to trace, it is also true that “salsa's rapid spread through Latin America during the 1970s, followed by its adoption in Europe, Japan, and Senegal during the 1980s and 1990s, necessitates including this genre in discussions about globalization” (Waxer 2002b:16). In some ways the very fact that the globalization of salsa dancing is harder to isolate is supreme testimony to its now deeply embedded and embodied practice worldwide.

Lacking competitive ballroom's formalization and structure of fundamental steps, figures, and techniques of movement and partnering the salsa being taught from studio to studio, city to city, and country to country is not exactly the same salsa in the ways that a ballroom waltz, rumba, or foxtrot remains the same across locations. At the same time, however, "salsa's multiple sites of production and reception around the globe flow directly into its status as a significant popular style" (Waxer 2002b:16), and salsa dancers from around the world can and do successfully partner and dance with each other upon first meetings. Where Waxer asserts that "Latin music and salsa, despite their clear reference to Cuban/Puerto Rican-based styles, have evolved into musical expressions with multiple sites of articulation" (Waxer 2002a:5),<sup>36</sup> the same is true of salsa dancing, with New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, London, and Sydney being just some of the widely recognized hubs of salsa dancing worldwide, and it is in this same vein that Waxer's assertion that salsa music cannot truly be understood save in relation to "the constant circulation of people, ideas, sounds, and musical commodities among salsa's transnational sites" (Waxer 2002a: 6), is equally applicable to salsa dancing.

Just as with ballroom, salsa's status as a global product, process, and commodity does not negate its local nuances and practices. Indeed, the less rigid, structured, and codified nature of salsa dancing lends it to even greater local and personal level style and variation. This does not, however, make salsa dancing any less global since, in all cases, "globalization is intimately and simultaneously bound up with local processes and experiences" (Waxer 2002b:17). It is in this line that,

building off of Robertson's coinage of "glocalization" (1995), Waxer takes note of how "it is precisely in the localization of internationally diffused images, ideas, and forms, that globalization actually occurs" (2002b:17, based on Robertson 1995:31). Globalization is not, after all, something that only happens on a large scale, to organizations and nations but, even more so, globalization most deeply touches, influences, and helps shape human lives on a much more personal level. While certainly never divorced from enduring histories, by situating how various forces and dynamics of globalization play out in variously situated circumstances and lives ballroom and salsa both attest to the interrelationship of globalization with personal-scale practices and identifications.

### **Dancesport in the USA**

Unlike Europe, where social ballroom dance has often been taken as part of the social graces, the instruction of youth in ballroom dancing has been relatively late in coming to the USA. Certainly some families have been in the ballroom industry but, otherwise, there has not historically been much ballroom instruction for youth in the US outside of some basic cotillion-based instruction. This trend has shifted very rapidly over the past two decades however, with the influx of families and children from the former Soviet Union, first swelling and then coming to dominate the ranks of young and adult competitors alike. Separate from this influx, however, many ballroom dancers in the US are first exposed to ballroom and then to competition at college.

## **The College Circuit**

In the US, many people are first exposed to ballroom dancing in college, through recreational classes, ballroom clubs, and ballroom teams. Most such students will not really stick with ballroom much beyond these initial experiences but, in the US, the collegiate competition circuit has also proven to be a popular point of entry for many competitive ballroom dancers. I do not use the term “college circuit” to indicate a singular, unified, or organized sense of the collegiate ballroom scene but, rather, to differentiate it from the wider circuit circuits of ballroom competitions in the US. College teams often work with outside coaches, brought in to assist with the ballroom training of team members. In stark contrast to the majority of competitions in the US, collegiate ballroom competitions typically charge a fixed price, per competitor, for unlimited entries. Because no additional costs accrue for entering additional events, college competitions offer their participants the chance to try competing in a variety of ballroom styles and to easily compete with more than one partner. Especially for newer competitors the opportunity to dance different dances with different partners provides an easy and affordable opportunity to become acquainted with ballroom and to sample their various possibilities. Also worth noting is that, aside from the overall value of collegiate competitions, they are not subject to the restrictions of either USA Dance or the NDCA, meaning that on a campus by campus basis same sex couples may be allowed to compete.

College teams and competitions also typically provide for highly collegial training and competition environments. Within a college team, dancers often help each



other in learning choreography and technique, and travel to various competitions (often other colleges') typically serves as an important source of group bonding as the team members travel, compete alongside, and support each other. Team travel can take the form of carpools, vans, busses, and airplane flights and often involves hotel accommodations for more distant events. Due to generally low funding, most teams travel and compete within a relatively small geographic range so, in addition to getting to know one's team mates even better while traveling and competing away from campus, many dancers from nearby schools get to know each other from various competitions as well.

A last point to be made about college competitions themselves is the level of cheering and camaraderie that is typical of such events. Schoolmates cheer each other on in their various events, from the newest beginners to the most experienced team members, and friends from other schools may join in as well. This level of support and audience involvement is quite an exception—except for franchise competitions, as described in the next chapter—to most competitions where, at all but the highest levels, audience involvement is often relatively sparse. Finally, while the comparatively late start of competitors first exposed to ballroom in college makes it difficult for any of them to break into the highest levels of competition outside the collegiate circuit, this does not mean that dancers who first started in college do not sometimes reach very high levels of skill, either as amateur or professional competitors.

## **Pro-Am**

The largest number of non-professional competitors in the US do not come from either the childhood or collegiate ranks but, instead, start competing with their instructors in pro-am events. “Pro-am,” a contraction of “professional-amateur,” stands for the partnership between professional and amateur dancers—usually taking the form of a dance student with their instructor—as a competitive couple. The number of pro-am competitors is by far and away the largest segment of ballroom competitors in the US but, even more importantly, pro-am dancing is the economic engine driving the vast majority of all ballroom competition in the US ranging from very localized studio events, to the largest ballroom competitions in North America. And, while there is some-am presence outside the US (such as that at AMI studios abroad), it is only in the US that pro-am makes up both the majority of all ballroom competition and the economic catalyst for the ballroom industry at large.

## **Instructors**

The prevalence and centrality of pro-am to the US ballroom scene has several penetrating and far reaching effects. First and foremost, the presence of pro-am in the US allows for a concentration of ballroom instructors unequalled anywhere else in the world. The relatively high standard of living in the US (especially in comparison to the former Soviet Union) coupled with the demand for accomplished dancers/instructors generated by the pro-am circuit thus provided a very enticing employment situation for ballroom competitors from abroad. Taken in conjunction with the comparatively

small pool of US-trained ballroom dancers, pro-am dancing thus provided (and continues to provide) excellent opportunities for many foreign trained dancers; opportunities that they would not have at home. Amateur national finalists from Europe, for instance, have little trouble stepping into a North American studio with skills that are in high demand.

This situation actually proves relatively beneficial all around as studios get instructors who are already trained, instructors get employment and a standard of living that might otherwise be unavailable to them, and students get instructors with well developed skills. While certainly not a “rule,” this trend of “importing” instructors has become a significant one such that when I visited the FADS studio in Boston, for instance, not a single member of the staff—be it owner, manager, or instructors—was born in North America. As pointed out above, however, this arrangement does not only serve the instructors who are able to find work in the US due to the pro-am system, it serves studios and students as well. I met one FADS employee, for example, who regularly travel to Eastern Europe in search of new staff; staff who would arrive already trained and experienced in teaching ballroom dancing. While on the one hand this arrangement saves studio owners and managers in training time and costs, the flipside of this is that students are provided with fully prepared instructors as opposed to someone who is training to be a teacher but has only been dancing for two months, or less, as I also saw in some franchise studios (a topic I return to in the next chapter).

It is not only foreign born instructors who benefit from the pro-am system in the US, however, but US-born instructors as well. Especially when it comes time for a professional dancer to hang up their competition shoes, the size of the amateur and professional fields in the US, excluding the pro-am ranks, is far too small to support the number of retired professionals who now serve as both judges and pro-am instructors. Even after a competitor is out of peak competitive conditioning and form they are still able to dance in pro-am for many years yet to come and, as they no longer have the same training and practice requirements and regimen for their own dancing often even improve as instructors. The large number of students competing in pro-am thus provide continued employment possibilities, not to mention the number of judges needed for the close more than 100 pro-am competitions held in the US every year.

## **Students**

The pros and cons of students who dance pro-am are a much discussed topic in many ballroom circles; both in person and on-line. For many who have started dancing at a younger age, and especially for those who have moved to the US and were thus not previously exposed to pro-am, it is often disparaged to the point of not even being “real dancing.” And this sentiment is reinforced by the often held opinion that pro-am instructors are fleecing their students (especially older widows as the story goes) via exorbitant lesson and competition costs. A long history of a few high profile scandals of such antics (such as the 1968 case of Vokes v. Arthur Murray Inc) has not helped dispel this viewpoint and, unfortunately, this same type of behavior still takes place, at

least to the extent that the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) released a pamphlet *Facts for Consumers from the Federal Trade Commission* regarding Dance Studios in November of 1992 (see Appendix 7). The FTC pamphlet starts out stating that, “although dance lessons may offer opportunities for fun, entertainment, and companionship, they also may be more expensive than planned, especially if you do not know how to protect yourself against some dance studio sales practices” (FTC 1992), and goes on to warn consumers about: (1) Relay Salesmanship; (2) Overlapping Contracts; and (3) High-pressure Sales, whereby studio employees utilize “exploit student emotions or personal vulnerabilities to oversell lessons” (FTC 1992).

While these warnings and the opinions they inform are based on real and unfortunate cases of manipulation, it is problematic in the extreme to paint the entire pro-am industry with just this one brush. Especially for those who were not exposed to dancing as children or young teens, or did not get started with ballroom while in college, pro-am offers an opportunity to learn, develop, and compete under the wider ballroom umbrella. Most simply stated, there are many, many dancers competing in ballroom in the US who, if they lived anywhere else, would never have had the opportunity to start later in life that the pro-am circuit affords them. While it is true that physical limitations—be it age or just the lack of years of practice that others may have—may limit many pro-am students from attending the highest levels of excellence, this is neither a universal truth nor a sufficient admonition for a student not to develop their dancing to the best of their ability if they so choose.

Far from limiting a dance student's progress, competing in pro-am can actually be one of the quickest ways to raise the caliber of one's dancing. In the first place, the focus of pro-am lessons is solely on that one student and not split between partners. Similarly, one can learn, develop, and advance as quickly as one is able to, not being limited by another student's progress as is often the case in a non-pro-am partnership. And, also in this same vein, corrections and feedback from one's teacher is always available during partnered practice in a way that simply is not the case when one's partner is not one's instructor. The flipside of this last point, however, is that pro-am students cannot practice with their partners *except* during paid lesson time. This last point is one of the dynamics that competing in pro-am is often a costly endeavor, especially when considered alongside the travel costs, lost revenue and per dance fees typically paid to one's instructor to compete in a pro-am competition. For those who can afford the expenses of pro-am, however, it can offer an excellent resource for rapid improvement. The advantage of having a professional to work off of—both in practice and in competition—should not be underestimated as an aid to a student's development as a dancer.

Sometimes the pro-am floor is used to showcase a dancer's talent and abilities. In winning the US Pro-Am Rhythm title, for instance, Adrianna Chessa, attracted the notice of (professional) John Abrams, with whom she went on to become the number two professional rhythm couple in the country. Or, in what is probably the most extreme such case, (professional) Victor Kanevsky's partnered Beata Onefater at the USDSC to get her seen, and it worked as she was noticed by Michael Wentink, with

whom she then went on to win the Amateur World and Blackpool titles in 1998 and a spot in the professional World and Blackpool finals thereafter. For students who have not turned professional, the meteoric rise of Dara Campbell, showcased with her instructor Igor Suvorov on PBS's 2006 "America's Ballroom Challenge," is a premiere example of the heights that can be reached with only a few years of pro-am training and competition if one has the financial resources and is willing to commit the time and effort required to excel.

The majority of pro-am competitors, however, are not these young adults, in fantastic physical shape, and with an over-abundance of talent. The "average" pro-am competitor (to whatever extent any average is ever representative of individual persons) is a middle aged woman of sound financial means who, at least at the outset, lacks both the physique and the fitness level she may have enjoyed when younger. But does this mean that she (or "he" for the far smaller group of men dancing as students in pro-am) cannot maximize their own abilities, develop their skills, and enjoy the process of learning and competing? Does it mean that even older competitors cannot both improve their physical conditioning and dance prowess? Does it mean that these students cannot find the social networking, travel, and skill mastery involved in pro-am competition to be (sometimes deeply) fulfilling? The answer to all of these is: of course not. But even more to the point, if absolute ability and skill level were the only viable litmus test for what counts as "real" ballroom dancing and who should compete, then the vast majority of amateur and professional competitors would also need to

hang up their dancing shoes. Very few competitors will ever really challenge for national titles after all, let alone World or Blackpool ones.

While the pro-am circuit, and hence most of the older students competing in it, were not the focus of my research, there are a few points I want to make about them before wrapping up this brief section on pro-am competitors. In introducing the RVing populations with whom they worked, for instance, Counts and Counts take note of retirement as a “a generation of elders have become nomads,” and that “these old folks are not acting like old folks used to!” (2001:15). This same description applies to the older pro-am student who spends time taking lessons, practicing in the studio, and traveling to competitions; they too can be seen as a generation of older nomads. Retirement is, of course, a new type of social role and status (Counts and Counts 2001: 43), and with its own challenges and rewards. For some, retirement provides retirees with an opportunity to “turn hobbies for which they never had much time into avocations” (Counts and Counts 2001:16), and this is certainly the case for some pro-am students. For many such dancers, however, ballroom dancing is something new that they have taken up only after retiring.

Despite popular (albeit erroneous) western views regarding the “plight” of aging<sup>37</sup>, studies by Ellen Langer (1990), demonstrate that “seniors who see alternatives, who find a way to spend retirement in demanding, purposeful activities requiring complex planning may successfully delay decline and improve their quality of life in old age” (Counts and Counts 2001:45), and ballroom dancing well suits this prescription. “A challenging environment and purposeful activity,” note Counts and



Counts, “are necessary for an active mind and a vital and alert old age” (2001:44), and ballroom dancing provides both: challenge and purposeful activity. Paralleling the retired elderly RVers described by Counts and Counts, dancing provides older pro-am students with “something challenging to look forward to, control of their lives, and people to care about” (2001: 17).<sup>38</sup> In many cases the families of these dancers are supportive of this new hobby and of the enjoyment that they see as a result of it. In some cases however, and just as with Counts and Counts RVers, the elderly involved in pro-am are sometimes seen as “spending their children’s inheritance” (2001:91). This, however, speaks more to the entitlement culture so prevalent in the US today than to any dynamic of ballroom dancing, although in some few instances children and grandchildren do not find it “proper” for the parent or grandparent to be dancing, especially in the latin and rhythm categories with the shorter dresses these styles demand.

## **Settings**

As the largest segment of ballroom competitors in the US and, even more so, as the economic engine for the US ballroom industry, pro-am has played a large role in shaping the settings—both social and physical—for the majority of ballroom competitions in the US. While the majority of competitions held in Europe take place in sports arenas and conference centers, almost all NDCA competitions (as well as most other pro-am comps of sufficient size) in the US are housed in various hotels and held in these hotels’ ballrooms. Since this topic is heavily implicated in the differences of ballroom and ballroom competition culture between the US and Europe it is

explored at greater length in Section III; but, since it also ramifies onto the physical and social structures of competitions I want to make at least a few brief comments in this regard here as well.

The higher average age and economic means (which is, of course, related back to the higher age) of the pro-am competitor contributes to and influences the structure (and subculture) of pro-am based competitions. It makes a difference that pro-am competitors are not only the majority of competitive students in the country but also the majority of competitors at most US competitions. This difference is all the larger since pro-am competitors are the financial lifeblood of all but the USA Dance and collegiate competitions in the US. Because the NDCA competitions are catering to the more affluent pro-am student (versus the average, younger amateur), different event elements are prioritized, arranged, and accommodated.

Holding competitions in nice hotels with decent restaurants and room service is not part of the more sport minded European model of ballroom competitions. “Packages” from event organizers—including: hotel room, competition tickets, (at least some) meals; and reduced rates on competition registrations—are not part of the more sport minded European model of ballroom competitions. The plethora of dance skill level subdivisions is not part of the more sport minded European model of ballroom competitions. Indeed, splitting “Bronze” into Pre-Bronze, Beginning Bronze, Full Bronze, and Open Bronze; sub-splitting “Silver;” and sub-splitting “Gold” (as well as adding “Gold Bar,” or “Gold Star” categories), provides each pro-am student with far more possible entries per event; especially when also entering in different age

categories as well. The result of this sub-level proliferation is that the same student can dance as many as 200+ individual heats at a competition, most usually uncontested, and putting additional money into both their instructor's and the competition organizer's pockets with each and every dance. This topic is taken up at much greater length in the next chapter, as issues of power, control, and money are all part and parcel of the political dynamics permeating competitive ballroom dancing. For now then, I just want to point out that the high economic stake represented by pro-am students plays an important role in shaping the structure of most ballroom competitions in the US. Indeed, the most basic difference in the structure between US and European comps—including the important variable of where these events are held and how long they run for—can be directly traced to the role of pro-am in driving the US ballroom competition market, just as it does the teaching market.

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### **Endnotes: Chapter Three**

<sup>1</sup> For examples see Clifford 1988, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Fischer and Abedi 1990, Marcus 1992, Marcus and Fischer 1986, and Marcus and Myers 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The efficacy of dance as a socially leveling and formative arena of human activity (P. Spencer 1985:28), while always taking place within larger social contexts—which must themselves be looked at in any analyses of dance—is also generative of its own collectivities (Hanna 1988). This phenomenon is particularly telling in modern ballroom and salsa dance communities, which do not readily fit conventional models and understandings of community.

<sup>3</sup> Following Durkheim's model of representations as beliefs, sentiments, norms, values, attitudes, and meanings, Claude Levi-Strauss contends that the goal of social anthropology is "the study of institutions considered as systems of representations" (1963:3), and ballroom and salsa align well with this understanding of society.

<sup>4</sup> Understanding people as being what they do also resonates with vast and long standing tracks of Marxist scholarship.

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Jung's work on the use of rumor as a defensive mechanism (1910) seems likely to be of pertinence here in understanding the interaction between cultural systems and personal meanings. Goffman's concept of "impression management" (1959) as well as Adams's work on reputation enhancement through the belittling of others (1971) also seem to be relevant concepts.

<sup>6</sup> For examples of this phenomena see Chaiklin and Lave 1993; Cole 1996; Engeström 1993; Forman, Minnick, and Stone 1993; Goodnow, Miller, and Kessel 1995; Hutchins 1995; Lave 1988; Lave and Wegner 1991; and Rogoff 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Mobile in that they re-coalesces from night to night—in different locations with different permutations—while, simultaneously, being nontransient in that their core constituency remains stable over time, albeit in varying permutations.

<sup>8</sup> See Stacey Horn's (1998) *Cyberville: Clicks, Culture, and the Creation of an Online Town*, for an excellent examination of the reality of online communities and cultures.

<sup>9</sup> Such online salsa communities are growing, both in number and size, and are worldwide phenomenon: the largest such Yahoo™ community, Salsero Corner, has a membership of over 3,600 people at the end of 2005; Salsaforums.com has been averaging over one thousand posts per month since March 2005; and the Salsa forum at Dance-Forums.com, the largest English language partner dance discussion board in the world, is the second most largest and most active dance style forum.

<sup>10</sup> See Ortner (1996) regarding the overlap of multiple "serious games."

<sup>11</sup> This segmentary identification (Evans-Pritchard 1969[1940]) makes explicit the identity investment that collectivities entail.

<sup>12</sup> This topic also shows up in the next chapter in the context of the real (versus instrumental) bonds that can develop between, in this case, dance teachers and students.

<sup>13</sup> In saying that ballroom and salsa involve shared goals, I do not mean that everyone who dances shares the same purposes or motivations for doing so. Not everyone wants to be a national champion, just as not everyone wants to impress the cute girl or guy they saw the last time they went dancing. The more activity specific goal in either case, however, is to dance "well" (whatever that may mean in a given situation).

<sup>14</sup> The materials about developing expertise by both Dreyfus (1983, 1984) and Holland (1992a) are also implicated in and address this topic but, for the purposes of this dissertation, are used in reference to cultural and personal learning and development in Sections III and IV.

<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that these same dynamics transpires on the personal level as well. A person cannot do whatever they want and have it "count" as a waltz, but competitive couples do develop their own choreographies, costuming, and personal styles within the framework of waltz.

<sup>16</sup> I should point out that, on the flipside, many of these same coaches commented that one of the things that had changed for the worse since they competed was the artistry and stillness of dancing, with everything now being "rush, rush, rush."

<sup>17</sup> Within the context of dancing, "musicality" describes a dancer's ability to express and match the nuances of the music in their dancing.

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<sup>18</sup> The stipulation of arriving on a straight leg applies to the International Latin style cha cha, as contrasted with the American Rhythm style cha cha wherein the dancer arrives on beat with a slightly flexed knee. The cha cha danced in these two styles continues, however, to become ever-less distinguishable as an emphasis on speed moves the American cha-cha closer and closer to International technique. The stipulation of a toe (versus heel) lead, however, is equally applicable in both styles, as are the requirements of constant foot pressure, on the inside edges of the feet, and with slight turned out.

It is also worth noting that the “whole-whole-half-half-*whole*,” “two-three-four-and-*one*” rhythm which is the convention for ballroom cha cha, differs from the “club” or “street” cha cha danced in salsa clubs. Club cha ch started out, in New York, as “two-three-cha-cha-cha” but many of the people in salsa clubs today—probably the vast majority in North America outside of NY, in Europe, in Australia, and in Asia—typically dance cha cha as a “one-two-cha-cha-cha” rhythm.

<sup>19</sup> I want to note that “competitive” can mean very different things within the ballroom world too; a topic that will reemerge in Sections III and IV.

<sup>20</sup> Sometimes another student who had not made it onto the competitive formation team and was training on one of the UCSD DanceSport Team’s junior or practice teams might use such a situation to express their resentment of not having made the higher level team themselves, asserting that they would have picked up the material faster and done a better job. Even this, however, remained a very rare happening while I was associated with team.

<sup>21</sup> The US airing of the second season of *Dancing with the Stars* on ABC provides an interesting case of the interconnectivity between virtual and real life sharing and identifications, as forum members post their comments and observations in real time, while watching the show.

<sup>22</sup> There are of course, many other such peripheral practices, although what they are and how they function may vary between communities and cultures. Aside from greeting practices the sharing of food in day-to-day circumstances (ritual meals being a more specific case, often being too central to rightly belong in the class of peripheral practices). The shared meals of “full package” holders at Pro-Am competitions in the US, and just that snacks and drinks with other competitors—be it at a table, on benches, or at a nearby eatery after the event—also serve as such markers.

<sup>23</sup> Skinner, noting how all regional systems are nested within larger ones, notes that “spatial-cum-temporal systems at any given level nest in, relate to, and are subordinate to systems at the next higher level. The essential point is that most systems are in fact subsystems of more inclusive systems.” (Skinner 1980:3)

<sup>24</sup> This point may seem relatively obvious, especially in an era of mass transportation, but even in remote, pre-industrial life access to rich resources a mere mile away might have been close to meaningless in the face of a sheer cliff, a non-fordable water way, or a yawning gorge in the midst of the otherwise short intervening distance.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to suggest that there are not “tools of the trade” common to psychotherapy, law, or dance but, rather, that the therapist, lawyer, and dancer can each practice their craft in the absence of such tools in a manner that the sculptor, painter, or construction worker cannot.

<sup>26</sup> Obviously a potter or an auto mechanic can make arrangements to acquire or use another potter’s or mechanic’s facilities, materials, and supplies, and this would hold true for almost any object base craft and occupation. The point being made here, however, is that in so far as one is limited to what they can actually take with them, then certain tasks, especially those that are service versus goods oriented, allow for a far greater amount and range of personal—and hence professional--mobility.

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<sup>27</sup> Doing shows is where the greatest money is for successful competitors, a point that I shall return to in Chapter Four.

<sup>28</sup> This actually applies to the “regular” contest events and not the Team Match or Exhibition events that have their own judging panels. Starting in 2004 a small number of non-British past Blackpool Champions were used the adjudicating panels: John Kimmins (USA) and Rudolph Trautz (Germany) in 2004; and Lorraine Rohdin (Sweden), Tommy Sakuramoto (Japan), Nadia Eftidal (USA), Peter Townsend (Australia), Oliver Wessel-Theron (Germany), and Allesia Manfredini (Italy) in 2005. In 2006, however, the panels reverted back to being comprised entirely of British past champions.

<sup>29</sup> I have no hard numbers but, from the set of coaches I contacted who said they were going to be out of town over the summer, the largest percentage (if not the outright majority) named Japan as the location of their travels to coach.

<sup>30</sup> By the same token the concentration and number of competitors in other dance centers and locations also fluctuate relative to Blackpool. One pro-am student, for instance, commented how strange it was to be in New York with almost all of the top teachers and competitors absent from the city during Blackpool.

<sup>31</sup> I also want to reiterate that designating Blackpool as “the highest-order periodic and transitory center of ballroom activity in the world” does not mean that it is the largest, i.e. the event with the most people, only that it is the event with the most specialization available. When I attended the German Open Championships in 2002, for instance, the total number of dancers in attendance surpassed the number of dancers at that year’s Blackpool event. What makes Blackpool the higher-order center though, is that all of the top dancers and coaches from the GOC were also at Blackpool whereas many of the top coaches and dancers from Blackpool were not in attendance at the GOC.

<sup>32</sup> Distance, cost of transportation, and ease of access all factor into the pattern and structure of non-Londoners visits to London. Especially for those living further away, such as dancers from Australia, it makes far more sense as far as commute and expense to live in London—be it for a month or three years—whereas those living in countries such as Finland, Denmark, and Germany (especially with the rise of discount airlines in Europe such as EasyJet and Ryanair) typically find it much easier and more sensible to simply travel in and out of London as appropriate.

<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that all franchise studios are primarily social, as each franchise studio, just like each independent studio, will have its own focus based on local consumers’ interests and demands.

<sup>34</sup> Much of this section is based on a paper, “Globalization, Embodiment, and Identity in International Competitive Ballroom Dancing” that I presented as part of the Globalization, Embodiment, and Identity panel I organized for the 2005 AAA meetings held in Washington DC.

<sup>35</sup> In this case “couples” means the partnering of a male and a female as the accepted ballroom pairing by both the IDSF and WD&DSC, respectively the official worldwide governing bodies of amateur and professional ballroom dance.

<sup>36</sup> The essays in the first section of Waxer’s edited volume, *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meaning in Latin Popular Music*, for instance, all “explore salsa as a simultaneously national (i.e., Puerto Rican) and also transnational (pan-Latino) musical style” (Waxer 2002a:17).

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<sup>37</sup> “Although 95 per cent of the aged are neither helpless nor dependent,” note Counts and Counts, “the stereotype of the old person as sick, helpless, and undesirable persists” (2001: 41).

<sup>38</sup> As Counts and Counts point out, “elderly people who keep their minds and bodies occupied, who have control of their lives, and who have a supportive network of friends and family can and do remain vital and independent until shortly before the inevitable decline into death” (2001: 17).

## CHAPTER FOUR: **Eyes on the Prize: Politics and Economic Factors**<sup>1</sup>

Like any other human arena, the social settings of ballroom and salsa dancing are not without structure and orientation. Personal goals neither arise nor develop in a vacuum but, rather, always within their sociocultural surround. Even deeply personal ambitions, goals, and motivations must largely be understood as elaborations of socially privileged or advantageous aims and outcomes. No one, after all, sets out to do poorly—unless, that is, they have something to gain from doing so. So what are the things at stake within the communities of competitive ballroom dancers and salsa dancers? What, as Bailey asks (2001), are the “prizes” that count and matter? Because dancing cannot truly be separated from dancers’ non-dance lives, many of the “things” that matter within dancing circuits overlap with what matter outside of them; things such as money, fame, prestige, connections, knowledge, influence, and power. The only real differences between dance and non-dance contexts resides in what counts as each of these prizes; what counts as “money,” “fame,” “prestige,” “connections,” “knowledge,” “influence,” or “power,” how they are gained, and how they can then be deployed and utilized. Before starting to look at each of the prizes, however, I want to make a necessary distinction between what is prized within a given social sphere versus prizes.



## **The Duality of the Political**

Before delving into the ethnographic meat of this chapter, I want to briefly highlight the duality of the political. The vast majority of the judges I have spoken with all claim that they never judge politically. The point I wish to make here is that, even to whatever extent their marks have not been politically motivated, it would be inaccurate to label the situation as apolitical since the outcome of those marks is inherently political—whether maintaining or disrupting the status quo.<sup>2</sup> This duality of the political is not reserved for judging alone, as accepting new students, bringing in new coaches, choosing to get your latest costume from a new vendor, and many, many other facets of the dancesport circuit can have political outcomes regardless of their motivation.

## **The Political *is* Personal**

It is a simplistic understanding of political that asserts, “it wasn’t personal, it was political.” As with the duality of the political noted above, so too with the personal—regardless of intentions and motivations, things do not happen to nobody. Again, nothing need be said of the causes to recognize that political effects, *to be effects*, must have an effect on someone in some way. Politics are not politics and the political is not political, after all, if not experienced and felt by someone. What therefore needs to be said is that while various actors’ intentions may or may not be politically or personally motivated, it is shortsighted in the extreme to summarily dismiss and discount the political and personal *impacts* of such actions.

## Prized vs. Prizes

In differentiating between what is prized and prizes, it is necessary to recognize that while all prizes are prized, not everything that is prized is also a prize. To say that prizes are prized is redundant, but it is important to realize that those things that count as prizes do so specifically because they are *prized*. Yet not everything that is prized is available as *a prize*. The distinction being made here is between what is *at stake*, the prizes, versus what is *valued*, which is a larger category. Two straightforward non-dance examples of this distinction include being born into certain lineages, such as royalty, or having certain physical attributes, such as being tall if you want to be basketball player. Such factors may be prized for any number of reasons but, because they cannot be achieved—no matter one's intentions, effort, resources, commitment, or dedication—they cannot truly be considered prizes. It is in this same way that, in dancing, certain types of physical prowess and ability, a particularly good ear for music, and other such variables are certainly prized yet do not properly belong under the umbrella of prizes that help drive and shape the structure of the dance community. What qualities that are prized within ballroom and salsa dancing are taken up under the rubrics of aesthetics and values in Chapters Eight and Nine. For the moment, however, I turn to a more in depth analysis of the social prizes<sup>3</sup> that are available, and at stake, within the salsa and ballroom dancing communities.

## **Money and Skill**

The most straightforward of the “prizes” at stake in dance is money. As Ortner points out, however, “money is an extremely complex symbol that must always be interpreted” (1999:66), and, “as a motive is never a simple one” (1999:207). Money can mean many things after all, “including things like security, freedom, comfort, status, power, and generosity” (Ortner 1999:206). Recognizing the complexity of money as a motive is all the more important within salsa and ballroom given the often wide-ranging mix of nationalities and backgrounds of those involved. While the financial aspects of dance are sometimes cast as nothing more than corruption, selling out, and the commodification of art, the same money can also represent real freedoms (including social and political) including the freedom to even dance at all. This range of understandings of money is an important one, because “the need for money embodies complex desires,” and many persons “do not seek money merely to eat or to get rich” (Ortner 1999:207). Simply put, money is privileged in modern societies and dancers’ lives intersect such living at myriad levels. Dance itself takes money—whether in the form of entry fees, lessons, coaching, shoes, or simply gas money and door fees to a local club. How some of these dynamics play out within the dance community is a topic I shall return to shortly, after first giving a similar overview of the other prizes: skill, fame and prestige; connections and knowledge; and influence and power.

Similar to money in being both readily defined and readily demarcated is the prize of skill. Like money, it is not hard to determine who has a skill and at what

general level. Naturally there are differences of opinion as to exact levels of skill in dance as in any other arena but, in a general sense, it is not difficult to differentiate between various strata of skill. While the most focal skill within dancing is, of course, skill in dance itself, other skills are also prized; especially skill in teaching dance. And, like money, skills in dancing and teaching are prizes not just in their own right, but also in so far as they can facilitate access to other prizes such as fame and prestige.

### **Fame and Prestige**

As complex a motive as money may be (and skill, albeit perhaps to a lesser extent), its assessment is still relatively clearly demarcated. People do not have trouble, for instance, with assessing expenditures or earnings regardless of any minor issues that may arise from exchange rates and differences in personal incomes. The same cannot as easily be said for the far less straightforward prizes of fame and prestige. While what counts as fame and prestige within the dancing circuit may be relatively easily recognized, they remain more resistant to easily quantified evaluations and assessments. Even if all parties concerned acknowledge someone as being famous, how *much* fame or prestige they have is not always so easily discerned, nor may everyone agree whether these people deserve their fame or prestige. Aside from not being subject to any easy calculus of how “much” a fame or prestige a certain person has—let alone debates over how much they *should* have—what and how much can actually be *done* with their fame or prestige often remains frustratingly obscure. This lack of ready demarcation makes the specific influences and impacts of

fame and prestige more difficult to pin-down, even when their presence and general significance are readily agreed upon and recognized.<sup>4</sup>

## **Connections and Knowledge**

Where fame and prestige depend on what others know—i.e. you cannot be famous if no one knows about you—connections and knowledge depend on personally held information. Much like money, knowledge is a rather self-contained prize. What counts as knowledge (or as money) may vary circumstantially but, with that caveat aside, one knows what one knows (much as how one has as much money as one has). In dance, knowledge of technique, partnering, and performance are all among the most highly sought prizes and, indeed, prizes upon which the other prizes such as money, fame, prestige, connections, influence, and power often rest. Similarly, connections count as a prize since they too provide access to other prizes. Because money, fame, prestige, knowledge, influence, and power are of no consequence if they cannot be accessed, having connections to these prizes comes to count as a prize in and of itself.

## **Influence and Power**

In many ways the most fluid and the least easily defined prizes, influence and power, are also the trickiest of the prizes to unpack. Part of this difficulty lies in the simple reality that influence and power are *dynamics* in all social relations and not some “things” independent of the social interactions within which they inhere (e.g. Wolf 1999, regarding power).<sup>5</sup> As Bailey pointed out over 35 years ago, “*political activity nowhere stands on its own*: it exists within an environment of other kinds of social interaction and, indeed, of other constraints and resources which are not

themselves social” (2001:144, emphasis added). Influence and power do not exist, after all, except as influence and power in relation to something or someone. It is only in the *relations* of different social parties and practices that influence and power arise, takes shape, are exerted, and are felt.<sup>6</sup> Influence is not influence if it is of no consequence, just as power is not power if it is of no consequence.

### Comparing the Prizes

Taken together then, and as depicted below in Table 4.1, distinctions between the various prizes can be seen relative to the ease of both definition and of demarcation. Money is easily defined and quantified, fame and prestige are easily defined but not easily quantified, connections and knowledge are not easily defined but are easily quantified, and influence and power are neither easily defined nor easily quantified.

**Table 4.1: Defining and Quantifying “Prizes”**

	Money/ Skill	Fame/ Prestige	Connections /Knowledge	Influence /Power
<b>Easily Defined</b>	yes	yes	no	no
<b>Easily Quantified</b>	yes	no	yes	no

One consequence of the differences in defining and quantifying the prizes of money, fame, prestige, connections, knowledge, influence, and power, is that different prizes may be easier to come by than others. This dynamic can easily be seen in the dance world where money—as the most easily defined and quantified prize—is typically among the most commonly sought prize as well. But what counts, exactly, as each

type of prize within the ballroom and salsa scenes? How are the various prizes won? And, once gained, how are the respective prizes then employed and utilized? These topics are ones I shall return to shortly but, first, I want to unpack two important vectors in the winning and utilization of prizes: the forms and sources of authority.

### **Formal Prizes: The Skating System of Judging**

The skating system of judging, the scoring system for ballroom competitions is, itself, both a testimony to the problems possible with biased judging and a means of constraining and curtailing the impact and outcome of such biases. For all rounds prior to the final, each judge is asked to call back a certain number of couples for the next round, not ranking these couples in any specific order, and typically cutting the number of couples in half from round to round.<sup>7</sup> The couples with the most total recall marks from the various judges then advance to the next round. In situations with tied recall totals that contradict the number of couples recalled to the next round it is up to the Chairman of Judges to determine if the next round will be run with either fewer or additional couples.

In the finals judges are requested to mark each couple ordinally, from first through last places (usually from first through sixth but possibly up to eighth). The outcome is not, however, determined by an average of the judges' marks but, rather, through a majority based preferential system that awards first place to the couple receiving the majority of first place marks from the judges. If no couple receives a majority of first place marks, first place is awarded to the couple receiving the majority of first and second place marks. If no such couple exists than first place is

awarded to the couple with the majority for first, second, and third place marks (and so on). The other places in the final, from second down, are awarded in the same manner based on the majority of marks being received for each spot in the final. The total placements for each dance are then totaled with the lowest totals being awarded the top placements as the following table illustrates:

**Table 4.2: Skating System Final Marks – Example 1**

Couple	Waltz	Tango	V. Waltz	Foxtrot	QS	TOTAL	Place
#201	1	1	1	1	1	5	1 <sup>st</sup>
#202	2	2	2	2	2	10	2 <sup>nd</sup>
#203	3	3	3	3	3	15	3 <sup>rd</sup>
#204	4	4	4	5	5	22	4 <sup>th</sup>
#205	5	5	5	4	4	23	5 <sup>th</sup>
#206	6	6	6	6	6	30	6 <sup>th</sup>

Competition results are not always so straightforward, however, so two other rules—Rule 10 and Rule 11—come into play in the case of a tie in the TOTAL. In the sample set of marks below, both couples #202 and #203 have total placements adding up to 13. According to Rule 10, however, couple #202 is placed second and couple #203 is placed third because couple #202 placed ahead of couple #203 in three dances (versus the two in which couple #203 placed better). If there was still a tie after Rule 10 had been taken in to consideration (which is not the case in the examples provided here), then Rule 11 stipulates that the individual judges' marks be looked at for the tied couples and whichever couple received more actual 1<sup>st</sup> place markings from the individual judges wins the tie break (or, if neither couple received any first place marks, the couple receiving the most 2<sup>nd</sup> place marks, and so on). Only if Rule 11 cannot differentiate between couples is a tie awarded.



**Table 4.3: Skating System Final Marks – Example 2**

<b>Couple</b>	<b>Waltz</b>	<b>Tango</b>	<b>V. Waltz</b>	<b>Foxtrot</b>	<b>QS</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Place</b>
#201	1	1	1	1	1	5	1 <sup>st</sup>
#202	2	3	5	1	2	13	2 <sup>nd</sup>
#203	3	2	2	3	3	13	3 <sup>rd</sup>
#204	5	5	3	4	4	21	4 <sup>th</sup>
#205	4	4	4	5	5	22	5 <sup>th</sup>
#206	6	6	6	6	6	30	6 <sup>th</sup>

The main objective and impact of the skating system of judging is that it very difficult for the marks given by any individual judge, on their own, to sway the final outcome and results. Where an averaging of the judges' scores would allow for a single judge to quickly draw down a couple's placement with a few low marks, the skating system privileges majority opinion so that even a last place marking in every dance from one outlying judge will not upset the results if the majority of judges see things differently.

## **Authority**

### **Institutional vs. Personal**

As in any other social system, authority within the ballroom and salsa dance communities can be—and is—derived from both personal and institutional power and status. The authority of one coach, for instance, may be based on their own dance knowledge and their skill as an instructor, while the authority of another coach may reside in their status as a very active judge on the competition circuit. This distinction between personal and institutional authority is not to suggest that these two forms of authority are in any opposition to each other or in any way mutually exclusive but, rather, to highlight that not all authority arises from or is invoked in the same ways.

## **Expected Utility vs. Morality**

Approved, official, and formal systems, structures, and process are not the only ways in which people relate, get things done, or make decisions. How things get done can very well be at odds with how things “should” get done, although how things “should” get done is rarely, itself, that straightforward. Some ideas of “should” may be commonplace, some may fall within “acceptable” limits of variation, and yet others may fall outside the range of mainstream acceptance. Separate from this, however, are the real discrepancies between how things should get done and how they *do* get done; between the normative rules and understandings which prescribe proper action and the pragmatic ones which describe effective action (Bailey 2001:238). Similarly, morality cannot simply and uncritically be credited as right and proper. As Bailey points out, for instance, “there is likely to be a wide measure of disagreement about the normative rules” (2001:179) and, as such, morally mandated actions may be no more “just,” in any abstract sense, than actions based on expected utility. It seems worth noting, however, that there may very well be a real and significant difference in between actions that are felt and understood to be justifiable (those based on expected utility) versus actions that are felt and understood to be just (those based on moral mandates). Also, and as a final point, even if there is agreement on a given “should”—itself never a given—this does not mean that everyone then acts accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

## **Authority: Expected Utility/Morality and Institutional/Personal**

Any authority ultimately exists as an intersection between considerations of expected utility versus morality and institutional versus personal status. In simple terms this suggests the four cell model of authority depicted below in Table 4.4 that distinguishes between: (A) personal authority based on expected utility; (B) personal authority based on morality; (C) institutional authority based on expected utility; and (D) institutional authority based on morality.

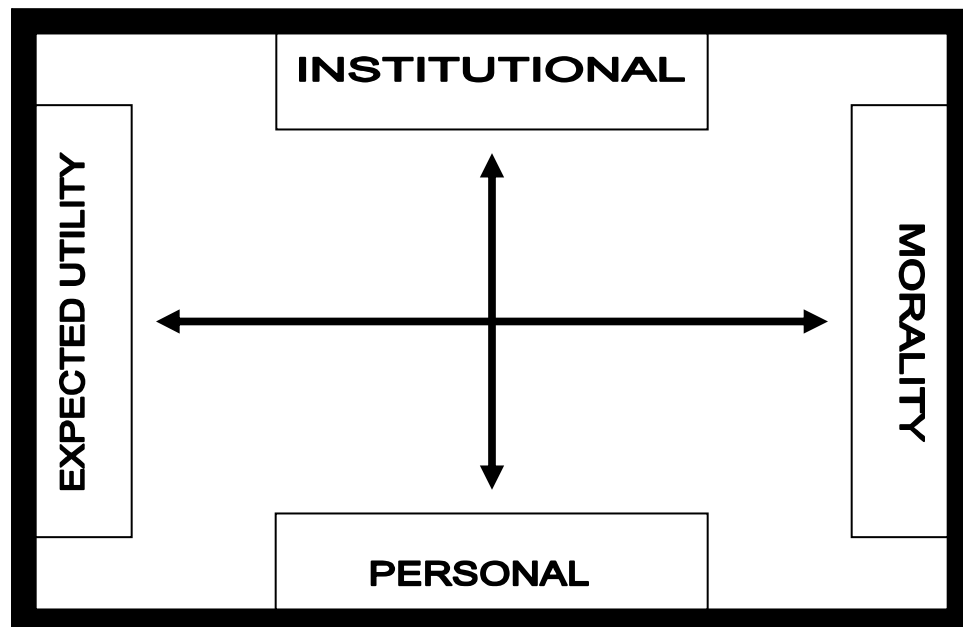
**Table 4.4: Four Cell Model of Authority**

Based On:	Personal Authority	Institutional Authority
Expected Utility	A	C
Morality	B	D

Does this model actually work however? Yes and no. As a quick gloss, the four cell model does serve a purpose, differentiating between both the natures (personal versus institutional) and the bases (expected utility versus morality) of authority. Take the case of dancers who take lessons from a coach whom the dancers do not find helpful regarding their actual dancing, but still feel compelled to seek out and take these lessons because of that coach's stature as a judge; a scenario I encountered time and again in interviews, informal conversations, the reports of others, and via observation. Many dancers' own labeling of such as "political lessons" (versus "dance lessons") well illustrates a classificatory scheme entirely in line with the four cell model of authority. In this scenario the coach is sought out not because of anything that they, personally, have to offer but, rather, because of their institutional

status as a judge and the presumed benefit in marks that taking lessons from them may engender.

I would like to suggest, however, that the same classificatory ease that is the strength of the four cell model of authority is, simultaneously, also its shortcoming. As a tool for analyzing social structure and centers of authority within a social system, the four cell model of authority provides a quick overview and certainly pinpoints key dynamics and nodes of authority within any given system or situation. But neither the nature nor the basis are binary, being entirely personal or institutional, or entirely (expected) utility or morality based. As such, a true topography of authority needs to be more nuanced, recognizing both the nature and the basis of authority as continuums. This understanding provides for the four pole model of authority depicted below in Figure 4.1:



**Figure 4.1: Four Pole Model of Authority**

In recognizing the personal versus the institutional and expected utility versus morality as contrasting pairs of poles for authority, the four pole model of authority recognizes often negotiated tensions missing from the binary attributions of the four cell model of authority. Rather than asking and casting authority as personal *or* institutional the four pole model asks to what extent is authority personal and to what extent is it institutional in any given setting or situation. And, in just the same way, rather than asking and casting authority as being based on either expected utility *or* morality, the four pole model asks to what extent is authority based on expected utility and to what extent is it based on morality in any given setting or situation.

### **Prizes and Authority in Play**

With the prizes at stake and topography of authority now introduced, I now turn to looking at how the prizes and authority actually play themselves out, providing the structure and systematicity under girding the ballroom and salsa communities. In examining how various prizes are won, utilized, and deployed it is worth noting that differences in social status and role are not, *a priori*, asymmetrical (e.g. Nicholson 1986:92,103; Rosaldo 1980). Just because people can have different roles and fit into their surrounding social structures in different ways does not, inherently, mean that they vary in the degrees of agency and efficaciousness each has, either in relation to each other or towards their social context. Within the larger ballroom scene there is a fundamental distinction between being a Ballroom dancer and being a Latin dancer. The specific opportunities provided to each, the competitors one has, the potential partners one has available, the coaches one is likely to work with, the studios one is

likely to practice at, and much more, are all quite different for the Ballroom and Latin dancer. And these differences remain in place, indeed often expanding, the higher one climbs towards champion status. To say that these differences are deep, enduring, and even fundamental is, however, quite different from saying that they are asymmetrical.

Indeed, while the very categories of public and private and the binary dichotomization between the two are quite problematic in their own right—on both theoretical and empirical grounds (and as many others have already pointed out)—in discussions of the public and the private Nicholson makes the important point that the “public” cannot automatically be credited with power and authority (1986:79). As such, the public roles and rewards within ballroom and salsa do not, on their own, always account for their own power structures.

An important and closely related point is that the use of power is not, intrinsically, exploitative (Blackwood 2000). The use of power can be *for* people. Sometimes such benevolent uses of power are intended to help people. Other times the use of power may simply be helpful to some as a byproduct of an unrelated agenda. In any such case, however, it is a mistake to assume that any use of power is inherently exploitative or, even when exploitative, that it is exclusively so. As Ortner has pointed out, for example, “in relationships of power, the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal...The subordinate thus has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship” (1995:175). Completing this theoretical loop, there can be—and often are—as Blackwood’s materials well illustrate, motivationally salient reasons for those with power not to over-reach or excessively

exert their control over social subordinates (2000).<sup>9</sup> No matter how vehemently a ballroom judge may dislike some national finalist, for example, that judge cannot just mark any other dancers to win over that finalist. The adjudicator in this scenario cannot, for instance, mark a newcomer to win over even their most hated nemesis since, in any such instance, the judge would actually have more to lose. This adjudicator's very credibility as a judge—and thus their ability to function as a judge—would be compromised.

A final and important point to be made here is that, like any other undertaking, the use of power may also give rise to unintended, although far from random, consequences.<sup>10</sup> Whether it is misunderstood intentions, unaccounted for parties, misunderstood dynamics, or any other unanticipated confounds and unexpected effects, intended actions often have unintended results—sometimes in place of intended results and some times in addition to them. As the following examples and discussions all make clear, however, unintended consequences are quite different from random ones.

### **The Layers of Politics**

Politics are typically multi-axial; rarely exerted, functioning, or being felt—if ever—solely along a singular axis. Politics are often both over-determined and multi-causal. Numerous influences both generate *and* ensue from various political elements. And, just as politics encompass multiple axes, so too do politics rarely, if ever, function unidirectionally. The political pressures, influences, and outcomes of lower level systems can influence what is brought to higher level systems, just as the

political pressures, influences, and outcomes of higher level systems may redefine the contexts for lower level systems. This does not suggest, by any means, that those “on top,” do not, indeed, wield greater and more expansive power. Simply stated, they do. The representations of those with power, after all, color those so represented (Ortner 1999:56) and it is higher-level systems and politics that contextualize and define the very fields within which lower-level systems and politics operate.

The idea that lower-level systems function under the umbrella of higher-level systems is, however, a far cry from suggesting that lower-level systems have no impact on higher-order systems or that the impact and sway of higher-order systems is always of overarching impact on such lower-order systems. Less power—as feminist anthropology, in particular,<sup>11</sup> makes clear—cannot be equated with the lack of any power. And, from a socio-political stance, Bailey makes just this point in noting that “dependency, as the word does not imply, is always in fact a two-way interaction” (2001:12). Given the range and variability of such permutations, I now turn to three dynamics—Lower-Level to Higher-Level, Higher-Level to Lower-Level, and Higher level only—tracing, describing, and illustrating how each can be played out in the social field of ballroom dancing, including how some of the prizes at stake play into such politicking.

### **Lower-Level to Higher-Level**

One example of lower level to higher-level impact involves studio level politics in relation to larger regional, national, or even international competition. It would be true to say that what happens at all but a few of the most elite studios is



unlikely to have any impact on the shape of ballroom competition and the competitive circuit at large. This is a far different proposition, however, from saying that studio level politics have no relation to, or bearing on, the larger system. In-studio problems between instructors and management for instance, may have a considerable impact in an array of higher-level systems such as top studio competition standings or franchisee rankings. In either case, the lower, studio-level politics shape what it is that the studio brings to higher-level systems such as the competition circuit or the franchising body.

For a more specific example, take an “average” studio<sup>12</sup> in the United States. There will probably be several instructors working as studio employees<sup>13</sup> who have all started both their dancing and their training to be teachers sometime after high school. The studio schedule and customer base will probably be based on social dancing. So what happens when a new instructor, one recently relocated from overseas and who has been training and competing in international competition, first as an amateur and then as a professional, arrives at the studio? In the first place studio politics could flow along any number of axes. The studio manager might, for instance, have a favored instructor who is essentially his or her protégé. Conversely, the studio manager might be bringing in the foreign instructor specifically in order to boost the studio’s image, prestige, and reputation.<sup>14</sup> Yet overall, the most common way in which an instructor may impact the studio system is probably via their direct roles with students, an example to which I return shortly. Of key significance to the point being made here is that, at the same time that local-level politics can (and even often do) have a profound impact on local-level participants, the workings and outcomes of exactly such lower-

level systems also, in turn, feed into the higher-level systems of ballroom dancing, ramifying onto what the dancers from each such local level bring with them into higher level systems of the ballroom world.

### **Higher-Level to Lower-Level**

The impact of those higher up on those below them is the most typical and extensively displayed dynamic of political power—and the ballroom world is no exception. One of the most concentrated sites of top-down influence in competitive ballroom dancing can be seen in the selection of judges for a particular event. Leaving aside, for the moment, the issue of politics in judging—a separate topic and one that I will return to shortly—every judge (like any other person) has their own personal tastes, preferences, likes, and dislikes. Given their own aesthetic preferences, a given judge is likely to favor a couple strong in these aesthetics over an equally competent couple who's dancing better exhibits a different set of aesthetics. Furthermore, judges' tastes and preferences can be recognized and identified in patterns of their own judging over time.

Two or three couples may be relatively on par with each other, trading places back and forth, from weekend to weekend, over a span of several months. Yet in examining the score sheets, the flip flopping placements start to make a fuller sense and patterns can be seen. It is rarely the case, if ever, that each couple fares equally well with each judging panel. Rather, some panels exhibit a preference for the aesthetics of one couple's dancing (relative to others). Some balancing between

varying preferences does occur and this is one of the under girding dynamics of the DanceSport judging system. Indeed, the judging system of DanceSport is such, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, that the aberrant marks of a single judge cannot sway the outcome of the overall placements. While a good thing in its own right, this same dynamic highlights the fact that the preference of a majority on the judging panel is what decides ballroom competitions. As such, when a majority favors one style or aesthetic over another the couple best exhibiting these dynamics will win (assuming, of course, that all other factors are roughly on par).

At first blush the idea of a preferred aesthetic winning a given ballroom contest may seem to make sense. The aesthetics of the performance being, after all, what marks ballroom dancing as an art. Be that as it may, however, it is simply not the case that judges find themselves on various judging panels by random assignment or happenstance.<sup>15</sup> Someone needs to select and hire the adjudicators working for each event,<sup>16</sup> and these choices can have profound and overarching impact on the outcomes of the competition. Choosing a panel of judges who prioritize body rhythm over footwork, for instance, favors certain couples over others, while a different panel, with different tastes, would favor a different couple.<sup>17</sup> “As soon as we saw who was going to be on the judging panel,” said one national finalist, for instance, “we knew we’d come in fourth.” Again, nothing sinister needs to be considered to see that the choice of a judging panel—and thus the control exerted by those in the structural positions to make such choices—has an impact that quickly cascades down to lower levels of the same system. The power to choose the judging panel thus represents a powerful

institutionally based authority, one that well illustrates the telling impact that higher-level operations can exert on all lower-level ones—often by establishing the very context within which lower-level operations transpire.

A related point regarding the nature of cascades from higher-level systems down, concerns the prize of prestige. Not all competitions are equally prestigious which, in turn, means that the institutional authority and power inherent in setting the judging panels for different competitions corresponds along parallel lines as does the prestige of being an adjudicator or a winning competitor. Success at a major competition such as the Emerald Ball, Ohio Star Ball, or USDSC is of a different order in establishing and positioning a couple in the national DanceSport scene, for instance, than is success at smaller, predominantly regional competitions. Tradition, caliber of the judging panel, and caliber and depth of the competitive field are all factors that contribute to the different prestige accorded to different events. This same hierarchicization is true across other countries as well; the results from certain competitions simply “count” more than others. This same pattern holds true in the international circle as well, with certain marquee competitions “counting” more than others. Controlling the judging panel for such first-order competitions is powerful clout indeed—both in setting the competition stage and in shaping the “who’s who” in coaching—just as adjudicating such events provides more prestige, and hence influence and authority.

## Higher Level Only Politics

Despite their often contextualizing role (and much kowtowing to the contrary), the operations and outcomes of numerous higher-order systems are often of little interest, if any, to those sufficiently distant in the operational structure. And, as much of a blow as it may be to the egos of many “power players,” this lack of interest makes sense given the lack of significance that many higher-level decisions, policies, and directions do, in fact, have for those in sufficiently lower or distant levels.

A prime example of the possible disconnect (between political levels) concerns the nearly all-out battle which ensued in the U.S. between the NDCA and USABDA over the issue of amateur competitors teaching ballroom dance. In the briefest terms, USABDA (now USA Dance), the governing body for amateur ballroom dance in the United States, implemented a rule allowing a percentage of its highest-level competitors to teach for pay in order to offset their own dance related expenses as is the case in most other countries (England being the major exception). The NDCA, then the governing body for professional and pro-am ballroom dance in the United States,<sup>18</sup> objected to any amateurs being allowed to teach for pay, this, and contended that teaching for pay marked one as a professional.<sup>19</sup> While the particulars of the arguments and issues are not relevant to the item at hand, it would be foolish to ignore that defining—and thereby controlling access to—amateur and professional status is inextricably bound up with the many prizes such as money, prestige, connections, influence, and power that are at stake in ballroom dancing. Can there be any doubt

then, as to why the ensuing dispute generated such fierce argumentation and support from each?

What is of significance here—and quite contrary to what the power players on *either* side might like to think however—is that neither the debate nor the eventual outcomes were of either interest nor impact to the vast majority of ballroom dancers in the United States. The discrepancies between USABDA and the NDCA did not concern any but the upper echelon of amateur dancers, certainly not the average competitor, and certainly not the far more vast numbers of social dancers. In fact, the overwhelming majority of people involved in ballroom dancing in the U.S. had no idea that a heated debate was even transpiring between USABDA and the NDCA, let alone knowing what the debate was about, what issues were involved, or having any stake in the prizes being thus contested. Just as the “average” U.S. farmer is probably unaware of the U.S.’s policies regarding foreign aid distribution in Africa, so too does the average social dancer lack awareness of the functioning of the competitive ballroom circuit and the particulars involved. Furthermore, even among those who knew of, discussed, and argued about the issues involved<sup>20</sup>—be it through face-to-face conversations or online—almost none were in line to be directly effected by the eventual outcome, whatever it might be.

Such disconnects between power elites and the mainstreams are a commonplace, if unfortunate, feature of politics. But it would be a mistake, however, to think that such disconnects are always improperly motivated or inappropriate. The thinking and decisions of those positioned “higher up” may arise, for instance, from

knowledge of things that those “lower down” are unaware. Or, in a like vein, those at the top may find themselves faced with needing to make utilitarian or function based assessments, decisions that those “lower down” may lack sufficient background, knowledge, or information to make. Even given such caveats however, two key points remain: first, that those in the political elite have their own personal and individual motivations; and second, that the actions of political elites are not *always* as widely felt as either casual observation or the beliefs of those elites might otherwise suggest.

### **Prizes in Play: The Examples of Students, Partners, and Coaching**

As the brief discussion and examples of different layers of politics (i.e. lower-level to higher-level, higher-level to lower-level, and higher-level only) should make clear, the various prizes being sought often intersect and overlap with each other. Over the following several pages, I use the examples of students, partners, and coaching to illustrate and examine some of these overlaps and intersections, and to explore, in particular, the interactivity and dynamism of prizes “in play.”<sup>21</sup>

#### **Students**

Students are not randomly placed or allocated vis-à-vis dance teachers. If geography only provides for only local instructor, for instance, that is far from “random” in the fullest sense of the term. Similarly, when a student enters a new studio seeking instruction, it would be unlikely in the extreme to see the manager roll dice or draw cards to select what instructor to pair that student with. In circumstances where the dance instructors are employed by the studio, the manager may, for

example, channel more, or “better students” to a favored instructor (so already the role of connections can be seen). Furthermore, “better students” may mean several different things in this situation. Because they provide their instructor with reliable income, the prize of money, “better students” might be regular, long-term students; as opposed to new, unproven, or irregularly scheduled ones. Similarly, “better” might mean students who provide their instructor with abundant income, spending a lot of money on lessons even if they (be it student or instructor) can barely dance. Or, in addition to their normal studio clientele, a preferred instructor might be allowed to teach personal students<sup>22</sup> on the studio floor. The instructor’s personal income from such students—whether free of charge or with paying a small floor fee—is regularly four to seven times what an instructor is paid (by the studio) for teaching a studio student.

Alternatively, “better students” might actually mean students who are, in fact, better dancers and, as such, provide the instructor with more accomplished students who are then viewed and evaluated by studio newcomers and spectators watching the students compete at various competitions. In this last instance, because of the implicit attribution that it is that instructor’s instruction that has helped produce the superior dancing, the instructor gains prestige and advertising (also read as fame) from being seen as having students who are, in fact, better dancers. These prizes of fame and prestige have value in their own rights, but also have direct financial implications as other students look to take lessons from instructors with fame and prestige.



Separate from any big picture considerations, students often represent several significant prizes in studio-level politics alone. But this is only part of the situation since (and as noted in the introduction to money as a prize) money is often a complex variable indeed. In this case, for instance, money is often implicated in an instructor's own coaching and training, thus buying them other important prizes like dance knowledge and skill which, in turn, are stepping stones for prizes such as fame and prestige; and, of course, the chain of prizes does not end there.

## **Partners**

### **The Case of Sam, Ed, and Mary (...and Sue Too)**

As the example with new students above makes clear, an instructor's connections with the studio owner or manager can be an important, facilitating, and significant prize indeed. As with most prizes, however, connections can usually be advantageous—and typically are—in more than one way. Unrelated to any students, for instance, a studio owner or manager may bring in a new partner for a favored instructor, regardless of whether that instructor is the even the best dancer or the best match available within the studio. As with all politicking, such maneuvering takes place along a spectrum, being almost imperceptibly subtle at some times and utterly overt at others.

One blatant case of such politicking involves Sam, Ed, and Mary, all three of whom are instructors at an isolated studio. Mary is friendly, gracious, and vivacious; exuding a warm and captivating smile while dancing, while accepting awards, and just

in passing. This holds true both in the ballroom and elsewhere in the hotel, regardless of whether Mary is alone, with students, or with her partner. Sam lacks Mary's warmth and friendliness. In an entire afternoon of Pro-Am competition, one in which Sam had many student entries, I saw him smile and thank the judges presenting him and his students with their awards just once, essentially putting on his smile only while on the floor competing. Sometimes he would bother to escort his students to accept their awards while many times, even when already standing with them, he would just tell them to go retrieve their awards themselves.

Despite their patently contrasting demeanors, Sam is Mary's partner. Partnership notwithstanding, however, Sam can both readily and regularly be heard leveling criticism after criticism at Mary while they are practicing. These fairly public and ongoing disparagements are rather ironic, however, since Mary is a much better dancer than Sam, a reality substantiated by the comments and critiques of numerous teachers, coaches, and judges, and countermanded by none. And Mary is clearly not particularly happy about, or within, her partnership with Sam. She is often despondent after having practiced or competed with Sam and where he has, seemingly inevitably, berated her yet once again. Yet Mary does try to hide her upset, still smiling her warm and engaging smile whenever in the ballroom or in public, and always trying to be friendly to those around her. Once she is out the door, around the corner, and down the hall however—away from the flow of ballroom traffic—I can see that her shoulders slump as her smile slides away.

So what about Ed? He is much like Mary as far as personal demeanor is concerned, typically exuding a warm, friendly, and a smiling countenance both on and off the floor. While Ed does not have a professional partner, he is clearly a good dancer, and one with lots of additional heretofore untapped potential. The current quality of his movement is readily seen in the dancing he does with various students and, in the view of all the judges I heard from, is of a higher standard than Sam's.

Given the glaringly obvious greater compatibility between Mary and Ed than between Mary and Sam—both in disposition and ability—why does Mary remain partnered with Sam rather than with Ed? Hypothetically speaking there could, of course, be many answers to this question, ranging from commitment levels to finances, from jealous romantic partners to past history, from incompatibility on the floor to a failed relationship between them. And all of these reasons—and more—do inevitably arise in various situations. For Sam, Mary, and Ed, however, something—or, in this case, someone—else is at issue, namely Sue, the studio owner and manager where Sam, Mary, and Ed all work.

For Sue, Sam is the “chosen one,” and this ramifies onto Mary and Ed as well. Not having seen Ed in a year, for instance, I was surprised to find him still without a professional competitive partner, especially given the coupling of his natural ability and his pleasant disposition. When I asked him why he did not have a partner yet, and when he was going to get one, Ed merely responded with a slight shrug of his shoulders. After some gentle prompting on my part, Ed confessed, with a somewhat abashed look on his face, that he did not think he would be getting a partner because

“she doesn’t want me to have one;” his comment being accompanied by a vague gesture of Ed’s chin towards the table where Sue was currently sitting. While matching Mary with Ed would leave Sam without a partner, that, alone, contributes only a small piece to the Sam/Mary/Ed partnership puzzle.

Given Ed’s (dancing) skills and ability, coupled with his pleasant and personable manner, even bringing in an entirely new partner for Ed would be likely to soon unseat Sam from his perch atop his local, isolated dance hierarchy. Belonging to a local and isolated dance community is, in the end, precisely what enables Sam to stay on top, locks Mary into a far from ideal partnership, and locks Ed out from having a partner at all. Sue’s favoring of Sam and the limiting scope of their local dance scene means that Mary and Ed must “make do” in their current circumstances—despite their far from ideal conditions—since making any waves in the status quo, by either Mary or Ed, would probably land them in even deeper water, or possibly locked out of their local dance scene altogether.

Being locked out of the dance scene, especially in smaller dance communities, can prove doubly difficult representing, as it does, both a loss of employment as well as loss of access to a meaningful activity. The very fact that people like Mary and Ed continue to work in the dance industry, especially given their gnawing frustrations with their given situations, is indicative of a deeper reality—that dancing matters to many, often quite deeply,<sup>23</sup> and thus represents a powerful lever along which force, often in the form of political maneuverings such as Sue’s, is often exerted. At the risk of being redundant, Sam’s connection with Sue is a valuable prize indeed, providing

Sam with an situation and opportunity predicated on Sue's institutional authority as studio owner/manager and as both Mary's and Ed's employer.

### **The Cases of Erika and of Ned and Maya**

The example provided by Sam, Sue, Mary, and Ed is far from an isolated one, with the same dynamics showing up across a wide gamut of situations ranging from those of junior competitors on one end, to long established and more highly accomplished professional competitors on the other. Erika, for instance, was a young competitor in her early teens who was essentially run out of her local studio when it became clear that her dancing would prove a challenge to the studio owners' daughters' own status as the studios dance queen. Or take Ned, an up and coming competitor, who had been taken under the wing of a past professional Blackpool champion, and was clearly being groomed for professional success. When Ned chose to partner Maya, however, that all changed. Despite the fact that Maya was also a student of Ned's instructor, she was not the partner that Ned had, apparently, been being groomed for.

The impact on Ned after choosing to partner Maya *against his instructor's wishes* was as swift as it was dramatic. Ned and Maya no longer had the same access to their instructor that they had each previously enjoyed; the connections and access to knowledge they had both heretofore amassed essentially evaporated. Seemingly overnight their instructor's schedule was always already filled when they tried to book lessons. This was particularly striking since, before, time could often be found for Maya and could almost always be found for Ned. Similarly, access to performance

opportunities, as well as personal introductions to and inclusion in conversations with other top tier coaches, all dried up as readily as the now unavailable lesson slots, all because Ned chose to partner Maya against his coach's wishes.

## **Coaching**

As the case of Ned and Maya starts to suggest, coaching, like students and partners, is another area wherein the various prizes are often contested, lost, and won. Visiting coaches, for example, typically leave the booking of their lessons to the hosting studio manager. What matters to the coaches, after all, is that they are booked for a certain number of hours per day, not how such bookings are arranged. From the coaches' standpoint this system is largely one of expediency; they want to come in and teach as much as they wish, with as little personal trouble as they can manage. And who would not want the same if they were the ones in the coaches' position? Yet this arrangement provides the studio owners or managers (or whoever else is in charge of booking the coaches' lessons) with a powerful political lever as gatekeepers (see page 270, in this chapter, for a more detailed look at the roles of gatekeepers and gate-keeping) to the coaches' expertise and political clout. Clearly connections, money, and knowledge are among the most prominent prizes at play in any such scenario and as the case of Fran will make even clearer.

Fran, for example, is an advanced student who eagerly seeks out top-level instruction, especially whenever a higher caliber coach will be visiting her studio. As Fran continued to improve, however, she found the manager of her studio telling her that the visiting coaches were already all booked up more and more often. At first Fran

just attributed this to certain coaches' popularity or even plain bad luck or bad timing on her part. Over time, however, she began to notice that some of these coaches had open or unbooked slots in their schedules, hearing studio employees trying to recruit other students for these slots up to the last minute and even, on occasion, witnessing visiting coaches go out and grab a coffee in an unfilled lesson slot.

The breaking point came when one coach, one with whom Fran had previously formed quite a good rapport, stopped Fran in passing at the studio and asked her why she had stopped competing. Fran, quite taken aback by this question, ended up mumbling something along the lines of, "umm, I haven't..." to which a now somewhat embarrassed coach responded, "Oh, I'm sorry...I thought you had since you hadn't seemed to be pursuing any coaching anymore." Fran, both shocked and devastated by this declaration, could only express exasperation at this point, reeling off a very long list of all of the efforts she had made, in fact, to secure exactly such coaching; as well as the equally long list of "reasons" and "explanations," provided to her by the studio manager, as to why each of these coaching opportunities had not been available.

What emerged to be the case was that Fran's very improvement was actually the genesis of her difficulties in securing continuing coaching opportunities. Apparently the substantial degree of improvement she had been achieving threatened to "show up" several of the studios less accomplished instructors; thereby triggering the studio manager's behavior in blocking Fran from having access to the coaches visiting the studio. Once the machinations involved in this situation unraveled, Fran

departed from her former studio and started booking her own coaching for herself at another, nearby facility. In this case then, the hard earned prizes of dance skill and knowledge that Fran had achieved were the same criteria that set her up as a threat and rival (at least in the studio manager's eyes) to some of the lower level instructors at the studio. In many situations, however, and unlike Fran's case, a student's studio is their only source of access to visiting coaches. In such situations many students, if not most, lack either access to coaches or to alternative facilities (or both), thereby cementing the power that studios can and do exert based on connections—i.e. as gatekeepers—by controlling the access to various coaches.

Only an examination of each situation can determine whether it is the owner's homegrown cousin or the manager's wunderkind from abroad who most benefits from the politics of the specific examples given above—as well as along what lines and in what ways. But as the examples of access to students, partners, and coaching all demonstrate, the various prizes of money, skill, fame, prestige, connections, and knowledge often overlap in myriad ways. And it is no accident that the specific examples used all fall under the umbrellas of both lower-level to higher-level and to higher-level to lower-level politics that I had introduced above. As such, each of the examples given above helps illustrate the ongoing interrelationships between both the various levels and prizes often at issue in competitive ballroom dancing. Prizes won at higher levels—such as a coach's fame, prestige, and knowledge—ramify down to lower levels after all, just as prizes won at lower levels—such as Fran's improved dance skill—ramify up to higher levels.



## **Panel Preferences and Coaches' Prestige: Selective Privileging**

Returning to the issue of adjudicator selection, the political pressure exerted by choosing judging panels is actually twofold. First, and most directly, different judging panels will favor different dancing and dancers, and the choice in judging panels can thus exert a direct and fundamental impact on competition results. The level of such impact does, of course, vary in relation to the significance of the competition in question. At whatever level however, be it in small-scale local standings or major international competitions, the top down dynamic of such influence cannot be ignored or avoided. This impact on competition results, intrinsic to adjudicator selection, also helps set the stage for each competition's final outcome by privileging certain aesthetics over others. If speed is what is being rewarded, more and more lower level dancers then try to incorporate this dynamic into their own dancing—a dynamic facilitated by the drive to emulate attributes and follow the models provided by those who place well. Furthering this tendency is the fact that lower level dancers deliberately seek out these more “successful” dancers as teachers and coaches, only serving to reinforce both the value of these attributes and the very validity of these attributes as legitimate criteria for success.

The other top-down influence clearly in play with the choice of judging panels is a secondary process and concerns the prestige and desirability of certain judges as coaches. Given the multiple roles of many ballroom professionals, being recognized as a national championship or international championship caliber judge can drastically raise the value—and thus the actual price as well—of one's stock as a coach. Here,

again, a twofold dynamic is at play. In the first instance, a coach's judgment may be held in higher regard simply because they are recognized as an elite adjudicator. The basic thought process in this scenario being "if they have a good enough eye to judge that, then they must really know what they're talking about and so surely they can help me." This formulation attributes the coach's authority to what is, in essence, the equivalent of a moral mandate. Conversely, in the second instance, the benefit being sought is more accurately attributed to expectations of utility. Here, the thinking runs along the lines of "they judge important competitions and, if I take coaching with them, I'll probably do better in those competitions."

### **Effective vs. Affective Benefits from Coaching**

This second track of reasoning—"I'll do better at competitions if I take lessons with the coaches judging those competitions"—also consists of dual aspects, one affect based and one effect based. On the affective side, the idea is that a coach will push their own couple, talking them up to other judges, letting it be known among other judges whom they are friendly with that "X" is their couple, and marking them preferentially whenever judging them. While most of the judges I have spoken with claim not to participate in such back-scratching, these self-reports do not always hold up against the glare of reality. Natalie, for instance, is one such judge who, when interviewed, assured me that she never partook in such behaviors and, in fact, that she did not associate herself with judges who behaved in such a biased manner. As it turns out, however, this was not true. About a month or so after I had interviewed Natalie I

happened to be in an airport, on my way home from a competition, sitting with my back to Ted, another judge. As I sat there going over some notes I had made during that weekend's competition, Natalie comes storming up in front of Ted (so facing my back), pulls a set of scrutineering marks out from the inside breast pocket of her jacket and, in a loud and biting voice, started ranting at and berating Ted: "How could you mark *my* couple like *that*? What were you *thinking*?"<sup>24</sup>

Trevor, a well-known judge who had placed very highly in the professional ranks as a competitor, provides another example of this same process. Trevor's daughter, Nancy, is a very skilled dancer, now competing as an amateur, and usually placing quite well. Growing up around top level dancing, having access to premiere level coaches, and name recognition are all, inevitably, to Nancy's advantage. Still, while most would consider Nancy fortunate, this alone would probably not draw too many raised eyebrows. It is quite a different story, however, when Nancy does not place as well as Trevor thinks she should have. In such instances Trevor has been known to go over to one of the judges who have marked Nancy poorly, saying, "I'm Trevor Cunningham. Can you tell me what they [meaning Nancy and her partner] did wrong?" Trevor does not, however, challenge other judges indiscriminately. Rather, Trevor only confronts judges whose own dancing accomplishments are not on par with his and who, as judges, are lower in the "ranks" than he is. Implicit in Trevor's inquiry, however, and as confirmed by other judges, is a direct and pointed challenge. "Who are you," says this underlying message, "to contradict me?" Also being implied

is the message, “recognize who I am—and, in the future, mark my daughter accordingly!”<sup>25</sup>

A different example of the affective use of coaching comes from professional world finalists Neil and Carla. One of the questions I regularly asked various dancers concerned who they chose to take their coaching from and why—who *their* coaches were, and why they chose to work with each. Most of the time, I received fairly straightforward responses to this question, and was therefore caught rather by surprise when I got to this question during my interview with Neil and Carla. Before responding to this question, and in marked contrast to the great candor with which they had previously been speaking, Carla asked me to reassure them, again, that the interview and everything they were saying was going to be held in the strictest confidence. And, after I had assured them that yes, everything was strictly confidential, they responded to my question, listing off their coaches. Given that whom various dancers work with is relatively well known however—especially at the higher levels—and since this question had never seemed to raise flags before, it struck me that there must be something deeper going on here. So, as a follow up question, I next asked Neil and Carla why this might be considered a sensitive issue. Their response is highly illuminating. “Of course each of our coaches knows who we’re working with in general,” relates Neil, “but they don’t actually know how much time we spend with each one of them.” Expanding on this comment Carla goes on to say that, “as long as they each think of us as ‘their’ couple they help push us. We’d lose that if it came out that we really consider [X] our main coach.”

While Neil and Carla both clearly felt that each of their coaches added something to their dancing, they were also highly cognizant of the push that couples can get from their coaches. Perhaps most significant in this example is the fact that Neil and Carla are, as previously mentioned, professional world finalists. While telling in its own right, this is also far from surprising as ever more political activity swirls about the closer one gets to the pinnacles of power and influence in any social system, ballroom dancing not excepted.

A final example of the how competitors try to harness the affective “push” from coaching—and one conceptually related to Neil and Carla’s situation—concerns Stuart, Martina, and Matthew. Stuart and Martina had saved up enough money to go to London for a couple of weeks and get some coaching, and were consulting with Matthew, their coach, regarding who they should go to for lessons in London. As they went through a list of the top coaches in London, the various names were split into three categories: 1) “dance lessons;” 2) “political lessons;” and 3) “dance *and* political lessons.” The consensus between Stuart, Martina, and Matthew was that Stuart and Martina still were not “big enough” to be too concerned with taking purely “political lessons,” so the coaches who only fit into that category were ruled out. Among the other possible coaches, however, Stuart, Martina, and Matthew also felt that, just as a hedge, Stuart and Martina might as well seek out lessons from those who offered both “dance” and “political” returns. The categorization of some lessons as “political,” some as “dance” lessons, and some as both “dance” and “political” well illustrates

both the affective and effective dynamics of seeking coaching for improved results, as well as the overlap that often exists between the two.

The affective dynamics I have been describing are often—and unfortunately—conflated with effective dynamics however. When a dancer takes lessons from a coach, for instance, they are learning to dance according to the aesthetic schema of that coach and thus, inevitably, will come to better fit that coach’s model of good dancing. That dancer is therefore likely to place better with that coach when they are adjudicating because they now better fit that coach’s model of good dancing. Furthermore, that particular judge is likely to be friends with other coaches with similar tastes in dancing, and thus in judging,<sup>26</sup> who are therefore likely to mark the same type of dancing well. Given such dynamics then, it is understandable that a couple who takes coaching from a judge may, in fact, dance in a manner that both that judge, and other judges friendly with their coach and sharing the same tastes, would mark well. In such circumstances, being marked well may very well be the effect of learning to dance in a certain manner. This is a far cry from a dancer’s coach marking the couple well *because* of being their coach or pushing their couple with their friends. This is not to say that this does not happen. Indeed, as Ruud Vermey, a world-class coach who has been involved in the careers of several amateur and professional World and Blackpool finalists explicates, “dancers can [and do] choose to go to certain judges for coaching, not necessarily because they believe them to be good teachers but as a political move” (1994:41). As all of these examples above help demonstrate, the affective dynamics of judging do exist, and this is neither a secret nor a silent truth.

One caveat that does need to be made here is that the line between the effective and affective dynamics is not always a clear one. Take Karl and Teri, a mid-level amateur couple, for instance. They always placed poorly in competition in the big city closest to the remote suburb where they lived, yet always beat these same couples everywhere else they competed. At one level it looks like the coaches in that city favored their own couples, undeservedly marking their students ahead of Karl and Teri (as evidenced by the fact that Karl and Teri came out ahead anywhere else). To some extent deliberately biased marking was involved, especially given the regularity and circumstances of such marking. At the same time, however, an element of unintentional perceptual disconnection also seems to have been in play. At one competition in the nearby city Fran, a judge with little exposure or involvement outside her local scene, came storming up to Sylvia, a past world championship judge, demanding to know how Sylvia could have placed Karl and Teri to win their event.<sup>27</sup> Sylvia's response was as straightforward as it was terse: "because they were the only ones to stay on time."

Timing is such a basic and fundamental element of dance that, almost universally, judges extol it as the first and most important variable they look at.<sup>28</sup> Indeed the common wisdom and the most typical statement made by judges is that dancing off time is the most egregious error that competitors can make. In Fran's case, however, there seemed to be a perceptual disconnection: she could not even see the difference in timing. If Fran had been able to see the timing in question, there is no way she would have challenged Sylvia regarding Karl and Teri's marks. In the first

instance Sylvia, as a world championship judge, “outranks” Fran by several orders of magnitude. Fran has also taken coaching from Sylvia in the past, so was well aware of who Sylvia was, and of her expertise. The whole situation could also have played out quite differently had Fran—especially as an occasional student of Sylvia’s—simply asked what it was that Sylvia was marking. The outright indignation with which Fran accosted Sylvia, demanding a justification of the marks given, reads quite differently however. In this case—and clearly at odds with the universal primacy placed by judges on timing—there was a perceptual disconnection. Fran literally could not see the timing discrepancies in question. As the case of Karl, Teri, Fran and Sylvia thus makes clear, there is not always a simple binary split between the effective and affective dynamics involved with improving one’s results via coaching. While some cases may clearly fall on one side or the other, in general the effective and the affective represent poles on a continuum, a continuum including the full range of possibilities between the two.

Finally, acknowledging the reality that judges do, at times, intentionally advocate and push for their students is a far different proposition than saying that all improved marks received as the outcome of coaching partake of these dynamics. This conflation of effective and affective outcomes seems to be one of the major shadows hanging over ballroom judging. Indeed, the lack of recognition of effective results from coaching makes it that much harder to identify the affective ones and, taking this one step further, actually allows for more prejudiced judging. Calling all coaching related marking “biased” or “political” provides a veil for the very practices it decries,



as legitimate content and aesthetic based preferences are cast in the same light as prejudicial marking. At the same time, however, to suggest that politics are anything but a significant dynamic of competitive dance is problematic in the extreme, and it is for exactly this reason that Vermey calls into question if results can ever be “real/accurate?” given competition politics (1994:41).<sup>29</sup>

## **Judging is Political**

### **The Dual Nature of the Political**

Simply stated, suggesting that competitive dancing is in any way non-political is simply wrong. The very lack of objective criteria for judging in DanceSport invites political considerations because people *cannot* objectively evaluate other people (Vermey 1994:42).<sup>30</sup> What this means is that even if a judge marking a competition has never seen any of the couples before, and knows nothing about these particular competitors or which coaches each of them regularly work with, it is overly simplistic to credit such a judge’s decision as being non-political, as any number of subjectivities may still be at play. Far more important than any such biases<sup>31</sup> may be, however, is that any denial of the political element in DanceSport judging neglects the political duality of action. Decisions and actions—including the absence of any decision or action—can, after all, be political in two different ways. *While it is true that choices may or may not be made politically, once made, however, they may very well also have political outcomes and consequences.* Even if a judge is as forthright as they can be in their assessment of who wins a given competition, the higher the stakes (i.e. the

bigger the title) the greater the political ramifications of the decision; even if for no other reason than the *political impact* that winning can have for those who do win.

Especially in overtly competitive arenas (such as athletics) the difference between coming in first and second—and the lasting repercussions associated with such distinctions—can be immense. Even if only by a marginal fraction, the winner is likely to have very different prospects, in comparison to the runner up, as far as financial remuneration and cultural capital (i.e. prizes such as money, fame, and prestige). National or international title holders typically have certain opportunities—invitations, and overall demand for doing shows, for coaching, and, later on, as judges themselves—that the same couple might not have if even a couple of judges' marks had been different. The exact same dancer, dancing in exactly the same manner, can command very different attention as a finalist or champion (be it at the national or international levels) than they would if they were not finalists or champions. Such differences can be profound ones too, especially given the economic stakes typically involved in doing shows and in coaching.<sup>32</sup>

### **Institutional Status**

One need say nothing of an individual judge's motives, agendas, or behavior to concede that it is politically and institutionally advantageous to be a judge. Vermeij, a judge himself, only points out something that is as obvious as it is blatant when he states that “being a judge institutionally and politically elevates individuals” (1994:41). The same dancer who was competing a week ago is received quite differently the very next week as a judge, after just retiring from competition. Asked

about any differences in how he has been received and treated since his recent retirement, Harry, a many time international semi-finalist, comments, “people have been coming up to me, saying ‘hi,’ and telling me how much they’ve always liked our dancing, and I can’t help but wonder, ‘then why is this the first I’m hearing of it?’ It’s just ridiculous!” Or, on the other end, the same dancers who were Harry’s competitors, even those who placed significantly ahead of him as a dancer, are now institutionally subordinate to him as a judge; and their behavior reflects an awareness of this structural realignment. “Other dancers,” relates Harry, “who may have only said hello in passing, or who may have never had a nice thing to say about me in their entire lives, now all of a sudden stop to talk to me, want to ask how things are going.” Building on this even more, Harry is quite clear that now, as a judge, he is being included in different discussions—ranging from formal meetings to informal sit-downs, drinks, and dinners—and provided with different contacts and opportunities.

### **Overlapping Interests and Impacts**

As I pointed out above, only the officers of each organization and a handful of elite amateur competitors were directly involved in the fight between the NDCA and USABDA, and neither the average competitor nor social dancer had any stake in either the debate or its outcome. Yet this is not to say that only a small, elite group of amateur competitors and the officers of both the NDCA and USABDA were, ultimately, the only parties concerned with the outcome. Given the limited resource of dance students and dance student dollars, any number of professional instructors also

had stakes in the outcome of this issue. Many instructors did not welcome the competition, and so adamantly insisted that there was no way, under any circumstances, that amateurs should be able to teach for pay while retaining their amateur status. Other instructors I spoke with did not mind the “competition” in the least, one, for instance, saying, “if they’re a better teacher than I am, then good for them, they deserve the money.” While the variety of perspectives may be interesting, what is significant in this case is how the eventual outcome came about—what pressures were involved.

On the one side was the NDCA, ostensibly defending the livelihood of its (at the time) entirely professional membership. On the other side was USABDA (since renamed USA Dance), the U.S. membership organization of the IDSF and, as such, the body responsible for selecting the U.S. representatives to the IDSF World Championship events. USABDA’s rule to allow top amateurs to teach for pay was, at least in large measure, intended to help U.S. couples be more competitive with their world counterparts who, with the exception of England, were all allowed (by their respective national governing bodies) to teach for pay. Were these two parties the only political players involved however? No, absolutely not. Why, for instance, did the NDCA eventually create its World Competitor status?

While allowing far fewer amateurs to teach for pay than USABDA did, the NDCA’s “World Competitor” status essentially provides for nothing more than a much more stringent version of USABDA’s own policy, all without coming to any accord with USABDA. Given its initial objection to *any* amateurs teaching for pay,

why the eventual accommodation by the NDCA? The answer to such questions lies in the fact that the most elite amateur dancers in the U.S. also represented a very potent political force in this debate. Without a strong and coordinated organizational presence, how did the elite U.S. amateurs influence the NDCA's eventual creation of its World Competitor status? In short, the answer to this question lies in the fame and prestige of the elite amateurs.

If the NDCA had disallowed teaching for pay by *any* amateurs, they would have ended up running their own amateur events, including their own amateur national championships, without the elite amateurs still recognized as such by USABDA. What this means is that USABDA and the NDCA each would have run their own “amateur” national championships—as, indeed, they both do—but that the championships run by USABDA (as the U.S. member body of the ISDF) would not only be the event that qualified dancers for the ISDF-run “amateur” World Championships, but would also have ended up with a far stronger caliber of finalists than any NDCA counterpart that disallowed these same competitors. The prestige of the NDCA event would have suffered by comparison as the NDCA recognized finalists and “champions” would have been summarily beaten by their USABDA counterparts at any and all competitions where they went head to head (e.g. at USABDA competitions in the U.S. as well as all of the most important international events). The visibility and proficiency of the most elite amateurs, coupled with the fact of their recognition and legitimacy on the international scene, served as a powerful political lever since

discounting these dancers would have meant a lack of credibility, both in the U.S. and abroad, for the NDCA championships and, by extension, for the NDCA itself.

## **Gatekeepers**

Like any other social dynamic, contestations for the various prizes in ballroom dancing typically transpire along multiple channels and across multiple levels. Indeed the constant creation and negotiation of power and influence are social dynamics that, in Geertz's famous words, go "all the way down," and access to power—including the control of such access—is itself an often-significant form of power. As those with institutional roles, connections, and authority to monitor and control access to the various social prizes, political gatekeepers thus emerge as very powerful political players. As with any other prize, what counts as power is, of course, always contextual. In ballroom dancing, for instance, technical knowledge is often a very potent weapon. One ramification of this is that, in addition to those who have technical knowledge, the people who control access to those with such knowledge also wield what can (at times) be a very substantive power. As a basic example, the manager of a dance studio may, for instance, hold power far in excess of what is explicable from their dance skills or knowledge alone.

The intrinsic power of gate keeping manifests itself across all levels of social interaction. Within ballroom some of the more obvious levels of such manifestations include the studio, local areas, geographic regions, franchise regions, specific competitions, competition circuits, full franchises, national organizations, and the international scene. In a more abstract sense, pinpointing the gatekeepers at each level,

and the means by which they exert control, are both critical elements in the conceptual connect-the-dots representing the webs of power involved in any social system. Determining who the gatekeepers are and where they are positioned in any given system establishes the “dots” of that system while understanding which of these nodes of power connect to each other establishes where the lines should be drawn, i.e. how the dots are connected. The web so described is, of course, multidimensional as different nodes function on different levels relative to each other. Beyond even this, however, the connections are neither static nor equally bi-directional; as flows of influence may be weighted in any number of ways.

How webs of power function, and the role of gatekeepers in setting and maintaining them, “on the ground” can be as straightforward or as nuanced as any other facet of social life. As the example of Fran makes clear, a studio manager may be the one who determines who has access to visiting coaches, serving as a gatekeeper by giving priority to preferred dancers or couples on the one hand and even entirely blocking access to others, such as happened to Fran, on the other. The discord between USABDA and the NDCA is also best understood as a struggle over gate-keeping. Beyond the overt contestation of amateur eligibility, after all, was an underlying struggle regarding who gets to decide such questions of eligibility. Rules and regulations regarding eligibility—and their enforcement—are always important in any social situation, and ballroom dancing is no different.

Who is eligible to compete, what figures one can dance, and costuming restrictions are all some of the eligibility issues often at stake in competitive ballroom

dancing. At the highest levels, eligibility issues determine which couples can compete for the respective national titles and world championships. Hand in hand with the ever growing international scope of competitive ballroom dancing is a commensurate internationality of individual partnerships, so questions and determinations regarding eligibility continue to become ever more common. Which country a couple will dance for and represent, for example, concerns any number of variables including (but not limited to) access to their own coaching and myriad financial considerations.<sup>33</sup> No less important, however, may be the question of eligibility.

Especially for dancers in the heat of their competitive careers, a prolonged absence from the competitive floor may be perceived as an insurmountable blockade to their results. Even if not assessed as such on the pragmatic grounds of stymied inertia, a longer delay may be intolerable to a new couple for any other number of reasons. Most competitors, after all, compete because it is something they enjoy doing. For a highly skilled couple, not being able to compete for national and world titles for an extended period of time may very well be a deciding factor between which countries they ultimately choose to represent. An important dynamic revealed via such considerations is that a couple's national representation may very well not be based on nationality at all but, rather, on issues such as access to coaching, financial opportunities including governmental subsidies, and varying competition eligibility standards.

At far more elementary levels, issues of eligibility may concern what figures one is allowed to dance in competition. The different syllabi of various dance teaching



and testing organizations are, of course, all elements of this type of gate keeping. For the competitive dancer this often shows up in restrictions to bronze, silver, or gold figures, or in being able to dance one's own choreography instead of established patterns. The very struggle at the heart of the wildly successful Australian movie by Baz Luhrmann, *Strictly Ballroom*, concerned exactly this issue with the main character, Scott Hastings (played by Paul Mercurio), confronting and challenging the gate keeping authority of the Dance Federation's President, Barry Fife (played by Bill Hunter), who adamantly insists that there will be "no new steps," going so far as to first deceive Scott and eventually rig the "Pan Pacific Grand Prix Championship" against him in order to prevent any unsanctioned "new steps" from being introduced to the competition scene.

While it is clear that the over-the-top character of the film is deliberate, many ballroom dancers find extra appreciation for and enjoyment in noting how much less exaggeration is involved in *Strictly Ballroom* than the average layperson may well realize. The characters and issues on display in *Strictly Ballroom* are purposefully exaggerated, yes, but they have real life counterparts in the ballroom world,<sup>34</sup> and the contestation depicted between governing authority and individual dancers—including the often pivotal role of gate-keeping—is no exception. Whether at the level of national governing bodies or in the decisions of a given competition's chairman of judges, the power to determine eligibility is among the most powerful of a gatekeeper's prerogatives. The discord between USABDA and the NDCA regarding

amateur competitor eligibility—largely hinging over the gate-keeping role of who controlled this eligibility—well illustrates this dynamic for national governing bodies.

At a given competition the chairman of judges is, arguably, the most significant gatekeeper. While there are a series of rules for breaking ties in competition marks and placements, it is the chairman who decides whether to cut or allow extra couples, with tied recall marks, from round to round—whether to run a semi-final with 10 couples or with 14 couples, or an eight couple versus five couple final, for example. The 2004 USDSC, for instance, had an eight couple final for the National American Ballroom title. In this case it was the chairman of judge’s decision alone—in this case to conduct an eight couple final—that literally made it *eight couples* who could declare themselves as U.S. National Finalists. This is a potent power indeed, especially when one considers the lasting impact that being a finalist can have on a couple’s career trajectory—including their own dancing, invitations to do shows, desirability as coaches, as well as the financial ramifications involved with some of these opportunities—both in the short run as well as into their retirement.<sup>35</sup>

In Chapter Three I explored the question of community membership, examining who belongs to the competitive ballroom and salsa dance scenes, how, and why. One important component of this analysis concerned the complex, translocal communities, consisting of overlapping co-extant social networks typical of the dance communities in question. Where Chapter Three demarcated the “who” and “how” of community membership, Chapter Four analyzes the social structure and networks of

the community; unpacking the relationships of power and authority within, and in relation to, which other dynamics of ballroom life unfold.

In this chapter I did four things. First, I outlined the general structure of competitive ballroom dancing. Second, I introduced the structurally privileged goals that are at stake; Bailey's prizes (2001). Next, I turned to the issue of authority, (1) distinguishing between the institutional and personal basis for authority, and (2) explored how authority arises from and is exercised by way of both moral mandate and expected utility. Fourth, I examined how the various prizes actually function within the ballroom circuit, including how they often articulate, overlap, and impact each other, as well as how these prizes shape, constrain, support, and perpetuate the various facets that comprise the ballroom and salsa circuits. Overall then, this chapter identified how the ballroom (and salsa) communities operate, revealing the prizes that underlie the systematicity which serves as the context and structural framing for both the culture and persons as taken up in Sections III and IV respectively. First, however, I want to look at the "selling" of dance, including the financial side of dancesport, the structure and operation of US based ballroom franchises, and look at ballroom and salsa politics "in action"—for all of which I now turn to Chapter Five.

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### **Endnotes: Chapter Four**

<sup>1</sup> I am particularly indebted to F. G. Bailey, without who's invaluable advice both the structure and the content of Chapters 4 and 5 would be a hollow shell of their current form. Any and all remaining gaps and confusions are, of course, solely my own.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the dual nature of the political in judging see page 255 of this chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Social prizes are not, of course, the only reasons why people dance. Increasing confidence, self-expression, achievement, and mastery are just a few of the other motivationally salient dynamics that can come into play. For more about the values that can also prove motivational see Chapter Six and Seven, and for more on personally salient motivations and dynamics see Section IV (Chapters Ten-Twelve).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that within the competitive ballroom world it is quite difficult to achieve competitive success without the corresponding amount of fame. Whereas a businessman, farmer, or bank manager might all be quite successful without being famous, the very nature of dancesport connects link success with fame.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the conflation of power with expressions of power is the same mistake made by earlier models of culture, wherein culture was simultaneously, and circularly, cast as both cause and effect. Defining politics—and as I think it should be defined—as the ability to exert influence on, or over, someone, or something lays bare the relational character of such power.

<sup>6</sup> Rosaldo (1980) is advocating a similar relationship in noting that institutional facts do not, in any way, inhere in brute facts; the distinction between brute fact and institutional facts—as well as the lived reality of both—following from the work of John Searle (cf. D’Andrade 1984).

<sup>7</sup> A round of 96 gets cut to a round of 48, for example, which then gets cut to a round of 24 couples for the quarter finals, 12 couples for the semi final, and finally 6 couples for the final.

<sup>8</sup> Arguably the most wide-spread example of the common disconnect between how things should be done and how they are done comes from organized religion, wherein many people may readily agree on how things “should” be done (on at least some things!), despite, or in fact even oblivious too, their own practices at odds with these “shoulds.” Even so entrenched a set of practices as religion is *always* expressed and followed through the “lens” of individuals and rarely, if ever, is this a straightforward process. “Few people, individually or collectively,” notes Ortner, “follow the precepts of their religion in some clear-cut and direct way” (1999:69) Without a doubt it is persons who “deploy” (ibid:126), mobilize (ibid:133), and overcome (i.e. ibid:128) their religious practices and beliefs and, as such, “there is always a range of variation in different people’s belief in and commitment to religious precepts” (ibid:143). Given this inherent variability for more institutionalized systems such as religion how much moreso than the differentiation for less deliberate meaning making systems?

<sup>9</sup> Despite her complex and nuanced treatment of social categories, interactions, and power Blackwood further recognizes that “life holds more complex meanings still” (2000:194). What some of these meanings are, how they are generated, and—most importantly—how particular configurations of such meaning become salient for particular individuals are all at the heart of my own theoretical interests.

<sup>10</sup> This concept provides a theoretical backbone for Bailey’s *Stratagems and Spoils* (2001 [1969]), see, in particular, pages 8, 69, 111, 121, 233, and 239. Also see Popper (1966), who foregrounded this same point and the significance of such unintended results for social science and Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:272-273) for an interesting exploration and example of such dynamics regarding missionary efforts to create domesticity.

<sup>11</sup> The works of Rosaldo, Chodorow, and Ortner all provide good examples of this from early feminist anthropology.

<sup>12</sup> The “average” studio is, of course, a hypothetical one as no studio—just like no person—is actually average; while certain dynamics may even be typical, a range of variation is always in play.

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<sup>13</sup> Versus a studio situation where, for instance, all the instructors were independent agents who just happened to teach in the same facility.

<sup>14</sup> Whether such a boost in image is merited (or not) is a separate question; one which could only be answered on a case by case basis and, even then, would likely be highly dependent on both frame of reference and individual opinion and assessment.

<sup>15</sup> In the course of my research I encountered one exceptional case where a judge did, in fact, end up on a judging panel by chance.

<sup>16</sup> “Someone,” in this case, need not be a single person. A single event organizer or a small group of event organizers may equally be responsible for choosing and hiring judges.

<sup>17</sup> This topic is more fully discussed in the section on judging in Chapter 8.

<sup>18</sup> The NDCA has since, and largely as an outcome of the rift with USDBDA engendered by the debate over amateurs teaching for pay, started registering amateur dancers and running its own amateur national championships as well.

<sup>19</sup> Who counts as a professional, and why, is a different if interesting question, and one that I address in the discussion regarding the conflict between the NDCA and USABDA.

<sup>20</sup> Most such discussions seemed to be of three varieties: trying to push the point of view they espoused; wanting to “belong;” and wanting to be “in the know.” For some discussants it was easy to isolate one of these tendencies as clearly dominant while, for others, there seemed to be more mixed permutations.

<sup>21</sup> Much in the same vein as Ortner’s “serious games” my use of “in play” is not intended to discount the stakes involved but, rather, to highlight both the individual agendas and the contested nature of the interactions involved.

<sup>22</sup> Personal students, meaning students that the teacher personally brings in who, in no way, have been recruited through the studio (be it via studio name recognition, marketing, advertising, etc.).

<sup>23</sup> The deep meaning that dance can have for dancers is a primary focus of Section IV on “Self.”

<sup>24</sup> I want to point out that Natalie might very well consider herself not to be being political or promoting politics but, instead, simply reacting to what she perceives as blatant unfairness. As I pointed out at the start of this chapter, however, even if this is the case, the very fact that her comments (as a judge) can have social consequences makes it political.

<sup>25</sup> Notice that the implied “or else” in this statement links moral and utility based power.

<sup>26</sup> This is, of course, far from a universal dynamic. Indeed, even some married coaches—despite having partnered each other as competitors and developed compatible dancing styles—may evaluate and judge other couples quite differently.

<sup>27</sup> The other judges (besides Sylvia) were local one’s who placed Karl and Teri poorly so they did not actually win the event. Part of Fran’s disconcertment though, was that Sylvia’s mark was enough to put Karl and Teri in second place, ahead of Fran’s own students.

<sup>28</sup> Largely this is more of an issue with lower level dancers and dancing, where many judges will look to see who’s off time to cut from the next round or to place at the bottom. How timing is used, however, is

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something that carries through all the way to the highest levels of dancing and judging. One judge I spoke with, in explaining his preference for one of the two top couples in the world, pointed out how one couple only used the basic timing and so, to his mind, did not demonstrate as much of a command of their dancing—a distinction still being made between the two best couples in the world!

<sup>29</sup> Although decisions at any level can be political, this challenge to any type of reality or accuracy in judging is particularly applicable to the highest levels of competition. The untrained and unfamiliar eye can readily discern the difference in expertise between novice and accomplished dancers after all. Indeed any night spent at a bar or club with dancing provides ample opportunity to observe the easily discernable differences between “good” and “bad” dancers. It is when all of the dancers concerned are not only good but, in fact, among the best, that the objectivity of assessments and relative evaluations becomes that much less objective.

At any level, however, there is a limit to how hard a judge can “push.” Pushing too hard for an objectively poor couple, for example, cannot help but attract notice which, at the least, will give rise to abundant gossip. At a more serious level the chairmen of judges may ask a judge to justify their marks and the judge may lose credibility and therefore judging assignments. In theory judges can also be reported to the national registering organization and, again in theory, have their registration as a judge rescinded.

<sup>30</sup> While Vermey makes the point that “totally objective evaluations are not possible where people are evaluating other people” (1994:42) he also goes on to suggest that, while unconscious judgments cannot be curtailed, outline for conscious evaluation would be beneficial (1994:42-43).

<sup>31</sup> I am using this term in a rather neutral sense here, as in everyone has their own perspectives; and not in the sense of having an agenda.

<sup>32</sup> One past Amateur World Champion quoted me a figure of \$7,000 and all expenses paid to do a three day trip and set of shows in Japan (on top of which more could be earned for teaching) .

<sup>33</sup> Some countries, for instance, offer large subsidies to their most elite amateur competitors while others do not. Similarly, in some countries a top ballroom dancer will be widely recognized and respected while, in others, the reigning world champion would go unnoticed by anyone not deeply involved with ballroom dancing.

<sup>34</sup> Many of the characters in *Strictly Ballroom* were both inspired by and rather closely modeled on real people in the Australian ballroom scene; as I realized the first time I met one of the Australians in question. What is more important, however, is the archetypicality of many of the movies’ main characters. The same “characters,” for instance, are well evidenced in the U.S. ballroom scene.

<sup>35</sup> The chairman’s power as gatekeeper is not, of course, restricted only to the higher levels of competition. The most introductory of amateur and pro/am levels are equally subject to various determinations that the chairman of judges may make.

# CHAPTER FIVE:

## Selling Dance: The Franchise Structure and More

### **The Financial Side of Dancesport**

In Chapter One I introduced the ethnographic settings of this research: studios, camps, clubs, congresses, and competitions. In Chapter Two I introduced the ballroom and salsa dance genres, providing historical background for each. In Chapter Three I sketched in the personnel who constitute the ballroom and salsa communities, as well as the structure of their community and their social roles. In Chapter Four I unpacked the various dynamics of power, control, and influence that permeate the social networks of these dance communities. Here, in Chapter Five, I examine the financial side of dancesport, the franchises, and politics in action.

### **Top Teacher and Top Studio Awards**

Like any other element of the ballroom industry, dance competitions are, first and foremost, business ventures and, as such, financial concerns ultimately undergird the structures, conduct, and practices of such events. This is not to say that genuine love of dance, dedication to the art, personal determination and sacrifice, and generous contributions of effort, energy, and expertise are not all also part and parcel of the ballroom circuit. Instead, what I am herein highlighting is that the very context within which all these other elements transpire is, itself, shaped (albeit not determined) by financial considerations and constraints.

Let me use the “Top Teacher” and “Top Studio” awards presented at the many pro-am competitions run throughout the United States as an example. These awards are publicly announced, most typically on the concluding evening of each competition, and between rounds of the last major events and performances. In brief, the scoring system for such awards are accumulated via a point system that represents some variation of  $[(\text{entry}^1 \times \text{placement}^1) + (\text{entry}^2 \times \text{placement}^2) + (\text{entry}^n \times \text{placement}^n)]$ , so that total entries contested as well as placement both factor in total points. From a standpoint of simple mathematics, volume of entries alone can thus account for the greatest number of total points, which, in turn, win a teacher or studio their Top Teacher/Studio standing.

While it would be a mistake to deem anyone’s full set of motivations as fully transparent, the Top Teacher Awards provide blatant structural motivation in the form of abundant monetary rewards. Certainly individual instructors may also find winning such awards gratifying and ego-enhancing for any other number of reasons but, in the Pro-Am competition structure, Top Teacher placements—typically from 10<sup>th</sup> through 1<sup>st</sup>—directly translates into often quite substantial monetary rewards. While there certainly are also financial awards for placing in the professional categories, the amounts involved are typically quite paltry in comparison to the Top Teacher prize purses. I should make it clear, however, that these are not exactly comparable tracks for a number of reasons. First, professional competitors can compete in the various professional divisions while also dancing in various pro-am categories with their students and, indeed, the majority of professionals currently competing in the United



States do exactly this. Second, there are numerous, separate professional categories danced at most ballroom events compared to one, overall, set of Top Teacher awards.<sup>1</sup>

The difference and distinction between many professional categories versus any one Top Teacher contest has several financial repercussions. First, an open professional purse may only amount to \$1,000 (or less), while the Rising Star professional purse may only be \$600 (or less), with four of each of these awarded<sup>2</sup> for a total of \$6,400 (or even less) in first place awards. Factor in second through sixth place awards<sup>3</sup>, as well as a Showdance division if offered, and the total professional competition purse being awarded might be \$15,000. As such, awarding a solitary \$5,000 Top Teacher award makes sense in a way that saying “the teacher with the most pro-am points gets five times as much as the top professional couples” does not. Beyond this, however, is the issue of organizer investment and return.

While some competitors contend that many spectators attend a given competition in order to see them (the professionals) compete, the majority of people at any competition are at that specific competition because they themselves are also competing and, in the U.S., most often in pro-am competition. Thus, while it is true that a given attendee may (or may not) choose to attend a given session based on which professionals they may get to see compete, most of these attendees are only at the competition, *at all*, because of their pro-am entries. Furthermore, pro-am contestant provide the financial lifeblood of most sizable U.S. competitions, purchasing full event packages, booking the room blocks (which, when filled, often provide for free, or at least discounted, use of the hotel ballrooms), and paying

multiple entry fees themselves, depending on the range and variety of events they have entered.

With individual pro-am event entry fees ranging from \$15-\$35 and up, and some pro-am contestants dancing as many as 200 entries or even more, this can represent a sizable financial stake. Such pro-am contestants do not register for nor attend competitions on their own however; but only do so with their instructors. Some instructors dance as many as 300 or more individual entries. These instructors thus represent a significant financial stake for competition organizers, a stake worth enticing via Top Teacher awards with significant financial remuneration. Especially given the many pro-am competitions available throughout the year (especially when including NDCA, franchise, and independent events) it behooves event organizers to make their event financially enticing for those instructors who bring sizable numbers of entries with them—a dynamic which, in turn, makes it enticing for such instructors to encourage maximal entries from their own students.

The financial reward available to teachers—by placing in the Top Teacher standings—helps drive many facets of the structure of pro-am competition. Rather than only rewarding a single Top Teacher purse to a single instructor, typically the top ten instructors are recognized—tenth through first—with escalating financial awards. Since there are more pieces of the Top Teacher financial “pie” available this provides additional incentive to various instructors to maximize their students’ entries. Additionally, since few competitions can, individually, offer Top Teacher awards much larger than other comparable events, various competition circuits have emerged

with cumulative points counting towards larger, and overall, circuit-wide Top Teacher awards. Such circuits represent structural adaptations to an ever more crowded competition calendar. With over 90 NDCA sanctioned competitions per year, each event is in competition for a limited number of students' entries and, more to the point, the student dollars that come with those entries.

The limited number of dance students—the financial lifeblood of pro-am competition—thus has both penetrating and powerful ramifications on the structure of these competitions (NDCA, franchise, and other “independent” pro-am events). The most straightforward and efficient means of recruiting student entries is, of course, to attract their instructors. Especially given the abundance of pro-am events available year round, instructors often play quite a large role in what events their students ultimately attend through suggestions, advice, and actual willingness to attend. Instructors, after all, do not just teach dancing to their students; but also guide and direct much of their students' dance “careers”—the dances, styles, levels, and events that they work on and, ultimately, compete in. Aside from steering students toward certain events, however, instructors most powerfully impact their students' event choices not only by dint of being the students' teachers, but also by dint of being the students' competition partners. What this means is that, if a given instructor does not want and chooses not to go to a certain competition, then all of their students will be absented from that event as well.

Top Teacher purses are, as it should be clear, geared specifically to attract those instructors who bring the most student entries (and hence student money) with

them. And, as already mentioned above, various competition circuits have emerged wherein cumulative points and prize moneys accrue. If Fred, for instance, has the choice between taking his students to a set of three disparate events or, alternatively, of attending a set of three events all within a given competition circuit—and assuming that, individually, each of these six events have (relatively) comparable Top Teacher awards—from a simple financial standpoint it makes better sense for Fred to maximize his potential financial gains by steering his students towards the circuit of competitions.

### **Experience vs. Training**

Yet it is also important to realize that not all dance teachers, studios, or students are even selling, or in the market, for the same things. An important distinction (and one with important financial ramifications) needs to be made between social and skill based approaches, motivations, objectives, and goals to, and for, dancing and dance training. “Many studios sell the EXPERIENCE of dancing to those with disposable income,” notes T.O., for example, “whereas you are more selling TRAINING in dancing to those with determination, and the two markets price out very differently.” Rather than suggesting any type of dichotomization—wherein dancers are cast as being either entirely social or skill driven—I would like to suggest that T.O.’s sociality based “experience” and skill based “training” represent two axis on a grid of dance motivations and involvements. Some people will rank high on one scale and not on the other while others will reverse the pattern. Some people will rank high on both scales while others will rank high on neither. Some dance people can find

one single studio that suits their personal positioning on such a grid, while other dancers visit two, three, or even more studios in order to find the balance that best matches their interests. The issue of experience versus training expectations and motivations is further explored in the “Franchises” section of the following chapter but, for the moment, I want to introduce the issue of location as a financial component and consideration within the ballroom circuit.

## **Location**

Attracting student dollars gives rise not only to Top Teacher prizes and circuits, but also to numerous other competition considerations as well. For one thing, event location can, for some, play a sizable role as well. Certainly many contestants choose local competitions for ease of convenience and commute time. But, especially with airfares often being relatively comparable across a wide range of travel distances, flying to a competition three states away versus a competition 15 states away is rarely a purely economical decision. With airfares, entry fees, and hotel costs being the major competition expenses, distance often plays less of a direct role in expenses than many might first assume. Given that hotel and entry fees are independent of distance traveled, these can only really be considered on a competition-by-competition basis—but the same is true of travel expenses as well. Given the often seemingly bizarre fluctuations of available airfares, convenience and interest of location often play significant roles in the competition selection process. When I saw Robert, an amateur Blackpool semifinalist, at the IDSF Grand Slam event hosted at the Embassy ball in 2005, for instance, he mentioned that he much preferred the new venue, in Irvine,

California, compared to the events previous location in Hollywood Beach, Florida. Given the far more opulent and impressive nature of the Florida facilities I asked him about his preference, to which he replied that there was much more to go do and see in the general area from the Irvine event.

On one occasion when I was pricing airfares to several competitions, for example, the lowest available roundtrip fare I could find to Seattle, Washington from San Diego, California was for over \$400 while I could find a roundtrip to Miami, Florida from San Diego, California for \$240. Various elements of my research agenda certainly play an important role in directing which events I attend, but so too do economics. In this case, for example, traveling farther was actually the more economical option. Like me, however, for many competitors economics is not the sole determinant, so location often factors in; and sometimes quite strongly at that. Given the locations mentioned above, and all other factors being equal, the choice between a competitions in Seattle and Miami is also a choice between “Seattle” and “Miami” as well, not just between the two events in comparable if respective locations. In response to such geographic selection—as well as several other variables to which I shall shortly return—several event organizers run (or are involved in running) competitions in different states from where they themselves reside, a few examples of which include: Judi Hatton (FL) and the Yankee Classic (Boston, MA); Debbie Avalos-Kusumi (MO) and the California Open (Irvine, CA); and Mary Murphy (CA), Wendy Johnson (CA), and Sam Sodano (OH) and the Holiday Dance Classic (Las Vegas, NV).

Aside from direct appeal, however, location can play an important role in event selection and attendance in other ways as well. One point already noted is that airfares are not necessarily dependant on distance traveled. While this is, indeed, the case, event location is often related to cost in two other, often related ways: ease of access and travel time. While distance itself seems to have little enough to do with airfare pricing structures, competitive airline markets, the vicinity of alternative airports, and hub locations can all drive costs down by considerable amounts. Beyond their impact on pricing, hub locations also typically offer more direct access, i.e. flights available from many more individual locations without having to make connections. All of the same variables that play into the ease of access calculation also play into travel time, the other indirect impact of location on event selection. More flights—for whatever reasons—mean more accommodating travel schedules and, particularly in regards to hub sites, typically mean non-stop flight access. For the many competitors who try and squeeze in weekend competitions with as little disruption to their work week as possible, and even for those professional competitors who try and compete at two different events in the same weekend, convenience and readily completed journeys are welcome attributes and valuable incentives in choosing which competitions one will attend.

The two indirect location incentives—ease of access and travel time—both serve to favor events close to large competitor bases, and, as would be expected, this is the case, with concentrations of competitions in California (particularly the Bay and the larger Los Angeles areas), the North East (especially the New York area), and

Florida. The concentration of events driven by both the direct and indirect location incentives, taken together with the rapidly burgeoning number of new competitions, led the NDCA to place a moratorium on the registering of any new competitions with the NDCA. This moratorium held until August of 2001, when it was partially lifted, with the regions still impacted by the moratorium closely matching the more highly concentrated competitor bases of California, the Northeast, and Florida, as mentioned above.<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest, however, is that the moratorium still in place for Florida is only for the months of July through December—a time range closely connected with Florida's direct location appeal to those from other, less temperate parts of the country.

All of these locations dynamics do, of course, come back to the underlying reality that, for the organizers—as well as the officials and instructors—ballroom competitions are a business venture and, as in real estate, location matters. For event organizers other competitions scheduled (relatively) close by, and near the same calendar dates, represent competing alternatives for student entries, and thus represent substantive competition for limited resources. As with its moratorium on event registrations, the NDCA has played a part in preventing such potential conflicts, placing restrictions on the proximity allowed between registered events held on overlapping dates, precisely in order to mitigate overly-diluting the limited support base (of students, their entries, and their fees) that underlies and feeds the (businesses comprising the) competition circuit.



## **The Individual “Touch”**

Given the plethora of dance competitions available to those dancing in the largest ballroom circuits—such as those competing for and accumulating Top Teacher/Student points in the Dancesport Series<sup>5</sup>—the personal touch of certain organizers/events may also come to play a significant role in competitors’ event choices. Since, as a function of their very existence within the ballroom world, all competitions share immense structural similarities, individual event character, “perks,” and personal touches are also dynamics involved in event appeal.

Whether it is the event organizer who works the room, making sure to say hello to everyone in attendance, to thank them for coming, and to make sure everything is all right, or the event organizer who includes a welcome “surprise” in each persons’ registration pack, such personal touches often go a long way in garnering event favor. Or maybe one event has a theme that is well and consistently integrated throughout the weekend. Assuming that there is a choice between events of comparable interest, such factors can—and often do—weigh in to competitors’ evaluations, choices, and decisions.

One place where individual touch comes into play is with smaller competitions. While choices between larger and smaller competitions is a separate issue the issue of individual touch has particular bearing on smaller events. Where the larger events, by dint of their scarcity and size alone (although also often due to other dynamics as well) all have their own, established, individual identities, there are many times more smaller events—and therefore more pressure on each of them to attract

entries. Where the larger events can afford the absence of even several “big entry” instructors,<sup>6</sup> the absence of even a couple such big entry instructors can have a significant impact on the bottom line economics of a smaller event. Whereas some smaller events find different ways to maximize their appeal, this same dynamic can also give contestants—especially larger entry instructors and studios—immense influence over smaller events. One studio, with a large entry instructor and several other fairly large entry instructors might, for instance, end up representing as much as a full third (or even more) of a smaller competition’s total entries. In such circumstances the studio and instructors in question have sizable influence commensurate to the sizable economic stake they represent.

## **The Franchises**

As briefly introduced in Chapter Two, the two main ballroom franchises in the United States today are Arthur Murray International (AMI) and Fred Astaire Dance Studios (FADS), each a Full Member Organization of the National Dance Council of America (*NDCA*) with the six votes allocated to full members. Also worth noting in this regard is that the franchises also play into the overlapping roles typical of the rest of dancesport (such as the competitor, coach, judge, event organizer). Aside from overlapping roles within the franchises (just as outside them), many of the actors within the franchises are also prominent actors in the wider ballroom scene as well. Prominent figures in such positions including people like Thomas Murdock (NDCA Executive Secretary, AMI Competition and Publicity Director, ABC past Secretary/Treasurer), Johns Kimmins (NDCA Competition Director, AMI Executive

Vice President, World Federation of Ballroom Dancers President, ABC past President), and Vincent Bulger (ABC past President).

## **Franchise Studios**

My own ballroom experience actually started at an Arthur Murray dance studio. Unfortunately my experience was a very poor one, and it actually took a number of years after I had left my first studio before I was even willing to set foot in another Arthur Murray studio. In the course of conducting my research, however, I thought it was important to be comprehensive so I did, eventually, visit a couple of other Arthur Murray schools. Truth be told, I was pleasantly surprised and impressed.

Matching my own mixed perceptions, Taita makes the following observations:

I have also found that it's not easy to characterize an entire franchise based on the experience had at a single school. I have visited many schools from the same franchise and found them to be pretty much self-owned and managed. Some are well run operations where a pleasant experience is assured and morale is high with both the staff and the students. Others are badly mismanaged where the staff feels little better than slaves and the atmosphere seems a bit too workmanlike.<sup>7</sup>

One point of clarification that I should make in this context is to point out that the variations between studios Taita describes are in no way unique to the franchise system; that these same discrepancies are equally present in independent studios and how they are managed.

Although the impressions of many are that the Franchise studios exclusively teach social, “American Style” dancing, and while this may be true of any given franchise studio, it is far from a universal truth for the two largest franchises, Arthur Murray International and Fred Astaire Dance Studios. While the majority of teaching

at most franchise studios is, in fact, more focused on the everyday social dancer than on the more competitively minded and inclined dancer, this is largely the result of simple economics. Although the average competitive dancer will spend far more on their dancing than the average social dancer, the sheer numbers of people who will take up some form of social dance instruction provides a much more widespread economic base which more than balances out the typical discrepancies in spending between social and competitive dancers. The widespread name recognition of “Arthur Murray” and “Fred Astaire” are, after all what the AMI and FADS franchises use to build their student bases, and it is exactly this name recognition (i.e. fame) that (among other things) is being purchased by the franchisees.

Additionally, the amount of training needed by instructors to teach serious competitive dancing is typically several magnitudes greater (at least) than the amount of training needed by instructors who teach general social dancing. This means that the costs (in both time and money) of training a teacher until they are sufficiently qualified to teach competitive dancing will also be several magnitudes greater than the costs of training the same teacher until they are sufficiently qualified to teach social dancing. Factoring these increased costs against the considerably greater demand for social (versus competitive) dance instruction, it is easy to see why most franchise studios tend towards specializing in social dance—especially when linked to their more widespread name recognition (meaning that a disproportionate number of the people looking for a dance studio for the first time will end up walking through their doors).

## **Cost vs. Value**

Although often spoken of interchangeably, price and value are far from the same thing. Aside from the fact that a higher caliber lesson will facilitate faster development, there are also qualitative as well as quantitative differences between lessons. There are, for instance, various elements and nuances of technique that will never be noticed, let alone taught, by most teachers. Even an infinite number of lessons, no matter how much time and money one ultimately invests, will ever build up to material and a level that exceeds a given instructor's own knowledge. The quality and caliber of the lesson therefore need to be factored into questions of value, just as much as does the price. As such, and despite wider social pressures to the contrary, price and value should not be conflated, and the distinction between them has several important ramifications within the world of ballroom dancing.

In the context of assessing the value of lessons at franchise studios two particular items need to be mentioned: “extras” and portability—both factors that are built into the franchise system and lesson structures, and that are rarely (if ever) included in the price of non-franchise lessons. Since the price of attending group classes and practice parties is included in the price of lessons through the franchises, for those who utilize these services, the higher priced lesson may still be of greater value. Yet making the choice of whether or not to attend group lessons and practice parties is not, on its own, just a single variable; and especially not as pertains to evaluating the worth and value of franchise lessons. Several other considerations still

have to be factored in, including the number and frequency of group classes that are being offered, at the appropriate level and at a viable time, for any particular student. And, following from this, what is the caliber and quality of teaching of each of these classes? Are some of them offered by senior studio instructors or are only the greenest new staff members scheduled to teach all of the group lessons?

Since there is no guarantee that any given independent instructor will be any more accomplished than any given franchise instructor, even when beginning instructors are teaching all of a franchise studios group classes, a comparison would still need to be made on a case by case basis. Similarly, even in a situation where the franchise instructor *is* the somewhat less accomplished teacher, the additional group classes and parties available within the franchises may still make the higher priced franchise lesson the better value for a particular student. In each case then, the interests of the student and the schedule of offerings provided by each studio also need to be assessed, along with the price. The significance of additional frequency of, and exposure to, dancing and opportunities to practice facilitated by the group classes and practice parties provided by the franchise studios should not be underestimated—and especially not in the cases of newer students as they are initially starting out.

This additional benefits of group classes and parties tend, however, to function as an element of diminishing returns since most studios have far fewer group classes and events (if any) that are geared towards higher and higher level dancers. Also, even when a given studio does offer such classes, these are almost always less and less frequently scheduled offerings the higher the level of the dancer and dancing in

question.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the fledgling dancer is likely to benefit greatly from being surrounded (almost entirely) by more experienced dancers when first attending practice parties and starting to dance. Once a dancer has progressed however, and developed their dancing beyond the vast majority of those attending a practice party, the benefit of dancing at such functions rapidly diminishes. Indeed, for some general practice parties and even lower level group classes become something to be avoided because of the compromises in technique felt to be necessary in order to successfully dance with the average newcomer. This is not to say that someone may not find such parties perfectly enjoyable, or even beneficial to some extent. But, even if this is the case, as far as skill development is concerned the same group lessons and practice partners that are of tremendous technical value to the beginner are simply of less technical value the more experienced one becomes.

An additional (potential) benefit within the franchise system is that of portability—a version of the prize of connections that is, perhaps, unique to the franchise sector of the ballroom industry. While some students never travel and always use the same studio, this is not true for all. For those who can and do make use of it, the option and ability to join in group classes and parties throughout their franchise's system can be a very inviting benefit, as can be the ability to take exchange private lessons other franchise studios at no additional cost. Also, because the practice parties, group classes, and private lessons are all from within the same franchise's overall system, the same syllabus of patterns and materials will be in use system-wide, thus greatly facilitating the ready inclusion and participation of the traveling student. Just

as a personal example of these dynamics, prior to starting my own research for instance, and while I was first enrolled at an Arthur Murray studio, I remember visiting family in Pennsylvania and looking up the nearest AMI studio to find the schedule of their classes and parties. I attended two group classes there on one night, and had a private lesson and attended a party there on another night. All of the instructors and other students there were very friendly and inviting and, after the group classes, a group of students who regularly went out for ice cream after class invited me to join them.

### **Camaraderie**

Besides the more readily quantifiable extras such as group classes, practice parties, and the portability offered within the franchise system, camaraderie is something else that must be mentioned. It is not only due to expectations of utility that connections are prized after all. People like to belong. Certainly not all people like to belong to the same extent as everyone else, nor equally in every situation, but, ultimately, people are not, by nature, solitary creatures. As such, the ability to “fit in” and feel like one “belongs” in studios far from home is a very potent reward—and one largely unmatched outside the franchise systems. The enthusiasm of franchise dancers and spectators alike—be it at lessons, in the studio, at showcases, or at competitions—is almost palpably warm and energetic. Indeed, at franchise competitions (a topic to which I will shortly return) students and teachers alike all routinely watch, applaud, and cheer for each other by name in a manner that I have only seen matched in ballroom in the collegiate competition circuit.



## **Contracts**

One of the other issues that separates franchise studios from many non-franchise studios are the franchises use of contracts. Certainly the use of contracts should not be mistaken as being solely the province of the franchise studios, as any numbers of independent studios—especially those with staff instructors—also use contracts as well. Many independent studios, however, perhaps even most, work on a pay as you go system. I am not so much concerned here with why franchise studios use contracts (as they are legally required to do so) but, rather, with how these contracts are used, what impact(s) their use may have, and how those both inside and outside of the franchise system view these contracts.

One argument against contracts that I have heard voiced on several occasions is that if the product (in this case the dance instruction) is really of value, it will sell itself. The basic contention being advanced here is that students should be continuing with their lessons and instruction because they want and choose to, of their own ongoing initiative, and not because they have been required to make an up front commitment which they are then locked into. Proponents who defend the use of contracts argue that contracts allow dance teachers to plan and design a course of instruction appropriate to each individual student's wants and time commitments. Yet in this regard it is worth noting that every top instructor that I have ever seen teaching throughout the U.S. and Europe receives payment on the completion of their lesson without issue and do not work with contracts. Still, it is worth reiterating that the franchise studios are legally required to utilize contracts and, as such, if the franchise

system or studio in question otherwise meets a given student's wants and needs, then contracts should not be seen as a deterrent if—as per the considerations discussed above—the student considers it to be of good value for themselves.

### **Commoditizing Choreography**

Interestingly, the business model that the franchises seem to be grounded in both quantifies and qualifies the value of their programs from a choreographic standpoint. From a certain perspective this is a truly odd phenomenon since dance is a skill and, as a skill, even the most rudimentary elements of dance can be taught across a wide range of levels. In fact, the common wisdom within the dance world is that what makes the best people in the world truly the best is the technique with which they execute not only “even the most basic steps” but *especially* the basics. The best dancers in the world are not, after all, simply those who know the most choreography or who know any “special steps.” Instead, the best dancers in the world are those who can execute the most rudimentary actions and figures at levels that few franchise instructors, if any, can ever even hope to match.<sup>9</sup> This makes it particularly intriguing then, that the franchises seem to quantify choreography as much as they do and place such an emphasis on it in the structure of their programs.

Part of the explanation as to why the franchises seem to be commoditizing choreography lies in the fact that the dance skills ostensibly being taught are far more easily defined regarding choreography than dancing knowledge. Since producing real quality in dancing takes lots of time and hard work for all but the most naturally gifted, choreographically quantifying dance knowledge thus makes it much easier for

an instructor to say to the (relative) beginner, “look how much you’ve learned!” Where a skill based assessment might reveal a still neophyte dancer, the commoditization of choreography allows, and in fact enables, teachers to “up sell” the next set of steps and patterns.

Despite their seeming over-emphasis on choreography, the franchises still certainly recognize the same levels and qualities of technique and performance as constitutive of good dancing that everyone else in the wider ballroom circuit does. At the same time, however, various classifications and procedures within the franchise system seem to countermand these selfsame understandings. West Coast Swing, for instance, was categorized as a Silver *level* dance at the Arthur Murray studio where I first started dancing. This classification seems to fly in the face of the more widespread understandings that any dance can be executed at a variety of levels and that “Silver” represents a level of mastery and technique. More to the point, levels of steps are, in many ways, what are being purchased within the franchise system. When first taking lessons for instance, I had progressed further in cha cha and rumba than in any of the other classes regular offered at my studio. On one occasion I went to take the more advanced “Bronze 3” cha cha class, and the studio manager called me over and told me that I was not qualified to take that class yet because I had not tested out of the previous “Bronze 2” level. In that particular situation he was wrong as I had, unbeknownst to him, tested out of “Bronze 2” cha cha with the studio’s dance director the previous afternoon. What is more interesting in this context, however, is that it was not my ability in cha cha—which the studio manager knew quite well—that was being

used as the evaluative mechanism but, rather, what “level” he thought I was *officially registered for* and enrolled in.

During my interview with Seth, a high ranking and long-time franchise associated coach, he proposed that if you went into a store and paid for certain products that you would not then expect other products to be included in your order. Seth then suggested that the same held true in the service sectors as well, since if you consulted with or hired someone like a lawyer, real estate agent, or investment broker you would not then expect them to provide you with guidance, services, or advice except for the specific services which you had contracted with them for. Seth then went on to say that teaching dance is a service in exactly this same way and, as such, that it is eminently reasonable that teachers and studios do not teach students materials for which they have not paid. Seth’s viewpoint, however, overlooks the fact that even if teaching dance falls under the larger umbrella of services, it is still a service of a different type than what is involved in consulting with a lawyer, real estate agent, or investment broker because dancing is a skill.

What is being paid for with a lawyer, real estate agent, or investment broker is their advice and guidance based on their expertise regarding what actions one should take. Teaching dance proves to be a different situation however, since what is being paid for is advice and guidance on learning how to execute certain actions *for one’s self*. Thus, while hiring a dance instructor is a purchased service, the parallel with hiring lawyers, real estate agents, or investment brokers is a false one. A person pays a lawyer, real estate agent, or investment broker to advise and represent them, and not to

actually teach them law, real estate, or investing. A dance teacher, in contrast, *is* being hired and paid precisely to teach their students how to dance for themselves. This contrast highlights an important distinction since, while consultants may be paid to provide advice based on their own expertise and experience, there is still a significant difference between instrumental and processual input. Advising a person on concrete steps and courses of action is, after all, ultimately a far different order of involvement and input than is teaching them a skill for themselves.

As a writing teacher, for example, I typically teach courses dedicated to thesis construction, evidence explication, and proper citation. This does not mean, however, that I refuse to answer a student who comes to class with another writing related question simply “because that is not the class that they had signed up for.” More importantly, I do not set a limit on the progress my students can make simply because they are taking a given class focused on certain materials. What professor, after all, would not be ecstatic with a student who moves beyond the limits of the materials and the requirements provided for on the course syllabus? In direct contrast to this “the higher the program you are enrolled in,” says franchise instructor Alyssa, “the more fun and exciting things we can teach you during your lessons.” This comment reflects a commoditization of dancing that seems antithetical to teaching a skill and, whereas the franchise instructors and management may quantify what can be taught by the package a student has signed up for, I have never heard “you haven’t purchased that yet” from independent schools and instructors. Teaching is more than just consulting, advising, or providing a product after all, and many of the criticisms typically leveled

against the franchise studio system can be traced to exactly this distinction—or lack thereof as herein seems to be the case.

An account of Becky's experience as a franchise instructor, however, makes clear that it is not only choreography that seems to be commoditized within the franchise system, but technique as well. Becky, formally a successful European amateur and professional competitor, took advantage of the opportunity when invited by a franchise studio to come to the U.S. to work for them as an instructor. Within several months of arriving in America Becky was busy at work with one of her better students when she noticed a regional franchise representative who seemed to be paying inordinate attention to the lesson she happened to be teaching at that moment. After the lesson finished Becky went back into the staff room to grab a quick snack and was quickly joined by the franchise representative who proceeded to ask her why she had been teaching so much technique during that lesson that he had just observed. Becky explained that the particular student she had just been working with was a particularly advanced one and that he was ready for the level of instruction she had been providing. The franchise representative responded to this by telling Becky that she had been sharing too much information and asked her what she was going to do when she ran out of material to teach that student. Becky responded by saying "I'll retire." "You want to retire?" the franchise representative queried in apparent surprise. "No," said Becky, "but I've been dancing and competing for 20 years now, so when I run out of things to teach I should retire, don't you think?" Clearly the franchise representative did not understand Becky's meaning and missed the sarcasm of her

response as he later warned both the studio manager and the studio owner that they should keep an eye on Becky since, as far as he could discern and was concerned, Becky was thinking about quitting and retiring.

Clearly Becky neither had any intention of retiring nor was her comment intended to make any suggestion to that effect. The point she was making, albeit with more than a modicum of sarcasm which was clearly missed by the franchise representative, was that no matter how much she was providing her students during a lesson, she was not about to run out of information about dancing and technique that she could teach to teach her students. Becky's point was lost on the regional franchise representative visiting the studio, however, since it flew in the face of the franchise's standardized model of lessons and instruction that often seem geared to keeping students dependent on their instructors and their studio.<sup>10</sup>

An on line post following along the protectionist view of the franchises, for instance, reads "I've read the franchises try to keep people from going beyond their network, hence one motive for exclusive competitions."<sup>11</sup> To what extent is this true and, more importantly, why is this the case to whatever extent it may be? Over more than two years of fieldwork I had noticed that FADS students, for instance, compete at more independent (i.e. NDCA) competitions outside the FADS competition circuit than AMI students seem to compete outside the AMI competition circuit. Although my assessment is not a systematic one, my general sense of this is corroborated by the impressions of many others. One dancer based in the North East for example suggests that, "as far as independent competitions, it does seem to me that I see more FADS

students competing at these things than AMI students. As a matter of fact, I don't think I have ever seen an AMI student competing at an independent venue!"<sup>12</sup> The under representation of franchise competitors at independent competitions represents an important vantage point for assessing many of the interwoven social dynamics implicated within the franchise system.

### **Keeping it in the Franchise**

There are a variety of reasons why those within the franchise system may not be participating in non-franchise organized and run competitions including some reasons that pertain to franchise students, some reasons that pertain to franchise instructors, and some reasons that pertain to franchise management. In the first instance, and as I have already noted above, the enthusiasm, camaraderie, and enjoyment of dancing that is abundantly expressed at franchise competitions is unparalleled at any USABDA or NDCA events. While it may be difficult to understand the depth, draw, and appeal of this atmosphere for those who have not experienced it, for many of those who have had this experience, the franchise setting may set a standard which independent studios and competitions cannot live up to, as the following account makes clear:

The franchise studio atmosphere is pretty unique. They provided a soup-to-nuts dance experience, with performance opportunities, nightly classes, practice parties, coaching, exams, all in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Not to be duplicated anywhere I could find. It was just plain fun! ...franchises are very good at making dancing fun and easy.<sup>13</sup>



Also responding to the appeal of the atmosphere typical of the franchise system, dance student Frederick offered the following comments about his experiences with Arthur Murray:

It has been hard for me to walk away from the franchise system for the very reasons that you mentioned. The fellowship, support and enthusiasm you get at Arthur Murray are difficult to find at any NDCA competition.

Everyone complains about the franchise prices. But my...coach said something very interesting to me when I was talking to her about the coaching business. She said that less than 10% of the people who come to her are dancing for pure dancing sake. Most of them are using dancing as a means to accomplish some other end – To find a mate, to increase their confidence, to get some exercise, to find some companionship.

If this is true then most people are better served at a franchise system...the quality of experience is so much richer. Almost everyone stays in the ballroom to watch everyone else dance. Everyone cheers their fellow students on, and you walk off the floor to showers of compliments after each heat.

The bottom line is that Arthur Murray is great at what the organization is designed to do. Expose people to the life transforming power of social partner dancing.<sup>14</sup>

As the comments of Frederick's coach indicate—and as each chapter herein highlights—as with any other chosen and participatory activity and commitment system, a person's involvement in dancing can never be explained in reference to itself alone. As I have continuously pointed out, dance is never only about dancing. Certainly goals and motivations such as finding a mate, increasing one's confidence, getting exercise, and finding companionship are not the unique province of dance, nor within dance are they the unique province of the franchises. At the same time though, it is important to recognize that the atmosphere and experience that the franchises cultivate and provide are highly facilitating of exactly such possibilities and objectives. As Frederick went on to note, and as this text makes clear, partner dancing

can, indeed have “life transforming power” and the role of the franchise systems in proliferating such transformations should not be overlooked or dismissed.<sup>15</sup>

None of the aforementioned reasons why students might want, and choose, to compete within the franchise system mean, however, that franchise instructors and management do not also have their own reasons and agendas for wishing to limit both their own and their students’ contact with the independent non-franchise competition circuit. An important consideration in this regard, already mentioned, lies in the fact that franchise instructors typically have less dance training and experience than do independent dance instructors.<sup>16</sup> One notable ramification of this is that the independent competition circuit—replete as it is with often better-trained and more experienced dancers—represents a threat along two interrelated fronts: professional logistics and personal accomplishment.

Franchise students are likely to be exposed to a higher caliber of dancing than within their franchise when attending independent competitions. From a financial perspective, such exposure can be seen as representing a real economic threat by providing an obvious and viable alternative to the franchise structure and system. The economic threats involved, however, do not only concern students, however, but also professionals as well. Many franchise teachers are quite new to the dance business themselves, after all, and, just like most of their students, may well be quite ill informed regarding the wider dance scene beyond the scope of their own franchise’s structure.<sup>17</sup> The caliber of dancing and the prices typical of the independent circuit outside the franchise systems may pose just as attractive and enticing an alternative for

franchise instructors as it may for franchise students. This alternative to the in-franchise financial structure and status quo serves as and provides good reason why many franchise owners and managers alike may understandably be just as reluctant to expose their staff to independent competitions, as they are their students.

As an economically driven consideration, professional logistics function as a two tiered filtering system then: (1) between management and instructors; and (2) between instructors/management and students. Management does not want the instructors they have invested time and money in training to realize that equally good (if not better) training, jobs, and possibilities are also readily available outside of the franchise system, or that there are opportunities for the same instructors to make more money teaching outside of the franchise system. Similarly, neither the franchise management nor the franchise instructors want their students to realize that more options and better dance instruction may be readily available at a lower per lesson cost outside of the franchise system. In either case however—be it from franchise management down to their instructors or franchise management and instructors down to their students—those at the higher structural level are reluctant to expose those at the lower structural levels to alternative configurations of dance industry economics.

The reluctance of the franchises to provide exposure, either to their staff or their students, to industry competitors and alternatives is obviously understandable. It does not make financial sense, after all, to publicize one's competition unless there is something greater to be gained from doing so than what may be lost. Also important in such considerations is that, as wonderful as dance is for those who choose to invest

their time in it, and despite the claims of various dance enthusiasts to the contrary, dance is far from a necessity of survival—at least not in the same way as are biologically immediate necessities such as shelter and sustenance. Ballroom dancing is also far from a social necessity in modern industrial society; or even a highly socially esteemed and rewarded endeavor.<sup>18</sup> These points are worth mentioning since they serve as important background to understanding that the dancer's need for lessons and training are constructed needs. Indeed, it is especially because these needs are constructed ones that it does not financially behoove the franchises to publicize—neither to their staff nor to their students—alternatives to the services they provide.

From a purely financial standpoint then, it is in the best interests of those at the higher levels to have the lower level parties as dependent as possible, be it the instructors' dependence on the management or the students' dependence on the instructors and the management. There can be no denying that, as a business model, such perspectives, motivations, and objectives are both eminently sensible and easily understood. How many successful businesses build and maintain their market position by advertising who their competition is after all? The structural implications of this consideration, however, are wider ranging and go a long way in explaining the franchise system and competition structure.

### **Franchise Competitions**

Having become accustomed to the format and running of independent competitions, there were definitely some elements of franchise competitions that impressed me the first time I saw one. Especially in comparison to the NDCA

competitions with which I had become familiar, the overall enthusiasm and support in the ballroom at franchise competitions struck me as on par with what I had come to expect from the college circuit (see Chapter Three), but is almost entirely lacking at other events. Aside from the general camaraderie, one item that was particularly noticeable in this regard was the obvious joy that those present seemed to take in dancing—both in actually doing it and in watching it—something that seems surprisingly and sadly lacking at other events. “I feel like there is a ton of support and excitement within a franchise,” posts FADS instructor Alyssa, “the studio forms a tight bond and the enthusiasm that the ‘employees’ build definitely wears off on the students.”<sup>19</sup> Alyssa’s comments match up with my own observations and, for those students who enjoy the atmosphere and camaraderie provided within the franchise setting, it seems likely that they are getting just what they want. Also worth noting is that while the franchise events are expensive, the decorations, catering, and all the little “extras,” are all of the highest caliber—definitely on a level that exceeds the standards and practices of independent competitions.

Something that sets franchise competitions apart from their independent counterparts are their events for new instructors, the “Future Professional Champions” events within the AMI system and the “Novice” within the FADS system. These are professional two-dance events for instructors at the start of their careers.<sup>20</sup> I found these events particularly surprising when viewed, as professional events, in comparison to the independent NDCA sanctioned competitions with which I was familiar. The vast majority of the instructors entered in these events would not

be competitive with a very large percentage of the independent pre-championship and championship level amateurs if placed on the same floor against them. While it is quite true that good dancing and good instruction are not synonymous, and so the level of performance should not be conflated with technical knowledge or teaching aptitude, the level of dancing exhibited in these events suggests that any students who are trying to develop a certain more refined quality of movement should be very selective regarding their instructors within the franchise system (which is not, of course, to say that any such quality is in any way guaranteed in independent studios either).

Amongst the most telling structural consequence of the isolationist stance typical of the franchise system is the very existence of the in-franchise introductory professional competitor categories: “Future Professional Champions” for AMI and “Novice” for FADS. Because most franchise instructors have, historically, been new to dancing—or at least to ballroom dancing for those who have some other form of dance background—they do not have the same ballroom teaching, dance, or competition experience typical of those who have competed as amateurs; and especially those who have been doing so since a young age. The franchises’ two-dance new-professional categories therefore serve to compensate for and fill in this gap by providing introductory floor and competition experience for many beginning instructors.

For the teachers participating in the franchise’s new-instructor events, they can serve as a most welcome and valuable tool for developing their dancing, floorcraft,

and performance skills. “I was thankful that when I did start competing,” notes Trina for example, “that the franchise I worked for offered a division for new professionals.” And, as Trina went on to say, “It really helped build my confidence and helped me become a better teacher. Believe me if I would have had to start competing in Rising Star my first comp I probably would have never started at all.”<sup>21</sup>

The Arthur Murray “Future Professional Champions” and Fred Astaire “Novice” categories thus provide many beginning instructors with an introduction and training that facilitate their professional development. As Trina comments, “it is not only intimidating to dance against some of those fabulous dancers, but it also takes a certain amount of floor craft. And floor craft unfortunately is something you can only learn by actually dancing on the competition floor.”<sup>22</sup> Beyond providing a less intimidating introductory competition experience for starting franchise instructors, the beginning professional categories also provide an opportunity for these instructors to be seen on the ballroom floor—competing as professionals—by the by their students. Given the newness of many franchise instructors—not only to the industry but also to dancing altogether—this positioning can be an important dynamic, especially given its public visibility, in reinforcing the structural separation and elevation of teachers from their students by reinforcing their status as professionals.

Beyond bolstering the professional status and standing of new teachers within the franchise structure, the introductory professional events also serve the instructors well as a venue for personal accomplishment. Competing teachers are not just teachers themselves or just competing as teachers after all, but as competitors themselves, in

their own right, as well. Doing well in competition thus matters to them—and often quite a great deal—on a personal as well as professional level as well, and this dynamic is allowed for by the existence of the franchises’ professional newcomer category in which they compete. These events are thus one of the ways in which the franchise system provides an excellent opportunity for entry and training for instructors who do not already have years of dance experience behind them. In particular, the franchises’ “starting-out” categories provide a less demanding—and hence less intimidating—competitive experience that can help familiarize newer teachers with floor, competition, and performance conditions and experience. All of this can leave little doubt as to the potential benefits of the franchises as springboards to dance careers for numerous new instructors, many of who would probably never become involved with ballroom dancing without having such opportunities provided to them via the franchise system.

As beneficial as the introductory professional competition categories may be for new instructors a number of questions remain. Does having beginning professional events benefit anyone, other than the new instructors, in any way? Do the consumers/students benefit from the existence of introductory professional events in any way? At some level the students do benefit as it is largely through competition training that instructors develop their own skills, which, in turn, they are then able to pass along to their own clientele. This dynamic can be of real and substantive benefit to a student as their own teachers dancing improves through taking coaching from more advanced instructors. Over time this will build a greater and greater repertoire of



knowledge and understanding that, in turn, can then be passed on to their students. Perhaps equally significant, as their teachers are exposed to higher levels of coaching they are also experiencing higher level teaching that—a discrete skill unto itself—may, again, ultimately benefits the students as higher level teaching practices are modeled for their instructors.

It also makes sense that, especially in so far as the camaraderie and atmosphere of franchise events is predicated on feelings of mutual support, inclusion, and enjoyment, being able to root for their own instructors helps make students feel all that much more personally connected to, and part of, something larger than themselves. This second factor is largely an emotion based one however, while undoubtedly a source of enjoyment for some,<sup>23</sup> may also serve as a lever of manipulation at times as well. “I’d really love it if you came to watch me dance” an instructor says to their student, “especially after all the time we’ve spent working together, it would mean a lot to me for you to be there and see me.” While this might indeed be the case, when such comments are made after a student has originally elected not to attend or to compete at a franchise event him or herself, it is hard not to recognize the manipulative force (if not outright intent) loaded onto the expressions of such sentiments.

One of the questions that remains, however, is that even if the franchises’ “beginner” professional event are seen to be of value, why not still have a full beginner event of all four Smooth dances or all five Rhythms dances like the independent competitions’ rising star division? As I have already pointed out, dancing

and teaching dance *are* two different (albeit highly related) skills, at least some people are skeptical of those teachers presenting themselves as a competing professional when they are dancing the equivalent of an NDCA or USABDA run amateur Novice event. Some of the more skeptical have suggested that this arrangement enables franchise studios to market and introduce instructors barely off the street as “competing professionals.” And, for those new to dancing, being told that they will be training with a competing professional may seem quite impressive indeed. I know that was true for me, that I was impressed by the title and would tell my roommates, friends, and family that my teacher was a professional competitor. It was only later on that I realized that all one needed to do to *be* a competing professional was to enter a professional event. But this is only one side of things and there can be more to it from the starting franchise instructor’s perspective.

One instructor who started within the franchise structure sees the introductory professional events differently; pointing out that finding a partner can take time in the first place, as can then developing a full set of four or five dance routines, let alone then getting them “floor worthy.” There is something to be said for this since, as any competitive dancer knows, finding a partner is probably the single most difficult and important element of competitive dancing. Similarly, designing, learning, and rehearsing routines does take time. The process involved in getting routines together is, of course, a slower process for beginning instructors who are still, themselves, new to ballroom dancing. At the same time as this dynamic attests to the value of the introductory events for the contestants involved, however, it still leaves open the

question why such training and practice should be being underwritten by the instructors' students. Why, from the consumers' perspective, should their instructors' "floorcraft training" essentially be being subsidized by students? The prize money for these events comes, after all, from instruction costs that are considered exorbitant outside the franchises.

### **Franchise Costs**

It is not only franchise competition costs that are often considered excessive outside of the franchises themselves, but the cost of taking lessons as well. As was pointed out in the section on costs vs. value, however, price alone cannot measure what is being paid or what is being paid for. Just as importantly, as much as the franchise studios belong to a franchise system and structure, each franchisee runs their own studio and the cross-studio variation can be immense. Some franchise studios charge \$135 a lesson and up, but then also try and use "discounts" as a way to push large contracts, even when the instructor is new to ballroom dancing and has no more than a month of experience. Other studios within the same franchise may only charge \$85 a lesson, no matter how many lessons are signed up for, for instructors with over four years of experience. While it is true that it is up to the customer to decide if the price being offered is worth it to them in either case, the point remains that there is not such a thing as *a* franchise studio.

Following in this same vein, what is available as dance training at a given franchise studio is equally open to variation. One franchise studio may have not one person on staff that knows any international style while another franchise studio may

almost exclusively teach international style. Some franchise studios push their competitions and showcase events where another franchise studio may self-identify as and emphasize its social dance base. One franchise studio may not have anyone who has been on staff for more than a year while another may have no one on their staff that has not been with the studio for over four years. One franchise studio may never bring in any trainers or coaches who would be recognized outside of their own franchise system while other studios bring in reigning national champions and past world finalists. This last point deserves more elaboration, however, as it contradicts frequent criticisms of the franchise systems.

Despite the fact that the majority of instructors at franchise studios have less training and experience than their non-franchise counterparts this does not mean that top notch coaching and training are not available within the franchise systems as well. Nick and Elena Kosovich, the 1994 and 1995 U.S. National Smooth Champions coach within the AMI system, as do 11 time U.S. National Rhythm Champions, Bob Powers and Julia Gorchakova. Similarly, I am aware of FADS studios who have brought in: Nadia Eftedal, a Blackpool Professional Latin Champion; Vibeke Toft, a World Amateur Latin Champion and World Professional Latin Finalist; and Charlotte Jorgensen, a World Amateur Ballroom Champion and World and Blackpool Professional Ballroom runner up. Again, each studio is different and needs to be evaluated on its own merits. So why do the franchises receive such a bad rap from many?

The most problematic element for some franchise studios is that the same franchise name that provides them with name recognition also provides an associative link to those franchise studios with less than respectable practices. As I have previously noted the franchises are legally required to utilize contracts. How these contracts are negotiated and used is, however, as variable as the other studio elements such as price, and coaching noted above. Historically, the worst various franchise sales tactics have not only been extremely manipulative but have even been found to be criminally dishonest as was seen in the 1968 case of *Vokes v. Arthur Murray, Inc* heard by the Florida Court of Appeals.<sup>24</sup> Despite this history, however, some studios continue to utilize similarly exploitative tactics, as these comments from an independent dance instructor make clear:

I once tried to help a lady at a certain franchise location. She pretty much spent \$60,000 in one year. Her husband had taken care of the finances, and when he passed away, she was pretty clueless. They had her taking two lessons per day and each lesson was taught by 2 teaches, so she was paying for 4 lessons per day. There were times when they would raise their voice and semi-jokingly, semi-threateningly tell her she had better give them more money if she knew what was good for her. She was lonely and sad and the dance lessons were the drug. Now she is living on Social Security and has nearly nothing left. There ARE studios like this out there. Usually, it's the elderly that are at the greatest risk.<sup>25</sup>

Of course such issues with how some franchise studios are run cannot be seen as endemic only to franchise studios or even to dance studios alone. The following analysis actually highlights several of the points I have been explicating so far, including the economic stakes involved as well as the commodifying pressure on dance and choreography often so engendered:

The problem with the way some franchise studios are run is the same that you see in many public schools. The emphasis is on moving volumes of students, and on training their own teachers to be reasonably competent in getting students to move across the floor. That's patterning, not education, and it's the result of allowing standardized

syllabi to dictate pedagogical structures. What these studio managers don't get (mostly because it's not in their economic advantage to get it) is that the sole purpose of an administrator of any sort is to create an environment in which the teachers can do their best work. But that would entail hiring more expensive and experienced teachers and cutting into the profits of the management.<sup>26</sup>

Of course such issues with how some franchise studios are run cannot be seen as endemic only to franchise studios or even to dance studios alone.

### **Franchises in a Nutshell**

The value of the franchise programs can be quite good when group classes and parties are taken into consideration—especially earlier on in one's dancing “career”—and only the college circuit matches the enthusiasm and camaraderie that I have seen at studio events; an almost infectious enjoyment of dancing that is unmatched at independent competitions. The franchises also deserve their due in several other capacities as well, not the least of which is the historical role they have played in popularizing ballroom dancing and making ballroom instruction readily available throughout the United States. Also not to be underestimated is the role the franchises have played in facilitating the careers of numerous American dance professionals. Unlike Europe, where most dancers start at a very young age, the franchise systems have proven to be both the launching point behind the careers of many U.S. dancers. Indeed many highly successful professional dancers in the U.S. will credit their franchise beginnings as an important, if not crucial, step in their development as both a dancer and teacher.<sup>27</sup>

## **The Genuine and the Instrumental**

In many ways contrasting the genuine and the instrumental parallels the distinction between morality and expected utility (as the two poles of motivation) made earlier in this chapter. Whereas the distinction between morality and expected utility is concerns issues of motivation, however, the distinction between the genuine and the instrumental is a more encompassing one dealing, as it does, with the full gamut of personal connections and interactions. Numerous daily interactions take place separate from any issues of authority after all; out from under the umbrella of any “shoulds” based on either what would be the right thing to do or what would be structurally efficacious. Separate from any issues of what they should do, people act as they do for a myriad of reasons and, when it comes to personal interactions, issues of genuine personal connection and instrumental decision making are both significant considerations.

An important point I want to make here, and especially in the face of the both the preceding and following discussions about power and politics, is that real and genuine bonds can—and do—develop amidst, and even despite, numerous differentiations in various actors’ statuses.<sup>28</sup> Especially given the physically intimate proximity within which they typically interact, it should come as no surprise that competitors, students, and teachers often develop genuine personal bonds. Some teachers, students, and competitors, for instance, regularly travel together; sharing rooms and meals. Although this type of sharing is most common within the U.S. in the Pro-Am circuits, many professionals will also (at least sometimes) share rooms.

Similarly, elite amateur competitors may host each other when visiting each other's countries, students and coaches alike may host each other with home hospitality in their respective home cities, and studio owners may similarly provide personal hosting for specific visiting coach. Certainly many of these arrangements are economically advantageous ones and primarily based on simplicity and convenience. At the same time, however, substantive relationships can be formed and friendships made as discussed in the last chapter.

Unfortunately the emergent connections between teachers and students may also be preyed upon. This does not mean that all instrumentally (also read expected utility) motivated actions are predatory or unethical ones. Dancers regularly room with other couples on the road, for example, on the blatantly instrumental rationale of saving money for everyone involved. Similarly, and despite numerous romanticisms about dancing being as air itself to the dancer to the contrary, dancers cannot survive on their love of dance alone. But instrumental considerations such as food, shelter, and clothing in no way diminish or undercut the dancer's genuine love of dance. Dancers, like anyone else, have basic needs but also probably strive to live as comfortably as they can. No matter how blatantly instrumental trying to make money at one's occupation may be however, this does not—in and of its self—mark getting paid as in any way predatory or unethical. While a separate topic, and one certainly deserving of its own consideration, let me simply suggest, for current purposes, that interactions should not count as predatory or unethical ones simply based on being motivated by



instrumental considerations. This is not to say, however, that considerations of instrumentality do not give rise to deeply predatory and unethical behavior.

### **Masquerading the Instrumental as the Genuine**

Sometimes by false praise and sometimes by acting disappointed with students who do not sign up for more lessons, or for new studio packages, or to sign up for a competition, or to do a showcase, or for a certain number of competition entries, teachers and studio managers may exert undue commercial pressure on their dance students. Such practices can also include “hard sells,” as was the common practice at my first studio. One such practice involved having prospective new students being asked to fill out a questionnaire about what they thought the advantages of dancing were and what they hoped to get out of learning how to dance when they first came into the studio. These responses were then used as psychological levers to help drive enrolment in future meetings about that students dance goals, plan, showcase and competition entries, and package purchases. And, given the usually close working relationship between dance teachers and students, it can be quite hard to draw the line between genuine comments and feedback from psychologically targeted marketing.

### **Non-fraternization Policies**

At the same time as instructors were professing friendship this studio had a non-fraternization policy in place forbidding students and teachers from any type of private rendezvous. Ostensibly such policies are in place to protect instructors, providing them with an “out” given the typicality of romantic crushes and interests

developed and expressed by students (especially first time ones) for their instructors. In practice, however, such policies allow instructors to profess friendship and genuine concern for the interests and the well being of their students without being able to be held accountable to such a “friendship.” This situation is, of course, far from universal and quite different from other studios, without such policies, where teachers regularly go out for coffee or go dancing with their students. It is also worth noting that non-fraternization policies may be applied selectively and in ways that maintain extant hierarchies of privilege and power. My first studio provides some interesting and contrasting examples in this regard.

The most notable manifestation of the non-fraternization policy at my original studio concerned Natalie and Emma, both of whom were already students at the time I started taking lessons. Natalie, Emma, Rod, and I were all among the younger single adults at the studio and quickly became friends. We went social dancing on a couple of occasions (outside the context of the studio’s regular weekly dance parties), and I performed routines with both Natalie and Emma at one of the studio’s showcase events. Over the same few months the studio was having trouble retaining instructors as several of the staff left one after another and several of the newer trainees never returned. Soon thereafter, and within one week of each other, the studio manager offered both Natalie and Emma jobs as dance teachers at the studio. The relevant twist, however, comes from the fact that the studio manager informed each of them that if they accepted the jobs they could no longer be friends with Rod or I based on the studio’s non-fraternization policy.

As far as appearances are concerned, this stipulation made sense—newer students or visitors to the studio would not, after all, know that the friendships predated Natalie’s and Emma’s employments at the studio. As such, a condition of employment along the lines of only getting together outside the studio privately rather than publicly, such as at each others’ houses rather than going out to the movies or a restaurant, would have been more than understandable. This, however, was not what happened, as the studio manager insisted that neither Natalie nor Emma could continue their friendships with either Rod or I if they accepted his offers of employment. The manager’s steadfastness in this regard is indicative of two closely interconnected points: first, that the purported purpose of non-fraternization policies of protecting the instructors is, at best, only a partial explanation; and second, that maintaining a strong structural division between students and instructors is tightly intertwined with maintaining hierarchies of privilege and power.

If the sole purpose of non-fraternization policies is protecting the instructors, it makes no sense to say that such a policy must be adhered to between people who are already friends. So, what else may be involved? There are also arguments that such non-fraternization policies protect the students, preventing less scrupulous teachers from taking advantage of more gullible or enamored students. Some students express almost outrage at such explanations, insisting that they are as “intelligent adult” and can decide for themselves who they will or will not become involved with. This standpoint has merit but, at the same time, many of those who start dancing as adults—at least in the United States—do so when they are looking for something, be it

a new social outlet, a new activity, or anything else. Many of the people in this later group take up dancing after a divorce or the death of a spouse and, as such, it is not a stretch to suggest that some of them are seeking social or emotional contact or comfort (or all of these). In such circumstances even an “intelligent adult” can be emotionally vulnerable and over-easily swayed by personal overtures, especially when such propositions come from an admired other such as dance teachers tend to be. Certainly dance teachers are far from universally admired but, for those seeking out dance, the dance teacher is a figure of respect, often physically attractive and fit, and trained to move with assurance and stature. The argument can thus be made that non-fraternization policies exist to protect the students at least as much as to protect the instructors.

The argument that non-fraternization policies protect students is problematic on several levels. In the first instance, it is unevenly enforced. At the same time as Natalie and Emma were being admonished not to fraternize with Rod or I, for instance, Nate, a well established instructor at the studio, started dating Karen, a student who had joined some of the group salsa classes I was in soon after I had. While Nate and Karen were relatively discreet, it was still something that would have been noticed if one were not “looking the other way.” Again, the studio manager’s interest in maintaining hierarchical divisions of privilege seem to be implicated, a point I shall return shortly. Before doing so, however, I want to problematize the “protect the student” justification for non-fraternization policies on another front as well. As I have suggested above, non-fraternization policies actually enable instructors

to profess feelings and connections to their students while actually remaining insulated from then having to follow through and match deed to word. In action if not in intent, non-fraternization policies allow teacher to utilize almost all of the manipulative value of personal relationships without being held accountable to such a (personal) relationship.<sup>29</sup>

The manipulative distance provided by non-fraternization policies reinforces the structural division between students and instructors, perpetuating hierarchies of privilege and power. In this regard it is particularly telling that the studios typically staffed by less qualified instructors tend to be the same studios that most explicitly draw structural lines between teachers and students. The Arthur Murray studios that are so well known for running employment advertisements reading “Dance Teachers Wanted. No Experience Necessary,” are, for instance, the same studios that most often post prominent non-fraternization statements in their lobbies or above their reception desks. I find it both noteworthy and telling that it is studios which (potentially) have only a couple of weeks worth of training differentiating instructors from students that are also most concerned with demarcating the boundaries between teachers and students.

### **Differentiating Statuses: Structural vs. Personal**

The emphasis placed on differentiating the statuses of teachers from students is not unique to franchise studios. Indeed, most studios that do their own “in-house” teacher-training (of which the franchises are just one subset) seem to emphasize the distinction between teacher and student more so than do other studios that do not do

their own training. The very immediacy of in-house training means that many new instructors arrive with no background and yet will soon be starting to teach. Instructors from this background cannot help but be relatively unskilled, not only with dancing in general but also—and perhaps even more importantly—with teaching itself. Non-fraternization policies (and other similar policies) thus serve to provide structural differentiation between students and those beginning instructors who lack both sufficient dancing and teaching abilities to differentiate themselves as dancers and instructors on personally (versus structurally) based grounds alone. Analytically speaking this makes perfect sense too, with the difference in teacher versus student status needing to be institutionally reinforced precisely in so far as the instructors' status cannot rest on their personal authority as a dance resource since the financial lifeblood of staff-instructor based studios is almost entirely dependent on the success of these instructors.

In real life terms, it is economically imperative that even minimally qualified teachers have credibility in the eyes of their students. Structurally marking such teachers into an elevated status helps perpetuate this dynamic, especially when the teachers in question lack the experience to fully distinguish themselves individually. In this case ascribed status—“well they are a teacher”—is used as a substitute for the achieved status of more experienced dancers and teachers. At the same time, since these instructors' knowledge of dance and teaching are less likely, on their own, to establish them as a valuable commodity, an additional lever is needed. As such, the same non-fraternization policy that structurally differentiates instructor from student

also provides cover for emotionally and psychologically targeted sales by these instructors. In sum then, whether by design or just by practice, non-fraternization policies allow for a structurally hierarchicized differentiation between student and teacher while simultaneously producing a seemingly blurry border between the two roles. The structural differentiation so engendered compensates for a dearth in dance and teaching skill based distinctions while the predominantly false permeability suggested by the partially blurred border between social distinctions—“I really do like you and wish we could get together outside the studio but, because of the rules, we can’t”—is, in turn, a powerful lever along which emotional force is often exerted and, ultimately, manipulated.

Other studio selling practices also depend on elements of emotional manipulation. At my first studio, for instance, all sales took place in the studio manager’s office, behind closed doors, and with the student being outnumbered two to one by the student’s dance teacher and the studio manager. Again, information from the initial student questionnaire was used to tailor the sales pitch being delivered with the studio manager and instructor being able to bounce targeted prompts and responses off of each other. Kevin, an Arthur Murray instructor in from the Northeast back in the 1950’s says that he eventually quit because as much of their training was on sales as it was on dance. On its own this was a personal choice on Kevin’s part and, as many have made a point of pointing out to me, any dance studio, like any other business, is free to conduct its own affairs as it sees best and as are in its own best interests. While the concept is well taken it is also untrue, as legal parameters exist within which

economic interests are pursued. In the 1968 case of *Vokes v. Arthur Murray, Inc.*<sup>30</sup> the Second District Court of Appeals of Florida found a number of studio practices to be intentionally misleading and deceitful and motivated “as much or more from the urge to ‘ring the cash register’ as from any honest or realistic appraisal of her dancing prowess or a factual representation of her progress.”

At the risk of being redundant I want to stress, again, that each studio and manager runs their own studio as they see fit, franchise or not. To say that every studio does business in this way would be untrue, as would be saying that every franchise studio conducts its business in this manner. At the same time though, it would be equally erroneous to suggest that the practices I have been discussing or such as those noted in *Vokes v. Arthur Murray* are entirely anomalous either. In an undated *Extension Manual* from the 1950’s the manager of the San Francisco Mission and Marina Arthur Murray studios, Louise Taylor, outlines how to train analysts—staff instructors specializing in the intake and processing of new students—how to welcome, approach, and design and sell dance programs. Below are some of the practices that she advocated:

- Page 1: “Every person can buy up to \$1000 through proper *handling*” (emphasis added).
- Page 2: Under the heading Be A Friend To Your Student – “if you know him, if you are his friend, he will confide in you.”
- Page 3: “Let him know we can make him the kind of dancer he wants to be...Say to your student ‘I know we can make you a good dancer’.”
- Page 4: Under the heading Emotional Selling – “You must know the student before you can use emotional selling. If you don’t know his particular problems, what you say will not be effective...Through emotional selling you can make him see future happiness through what we have to offer,” and go on to list three ways of going about this.
- Page 5 (still as part of the section on emotional selling): “People are afraid of many things, unhappiness, loneliness. *Use the fear angle in such a way as to say, ‘This might happen to you if you don’t take this course’*” (emphasis added).
- Page 10: “Greetings are of great importance. For the dance analyst, a smile upon meeting the prospect and a sincere, friendly attitude can extend twenty-five hours to fifty hours



immediately. A compliment, given gracefully, *will make the emotional selling phase less obvious*...Each greeting should let the student know the analyst has been thinking of him away from the studio and that other staff members have noticed his progress” (emphasis added).

- Pages 11-14: Scripted greeting and farewell messages for each of the first five lessons.
- Pages 15: Under the heading Emotional Reasons Why People Take Dancing Lessons – “The following, the emotional reasons why a student takes dancing lessons, is what our Analysis and all our teachings hours are based upon...”
- Pages 16-17: List three means and strategies for eliciting information from students pertaining to their emotional reasons for wanting to dance.
- Page 20: “...we must find out and then convince the student that we have his interest at heart and that the school can arrange money matters to fit his needs” (original emphasis).
- Page 24: “Describe the course as you plan it -- in flowing emotional terms” (original emphasis).
- Pages 24-29: Script for how to make student feel like the plan is just theirs. Includes such phrasings as, “I want this course for you, Mr. Student, because *it is going to make you happy*. The confidence you gain in your dancing here, will carry out into all you do, your work, and other social engagements” (28, emphasis added).
- Page 54: “Show personal interest – *it helps win the student’s confidence*” (emphasis added).
- Page 55: “Be sure when he is away from the studio that he is thinking in terms of dancing, and not of money.”
- Page 84: “An Analyst must learn to overcome objections.”

## So What Does All Of This Tell Us?

While all of the examples I have provided concern elements of ballroom dancing typically connected to and associated with competitive dancing, this is neither to say nor to suggest that such dynamics are either caused by or only explicable in relation to elements or dynamics of overt competition. Just as many dance instructors are interested in dedicated, long-term students whose only interest is in social dancing and, so too, are there numerous social dancers fully as concerned with access to good instruction and facilities as are their competitive counterparts. Much more importantly though, however, the general dynamics involved are far from dance specific. As all of the examples help sketch in, power is not some fixed social element but, rather, an intrinsic and contextual *dynamic* of all social relations. Power, after all, is the power to

do something in a given situation and it is only through the *relations* of different social parties and practices that power develops and forms, is exercised and experienced.

### **Politics in Action**

All of the different elements and dynamics I have been presenting do not, of course, exist in isolation. Judgment calls are often just that—judgments—but also judgments that arise out of particular backgrounds, contexts, and outlooks. It is the same subjective criteria and lack of any standardized scoring formula, for example, which provides room for conflicting perspective at the same time as it allows for creativity and artistry. But room is also left for misconduct. Two of the most out rightly disturbing and unethical examples I encountered concern Olivia, an event organizer, and Marsha, a widely recognized coach and judge. While Olivia and Marsha are both far removed from the echelon of the most powerful ballroom personalities, both are also well-connected and politically active members of the ballroom circuit in the United States.

In Marsha's case, an amateur couple approached her after receiving some particularly low marks from her in their final, asking her what was wrong with their dancing, what it was that she felt they needed to work on. Marsha replied that they should have a lesson with her and that it would cost \$95. Since judges are not allowed (per NDCA regulations) to teach lessons at the competitions where they are judging, this would have meant arranging for such a lesson at another time, and the couple pointed out that they lived several states away from Marsha and, given the logistics, that arranging such a lesson would prove difficult. Marsha's shocking response of,

“well you don’t need to *take* the lesson,” is the most blatant expression of “money for marks” that I came across in the United States.

The most extreme stories of such money for marks type conduct, however, come from Russia and the Ukraine, including accounts of couples who, just after coming in fourth, fifth, or sixth in major national championships, animatedly and indignantly decry that they had paid \$10,000 for that title and that they should have won it. It is unclear how much of this money was supposedly a straight payment for results and how much may have been directed through coaching fees. I do want to point out, however, that while I have heard several such stories I have not done any research in either Russia or the Ukraine so cannot assess the possible veracity of such accounts beyond simply noting that I have heard such reports from several people including both current and former residents of these countries.

Earlier in my research, and as part of learning “the lay of the land,” I would go look at the posted scrutineer’s marks, especially those for the more marquee events. As I was still starting out and still trying to figure out “who was who,” looking at the marks, particularly of the premier events, helped me ascertain both who the ranking couples and adjudicators were. Interestingly, at Olivia’s competition, marks were available for every heat contested except for one professional event involving several national finalists. No marks ever surfaced for that particular event and, when asked, the scrutineer said that there was a problem extracting those results from the database.

On its own this might have just been an interesting anomaly, but it also seemed overly convenient as a couple Olivia did not like had placed much, much lower than

any other result would ever have predicted. Certainly couples can make breakthroughs and, inevitably, such breakthroughs come at the expense of other couples. Still, the extent of the shift from typical placements, coupled with the fact that the only marks missing from the entire weekend, suggested the possibility of something more sinister. While the scrutineer's marks never surfaced, later that night, after the evening session had concluded, someone did find the judges' original marking sheets in a trash basket down a back hall from the ballroom. And the marks on the judges' actual sheets—with the judges' signatures clearly visible—showed a different result from the one announced in the ballroom.

Who a couple takes their coaching from—and how—can matter. Shorty and Red, for instance, are a young couple who started competing as professionals. Never having “come up” through the amateur ranks and not being “under the wing” of any major competitors or coaches leaves them in a precarious position. While the two coaches Shorty and Red have chosen to work with are both excellent dancers, they are probably not the best choices that Shorty and Red could have made. Being new to the entire competition process, and not knowing any better, Shorty and Red failed to maximize the return on the investment of their coaching dollars.

Given limited funds to invest in their own training, Shorty and Red would have been better advised to work with coaches who had dance credentials to match those of their current coaches but also had more political clout. In their current situation Shorty and Red may be getting good dance information, but not better information than many others who are also getting a political push from their coaches. Shorty's and Red's

coaches, while well-known dancers, are neither judges themselves, nor event organizers, nor clearly embedded within the “camp” of any of the most renowned dancers or coaches. Any talking that Shorty’s and Red’s coaches may do about their “new couple” does not go as far or count as much as similar comments from more prominent and better connected coaches.

Beyond just “whom” a couple coaches with, there is a related issue of “how.” Two different coaches may be of similar caliber but come from competing camps of thought or even be direct competitors of each other’s. While seeking coaching from either of these coaches might be equally viable, trying to take coaching from both is a clear transgression of certain unwritten “rules;” it is just not “how things are done.” In a related vein, some coaches may be excellent informational resources but still be thought of and considered as *personae non gratae* for various personal, political, and historical reasons. Such outcasts may be useful resources, even informational treasure troves, but their outcast status also casts them as political quicksand. The ramifications of publicly working with such political pariahs can be as significant as they are swift.

More than one pair of U.S. and international finalists have told me that being seen publicly working with a political exile set their competitive careers back anywhere from six months to a year, or even more. It also seems clear that such setbacks—and despite the many other variables that may also be involved—can, in fact, be attributed to public coaching done with political “untouchables.” Thom and Mandy, for instance, had been getting coaching from Francis (among several other coaches) for a while, and their competition results had been on an impressive climb

including breaking into their national finals. Clearly the information they were getting from Francis, and the influence she had on their dancing, were not at issue. As soon as Thom and Mandy were *publicly* seen working with Francis, however, everything changed; they immediately “lost” their spot in the national final and it was a full year until their results came back in line with where they had been thereto. Seeing as how Thom and Mandy’s training and practice had not shifted, it does not take all that great a leap of intuition to realize that it was their public association with Francis that so dramatically impacted the trajectory of their competitive careers.

Being “seen” does not, of course, always ramify along negative lines, as being seen with the “right” people can provide a boost in exactly the same way that being seen with the “wrong” people can bury you. It is not only those working their way up who play the seeing game, however, as the more established ballroom “powers” often flex their political muscles by being seen in certain places and in certain interactions. Knowing how to interpret such sightings does, of course, require a certain modicum of familiarity with who-is-who and a certain fluency in the relative positioning and influence of these various people. At one competition where Lee Wakefield was serving as Chairman of judges he was standing at the podium, with his arms crossed across his chest, in the center of the elevated stage in a direct line across from the seated judges and directly behind the BYU formation team as they were competing. “So what?” might ask the ballroom newcomer, “why wouldn’t the chairman of judges remain in a position of visibility during a competition?” Those more familiar with the ballroom scene, however, know that Lee Wakefield is the Chair of the Dance

Department at BYU, that he coaches the BYU formation team, that the BYU Ballroom Dance Company has been a member organization of the NDCA since 1985, and that (in conjunction with the ABC) BYU long hosted the NDCA sanctioned United States Professional Standard Ballroom and Amateur Championships. Given these considerations, Lee's presence, arms crossed, standing directly behind his formation team and in inescapable line of sight from the seated judges begins to have a different salience.

Another element brought to the fore by Lee's conduct is that apparent action can be as equally significant as intended action. Whether Lee intended for his presence to be noticed and felt by the judges sitting across from him is a different (even if related) issue, since Lee's presence had an impact regardless of his intent. One other official I spoke with soon thereafter suggested that Lee had probably just been intent watching his team perform and had been oblivious to the appearance that his presence might produce and that, if only for appearances sake, it probably would have been better for him to have stepped down off the dais. This same official also seemed to think that if the situation had been pointed out to Lee he would have happily removed himself from his dominant visible position. Yet another official, however, suggested that Lee had been most aware of what he was doing and pointed out that Lee had been part of the ballroom competition circuit for far too long not to be conscious of exactly what impact his presence might have.

Whichever interpretation is taken, the fact remains that Lee's positioning was both blatant and noticed. Intent aside, Lee provided a visual marker of authority within

the U.S. ballroom circuit, and an authority with a vested interest and investment in one of the teams that was currently performing before the judges. Given the variety of overlapping roles played by many personnel in the ballroom world, such situations do arise and, even when done in innocence, may very well provide the appearance of impropriety and thus serving as a lightning rod for calls and accusations of impropriety and wrong doing.

I would like to conclude this section with a personal account that exemplifies the complicated way that things really happen—amidst multiple overlapping variables. At one competition I was competing with a new partner, for the first time, in a closed syllabus Pre-Novice event. Despite the description of the event as a syllabus one, both in the registration materials and in the program and heat listings, the couple that went on to win our event danced open routines; the same ones they then danced in the open Novice category immediately following and the same ones they then danced in the Pre-Championship category later that night in the evening session. This actually involved a double violation since, in addition to dancing open routines in a closed syllabus event, there is also a restriction that a couple can only compete in two consecutive levels. So what came of these violations? Nothing. Given that both syllabus infractions and dancing three consecutive levels are quite clear-cut standards, why was a couple clearly violating both restrictions allowed to win this Pre-Novice event? Understanding the circumstances under which clear-cut standards were left by the wayside, despite the presence of any number of people who knew better, serves as



a telling and highly illustrative example of how things really work given the often complicated and overlapping dynamics, roles, and forces all simultaneously at play.

In the first instance, one of the most straightforward gatekeepers in ballroom competition is the invigilator; someone who is responsible for assessing whose choreography and routines are within the acceptable parameters in any given event at any given level. In an ideal situation an invigilator would have brought the other couple's violation to the attention of the chairman of judges; but invigilators need to be paid, so many event organizers—as was the case in this situation—elect to make do without. In the absence of a designated invigilator, sometimes a judge will notice an infraction and mark the event accordingly. This is far from an automatic fallback however, and most judges are focused on *how* the couple is dancing—which is, by and large, what they are judging after all—rather than *what* they are dancing. And, while it is ultimately the responsibility of the chairman of judges to ensure compliance with various restrictions, given the many responsibilities of the chairman and the typically fast-paced turnover of events, this is often impossible. Any number of other people, however, could have pointed out the syllabus infraction to the chairman.

Either my partner or I could have brought this situation to the notice of the chairman of judges as competitors do, at times, lodge complaints that may alter the final results. In this situation, however, two factors figured into our decision not to say anything. From my perspective, in the first place, the couple that went on to win were clearly better dancers than us and, as such, deserved to win. Of course I would have preferred for the couple that beat us to have done so entirely within the rules, but this

did not negate, for me, that the other couple were still better dancers deserving of their first place result. Perhaps if I and had felt that the dancing was very closely matched he might have felt differently and chosen to lodge a complaint, although that is not something that can really be determined retroactively. Two different factors, however, provide reasons not to have lodged a complaint in this situation, regardless of the circumstances.

In the first place, and as many of the dancers from the most world elite all the way down have said to me, they would much rather dance well and not place well than vice versa. In this particular situation I did not feel that I had danced well so, even regardless of a closer match in overall skill levels, still would not have felt like I should have won. Secondly, I would not have wanted to be seen as someone who won on a technicality. In addition to looking like someone who did not deserve to win I might have then been seen as being petty and thus cost myself future credibility on the competitive circuit. Even in situations where one feels like they really deserved to win, holding one's peace is often the wisest course of action given concern for future ramifications. No one likes to be second-guessed or have their judgments and decisions challenged, and especially not in their own areas of proficiency and expertise. If such challenges come from a peer, a superior, or another expert they may be construed constructively. This is much more unlikely to be the case, however, when such challenges come from those who are not perceived as having put in the time, earned the experience, or having the expertise to make such assessments. In this capacity judges are just like anyone else and are unlikely to take kindly to those who

publicly question and challenge the established order of authority, and of which that judge is a part.

Aside from my partner and me, the on-deck captain<sup>31</sup> was someone who could have brought the winning couple's infraction to the attention of the chairman of judges. In this particular situation, however, such a complaint posed a conflict of interest, which could easily have been viewed as partial and biased since the on-deck captain was also our coach. As such, if the on-deck captain had said anything it could have set us up to win an event we were not seen as having deserved to win on the one hand and could have cost our coach credibility as it would look like the coach's position as on-deck captain was being used to push their own couple.

What the chairman of judges did eventually notice was when the winning couple showed up for their third event in the Pre-Championship event that evening, at which point the on-deck captain was asked, by the chairman, to say something to the couple. They insisted that their coach had told them it was fine to enter all of the events that they had, which brings up another interesting set of issues. Of course just because they claimed to have been told it was all right to enter all three consecutive events does not mean that, in fact, they *had* been told this. Beyond this, however, the ultimate responsibility for the couples' entries and actions was their own, regardless of what anyone may have told them. Yet claiming that their coach directed their actions provided a veil between them and their own responsibility, one that was easy to employ, especially seeing as how the absent party undoubtedly serves as the most useful scapegoat.

One other element that has to be considered in this picture is how this couple was able to register for three consecutively leveled events in the first place, especially seeing as how this violated the event organizers own registration policies. Was this a matter of consciously overlooking the violation since it brought in an additional entrance fee? In this case that is quite unlikely, especially given the relatively low registration prices for amateur events. But perhaps it was a matter of just taking whatever entrance fees were submitted without careful review of the actual registrations being paid for. Yes, each registrant should be responsible for their own registering but, at the same time, registration forms and materials can be hard to find and decipher, especially as there is little standardization between the different organizers and competitions in the United States. Or perhaps the person actually receiving the registrations was not all that knowledgeable or informed regarding the various restrictions and would not have even known that something was amiss? But what then of the registrar as the program is compiled and the heat sheets prepared? Who knows?

### **Institutional Inertia**

Certainly participants in any system may view various patterns of action as appropriate, beneficial, or even natural, but this overlooks that a large reason why things are done the way they are is simply because that is the way things are done. Some action systems do, of course, make sense in their current applications but others are little more than vestiges of institutional inertia. Most DanceSport judges, for instance, agree that an elevated viewing position would facilitate better evaluation yet

no WD&DSC or IDSF event (that I am aware of) has broken ranks with the practice of having judges standing on the edge of the floor.<sup>32</sup> There are, of course, some logistical considerations involved such as not wanting to further interfere with audience viewing; yet elevated corner platforms have been used for video purposes on several occasions. Such corner “towers” would, naturally, interfere with judges’ mobility to walk around for a different view of the floor, to see different couples, or to check on a competitor’s number, but the fact that attempts to adjust the judges’ vantage point has received such short shrift is a telling marker of the institutional inertia in play.

### **Structure and Status: Position, Power, and Privilege**

One of the more interesting and telling cases of differential status and positioning that I have experienced in the ballroom world took place while I was conducting an interview with two U.S. professional finalists in one corner of the hotel’s central lobby. I was sitting kitty corner from the two finalists, with a large coffee table between us upon which my micro cassette recorder was visibly resting with its recording light shining a cheery bright orange-red. Despite the conversation clearly in progress and the obvious recorder, we were interrupted several times by other dancers passing through the lobby that either just wanted to say “hi” or had not noticed the recorder until they approached us. On its own, this dynamic is quite typical of the competition circuit given the transient attendance and participation of any given dancer or judge from event to event and week to week. In this particular instance, however, Daryl, a judge and competition coordinator, came over, seated himself on the armrest of the couch the two finalists were sitting on, and proceeded, ostensibly, to

speak with us for well over half an hour. Several dynamics of this interaction are worth noting, as they tell a deeper story regarding the structural exercise of power.

In the first place, most “visits” were composed of a short “sorry, didn’t mean to disturb you but just wanted to say hello,” or, if slightly longer, were typically prefaced with, “I’m sorry and I don’t mean to disturb you but...[could I talk to you for just a second, or something to that effect].” Sometimes the greeting indicated that they had not seen the tape recorder until they had already initiated contact but that they were sorry to interrupt and would catch up later. In Daryl’s case, however, no acknowledgement was even made of the tape recorder or of the interview and conversation he had interrupted. In the same vein, rather than a brief greeting or a short comment, Daryl’s presence lasted almost 40 minutes. Additionally, Daryl proceeded to dominate the majority of the time not so much engaging us in a discussion as proceeding to tell us his views on various ballroom related issues and happenings.

While I cannot speak to Daryl’s perception of the situation or motivations, his actions are still telling in several regards. In the first instance it is noteworthy that, quite unlike every other person who happened by, Daryl made no acknowledgement that he was intruding in any way into or disrupting an ongoing conversation. Next, and also unlike everyone else, Daryl did not acknowledge the presence of my micro cassette recorder—which was in plain view—in any way. Either he did see it or he did not see it (and despite the fact that I turned it off once it was clear he would not be departing in short order). If Daryl did not see the recorder he was the only person not

to in over two hours and, if he did, he was the only person to come by who did not view it as a deterrent to interjecting himself into our conversation across that same time frame. In either eventuality, Daryl did not acknowledge the same environmental and social clues that were apparent to everyone else, including a reigning World and Blackpool champion.

After Daryl had finally departed the U.S. finalists I had been interviewing and I ended up discussing the interlude caused by Daryl and they, as well as I, found it significant that Daryl had either felt no need to be aware of his surroundings, and hence failed to even notice the recorder, or that he took it for granted that he was more significant than us to the extent that we did not even deign to acknowledge (let alone make an apology) that he was in any way interfering with the interaction that was already in progress. Aside from merely interrupting, however, Daryl's intruded presence was neither short lived nor unobtrusive and he proceeded both to dictate the content and duration of the exchange.

I cannot know whether Daryl was conscious of the scope of his intrusion and, as such, also cannot speak to how deliberately he may (or may not) have intended to be in interrupting. Regardless of any such considerations, however, it is clear that Daryl's positioning was such that he either felt entitled to intrude or that he never even crossed his mind to consider his ensuing behavioral antics as an interruption. If the first scenario is true than it implies an awareness of his relative status as well as a deliberate exercise thereof. If, on the other hand, Daryl was unaware of his intrusiveness than that implies an even more drastic situation as the structural

positioning and privilege of his status as the privilege he feels entitled to as a high-ranking judge and event organizer has become invisible to him; it is now taken for granted in the same way that the most enduring of cultural patterns are as “given” or “just the way things are.”

No matter the particulars of perception, intention, motivation, or deliberateness, Daryl’s intrusion serves as a prime example of the structural positioning at work in the competitive ballroom circuit. Beyond the institutionalized power inherent to being an adjudicator, Daryl is also the organizer of an important competition and politically well connected within the NDCA, both roles with their own institutionalizations of status and clout. Taken together, the various roles played by Daryl situated him, relative to current U.S. finalists and myself, such that he could wade into and disrupt our interview without feeling any need—either because of consciously felt privilege or the sheer obliviousness of even more greatly internalized privilege—to apologize. Just as tellingly, however, both the two people that I was interviewing and I condoned and propagated Daryl’s structurally base privilege and entitlement, at least tacitly, via our acquiescence to his intrusion and continued presence.

As currently competing professionals, and especially as ones in their national final, neither of the people I was interviewing felt comfortable risking Daryl’s wrath but pointing out his intrusion to him. Similarly, as someone whose research is largely contingent on the goodwill of many event organizers, I did not feel it was in my own best interest either to make this point either. These last points bring the picture full



circle, as the power and privilege of differential status and positioning only exist by dint of their acceptance by those lower down the proverbial totem pole. But, as this situation makes clear, bucking the status quo can be a risky proposition, especially as those lower down often have something to gain from going along with things as they are and often risk much to challenge those in power.

### **Social Gravity: Hierarchy in the Round**<sup>33</sup>

Social life is lived in the round. Social norms, expectations, understandings, influences, and interactions transpire as overlapping and interacting fields. Systematic power differentials inevitably emerge from such multidimensional dynamics. The social sciences typically discuss such distributions of power as hierarchies. Unfortunately, however, such nomenclature tends to gloss over the multidimensional and encompassing nature of social dynamics. Instead of thinking of such systemic dynamics as hierarchical, it strikes me as more fruitful to conceptualize such spheres as functioning within a social gravity, with the various spheres orbiting at different distances from the core of any given network.

Let me use the salsa scene to illustrate how the social gravity model may be utilized to good effect. The scene in question, of course, is a dance one, so dance related status (however so conceived) tends to define the center of the system. Dance status is typically linked to—although not synonymous with—proficiency, so, on any given nights at a salsa club, “batches” of dancers of roughly similar ability (and who have, typically, started dancing along similar time frames) can be observed dancing with each other more than with others. Now certainly there are regular breakouts from

the typical “batches,” but the pattern of like-with-relatively-like is still the dominant model and, since most of those who start at the same time tend to be of roughly similar levels, they also tend to remain within closely aligned orbits of one another.

A couple of points come to mind regarding this general scenario:

- (1) The social gravity in question is roughly equated with dance ability.
- (2) There are various points of equilibrium around the system (different orbits).
- (3) The orientation of all primary orbits is the center of the system.

These regularities translate into a variety of dynamics and practices. First off, people tend to look to those of higher ability as social/dance foci and it is this general orientation to ability that, at first blush, comes across as (simply) hierarchical. Second, dancing with those of like ability is gravitationally (socially) easy, since they move within the same orbit. This second dynamic helps account for general stratifications, even across social cliques. Different “bodies” of dancers can be in orbit on opposite sides of the center but still be equidistant from, and mutually oriented towards, their common center. Third, orbits tend to be broken along two lines: (A) trying to attract others into one’s own orbit, or (B) trying to move into an orbit closer to the center. So how do these two vectors play out in our salsa scene?

Attempts to attract others into one’s own orbit account for many of the situations in which someone dances with those of significantly lower proficiency whereas dancing with those significantly better is implicated in moving into a more central orbit. Of course these processes are neither so straightforward nor so simply enacted and achieved. In the first instance, dance ability is really only relevant in so

far as it is perceived. In practice this means that dancing “down” is not problematic if your own orbit (read as level) is already established. Take Ken, a regular in the San Diego salsa scene. As a well known regular, Ken’s orbital positioning is widely recognized. This makes it possible for Ken to walk into a club and dance his first dance with a total novice, of minimal ability, without threat to his positioning. Someone new to the San Diego scene, however, does not have the same leeway. As an unknown quantity their first couple of dances serves as the basis for their positioning within the larger orbital system. In practice this means that those not solidly ensconced within a local system tend to look for a partner who they can “show up” to good effect with for their first few dances.

It is important to realize, of course, that not all dancers are concerned with or even aware of such dynamics. Those who grew up with salsa, dancing it at family functions with cousins and grandparents are often unconcerned with proficiency and the orbital stratifications involved. Others may be aware of such dynamics but remain unconcerned—perhaps being primarily focused on the social facets of the dance scene. Newer dancers are often unaware of the orbital politics involved so both transgress such norms and get away with doing so to some degree but, being unaware of the social gravities at work, also often misinterpret the social dynamics around them. Take Karen, a newer dancer who, from the outset, would go up to dancers far above her level and ask them to dance as soon as the music started playing. Many of her requests were turned down which she took to be signs of rudeness, an impression even further strengthened when she saw the same guys dancing with other beginning dancers later

in the evening. Being new to the dance scene, what Karen is failing to understand is that the men in question are making sure to establish their orbital positioning at the start of the night whereas later on, after their relative positioning has been “set,” they have more latitude to dance outside of their own orbits.

It is also worth noting that simply trying to dance “up” can be more problematic than it might first seem to be. Since it is possible that you will jeopardize your partner’s orbital position (also read as perceived ability) procuring such dances is far from a foregone conclusion and, as others see such rejections, messages are communicated regarding orbital valences. Additionally, dancing “up” also presents a further hurdle that must be negotiated: sufficiently dancing “up” to the new level. “Sufficient,” in this case, involves two dynamics—partnering and apparent partnering. While ideally overlapping phenomenon, partnering and apparent partnering are separate items with somewhat disparate impacts.

As far as partnering itself is concerned, the goal is to have your partner (from the more central orbit) finish the dance willing to dance with you again. This does not, of course, call for raising one’s ability but, rather, for a threefold success including the physical, the visual, and the psychological. Physically, the better dancer must be comfortable dancing with you again, meaning that they must feel that the leading/following was sufficiently comfortable to be willing to dance again. Visually too, the better dancer must be comfortable dancing with you again—this usually means that they do not feel that they have been made to look foolish by the partner in question. Finally, the better dancer must also be comfortable dancing with you again

psychologically. While this psychological element typically means that the better dancer had some fun, it also involves such ineffable notions as not being “creeped out.” If all three of these criteria—the physical, the visual, and the psychological—are successfully met, the more peripheral dancer may have made inroads into a more central orbit along two possible vectors. First and foremost, one is likely to get future chances to dance with the better dancer within their more central orbit. Second, the better dancer may comment to others within their orbit thereby facilitating greater access to that orbit for the lower level dancer.

Separate from partnering itself—albeit related—is the role played by *apparent partnering*. Being seen dancing with a partner from a more central orbit means that you are seen as someone who *does* dance within the more central orbit. This associative effect is, perhaps, the most visible manifestation of the social gravity I have been discussing. Being seen within the sphere of the more centrally positioned dancer serves as a gravitational pull that helps draw someone into a more central orbit themselves. One key caveat to this associative dynamic is that apparent partnering is something different from merely dancing with someone. Just being seen dancing with someone from a more central orbit is not the same thing as being seen *dancing* with them! Be it as lead or follow, it is important to appear to be dancing well with the more centrally situated partner—otherwise one is seen as dancing out of “place” and not as actually dancing within the better dancer’s more central orbit.

One interesting dynamic brought to the fore by the importance of apparent partnering is that what appears as partnering—and hence counts as it—is always

variable. Flashy patterns with lots of spins and tricks may strike a newer dancer as incredibly impressive whereas a more seasoned dancer may see the same performance and notice problems with timing and rough connections. The apparent partnering exhibited in this situation then is in no way the same to the different audiences in question. Just as the beginner may mistake spins and tricks as dance ability so too may they mistake such antics with a recognized dancer as being on par with the recognized dancer. The more experienced (or at least knowledgeable) observer may well see a discrepancy between even good ability and personal technique and the actual partnering being done. Also at issue are the many partnering dynamics not readily apparent to visual assessment. A dance might look top notch, even to a knowledgeable observer, but not have felt good to the dancers in question—and this is where, and why, partnering and apparent partnering are different, albeit related vectors, in calculating the social gravity within the dance sphere.

As noted above, successful (actual) partnering is likely to provide opportunities for additional future dancers with a better dancer, which, in turn, serve as additional episodes for apparent partnering to sway one's own orbital positioning. But also in play is the fact that the more centrally positioned dancer is also part of the dance universe as a social participant as well as as a dancer. What this means is that apparent leading is always also the possible subject of actual comment by the partner in question. Jenny, for instance, was really impressed by Vicky who she often saw dancing with Jeff. What Jenny was unaware of was that Jeff did not enjoy dancing with Vicky all that much, mostly did so out of social obligation since they were

members of the same social group, and preferred many, many other salseras as dance partners. As this example makes clear, partnering and apparent partnering are interrelated vectors implicated in calculations of the social gravity within the dance scene.

Now the motivational impetuses for orbital politics are variable. For some it can be an almost purely egotistically driven process. Such dancers are the ones solely concerned with how “good” they look. For some dance is largely used instrumentally—looking good may come into play, but largely only in so far as what such perception can be parlayed into. This second orientation tends to encompass those men (and women) who tend to use their dancing as a means to realize romantics/sexual encounters. Yet others are true dance aficionados and personal excellence is highly motivating. Achievement can be motivational for any number of physical or psychological reasons. A person’s motivational stance serves as a frame of reference from which one assesses and orients their involvement within the orbital politics of the dance scene.

An important distinction that needs to be made here is that social cliques form and function inside the larger field of hierarchicization intrinsic to social gravity. Two different social cliques who do not dance or even come in contact with each other might both, for instance, still share the same social orbit. The higher the degree of social and dance overlap between such cliques, the closer they will be relative to each other but, in either case, both may still share the same orbit even if diametrically opposed in all other regards. The more embedded in dancing a dancer becomes, the

more they often start to think about exactly these dynamics, as well as the ramifications that such dynamics may have for them personally. Trina, for instance, suggests that, “‘Cliques’ are easy enough to break. But ‘hierarchy’ felt somehow trickier. Could it be,” she goes on to ask, “that, as social animals, we humans cannot escape the inherent conditioning of naturally *becoming* part of the hierarchy? (as opposed to ‘cliques’, which are formed generally by *choice*).”

Although Trina’s conceptualization relies on a standard model of hierarchy, the observation and speculation she provides does point to a real and substantive difference between distinct types of social forces, those of association and of prestige. “I have successfully worked my way into a few cliques,” Trina offers, but “now, I am facing my *own* placement in the hierarchy. I am facing all the possibilities and limitations.” This last point is an important one as it returns the dynamic of power and power differentials to the forefront. Belonging to a clique, while always subject to its own politics and its position within larger social structures, is primarily association based. One’s position within the field of social gravity, however—Trina’s hierarchy writ round—is a different proposition altogether, as it is intrinsically related to a variety of social limits, privileges, restrictions, and opportunities. These dynamics are far from social abstractions outside of the awareness of most dancers and, as such, it is both the dynamics in question and the actions that dancers take based on these dynamics that ultimately establish the patterned interactions of their social matrix.



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## Endnotes: Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> Because of the far greater numbers of women than men dancing in the pro-am circuit, some competitions actually provide for separate Top Male Teacher and Top Female Teacher awards. Since they will not have to compete against the male instructors who typically have many more students, the presence of a Top Female Teacher category is intended to entice female instructors to bring their male students to that competition and to enter them in as many events as they can.

<sup>2</sup> For the four styles typically contested at most U.S. competitions, International Ballroom (also sometimes referenced as Standard or Modern), International Latin, American Smooth (also sometimes referenced as American Ballroom), and American Rhythm.

<sup>3</sup> The standard ballroom final involves six couples (although it can involve as many as many as eight couples in various situations).

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, and as delineated by the NDCA in a press release dated August 7, 2001, the moratorium on registering new competitions with the NDCA still holds in California, the North Eastern Corridor, and Florida (for the months of July through December), with the North Eastern Corridor being defined as:

Southern NY (Below a line drawn from Binghamton to Albany)

Massachusetts

Southern New Hampshire (Southeast of a line drawn from Brattleboro, through Concord to Rochester)

Southern Maine (South of a line from Porter in West to and including Portland in the East)

Connecticut

New Jersey

Rhode Island

Maryland

Washington DC

Eastern PA (Southeast of a line drawn from Harrisburg to Allentown)

Northern Virginia (North of Interstate 64 to include the City of Richmond)

<sup>5</sup> Up until 2006 this series was known as the Dancesport Superbowl Series but, under objection from the National football League to use of the term “Superbowl,” is now recognized simply as the Dancesport Series.

<sup>6</sup> “Big entry” instructors would be the ones who, between the various students they bring with them to an event, represent several hundred individual event entries.

<sup>7</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com)

<sup>8</sup> While the specifics of any given establishment may vary, as a rule of thumb this is, indeed, the case.

<sup>9</sup> This same stipulation, however, holds true for the majority of independent instructors as well. The reason that the issue of levels of execution is particularly relevant within the franchise context is since franchise studios seem to place a larger premium on choreographic achievement in general. Note that this is not to say that elements of technique are not taught or valued within the franchise system but, rather, that there seems to be a larger tendency to quantify accomplishment relative to choreographic mastery than does instruction outside the franchise system.

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that this trend does seem to vary between the different franchises as well as between studios within a given franchise as well.

<sup>11</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com)

<sup>12</sup> This comment, posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com), is particularly telling of a widespread and distinguishable pattern given the overlap in perception between the poster of this comment, who travels most widely within the circuit of competitions in the North East, and myself, with the majority of U.S. based events that I have attended being weighted towards the southwest.

<sup>13</sup> Posted at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ballroom\\_Life/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ballroom_Life/)

<sup>14</sup> Posted at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ballroom\\_Life/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ballroom_Life/)

<sup>15</sup> Increased personal confidence seems to be the most widely cited transformation brought about by partner dancing.

<sup>16</sup> A large reason for this is that those who already have experience are both aware of and have access to other alternatives—many of which are available precisely in so far as these dancers already have a certain base of dance related knowledge and skills. Many, many independent instructors in the U.S., for instance, owe their starts in dance to the franchises which provide them with their earliest training and opportunities.

<sup>17</sup> Actually, many newer franchise trainees, staff members, and instructors will be unaware and ill informed of many higher-level in-studio dynamics, processes, and procedures let alone the regional, national, or franchise-wide counterparts to these elements.

<sup>18</sup> Although that may be changing at the moment with the mass media popularity of current TV shows such as ABC's *Dancing with the Stars*, Fox's *So You Think You Can Dance?*, and TLC's *Ballroom Bootcamp*.

<sup>19</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com)

<sup>20</sup> Two years for AMI and 18 months for FADS instructors.

<sup>21</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com)

<sup>22</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com)

<sup>23</sup> It should be pointed out that the vicarious enjoyment of, involvement with, and pride in the accomplishments of one's instructor is in no way unique to the franchise circuits and that these same dynamics are regularly played out amongst independent teachers and students as well.

<sup>24</sup> Largely as a result of this case Florida continues to have amongst the most restrictive legal regulations for dance studios. See Appendix #4 for the full text of *Vokes v. Arthur Murray, Inc.*

<sup>25</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com)

<sup>26</sup> Posted at [www.Dance-Forums.com](http://www.Dance-Forums.com). This comment was actually followed up with the rather typical and cynical perspective of the franchises held by many franchise outsiders, concluding with the twist: "...and maybe interfere with the manager's ability to buy a new freakin Lexus each year."

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<sup>27</sup> The NDCA Member Organization History for AMI, for instance, notes that:

The organization is proud to have brought to dancing many of the celebrities who appeared on the famous Arthur Murray Dance Party TV series and such latter day dance stars as:

Larry & Betty Silvers, Vernon Brock & Beverly Donahue, Ron Montez, Sam Sodano, John & Beverly Kimmins, Patrick & Wendy Johnson, David & Carrie Kloss, Bill Sparks & Shirley Johnson, Tim & Barbara Haller, Pat Traymore, Terry Leone, Bob Medeiros, Julius Kaiser, Frank & Victoria Regan, Bob & Cindy Long, Bob Powers & Julia Gorchakova and Corky & Shirley Ballas.

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent example of this phenomenon in a different context, please see Ortnier 1999:152 regarding the relationships between Sherpas and Sahibs.

<sup>29</sup> This is not to suggest that some students do not, emotionally, hold teachers accountable to a personal relationship just because of rules and policies against fraternization. Instead, the point being made is that non-fraternization policies provide instructors in such circumstances with a normatively accepted rationale for not fulfilling the students' expectations.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix #4.

<sup>31</sup> Just to prevent confusion, although the on-deck captain often works quite closely with the MC and the chairman of judges, in most instances an on-deck captain would not be someone with the background, knowledge, or credibility to raise dance-related discrepancies to the chairman of judges. In this particular situation, however, it was otherwise.

<sup>32</sup> To be more specific standing on the edge of the floor is the standard practice for Ballroom, Latin, Smooth, Rhythm, and Theatre Arts competitions while a seated panel of judges in the "front" of the room is used for Showdance, Cabaret, and Pro-Am Solo routines.

<sup>33</sup> I owe my deepest thanks to Australian salsaera Shelley Hong for this section, as I first started formulating my own thoughts on the matter in response to questions she had raised.

## SECTION III: CULTURE

Both in conducting my research and in speaking to others about it, I kept hearing people mention the “subculture” I was studying. From a regional perspective I can see where such a conceptualization comes from. Bostonian dancers, for instance, are a subset of Bostonians just as Japanese dancers are clearly a subset of Japanese. Such a level of analysis, however, is incomplete. I would like to suggest that a different functional distinction ought to be made in assessing distinctions between cultures and subcultures.

Whatever else cultures may be—and the definitions and understandings of this have been wide ranging indeed—they are shared. As such, I would like to suggest that cultures be recognized as the largest such shared units whereas sub cultures represent subsets of more specific sharing. Yes, the Bostonian and Japanese dancers mentioned above are—as dancers—subsets of Bostonians and Japanese respectively. Yet, by the same token could these same individuals not also be recognized—as Bostonians and Japanese—as subsets of dancers? Ballroom dancers from the U.S.A., Japan, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, South Africa, and Finland do *not* represent a subset of any larger shared system<sup>1</sup> and, in point of fact, ballroom dance *is* what is shared. In this light it is as reasonable to speak of Danish dancers or Australian dancers as subsets of ballroom as it is to speak of such dancers as subsets of Danes or Australians.

I do not mean to suggest that ballroom dancers be thought of entirely as ballroom dancers. But I also think that relegating their self-selected and self-affirmed

status as such dancers to a secondary status—as being a subset of something else—is equally wide of the mark. Strauss and Quinn’s conceptualization (1998) of each person as an individual nexus of overlapping cultures well describes the situation represented by ballroom dance. Each dancer is certainly a member of their national culture but, at the same time, is also a member of the ballroom culture, separate from (but also inextricably interrelated with) their national cultural.<sup>2</sup> It is against this background that I contend that ballroom dance is more accurately termed a culture than as a subculture.

As Anderson (1991) has pointed out, imagining is a constitutive element of group membership. And how could it be otherwise? No one, after all, feels like a member of a community that they do not think they belong to. While necessary, however, imagining alone is not sufficient for group membership since distinct social groups achieve their distinction by way of group specific appraisals, norms, values, action systems, techniques. Thus, while ballroom and salsa classes, lessons, studios, workshops, competitions (and other such venues) do teach dance steps, patterns, and techniques, they simultaneously inculcate frames of reference and action that go much deeper than imagining alone. It is not by random happenstance, after all, that dancers from disparate countries can easily dance with one another in the absence of a shared verbal language.

While always taking place within larger social contexts, dance is a socially leveling and formative arena of human activity of great potency (Spencer 1985:28), and it is exactly this phenomenon that makes dance so efficacious in generating its

own collectivities (Hanna 1988). This dynamic is especially telling of (contemporary) ballroom and salsa which resist conventional locality based models and understandings of community. My observations from North America and Europe reveal that while both ballroom and salsa always vary both locally and individually, there are ballroom and salsa cultures; cultures with their own social rules and languages, codes and hierarchies (Savigliano 1998: 105-108), and stars and celebrities (e.g. Sumner 1906: 12) that remain opaque to the “outsider.” Yet how could it be otherwise? Ballroom and salsa are far from spontaneous activities, but deliberate institutionalizations of practices<sup>3</sup> and values that take effort.

The translocal ballroom and salsa communities are thus best viewed, examined, and understood as chosen commitment systems (Stromberg 1986). Stromberg’s notion of commitment systems as chosen cultural system—or Said’s elective affinities—eclipses Anderson’s (1991) conceptualization of self-constitutive imagination, accounting for the generation of both belief and action (1986: 90). This dynamic is especially informative of the multiplex nature of performative, activity-based communities, such as those of ballroom and salsa. The specific people who will be at the studio, in the club, or at performance or competition on a given night may—as it often is—be highly variable. At the same time, however, across time there is constancy of both community and culture: the same people do come back—what Skinner calls the “cyclical properties of human interaction systems” (1985: 289)—and, perhaps even more importantly, there are predictable patterns of activity—Skinner’s “spatial patterning of human interactions” (1985: 288).

Where Section II thus looked at who belonged to the ballroom and salsa scenes, including how and why, this section focuses on the beliefs and practices that define and demarcate these cultures of dance. Chapter Six examines the multiplex nature of the ballroom culture which is constituted via dynamics and elements of spectacle, art, and sport. Where Chapter Six looks at the cultural field of competitive ballroom, Chapter Seven focuses of the performance celebration, festival, and ritual at ballroom's most pivotal events, the competition. Chapters Eight and Nine feature ballroom aesthetics, with Chapter Eight focusing on aesthetic images and practices in the conduct and competition—as well as some of the consequences thus engendered—while Chapter Nine is concerned with ballroom costuming, and other elements of overt visibility, that are part and parcel of the ballroom world.

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### **Endnotes: SECTION III**

<sup>1</sup> More technically there is a larger shared range here, that of modern industrialized society. And, within the larger framework of modern globalization, perhaps there are shared elements to this range that would suggest a shared culture. I would contend, however, that, in fact, there are many similar or parallel forms at this scale, which are not truly shared. What this suggests is that any discussion of a “modern industrialized culture,” while perhaps a convenient gloss, remains somewhat overly simplifying and reductionistic.

<sup>2</sup> National culture is, by no means, the only separate (if intertwining) culture. Ethnic, religious, and occupational cultures are but a few of the other hubs of typical cultural identification and elaboration.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of this phenomena see Chaiklin and Lave 1993; Cole 1996; Engeström 1993; Forman, Minnick, and Stone 1993; Hutchins 1995; Lave 1988; Lave and Wenger 1991; and Rogoff 1990.

## CHAPTER SIX: Metagenre

By this point it should be clear that, despite their resistance to customary geographic parameters, ballroom and salsa communities do exist; that they are real and lived social arenas in which personal and collective identities are forged, challenged, and confirmed. As complex hybrid cultures, ballroom and salsa communities each exhibit elements of ritual, ceremony, leisure, performance, exhibition, pageant, competition, and belonging. Something is lost in any attempt to understand ballroom or salsa in the absence of any one of these elements, yet each one, when considered separately, falls far from the mark of adequately illustrating, revealing, or understanding the flavor of these lived world. Based on the modern Olympic movement, MacAloon's conceptualization of "metagenres" (1984) well suits ballroom and salsa—each a nexus of relations that also integrate other, overlapping webs of meaning and relations—as unique linkages of the symbolic actions of spectacle, festival, ritual, and game (1984: 241-259, 275-278).

Like MacAloon, Turner recognizes the cultural forms inherent to the performance of the "great genres"—ritual, carnival, drama, and spectacle—as "orchestrations of media" that also color the messages that they convey (1987: 23-24). For Turner then, these genres serve as a "temporal structure which interdigitates constant with variable features" (1987: 26), which simultaneously work to both sustain and challenge their social and cultural surrounds. As I take up in the chapters on



Aesthetics (Eight and Nine) and Embodiment (Ten), the gender roles performed in competitive ballroom dancing illustrate how the ballroom and salsa communities exemplify MacAloon's metagenres, exhibiting qualities, dynamics, systems, and orchestrations of spectacle, festival, ritual, and game as well as those pertaining to ceremony, leisure, performance, exhibition, pageant, and competition. Ballroom and salsa culture—like the cultures of the Olympics, rodeos, and the circus (e.g. Offen 2000)—function as nexuses of experience, meaning, and lives representing loci of social systems, models, and actors.

While part of what makes ballroom and salsa as interesting and compelling as they are, is their multiplex nature—including all of the overlap and feedback between the various facets and aspects involved—there is also something to be gained, for analytical purposes at least, in trying to consider some of the more prominent elements individually. While different permutations could be equally viable, I will focus on the dominant elements of dance as spectacle, art, and sport.

### **Dance as Spectacle**

In many ways the competitive ballroom world—and the salsa world to an only slightly lesser extent—is quite quintessentially “the society of the spectacle” (Baudelaire 1964). Competitive ballroom, unlike social ballroom, is meant to be displayed. Various movements and actions need to be clearly visible by judges and spectators 50 feet away and more. Big shapes and lines and easily “readable” timing therefore emerge as being of the utmost importance. Even more important, however, is being noticed. Judges do not mark and audiences do not cheer for couples they pay no

attention to. The couple that dances in a small, timid, compact manner might not even be noticed if “lost” in the middle of the floor among a multitude of powerfully active couples. Being noticed thus becomes the first priority of competitive dancing, and grooming, choreography, and costuming are meant to make couples stand out in the eyes of judges and spectators alike. Dancers’ hair cuts, hair color, make up, and costume choices are all important. Ruffles, fringes, and feathers amid an unending variation of colors, cuts, and fabrics—and almost always encrusted with an abundance of rhinestones in a dizzying array of patterns and colors—are par for the course; all for the express purpose of drawing notice and attention from both judges and spectators.

Bright lights, often in mixtures of blue, red, and white illuminate the ballroom floor, glinting off competitors’ costumes, and standing out all the more so amid the dimmer lighting around the rest of the room. The MC sits or stands behind a podium on a raised dais where the scrutineer and DJ are also typically located. The judges on a specific panel stand around the periphery of the competition floor, dressed in suits, tuxedos, or elegant gowns, with pens and clipboards in hand. The other judges, not on the current panel, sit around tables specially reserved for them. Competitors in the next event line up in the on deck area, according to numerical order, waiting to take their turn on the floor. Competitors getting ready for events still further off stretch, warm up, or practice beside the on deck area, in the back of the room, or outside in a nearby hallway. In earlier rounds couples are called back by the number they have been assigned and which is pinned to the gentleman’s back. For the final, however, the couples are also called out by name as well, sometimes with each even dancing a brief,

30 second, introductory dance. After the penultimate dance of their event (Bolero in Rhythm, Foxtrot in Smooth and Standard, and Paso Doble in Latin), the finalists are again introduced by name, each couple stepping forward and taking a bow as their names are called.



**Photo 6.1: 2004 IDSF Grand Slam** – Part of the IDSF’s premiere series, drawing a large and diverse international field of competitors, at the 2004 USDSC, Hollywood Beach, FL

In the US, where the majority of competitions are driven by the pro-am circuit, most competitions are held in elegant hotels and resorts, with the competitions themselves taking place in what are, at times, quite elegantly appointed ballrooms. While the afternoon sessions are often more casual affairs with not too many audience members aside from competitors, instructors, family, and friends, the evening sessions tend to be much more formal affairs with fresh white tablecloths (changed since the afternoon session) and centerpieces on all the tables around the room, and cushioned chairs all lined up, facing the ballroom floor. If some of the European competitions are

less elegant, more sportsman like affairs—taking place in athletic halls and the like—other European events are the epitome of class and distinction, such as The International, for which the quarter finals and on are danced in London’s Royal Albert Hall, the Star which was danced in the fresco covered ballroom of the Blackpool Tower, and the British Open which is danced in the Empress Ballroom of the Blackpool Wintergardens and with the evening sessions always danced to the accompaniment of a live band.



**Photo 6.2: Empress Ballroom** – Latin finalists bow to a standing ovation from the floor level, first balcony, and second balcony audiences along one of the short sides of the Wintergardens’ Empress Ballroom at the 2005 British Open, Blackpool, UK

It is also important to keep in mind that, unlike competitive skating, there are multiple couples on the floor dancing their routines simultaneously, and this is also part of the spectacle-like dynamic of competitive ballroom. Unlike performance numbers—with a clear focus on one couple or a coordinated routine between a larger group of dancers—the fact is that wherever one looks on the floor during a

competition, there are different things happening. Since there is no coordination in costuming or choreography between competitors, that “great new white dress” meant to stand out on a traditionally darker ballroom floor, may backfire if five of the six finalists had that same idea. The routines that each couple have meticulously crafted and practiced can be disrupted in an instant by the movement and positioning on the floor of their competitors.



**Photo 6.3: Where do I Look? – Example 1** Multiple couples all dancing their routines, simultaneously, at the 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA

Separate from the lack of coordination in costuming and choreography between competitors, each competition and venue is different as well. What size will the floor be? How “fast” or “slow” will the floor be?<sup>1</sup> How bright (or dark) will the lighting and the ballroom be? What practice facilities, if any, will be available? Will there be time to practice on the competition floor in advance, and if so, when? How



many other couples will be there in your event(s), and which ones? What music will the DJ play for each song in each round? While all of these questions variables may not, in and of themselves, seem like the stuff of spectacle, they all contribute to the in-the-here-and-now, on-the-moment aspects of ballroom competitions that differentiate them from being unhindered performances of known material, to known music, in known settings. As such, there is always something of an “anything can happen” feel and dynamic to the dancing on the competition floor. Even when it is obvious who’s dancing will win, there can still be collisions, accidents, and injuries on the floor. All of these factors, especially when linked with the lack of systematic coordination between competitors, all cast contribute to the mix of dynamic sights and sounds with yet to be determined outcomes that mark the spectacle-like facet of competitive ballroom dance.



**Photo 6.4: Where do I Look? – Example 2** US Professional Latin Championship at the 2005 USDSC, Hollywood beach, FL

## **Spectacle Writ Small**

The spectacle driven facet of competitive ballroom is not, however, solely confined to the level of grand scale performances and competitions. Smaller, day-to-day, and personal level conduct, practices, and interactions also fall under this umbrella as well. Many individual dancers, couples, and studios go out of their way to showcase and feature their successes. And, while hard earned results are important substantive credentials, both results and popularity also confer an element of personal spectacle-like status as well. Many of the more elite dancers are the subjects of varying degrees of hero worship, for example, despite the fact that most are actually very humble and generous with their time.

At the 2005 USDSC, for instance, I was standing near 13 time US National Professional Rhythm champion Bob Powers when two younger women approached him to express what great fan of his they were. The almost tongue tied demeanor of these two women is far from the exception, as many newcomers to the competitive scene find personal “heroes” among their favorite dancers. Particular individual dancers and dance personas thus emerge as spectacles writ small in many instances as well, with people flocking to particular studio workshops or competition venues in order to see “X.” Many dancers downplay their ‘heroesque’ images, leaving their dance positioning and status unannounced among those who might not know but would clearly be impressed if they did know. Other dancers, however, play up their spectacle status via various forms of conspicuousness and ostentation.

Even for those dancers who do not make a point of being personal spectacles, there is still a certain element of the linked personal recognition and impression that is actually an important element of a dancer's progress and promotion. In regards to professional ballet dancers Wulff notes that "transnational experience and exposure are regarded as desirable for dancers' development and reputation" (1998: 40), and the same is absolutely the case in ballroom as well. "Being seen"—one of the intangible (yet still important) judging criteria that I explore in the next chapter—depends on the conspicuous presence of a competitor across a wide ranging circuit of competitions and events.

In a related vein, beyond whatever personal and sentimental reasons may be in place, there is also a cultural reason that certain competitions typically serve as the retirement venues for the more highly ranked competitors. In the US, for example, most professional national champions announce their retirements at one of two events, the USDSC or the Ohio Star Ball. Similarly, dancers who have been among the most competitively successful on the international stage may choose Blackpool (usually after the Wednesday night team match event) or other first tier competitions to announce their retirements. The 2002 GOC, for example, was the venue chosen by four-time Blackpool Professional Latin champions Jukka Haapalainen and Sirpa Suutari to announce their retirement from the competition floor while performing a multi-dance show that had been pre-arranged with the event organizers but not listed in the program and so a surprise to most of the audience.



A final point I want to make regarding the spectacle-like nature of ballroom competition, concerns the audience's experience. To the extent that a competition is a performance, an audience can appreciate it as such without understanding it. But, while it is true, as Wulff has pointed out, that "the audience need not know the language of the dancers to enjoy their dancing" (1998: 37), there can be no doubt that knowing the "language" of the dancers may very well add or subtract from such experiences. Yet dancing also "speaks" for itself—needing no translation—in visual, auditory, rhythmic, and kinesthetic images. Thus, to the extent that dance needs neither translation nor verbal cue to attract and command attention, it trucks in—and is—the stuff of spectacle.

### **Performing Spectacle**

If ballroom competitions are a spectacle of sights, sounds, and movement, they are also performances by dancers, officials, and audience members alike. Unlike many other western dance forms, ballroom dancing is not a staged dance style. Ballroom audiences are not seated at a distance from the dancers and they are not seated in the dark; which also means that the dancers can easily see and interact with the audience as well. Spectators stand as well as sit, and most events sell standing room only tickets as well as specific seats. Applause and cheering during the dancing is not only expected but actively encouraged and appreciated, and still photography during the competition is par for the course.<sup>2</sup>

Competitors, officials, and audience members all have roles that they perform as regular parts of running a ballroom competition. The mass of spectators, as well as

their proximity to the competition floor, should not be underestimated in assessing the performance of spectacle in ballroom. As much as competitors are cast as the objects of spectacle for the audience, the dancers cannot help but be aware of this audience, especially given the proximity of many to the competition surface itself, and favorable audience reactions can spur competitors on, just as a lack of audience support can prove discouraging.

The behaviour of their [ballroom dancers'] audience is significantly different from the behaviour of the theatre audience who recognizes the theatre as the artist's platform upon which something is to be 'created' and where they, as the audience, are spectators. The audience in the competition dance hall participates with as much verve as the dancers. Names of dancers are called out, flags are waved and favourites are cheered and applauded during the 'performance.' Obviously this affects the end result. (Vermeij 1994:20)

Just as importantly, however, audience members cannot help but be aware of each other as well, seeing and hearing other spectators all around the floor, and feeling (and smelling) those in close proximity, and as clearly shown in Photo 6.5:



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**Photo 6.5: Standing Room Only – 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA**

While competitors, officials, and audience members all then have roles to play in perform the spectacle that takes place in the competition setting, just as clearly all of these roles orbit around the on-the-competition-floor performances that are the conceptual center and focus of the competitive ballroom culture. Yet in a twist that seemed particularly provocative early in my fieldwork, there never seemed to be a clear consensus regarding the specific nature of these on-the-competition-floor performances. Some people—coaches, judges, competitors, and spectators included—told me that they considered competitive ballroom to be an outright sport, while others said that they considered it to be an outright art. Most people, however, placed it somewhere between these two polls, but in what seemed to me an almost unending set of permutations including “an athletic art,” “both art and sport,” “an artistic sport,” “a sportive art,” “somewhere in between,” “neither really,” and “something of each.” I am not bringing this discontinuity to the forefront in order to try “solving it,” but rather to show that, in addition to its inherent elements of spectacle, festival and celebration, and performance, competitive ballroom cannot be fully understood without also examining its artistic and sporting aspects as well, and as I now do.

## **Dance as Art**

It isn't that artists are special kinds of people. It's that people are special kinds of artists.

Eric Gill (cited in Blacking 2001:22)

There should be no doubt that, as much as competitive ballroom dance may be spectacle, festival and celebration, and performance, it is also art. The shapes, lines,

and movements made by dancers' bodies are far from natural; they are deliberate and trained postures that take work, effort, and technique to produce. Most importantly, however, people watch ballroom dance to appreciate its artistry. Certainly technical and performance variables are noted and appreciated as well, but people do not turn on their televisions and tune to dancing shows, go out to or rent dance based movies, or buy tickets to and attend competitions simply to observe the dancers' technical and performance skills. It is the art and expression of dance that moves and inspires people; that captures their attention and draws them into the moment and experience of watching dance.

Dancing, of course, is much more than just a collection of static poses and positions, it is also movement. But not just any movement. Dance is movement that is meant and intended to be expressive; movement that is meant to be more than merely functional. Dance is expressively charged and aesthetically conditioned movement of the body. Expressiveness without the aesthetics is performance while aesthetics without the emotional charge is nothing more than technique. No less an expert on dance than Martha Graham has distinguished the difference between the mere form of dance—i.e. aesthetics/technique—and true dancing. “Dancers today can do anything,” writes Graham, “the technique is phenomenal. The passion and meaning to their movement can be another thing” (1991:11). Far from random then, how the body is used and to what ends is what makes movement into dance in the first place and what sets different genres of dance apart from one another.

The particular qualities and conventions that mark and are valued in competitive ballroom dancing are the subjects of the next two chapters focusing on aesthetics. The first, Chapter Eight examines the images and symbols invoked and evoked in the conduct and comportment of ballroom competitors, in how they conduct themselves in light of this, and the consequences that arise from always being “in public” amongst other members of the dancers’ art world. Chapter Nine then focuses on the costuming and visuality of competitive ballroom, and starts to unpack the culturally encoded symbols and meanings, motives and rationales, for the how and why of ballroom grooming, costuming, and comportment. Before turning to these more in depth expositions, however, I want to briefly consider the roles played by impermanence, collectivity, and convention in shaping and understanding the artistry of competitive ballroom dance, as well as looking at what is sport-like about it and how these artistic and sportive elements intersect and interact with each other.

### **Impermanence**

Perhaps one of the most compelling and captivating components of dance as art is its impermanence. The instant beyond its enactment, the art of that instant is gone forever. Dance is always brief and fleeting; so dance as art is equally brief and fleeting. Memories and images of it may last, as may recorded images, but the dance itself—the art—lasts but an instant; it is transitory. Recorded images of dance (be they photographs or videos) are no more art than a photograph of a great painting is, itself, the art that it depicts. “Of all the arts,” notes Hammond, “the art of movement is the most ephemeral—disappearing almost as it occurs, leaving few and inexact records of

its brief glory” (2000: 138).<sup>3</sup> However fleeting, dance is a powerful art form for using the body as its instrument. In using our bodies every day, and for a multitude of tasks from the mundane to the most significant, people have ideas and understandings about meanings of the body and meanings of movement of the body, and it is exactly these meanings that are tapped into and evoked in, and through, dance.

While some may argue that performances in sport are equally fleeting, this is an erroneous conflation, as the purpose of the sporting act remains in a way that is untrue of dance. After a sports game is over, one player (or team) scored more points; one athlete ran or swam the fastest, or jumped highest; one player (or team) had more blocks or saves, and so forth. What the athlete tries to do through their athletic performance remains done, even after the game is over. As far as the placements (i.e. who came in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and so on) involved in a ballroom competition are concerned, these do remain “after the fact” as it were in much the same way as any other sports statistics. Yet this final outcome is far from the only thing that is involved in, or even the purpose and goal, of every ballroom competitor; with the expressive nature of the performance being of even greater importance and significance to certain dancers and in certain situations. Quite a large percentage of the professional competitors I interviewed, for instance, said that they would always prefer to dance superbly, be the audience favorite, and lose rather than be placed first by the judges but dance poorly and disappoint the audience.

Some competitors’ assertions of their preference for quality of dance performance over actual results proved false—such as those I then overheard at that

same competition talking about how great they had danced and how worthless that was in light of their unwelcome placement. Just to be clear, I am not suggesting that these dancers were necessarily being insincere in their comments to me, only pointing out that, for some, their asserted values of what they intellectually found preferable turns out to be at odds with their experiential evaluation in at least some situations. For other competitors, however, their real world reactions matched their original assertion.

When asked about his experience of winning an Amateur World Championship, for example, Brent says that it actually turned out to be quite a let down for them (he and his partner), especially since they felt they had danced far from as well as they would have liked to. Expanding on this Brent says that, in reflecting back on everything, they realized that their entire goal leading up to that World's competition, including what all of their training had been geared toward and what their mindset had been up to and through the competition, was on winning and not on dancing well—and which he now says he thinks it should have been and wishes it had. A similar example comes from Charlotte Jorgensen, a past World Amateur Standard Champion and World and Blackpool Professional Standard finalist, and most recently of popular TV fame in the US as John O'Hurley's professional partner on season one of *Dancing with the Stars*.<sup>4</sup> Charlotte is very forthright in saying that she was never particularly fond of nor interested in competing. What she really loved doing were performances. As such, it was only because performance opportunities were so tightly linked to competition results that she really stuck with competing.

The point of these examples is that there is a difference between the impermanencies of sport and dance. The measurable results of sporting acts remain after the fact; one can always see who scored the most, went the fastest, or got the most points that were the goals, aims, and purposes of that activity. While it is equally feasible to go back and check the results or even individual judge's marks for a competition, this leaves out a major facet of the dancing that took place. What matters most to a large percentage of the dancers, judges, and spectators in ballroom competition are the quality of movement, partnering, and dance characterization; none of which are captured in the eventual placements may remain as a record of that dancing. I would suggest that it is this impermanence that most highlights the artistic dynamics of dancesport despite its status as a competitive activity. As impermanent as any and all dance may be, the activity of ballroom dancing—as art—is also incontrovertibly collective and, as such, subject to cultural conventions as well.

### **Art as Collective**

All art is collective (Becker, 2001:67), and ballroom dancing is no exception. At the very least art requires both artist and “audience.” While it may be untestable, I would contend that there can be no creativity without context and, if without context there can be no creativity then without context there can be no art. Creativity, after all, must be creative in relation to something; otherwise it is not creative, but merely random. As Becker points out, for instance, “Producing art works requires elaborate modes of cooperation among specialized personnel,” (2001:71) and “art is social in the



sense that it is created by networks of people acting together, and proposes a framework” (2001:76).

Ballroom dancing does not simply happen. Dancers learn from teachers and coaches in settings (typically studios) that are owned, managed, operated, and maintained. These dancers dance to music that has been composed, performed, recorded, compiled, reproduced, and marketed. These dancers learn steps, patterns, and techniques—whether it is from books, videos, or teachers—that have been codified, broken down, and recorded. As competitors they wear very specific and carefully constructed costuming and shoes, typically using a wide range of materials from a variety of sources (e.g. fabrics, fringes, beading, rhinestones, etc.). As much as the basic substance of dance is the body, it thus remains inescapable that, as art, both “artists” and “support personnel” are necessary (Becker 2001:68). More importantly, however, the coordination between all of these personnel and products does not need to be discovered anew by each dancer.

In the process of becoming ballroom competitors, dancers do not start from scratch in learning their craft, nor do they do so alone. They do not generate their own vocabulary of movements and techniques. They do not figure out for themselves how to physically relate to and interact with their partners. They do not independently select what music they will dance to and in what manner. They do not make up the gender models they think they should attempt to enact. They do not attempt to intuit what style of costuming will best match their dancing. As Becker duly notes:

People who cooperate to produce a work of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, *they rely on earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that*

*have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art.* Artistic conventions cover all the decisions that must be made with respect to works produced in a given art world, even though a particular convention may be revised for a given work. (Becker 2001:71, emphasis added)

In the process of becoming ballroom competitors, then, dancers learn a wide range of personal practices as well as mental models both for what constitutes good dancing and how they should go about producing it. But they also come to learn how the many different nodes of the ballroom art world are strung together and how to best utilize this web of interconnected ballroom-related skills, goods, and knowledge.

### **Conventions: Good and Bad**

As Becker points out, “conventions regulate the relations between artists and audience, specifying the rights and obligations of both” (2001:72). While I will unpack the aesthetic conventions of dancesport in Chapters Eight and Nine, I want to examine the field of artistic conventions, especially as they apply to ballroom dancing, before moving on to explore ballroom dancing as a sport. Perhaps of greatest significance in this capacity is the sheer persistence of convention. Expanding on the point that “conventions place strong constraints on the artist,” Becker goes on to note that:

They are particularly constraining because they do not exist in isolation, but come in complexly interdependent systems, so that making one small change often requires making changes in a variety of other activities. A system of conventions gets embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation and the like, all of which must be changed if any one segment is. (2001:73)

It is no more difficult to dance a Standard routine in a Latin dress, or even pants, for example, than it is a ballroom gown. Yet there are longstanding (albeit dynamic and evolving) conventions that differentiate between the costuming used for

Standard and Latin and, even more so, differentiating ballroom costuming from non-ballroom clothing. To change this convention to favor Latin costuming for Standard would have deep and wide ranging consequences. Most noticeably, any such change would transform the entire appearance of the competition floor. Yet that would only be the very surface of the systemic repercussions involved.

All of the dress vendors would have to switch their production from Standard to Latin dresses. Latin dresses use less fabric, and typically in a smaller variety, which would have an impact on both in house materials production and out-of-house materials acquisitions. Also, since the highest price tags are, as a general rule, on Standard dresses, what steps would vendors take to financially compensate for this switch over? Maybe the price of Latin dresses would go up, or maybe staff sizes would be trimmed down. In any case, however, the point remains that “we see that the same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works” (Becker 2001:76) and, as such, that conventions need to be recognized and understood as deeply interdependent elements of larger systems of practices.

While the embedded regularity of conventional action streamlines social and economic efficiencies, however, this does not mean that unconventional action is not possible, only more difficult and costlier (Becker 2001:76). Actions at odds with convention are not impossibilities, after all, but only improbabilities due to their greater costs in social, cultural, political, and economic capital. A dancer does not have to dance with the prescribed technique or grooming, for example, but they should be prepared for the consequences if they do not. Far from being merely superficial

then (although also not ruling it out), a judge's lower marks for an unkempt appearance are, in part, about breaches in artistic conventions. Whatever a competitor's reasons may be, the effect suggests that the accepted conventions are not of importance to them which, clearly, transmits a distasteful message to those whose careers have largely been defined in relation to these very conventions.

At the same time, however, the very constraints of conventions also present its greatest opportunities (Becker 2001:74). The very stability of norms inherent to conventions provides the background against which dancers strive to stand out. Too far outside the box may be poor ballroom dancing, but too far inside the box produces overly conventional dancing at best. Far from being a rigid line of demarcation then, artistic conventions represent a permeable zone—of different widths and circumferences for different situations, arts, and circumstances—between typicality and transgression.

Artistic conventions can thus be seen as following in line with the cliché that it is the exception that proves the rule. If a dancer cannot show mastery of the relevant conventions they are not free to break them in any way but, at the same time, it is the elite dancers' and coaches ability to venture into the inexact border of convention, without breaching it, which sets them apart from even the most technically proficient, but fully conventional, dancers. Minor challenges to convention—especially by those who show mastery over them—are actually the developmental edge of artistic development. As with any art form, dance evolves as minor alterations and embellishments to established conventions are made, gain in recognition, grow in

interest and appeal, begin to be copied, and emerge as the new edge of conventional (in)distinction.

It is significant challenges to regnant conventions, then, that are thus the most instructive and defining of cultural norms and standards, not the minor ones. As Becker explicates:

Any major change necessarily attacks some of the existing conventions of the art directly...An attack on convention does not merely mean an attack on the particular item to be changed. Every convention carries with it an aesthetic, according to which what is conventional becomes the standard by which artistic beauty and effectiveness is judged. (2001:75)

Indeed, Becker's key point here is mirrored in the construction of this section of my dissertation, with both Chapters Eight and Nine being dedicated to the aesthetic dimensions and expressions of ballroom culture—and without which any understandings of ballroom life would be sorely lacking.

### **Cognitive Conventions**

Conventions do not, of course, only concern issues of production and expression; they also concern cognitive conventions—conventions of classification. Just to reiterate, the four main styles of ballroom competition are composed of these 19 dances, listed here in alphabetical order: Bolero; Cha Cha (American); Cha Cha (International); Foxtrot (American); Foxtrot (International); Jive; Mambo; Paso Doble; Quickstep; Rumba (American); Rumba (International); Samba; Swing (ECS); Tango (American); Tango (International); Viennese Waltz (American); Viennese Waltz (International); Waltz (American); and Waltz (International).

In the course of presenting on and discussing my ballroom research at the 2005 AAA meetings in Washington DC, I found that some people had a hard time understanding why the different dances fit into the their respective styles/competitive categories. Providing the same list of 19 dances I have noted above, I posted an online question at Dance-Forums.com and, when asked, did explain that I was interested in seeing how others might group the dances in light of my AAA experiences. This topic generated a number of public responses as well as a few private messages as well, and suggested the following conceptual models.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 6.1: Movement & Tempo**

<u>Group 1</u> American Rumba International Rumba Bolero	<u>Group 2</u> Cha Cha* Mambo	<u>Group 3</u> Foxtrot* Waltz* Tango*	<u>Group 4</u> Viennese Waltz* Quickstep
<u>Group 5</u> ECS Jive	<u>Group 6</u> Samba	<u>Group 7</u> Paso Doble	* = both American and International

One of the first responses suggested the seven groupings illustrated above in Table 6.1. This grouping places “the three rumbas” together in group 1; as American rumba, International rumba, and bolero are often taken as a continuum of decreasing tempo and increasing sensuality. Group 2 includes the mambo and its derivative dance, the cha cha, so makes sense as far as both historicity and movement style, and upbeat character. Group 3, in placing waltz, tango, and foxtrot together seems to overlook the drastic difference in movement styles between the “swing” dances of waltz and foxtrot versus the more stalking action of the tango, in favor of a general mid-range tempo grouping. Incorporating Viennese waltz and quickstep into Group 4

continues the tempo based grouping of Group 3 since, as far as movement styles, Viennese waltz most closely resembles waltz and quickstep most closely resembles foxtrot. Indeed Viennese waltz and quickstep are often thought of as double time versions of their counterpart dances. Group 5 mirrors the historical and movement style based grouping used in Group 2, including ECS and its derivative, the jive. Finally, groups 6 and 7 are composed of the samba and the Paso Doble respectively, each independent of other dances, and most likely based on the unique movement styles of each.

What's most interesting here is that some of the groupings, such as Groups 1, 2, and 5 (and possibly 6 and 7 as well) seem movement based while the other groupings, namely groups 3 and 4 seem tempo based. One interesting observation about these groupings, then, is that it is the Latin and Rhythm dances which are movement based while it is the Standard and Smooth dances that are being tempo based. Although this is not an item I have had time to follow up on, some interesting issues arise from this classification alone, such as simultaneously grouping along two different strategies (namely movement styles versus tempo) yet differentiating between different general styles (namely Latin/Rhythm versus Standard/Smooth) via implicit means at the same time.

The next respondent to offer a categorical scheme suggested two: (1) "Spot/Slot dances" versus "Traveling dances;" and (2) "Easy to dance socially" versus "Not easy to dance socially." While this second scheme is probably a rather widely shared one, its variability is probably only slightly smaller. The first scheme

proposed here, however, is an interesting one and would break down as per Table 6.2, below.

**Table 6.2: Non-travel & Travel**

<b>Spot/Slot dances</b>	<b>Traveling dances</b>
Bolero	Foxtrot*
Cha Cha*	Paso Doble
ECS	Quickstep
Jive	Samba
Mambo	Tango*
Rumba*	Viennese Waltz*
	Waltz*
* = both American and International	

This categorization is particularly compelling as part of a discussion regarding conventions since many dance conventions break along exactly these lines. Whether Latin dances like Samba and Paso Doble, or any of the Standard/Smooth dances, for instance, the line of dance is counterclockwise around the perimeter of the floor, and it is the couple moving against this line of dance who is considered at fault from any collisions that may then result. The non-traveling dances, by contrast, are much more of a “free for all” in some ways, despite remaining relatively more localized. Where the traveling dancers will be deliberate in either trying to block someone or cede the right of way, anyone is equally entitled to the same floor space in the stationary Latin/Rhythm dances. Where the scheme in Table 6.1 thus categorized according to either movement style or dance tempo, the scheme in Table 6.2 classifies according to travel and floor usage.



In an intriguing twist, however, the same person who had suggested the “Spot/Slot dances” versus “Traveling dances” scheme and the “Easy to dance socially” versus “Not easy to dance socially” scheme also came back, later, with another one, this time using a relationship metaphor. Converted into tabular form, this metaphor model yielded these five categories:

**Table 6.3: Relationship Metaphor**

1. Rumba/Waltz = early stages of relationship: romantic – “so happy together”	2. Cha/Mambo = discovering your SO* has kinks: deciding you like it – a little too much PDA going on
3. Samba/Jive/Quickstep = You've learned to enjoy the aforementioned kinks and such in a more socially acceptable manner – but still having lots of fun	4. Paso/Tango/Viennese Waltz = Every once in a while you get confused, you fight, you have a conflict – and you must resolve it.
5. Bolero/Foxtrot = a mature, well-developed, loving relationship ( maybe Bolero is the private life, Foxtrot is the public side)	* SO = significant other, i.e. romantic partner

This scheme seems to play off the same base as the commonly used metaphor of a partnership being like a marriage, but also incorporates this person’s model of dance characterizations. Other DF members, for instance, commented that they too, or their instructor, used a relationship metaphor at times, although rarely with all of the dances assigned to these same groupings.

**Table 6.4: Movement Style**

<u>Group 1</u> Foxtrot, Quickstep, Waltz, Viennese Waltz	<u>Group 2</u> Bolero, Rumba, Cha Cha, Mambo, Samba
<u>Group 3</u> Jive, Swing	<u>Group 4</u> Tango, Paso Doble

What I take to be the only entirely movement-style based classification came from a dance-teacher-in-training. As Table 6.4 illustrates, this movement-based classification groups the four “swing” dances of waltz and foxtrot with their double time counterparts of Viennese waltz and quickstep, respectively, as Group 1—and in exactly the way that Table A did not. Group 2 combines all of the dances that utilize the “Cuban motion” of the hips generated from the flexing and straightening of the knee. Group 3 pairs the American style ECS with jive, its International style derivative. Finally, Group 4 pairs the progressive striding action of Paso with the progressive stalking action of tango. I find it particularly interesting, telling, and even logical that these particular groupings come from the sole respondent with any training as a dance teacher, suggesting that movement style may be more salient for instructional purposes than for participation.

The final model I want to reproduce involves some characterization of the dances along an interactional basis, as did the relationship model in Table 6.3 but, as Table 6.5 shows, the dances and group descriptions are fairly different:

**Table 6.5: Interaction intent**

1. Viennese (both styles), Quickstep, and Samba... youthful and hopeful	2. Waltz (both styles), International Foxtrot, and Bolero... here is my whole self all for you
3. Cha Cha (both styles) and Mambo... flirty... wanna?	4. Rumba (both styles)... why yes, I DO wanna, thank you
5. Jive, ECS, and American Foxtrot...aint life fun?	6. Tango (both styles) and Paso...you make me nuts but I want you deeper than deep...

Here the up tempo music of VW, quickstep, and samba are cast as corresponding to a cheerful demeanor in Group 1; and the continuous rise and fall of waltz, International

foxtrot, and bolero are cast as the most intimate dances in Group 2. Group 3, comprised of cha cha and mambo, is cast as flirtatious; and the two styles of rumba are cast as starting a relationship in Group 4. Group 5 is cast as exuberant in linking jive, ECS, and American foxtrot<sup>6</sup>; and Group 6 pairs tango and Paso as conflicted and frustrated but desperately passionate.

**Table 6.6: Rhythm, Latin, Smooth, & Standard**

<u>Rhythm</u> Cha Cha (American) Rumba (American) Swing (ECS) Bolero Mambo	<u>Latin</u> Cha Cha (International) Rumba (International) Samba Paso Doble Jive
<u>Smooth</u> Waltz (American) Tango (American) Foxtrot (American) Viennese Waltz (American)	<u>Standard</u> Waltz (International) Tango (International) Viennese Waltz (International) Foxtrot (International) Quickstep

But why did I indulge in this seeming tangent of classificatory schemes? Because I do not think this was really a tangent at all showing, as it does, how—when asked how they would group the dances—dancers familiar with competitive ballroom dancing conceptualize the categorization of the dances. More telling is the simple fact that there is little consensus, if any, between the different models, and that the strategies used for categorization include movement style, dance tempo, progressive versus stationary movement, relationship metaphors, dance characterization, and various combinations of these variables. Most revealing, however, is that none of these classificatory schemes comes close to reproducing the groupings represented by

the four contested categories of Rhythm, Latin, Smooth, and Standard as depicted above in Table 6.6.

Herein lays the point. As an art world ballroom is not only implicated in economic and expressive conventions, but also in conventions of classification; the very conventions of cognition through which competitive ballroom is received and achieved. For example, many new dancers ask why tango is included in the ballroom dances and not the Latin dances while, at one and the same time, many experienced ballroom dancers cannot even understand why someone would even think or ask this—*despite tango's Argentinean heritage!* Conversely, few people seem to question the placement of Paso Doble within the Latin dances, also known as the *Latin American* dances, despite its Spanish genesis. The cognitive conventions of ballroom are such that, as experienced practitioners, the presence of a European dance form (Paso Doble) in the Latin American division goes without notice just as does the presence of a Latin American dance (Tango) in the Ballroom division.

And what about the Jive, also danced as part of the Latin division, although in no way geographically Latin? This very issue came home to me when, in response to queries from prospective producers and backers for his show, *Latin Fusion*, Louis van Amstel—most widely known outside of ballroom circles from seasons one and two of *Dancing with the Stars* in the US—asked for my help in explaining to non-ballroom people how Jive was a “Latin” dance. While the particular response I discussed with Louis at the 2003 USDSC dealt with the role of the Jive in the context of his show, he made one comment that really jumped out for me regarding how as a Latin dancer it

was obvious to him how Jive was a Latin dance but that he had been finding it excessively difficult to explain this to the non-ballroom potential backers for the show.

From a purely technical standpoint Jive can be understood as an offspring of American swing, but one that has been transformed by the application of already codified Latin dance technique. Such commonalities of technique between Jive and the other Latin dancers are lost on non-ballroom dancer, however, whereas the long-time ballroom dancer may not even consciously realize them. Most tellingly, all of the materials in this section show how artistic conventions include and work through classificatory conventions as well as economic and expressive ones, and that the exploration and understanding of art worlds requires attention to these cognitive classifications.

### **Why Not “Art”?**

Before moving on to examining ballroom as sport, I want to introduce one final topic: why is ballroom rarely given credit as *art* by other Western dance forms? “Perhaps because it grew out of a social environment, as opposed to an artistic one,” speculates Vermeij, “it seems to have maintained an isolation from the greater ‘dance as art’ context” (1994: 17). Since it is 16<sup>th</sup> century French court dancing which, ultimately, gave rise to both ballroom and ballet, this seems somewhat strange; something of a historical oddity. Yet perhaps it is only in light of this common background that the disconnection can truly make sense. There is, of course, little need to distinguish one’s self from what one is obviously different from, and there is little reason to establish one’s superiority from those to whom one is obviously superior. It

is only when differences are not easily seen and demarcated, after all, that making and marking such distinctions really becomes an issue.

By far and away the most common reason I have heard for why ballroom is dismissed as an art is that it is competitive. I find this justification a flimsy one at best. In the first place, there are now more than abundant dance contests for ballet, jazz, and modern dancing. Far more importantly, however, competition is a deeply entrenched and fundamental component for all of these forms of staged dancing. Indeed, what is the grueling process of try outs for school and troupe positions, scholarships, and prominent roles if not inherently competitive? The idea that the pursuit of highly prized positions and roles, far outnumbered by the ranks of those wanting them, is not competitive is, at best, misleading, naïve, and ignorant but, in all likelihood, is either deceptive or delusional (or both).

### **Dance as Sport: *DanceSport*—What Makes Dance a Sport?**

Dancing requires a tremendous amount of physical energy. It is a path chosen by those who have a particularly strong current rushing through them, a Dionysian flow which threatens to overwhelm—‘the extraordinary potent’ in full force. Those who wish to use this energy, rather than be swept away by it must build an especially strong container within themselves.

Blackmer 1989:102-103

In “What makes a good sport?” social psychologist Nicholas Christenfeld (1996) demonstrates that there is an optimal level of season reliability—a balance between skill and chance—for fan enjoyment. Aside from the seven league sports he examines, Christenfeld also finds this same dynamic at work in tournament-based contests, using the examples of tennis and chess, when rankings are used to predict

success. Although I have no hard statistics on the issue, I think this trend casts some interesting shadows when applied to the arena of competitive ballroom dancing.

First off, neither the league nor tournament models match the judging system utilized in ballroom dance competitions wherein a certain number of couples (typically half) are recalled from previous rounds until a final, typically of six couples, remains. In the final each judge places all couples ordinally, with the couple receiving the majority of marks for each ordinal being awarded that final placement.<sup>7</sup> Unlike either league or tournament models then, competitive ballroom dance never actually involves structural one-on-one<sup>8</sup> head-to-head competition. Now in effect this may not always be the case. Couples one and two, three and four, and five and six may, for all effective purposes, all be in one-on-one competitions with each other for their respective positions or, in a like vein, any two couple may effectively be in one-on-one competition for the final slot in the next round. Such effective head-to-head contests, however, are different in both character and implication from structurally limited one-on-one competitions.

Perhaps the many-at-once model, as exhibited by track, cross-country, and swimming races, better approximates the nature of ballroom competition as far as the structure of qualifying and preliminary heats leading up to a final event that, in turn, provides a final, ordinally ranked, set of results. Unlike these sports, however, it is not a simple and self-evident matter of who “wins” which decides ballroom competitions. Successful ballroom competition is more akin to figure skating, gymnastics, or diving, wherein “expert” judges evaluate individual performances but, unlike these other

athletic events, no scores or points are given in typical couples competition.<sup>9</sup> So, do such evaluated sporting events also tend to achieve the threshold of reliability identified by Christenfeld; the balance between skill and chance?

Gymnastics, diving, and skating, like dance, are, I would suggest, often watched for aesthetic appreciation—*aside from their competitive element*—in a way that other sports may not be. This is not, of course, to say that there is not beauty, as indeed oftentimes there is, in the performance of other sports as well, merely that the focus is of a different nature. How many times, for instance, have the basketball court efforts of Michael Jordan been described by various sportscasters as “poetry in motion?” I would like to suggest that the difference here is that of differentiating between intentional aesthetics and instrumental aesthetics—between purposeful, deliberate beauty and visual appeal as a byproduct. The performance of the diver, the dancer, the gymnast, or the skater may very well be aimed at winning, but the aesthetics of the performance are tantamount to their performance and the purpose behind their technique.<sup>10</sup> This is a different situation from that of the pole vaulter, long jumper, hurdler, or basketball player who, while perhaps demonstrating great beauty in their actions, does so only in so far as their technique is directed to achieving some more instrumental goal, be it to jump higher, or further, or faster, or make the nearly impossible basket. The difference between intentional versus instrumental aesthetics also relates to one of the most prevalent criticisms of such sports, their subjectivity.

Responding to a question about whether ballroom dancing should be classified as a sport or not, Travis, a highly placed dance official suggested that:



...clearly dancers are athletes but, personally, I don't think dance should be a sport. I mean, if you watch how these kids prepare these days there's no denying what athletes they are, and so I guess, that its good for them to get the recognition, but a sport is something like running, or baseball, or hockey, where you can see who ran faster, had more home runs, or scored more goals, so no, I wouldn't say that I think dancing is really a sport.

Clearly the underlying conceptualization here is that there is a more self-evident, "objective" facet to sports than the subjective evaluations in ballroom dancing. One problem with Travis' formulation, however, lies in overlooking the oftentimes outcome determining impact of subjective judgments in most team sports. When is a foul called? What type of foul is it? When a strike, a ball, or an out? Clearly there are rules that specify all such issues but, in the games themselves, it is ultimately subjective human judgment that can make the difference(s) between winning or losing, advancing to the next round or ending your season, winning the championship or going home empty handed.

### **Seeing the Scene: Subjectivity and Scene vs. Seen**

One of the issues implicit in criticisms of subjectivity is the notion that there is an objective scene against which what is subjectively seen can be contrasted and assessed. While this may be the case in certain scenarios (such as is the case for instant replay in football), human observation is, inherently, subjective in nature. Half a century ago Albert Hastorf and Hadley Cantril (1954) documented the interpretational nature of sporting events—especially those of a social nature. "Of crucial importance," say Hastorf and Cantril, "is the fact that an 'occurrence' on the football field or in any other social situation does not become an experiential 'event' unless and until some significance is given to it: an 'occurrence' only becomes an '*event*' only when the

happening has significance” (132; original emphasis). And, as Hastorf and Cantril go on to point out, what anyone sees in such situations are only “a limited series of events from the total matrix of events *potentially* available to them” (ibid; original emphasis). This general framework explains why the same hard bump can be seen as fair, if rough play or as an unfair and deliberate foul.

Beyond accounting for and explaining the underlying mechanism for different interpretations of even more “objective” sports, however, the work of Hastorf and Cantril (1954) also suggests the roots of some of the more contentious discrepancies in the more commonly viewed “subjective,” evaluated and judged sporting events. Especially as what each individual sees passes through the lenses of their individual perspectives and orientations, what different individuals see *is* different. Hastorf and Cantril summarize their data as showing “that there is no such ‘thing’ as a ‘game’ existing ‘out there’ in its own right which people merely ‘observe’” (1954:133). Given that this is their finding based on a sport with supposedly objective goals and rules, how much more so the discrepancies than for sports and activities wherein individual judgments are, in fact, the basis for winning and success?

The interrelated elements of expectation and focus are additional factors in the perceptual and evaluative frameworks of sport. If a given player is known to play dirty, for example, than chances have it that this player’s actions will, indeed, be evaluated as such by spectators and officials alike—even when, objectively, on par with the actions of other players. On the one hand any observer who knows the players reputation expects certain behaviors so brings such expectations, as a lens, to their

observations. And, on the other hand, knowing the reputation in question any given observer is probably going to remain much more focused on looking for exactly such antics by this player and thus, by dint of this heightened focus, to actually see those infractions that are actually committed. Since this dual perceptual bias readily applies to “objective” sports such as hockey, basketball, or football, how much more so—again—for those activities wherein individual judgments are, in fact, the basis for winning and success?

So what are the implications of these dynamics of subjectivity to ballroom competition? As could be expected regarding the issue of subjectivity, the implications of these dynamics are open to different evaluations. In the first instance, different elements—such as ankle use, frame, and characterization—will be given different evaluative weights by different observers; both judges and audience members. Different elements of each couples performance will have different significance in each person’s assessment so, in fact, each person may, to some extent, see the same dancing quite differently. And, since what is significant to each person is personally valid, it can also be presumed to be objectively valid. Just as two sports fans can be yelling at each other over a given call (or lack thereof), different judges and audience members can easily mistake their own assessments as “evident,” thereby casting those who disagree as less informed or as obfuscating the “truth.” Related and contributing to these elements are those of expectation and focus. If a couple’s reputation is for clean footwork, this is likely what will be seen since. On the first hand equal footwork from someone else is unlikely to be seen as equally clean in the absence of an equal

expectation while, on the other hand, a reputation for such footwork is likely to draw focus to itself which, in effect, pulls focus away from both (A) the footwork of others which may be equally clean, and (B) other elements of their own dancing that may be weaker in comparison.

Let me take the case of Lars and Jenny to provide a somewhat more elaborated example and in order to take a more concrete look at the effects and interplay of (1) significance (2) personal validity, (3) expectation, and (4) focus. Unlike lower level couples that might have larger gaps in their dancing, Lars and Jenny would generally be recognized as a good couple, generally considered within the top 24 in the world. Like any couple at that level the issue becomes levels relative of excellence, rather than sufficiency, as all such couples are good—even great—dancers. Widely known for their speed, performance, and tricks, Lars and Jenny often receive relatively low placements in the finals, a placement that seems, on the surface to be in direct contrast to often overwhelming audience support. Many audience members view Lars and Jenny's results as politically motivated and, while some politics may be involved, that is a separate issue (as discussed in Chapter 4) and Lars and Jenny's case can also be understood through the often overlapping lenses of significance, personal validity, expectation, and focus.

It seems easy enough to imagine that judges and audience members might find different elements of a couple's performance to be of significance. The same charisma and showmanship that may drive spectators to their feet, for instance, could well be the same characteristic that strikes a judge as inauthentic. Even more likely, and

returning to Lars and Jenny, their charismatic performances may very well be of overwhelming appeal to the audience whereas judges, whether by dint of expertise or simply their roles as judges, find Jenny's lack of body actions to be more significant in their overall assessments. For the many audience members who find the charismatic performance presented by Lars and Jenny to be significant, this is also often than seen, by these audience members, as *the* valid assessment of Lars and Jenny's dancing. For such an observer, a lower than expected result must be about more than just the dancing that they, themselves, just observed. Conversely, while a judge may understand what the audience is reacting to, it lacks the same significance for that judge who, perhaps, finds certain technical elements, such as ankle articulation, to be more significant in assessing the overall merit of the Lars and Jenny's dancing. For such a judge than the technical element is seen as the valid criterion and as reflective of the true merit of the performance in question.

Related to the issues of significance and validity already mentioned, the contrasting impressions between many judges and audience members regarding Lars and Jenny's dancing can also be understood via the separate but often related dynamics of expectation and focus. Audience members and judges alike expect to see speed, performance, and great tricks from Lars and Jenny and, as has already been noted, it is exactly such expectations that help make these elements of Lars and Jenny's performances that much more visible and, oftentimes, salient. Where the audience member expects and finds importance (in this case salience and validity) in Lars and Jenny's speed, performance, and tricks the judge may also expect speed,

performance, and tricks but view these as obscuring contrast, subtlety, and substance. Given the differential filters of what counts as salient, the same expectation can also lead to very different assessments of the dancing in question. Similarly, the audience member may expect a great performance—*and thus see it as such*—even on an “off” night, whereas the judge may have come to expect inconsistency, thus having reservations about and seeing Lars and Jenny’s dancing as inconsistent even on a night when they really nail all their routines.

Different from expectation, but typically directed by it, focus is another dynamic with explanatory value regarding Lars and Jenny’s dancing. Expecting to see speed, performance, and tricks from them, audience members and judges alike will often focus on exactly these things thus *actually* seeing them more as a result of that focus. From an audience member’s perspective then, expectation and focus will work in tandem, reinforcing each other, so that Lars and Jenny are seen as faster dancers, better performers, and with top-notch tricks. Certainly Lars and Jenny’s dancing will have to hold up to such expectations and the concerted attention of such focus, but the point remains that focus on these elements of their dancing often serves magnify these very attributes even if on a par with others on the floor. Since someone can only really focus on one couple at a time, every added instant of focus on Lars and Jenny’s speed, performance, and tricks is, conversely, one instant less that these same attributes can be noted in their competitors’ routines. Similarly, but from the judges’ perspective, the same focus on Lars and Jenny’s speed, performance, and tricks might be at the

expense of noting when they do slow down, turn their focus inward, or are executing more basic actions.

Overall then, it is important to realize that what is seen by different people is unlikely to be the same scene; that dynamics such as salience, personal validity, expectation, and focus all contribute to the subjectivity intrinsic to judgment and evaluation. “The significances assumed by different happenings for different people,” note Hastorf and Cantril, “depend in large part on the purposes and probable behavior of other people involved” (1954:132). The same dancing can thus be seen quite differently by audience members and judges and, just as easily, between different audience members and different judges as well. While true of all sports and social events—as Hastorf and Cantril’s research makes clear (1954)—this is where I think the issue of intentional versus instrumental aesthetics re-enters the picture; the demarcation along which certain athletic pursuits are cast—at least to common perception—as self-evident, or relatively objective, rather than subjective. All of these issues regarding subjectivity provide some insight into what Travis means when he says, “clearly dancers are athletes but, personally, I don’t think dance should be a sport.” The distinction that Travis makes is that athletics involves physical exertion and skills but that sports provide unambiguous results. While the discussion on subjectivity in sports, above, highlights the subjectivity of all sports, Travis’ comment exemplifies a fairly wide held perspective regarding various athletics, that some such activities have objective results while others do not.

## **Sports vs. Games vs. Athletics**

Returning to the issue of what actually counts as a sport, popular media provides some interesting data. The Yahoo!® Sports page, for instance, has direct links to major sections for football, baseball, basketball, hockey, golf, NASCAR, and tennis and, as timely, offers such sections as Olympic and Tour de France coverage. Other sports that can be found include horse racing, boxing, cricket, swimming, track and field, figure skating, skiing, motorcycle (and various forms of car) racing, cricket, and rugby.<sup>11</sup> ESPN.com provides direct links to football, baseball, basketball, hockey, golf, motor sports, tennis, horse racing, and, as timely, Olympic and Tour de France coverage. It also features slightly less prominent but still direct links to sections on boxing, outdoor games, bass fishing, and rodeo. A drop down menu from “More Sports” includes a link to action sports (for the “extreme” genre sports) and “Other Sports” wherein further links can be followed to News Wires pages for cricket, cycling, figure skating, gymnastics, rugby, skiing, and track and field.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, these websites show that “judged” sports are presented as second tier sports with boxing receiving greater prominence than both figure skating and gymnastics.

## **Television**

Television provides perhaps the most visible and ongoing portrayal of sports available to and viewed by the most people in modern industrialized society, and the lack of dance in typical sports coverage is significant. While major league sports and tournament style events such as golf, tennis, and NASCAR (and other motor sports)



typically receive the most regular coverage, periodic events such as the World Cup, Tour de France, and the Olympics all receive major coverage as well. Still relatively in stream with line-ups on various sports networks now include activities such as horse racing (and other equestrian events) beach volleyball, cheerleading competitions, fitness competitions, and aerobics competitions. Typical airings also include X-games style events such as BMX, skateboarding, in line skating, wakeboarding, water skiing, street luge, snowboarding, skiing, lacrosse, and other such activities, as well as various outdoor “games” events, and world strong man (and strong woman) preliminaries and finals. Also finding airtimes, albeit more sporadically, are other physical events such as competitive juggling, and various police, SWAT, and fire “games” and obstacle courses. Less straightforward, perhaps, is the regular sports network coverage of billiards (9-Ball and trick shot events being the most common), dog shows, hot dog (and other) eating contests, darts, hot rods, fishing, chess, poker, and even spelling bees.

Poker has, in fact, recently taken a dominant role in sport network line-ups, a situation that well lends itself to discussions about the boundaries and distinctions between various sports, game, and athletics. If part of being a sport includes having self-evident results than, indeed, poker fits this criterion – as would a spelling bee. And if a sport includes a self-evident result that results from a contest in skills, than poker meets this criterion as well (as, again, do spelling bees). But what of athleticism? Are athletic activity, mastery, and skill no longer part of what constitutes a sport? Games such as jacks and marbles probably require greater hand and eye

coordination than poker and spelling, so why are these games not televised? Other events receiving airtime, including both half pipe and street course BMX, skateboard, and in line skating, half pipe snowboarding, wakeboarding and water skiing all typically evince great athleticism, but in what ways are the results self-evident?

Clearly outstanding performances can be differentiated from rudimentary ones by novice and expert alike; a situation mirrored in such events as the various cheerleading, aerobics, and fitness competitions. Receiving more mainstream recognition, skating, diving, and gymnastics all demonstrate great athleticism wherein top-notch performances are readily recognized by non-initiates and aficionados alike, but without self-evident results. Why is it then that non-athletic contests such as poker receive TV coverage whereas dance does not? And why is it that other, subjective athletics—such as skating, diving, and gymnastics—count as sports in the mainstream media in a way that dance does not?

### **Prestige, Recognition, and Validation**

An important dynamic in any consideration of the place of dance in relation to sport and art concerns issues of prestige, recognition, and validation. The mass society in the United States, for instance—be it company executive, construction worker, janitor, school teacher, or bus driver—typically has greater awareness of athletes than of artists. Certainly this is not the case for all people, or in all situations, but the average person is probably more likely to recognize, if not actually identify, more athletes than artists. And how could it be otherwise? News coverage in the mass media privileges sport in a way that it simply does not do for art. Be it in the newspaper, on

the radio, on TV, or online, news coverage inevitably highlights at least a sample of sporting stories and results. Given the seemingly omni-present prestige, recognition, and validation of mainstream athletes—in news coverage, via multitudinous endorsements, and as celebrities in their own right—it is quite understandable wherein the appeal may lie considering the similar effort and amount of training typical of top dancers.

That modern industrial society privileges athletics (and athletic competition in particular) above the arts is a separate and important issue, and one deserving its own consideration. In this context, however, this value differential suggests an important element in understanding the draw to be recognized as a sport expressed by some dancers, dancers who, for instance, recount the hours of practice, international travel for the best coaching and competition, and the myriad related expenses in time, effort, and money that constitute their training and preparation. The underlying issue, far from being recognized as a sportsman or sportswoman—and even different from simply being recognized as an athlete—involves the larger validation not typically credited to the dancer. This diminished evaluation is not, of course, universal, and differences in such evaluation—dependent upon national background among other related variables—show up in different ways.

Given the prestige of the arts in contemporary Russian culture, for example, to be a professional dancer, and therefore an artist, is something different than being a professional dancer in the United States. A quick survey of the youth couples involved with ballroom dancing in the U.S. reflects the different evaluations involved, with the

vast majority of such youngsters being from some post-soviet background.<sup>13</sup> The cultural perception of dance in this case facilitates dance participation and involvement in a way that is not the case for many other youth where dancing is dismissed as “just something that little girls do”—a formulation that devalues the activity (via feminine association) for girls and makes it almost forbidden to boys who “should” be playing “real” sports like baseball and football.

The lack of status ascribed to dancing is not, of course, limited to either the U.S. or to children,<sup>14</sup> nor is the situation as straightforward as a simple bifurcation between sport and art. As Jenne, a now retired professional competitor from Finland, related to me, “ballroom dancing always bounced back and forth between the ministries of culture and of sport in my country,” and, as she continued to relate, “while we always felt more at home and like we belonged in the ministry of culture, we always received greater financial support under the ministry of sport.” The exact same activity than, when viewed as sport (instead of “culture”) received greater financial backing even in a country that does help finance competitive ballroom dancing. And, while the dancers may even self-identify more as artists than as sportsmen, the (literal) value—and thus validation—of their enterprise is assessed differently when executed under the umbrella of sport as opposed to art. This is just one example of the accompanying prestige, recognition, status, respect, and validation that go hand in hand with sport—rather than anything intrinsic to “sport” itself—that seems to motivate many views and positions that support casting dance as a sport.

The impact of prestige, recognition, and validation is a comprehensive dynamic that functions at both the individual and institutional levels. Jenne relates that soon after being switched into the ministry of sport (from the ministry of culture), she, along with the other competition dancers, went for performance evaluations just like any other athlete under the ministry's purview and, among other evaluations and measures taken, there was one for cardiovascular endurance. When Jenne's turn came she got hooked up, and started to run on the treadmill. Shortly thereafter the technicians told her to stop, as there was some malfunction with the apparatus. She stopped and, after they had fiddled with it for a bit, had her get hooked up and start running again. Once again she was shortly asked to stop due to some malfunction. While the technicians were again going over the machine and its associated instrumentation, a non-dancer came by, also scheduled to do their cardiovascular endurance testing, who was on a tight time schedule. This athlete was soon hooked up and proceeded to complete their assessment without a hitch. Everything seeming to be back in fine working order now, Jenne was again hooked up, now for her third time, and again stated to run on the treadmill. Several moments in the technicians again asked her stop claiming that something was, again, wrong with the machine.

Somewhat exasperated at this point, Jenne asked them what was going on, especially as the other athlete had been tested without mishap whereas she had now started and been stopped three times. Rather abashedly the technicians said that they really could not explain it but that, for some reason, they just were not getting accurate read outs for her. When Jenne asked them what was going wrong with her results, she

was told that her read outs were showing up in the zones that only elite cross-country skiers registered in. “Oh, that makes sense” she said, “I do some cross country skiing to keep myself in shape to dance.”

To the sports technicians conducting the testing it was truly inconceivable that a competitive ballroom dancer would actually possess and exhibit the same cardiovascular profile as an elite cross country skier. For Jenne, on the other hand, intensive cross-country skiing was a way she helped build the endurance she felt she needed to compete at the level of ballroom competition she did. The sports technicians’ confusion regarding their machine and the results being displayed clearly show that they were not trying to be disrespectful. But it is the dismissiveness inherent to their disbelief that illustrates both the degree and the persuasiveness of the lack of respect competitive dance garners as an athletic pursuit. Some of this, of course, comes from the very performative aspect of ballroom competition. Make up, costumes, fancy shoes, rhinestones, fringes, feathers, and more all seem to counter-indicate raw athleticism. So too does the very nature of performative dance, wherein effortless execution is the image that successful competitors continuously try and evoke. Ironically, it is the same seeming effortlessness that is both testament to the immense and ongoing investment in time, practice, conditioning, and technique that also seems to signal non-athleticism to those less familiar with what is entailed in competitive ballroom dancing.

A similar example of the disconnect between actual and the perceived athleticism of competitive ballroom dancing comes from Edgar, a professional

ballroom competitor and active competitive martial artist. An ankle injury sidelined Edgar from either pursuit for several months and from competition for even longer. What is interesting is that Edgar returned to competitive sparring months before he returned to ballroom competition (actually over half a year earlier), commenting that, “my ankle just wouldn’t be able to take that yet,” as far as ballroom competition was concerned. Those present, including a mix of social and intermediate level amateur competitors, met this comment with a great deal of surprise.

Beyond personal experiences with the lack of prestige, recognition, and validation for competitive ballroom dancing (such as Jenne’s and Edgar’s), this same trend also translates across (and “up”) to the institution of competitive ballroom at large. Officially recognized as a sport by the IOC (International Olympic Committee), Dancesport was prominently featured in the closing ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Games. The lack of respect, prestige, and validation for ballroom dancing was clearly demonstrated in (and by) both the lack of proportional TV coverage—only fleeting glimpses of what was a prominent element of the closing ceremonies were part of the broadcast—and in the commentary, dripping with negativity, made by TV announcer Bob Costas contending that ballroom dancing was not a legitimate sport and including such flippant remarks as “What would happen if Rita Moreno pulled a hamstring?”

While the overall lack of coverage disappointed many fans of ballroom dancing it was Costas’ comments that really drew their ire. Over the following few days, hundreds and hundreds of complaints came flooding in to DanceScape.com, the largest and most active Internet ballroom forum at the time. Some of these comments,

and as reported in an October 9, 2000 Business Wire article included: “The announcers were condescending and rude,” “Making a lame joke about Rita Moreno pulling a hamstring only shows their ignorance,” and “We were verbally abused and molested.” As DanceScape founder Robert Tang was quoted, the broadcast comments “didn’t just insult an individual, it insulted an entire sport” (Business Wire 2000). It is this institutional level dismissal of ballroom dancing that underlies much of the Olympic push within the ballroom world.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Six

<sup>1</sup> In reference to floor conditions, dancers use “fast” to mean a comparatively slick surface and which their shoes can easily glide over, while “slow” is used for a floor with greater traction. Although preferences vary by individual, as a rule of thumb Standard and Smooth dancers tend to prefer “faster” floors which better suit the progressive nature of their dances, while Latin and Rhythm dancers prefer “slower” floors for the better grip it gives them to work off of for the short, fast, sharp movements and actions of their dances.

<sup>2</sup> Private video recording is prohibited at all NDCA sanctioned competitions (some exceptions are made for children’s events), and official videography companies do a very brisk business selling dancers tapes of their dancing.

<sup>3</sup> Some might argue that music is as ephemeral as dance or, at most, only slightly less ephemeral. Certainly neither dance nor music produce physical objects of art such as painting, photography, or sculpture (just to provide a few of the more common examples) which can continue to be perceived, evaluated, and appreciated as created by the artist. But this does not mean that there are not also differences between dance and music as well. Much of the music produced today is actually composed to be recorded for instance, while only a small fraction of dance is primarily composed for the sake of reproduction. More importantly, however, music is still perceived as it was created and intended, through sound waves entering the ear and then being “understood” as music. Recorded dance is different, in that the light being reflected into the observers eye does not come from the three dimensional source of dancers but, instead, from the two dimensional depiction of three dimensional artistry.

<sup>4</sup> Charlotte is also one of the judges shown for the children’s ballroom competition in New York that was the subject of 2005’s hit documentary film *Mad Hot Ballroom*.

<sup>5</sup> All of these materials were presented as lists or texts. The conversion to tables is mine, and intended to assist by both standardizing format and increasing visual clarity.

<sup>6</sup> The grouping of American foxtrot with ECS and jive is actually not the inconsistency than it might seem to be. Early jazz music provided the basis for both swing and foxtrot music, and International jive



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is a Europeanized version of ECS in much the same way that International foxtrot is a Europeanized version of the American version named after its originator, Harry Fox. As such, American foxtrot shares a musical background and an American genesis with ECS and, in many social ballroom dance situations, couples some will take to the center of the floor to dance ECS to the same music that other couples use to dance American foxtrot around the perimeter of the floor.

<sup>7</sup> The complete judging system is, actually, quite complex with a variety of rules for what to do if no couple receives a majority of ordinal placements and various tie-breaking stipulations.

<sup>8</sup> I use one-on-one to describe the binary competitive scenario—be it between two individuals or two teams—versus the many-at-once model of a track or swimming heat.

<sup>9</sup> The exception to this is in the various formation and show dance divisions wherein point systems are employed.

<sup>10</sup> An abundantly clear and public example of the emphasis on artistry in judged competitions came in the 1994 Olympics when, with tied overall scores, Oksana Baiul won the gold medal in women's figure skating over Nancy Kerrigan by dint of a higher artistic mark.

<sup>11</sup> An interesting item to note here is that figure skating and boxing are the only “judged” sports in this list, neither of which is as prominently featured as the primary categories of football, baseball, basketball, hockey, golf, NASCAR, and tennis.

<sup>12</sup> As with Yahoo!®'s sports pages, the “judged” sports are not among the most prominently featured sports. Boxing, although less prominent, is still featured via a direct link from the main page whereas links to News Wires pages on figure skating and gymnastics have to be accessed through a secondary page.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that these young ballroom dancers, themselves, originally hail from outside the US but, rather, that their parents are typically émigrés from former states of the USSR.

<sup>14</sup> The very lack of ethnographic focus on dance in its own right (and as discussed in Chapter One) highlights the marginalization of dance (and the arts in general) in academia which, unfortunately, is far from surprising in light of both the colonial heritage of western social sciences and the Cartesian dualism of western academia wherein the body is understood as separate from and even antithetical to the intellect.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: Competitions

As Chapter Six illustrates, competitive ballroom dancing is best understood as a complex of spectacle, art, and sport; and it is within this field of activity that ballroom lives are lived. Yet while this metagenre contextualizes ballroom lives—and it does—this is not because that is what the ballroom culture sets out to do; which would be far too agentic a view of ballroom (or any other) culture. Where Chapter Six thus helped unpack the fields of activities and values that are the stuff of ballroom living, this chapter tightens its focus from looking at ballroom competition in general to ballroom competitions themselves. Ballroom “competitions,” however, involve far more than just the dancing that unfolds in front of the audience and officials, but complex events which involve aspects of festival, celebration, and ritual as well. Whereas the spectacle, art, and sport of ballroom dancing are publicly performed and contested, there are important elements and dynamics of ballroom life that happen off the competition floor as well as on it.

Clearly there can be no doubt that the vast majority of ballroom life takes place away from the competition floor. Indeed, the hours put in at the studio far eclipse the amount of time spent at competitions, and many times over at that. Yet it is the competitions that competitive ballroom are all about. As much as ballroom life cannot be understood without knowing what goes on in the studios, what goes on in the studios must also be understood in light of their relationship to the competitive circuit

as well. Whatever variation in instructional pedagogy, business models, and social climate there may be from studio to studio—and there are many—the fact remains that the dancers from each show up on the same competitive floor and strive to attain the same results thereon. Thus, while the majority of any dancer’s time is spent in the studio, it is the competitions which, as epitomotic examples of ballroom culture, contextualize even local practices.

### **Performance: On “Stage” and “Backstage”**

To use Goffman’s terminology, ballroom competitions are “performative” both on and off the competition floor. Beyond the publicly performed dancing, the myriad festive and celebratory dimensions of ballroom events are also performed—not as spectacle for an observing audience, but as internally self-performative where connections, commonalities, and social cohesion are performed between (and for) the dancers and officials. Similarly, there are many ritual dynamics involved in the competition setting that are regularly performed on and off the ballroom floor. Rather than focusing on the activity of “competition” then, the materials in this chapter unpack the dynamics inherent to “competitions” as the pivotal and epitomotic cultural events that they are.

### **Festival and Celebration**

Insofar as a ballroom competition is a thing of spectacle—which it is—it is also, in part, a thing of festival and celebration as well. In the first instance, at what ever level they take place and are conducted, ballroom competitions represent in-

gatherings of “the tribe.” Studio-level competitions bring together a wider and deeper cross-sectioning of studio participants than almost any other studio-level events (with the possible exception of holiday parties which are, of course, full fledged festivals and celebrations). And, as much as the finished grooming and costuming of competition are the stuff of spectacle, the process and conduct of dressing up and “fancifying” one’s self as, competitor, official, staff, or spectator is the stuff of festival and celebration.

Beyond the most basic, studio-level competition, however, the festival and celebration-like facets of ballroom competitions emerge even more fully as the in-gatherings involved are of ever deeper and wider scales. Collegiate competitions, franchise competitions, and local USA Dance competitions all bring together dancers who do not, in the regular course of their day-to-day activities, all come in contact with one another, and certainly not all at the same time. Competitions thus serve as an opportunity to watch and observe styles and levels of dance one is not commonly exposed to, to see competitors one is not usually exposed to, and to interact with other dancers and competition personnel one does not regularly come in contact with.

Adding to the festival and celebration-like dynamic of ballroom competitions is the fact that, as a concentration of dancers, competitions are prime markets for ballroom industry vendors. As such, the “larger” the competition, the greater the draw for various industry vendors that sell shoes, dresses, fake tanners, costume jewelry, miscellaneous costume accessories, ballroom music, and the like. Whether in the back of the ballroom, adjoining conference rooms, the hallways just outside the ballroom,

or in a nearby exhibition hall, ballroom competitions start to take on something of the feel of a “ballroom market” as the vendors set up their booths. The presence of colorful costumes, numerous brands and models of shoes, tiers of costume jewelry, and racks of CDs, DVDs, and videos are all provide constant visual (and, in the case of music, sometimes auditory) cues as to the different-than-ordinary nature of the competition setting.

### **“Larger”**

Although slightly impacted by prestige of various events (i.e. the average “level” of dancers competing at the competition), overall the “larger” the competition the greater the number and variety of vendors, feeding back into the greater festival and celebration-like dynamics of the competition. “Larger,” however, means different things to different ballroom constituencies. What matters most to the organizer(s) of the competition is the total number of entries; that is the number of people factored against the number of events entered by each. 200 dancers dancing an average of 10 heats each, for example, represents two thousand total entries. The same two thousand entries could, however, also come from 400 dancers dancing an average of five dances each or from 100 dancers dancing an average of 20 heats each. To the event organizer, who is paid per person per entry, these different permutations of dancers and entries all represent the same number of total entries, and hence equivalent financial stakes as Table 7.1 helps illustrate. To the various vendors, however, these different permutations represent quite different stakes.

**Table 7.1: Heat Entries – Example 1**

<b>Dancers</b>	<b>Average # of Heats Entered</b>	<b>Total Entries</b>
200	10	2,000
400	5	2,000
100	20	2,000

While the total number of entries in each of these scenarios is the same, the number of dancers competing in each such scenario represents drastically different situations for any vendors in question. 400 dancers are, after all, a very different potential customer base than are 100 dancers. Yet the numbers used in Table 7.1 represent minor fluctuations in many of the pro-am competitions contested throughout the US where some students dance as many as 300 heats or more at a single competition. Again, as far as the event organizer is concerned, 300 heat entries generate 300 heat entry fees regardless of how that total number is reached. As Table 7.2 illustrates, however, one student entered in 300 heats is still only one potential customer whereas 20 students each entered in 15 heats provides a potential vendor with 20 potential customers.

**Table 7.2: Heat Entries – Example 2**

<b>Dancers</b>	<b>Average # of Heats Entered</b>	<b>Total Entries</b>
1	300	300
20	15	300

What Table 7.1 and Table 7.2 make clear then, is that while the total number of entries is what counts most (at least from a financial perspective) for competition

organizers in assessing the size of their event—i.e. how large their competition was—the total number of competitors in attendance is a much more important measure of competition size as far as vendors are concerned. Far from being a tangent, understanding the differences between the total number of entries and the total number of dancers at a given competition is a critical element in understanding the relative status and appeal of different competitions in the eyes of most vendors and competitors alike which, in turn influences the degree to and the dynamic by which a competition is (or is not) festival and celebration-like.

### **Why “Size” Matters**

“Smaller” competitions—that is competitions with fewer actual dancers—certainly play important roles and serve their purposes within the greater ballroom culture. They provide venues for newer dancers to test the competitive waters as it were, getting their competitive feet wet without being bowled over, sometimes quite literally, by far more experienced dancers. Beyond providing a less intimidating competition environment, smaller competitions give dancers a chance to hone their floorcraft and performance skills, and a chance to assimilate the various unspoken guidelines for competitions. Smaller competitions also tend to be less expensive, hence making it more affordable for a newer dancers family and friends to attend and provide support in a way that is much less common for larger events that are far more remote from home. Similarly, more students and fellow dancers from one’s own studio are likely to be attending and competing at smaller events so, in this way too, a network of familiarity and support is often built in to the smaller local events.

It is as the competitive dancer attends and competes at more and more events that they become more familiar and comfortable with the fairly typical set up, conduct, and procedures of the competitive circuit. At the same time there is also an informal socializing process at work, as the newcomer becomes familiar with an ever expanding sphere of “who’s who” type knowledge, and as they informally meet and chat with more and more people at various competitions. The greater knowledge of the competition scene provides for a less daunting experience of larger scale events while the increasing ring of acquaintances within the circuit provide an expanding network of support at these events. The vast social ease with which experienced competitors move through competition venues, even in countries they have never visited before, thus has a double genesis, stemming from the long since taken-for-granted nature of ballroom competitions on the one hand, and supreme familiarity and comfort with the social actors surrounding them. But let me take a few steps back at this point, before moving on, and comment on how the different configurations of dancers and personal heat entries (as depicted above in Tables 7.1 and 7.2) drive these cultural dynamics that I am discussing.

## **Vendors**

Vendors’ primary expenses are the same no matter the size of the competitions where they are vending. Whether 20 dancers, 200 dancers, or 2,000 dancers show up, vendors still need to travel to and from the event, transport their merchandise too and from the event, pay the competition organizer’s vending fee<sup>1</sup>, pay for their lodgings, and pay for their food.<sup>2</sup> The number of actual dancers at an event thus becomes a



critical factor for prospective vendors, as they weigh the potential revenue against the costs of doing business at any given event. Thus, smaller events, with fewer competitors, may not have a sufficient number of potential customers to justify more than one or two vendors, if any, being in attendance. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, thousands of competitors (such as at Blackpool or the GOC) justify the presence of multiple vendors in each genre—such as dresses, shoes, music, books, and videos to name the most common—thus adding to the festival and celebration-like atmosphere, both via the market-like feel they engender (as previously noted), and by providing an abundance of additional cues as to the stature of that competition as a concentration of “ballroom culture.”

Knowing that larger events have the most dancers in attendance, and hence the highest number of potential customers, also influences the production side of vendors’ business practices as well. Since more dancers equals more customers, the larger the number of dancers at an event the higher the demand for vendors’ products meaning the greater the supply necessary. Just as dancers gear up for major competitions then, so too do vendors—albeit in their own ways. The sheer quantity of product demand represented by the size of the population in attendance means that most vendors, like most dancers, have a schedule of the more significant competitions around which their other conduct revolves, with production quantity rising, sometimes quite drastically, in anticipation and preparation of the larger competitions.

Beyond product quantity, however, when it comes to the high end products of ballroom dancing—namely costuming—quality is also an issue with the larger comps.

This is not to say that the quality of the garments produced at other times is of a lower standard. Instead, the pertinent point here is that the size and scope of the larger events (in terms of dancers, judges, and audience alike) drives the demand for new and notable costuming. Larger competitions call for competitors' newest and best costumes in order to stand out among their largest competitive fields. In most cases this means that the period leading up to the larger competitions requires increased production from dress vendors, a demand only exacerbated by the dress vendors' need to also have a large supply of dresses available for sale at the vent itself as well.

But, just as much as the larger spectatorship and attention of larger competitions drive competitors to show up in their best costuming, so too does this same increased cultural visibility drive the vendors' desire to showcase their newest and best designs—on their displays, ordered in advance by dancers, and especially on the vendors' sponsored couples. The largest competitions—such as the OSB in the US and Blackpool internationally—thus emerge as the events that most partake of the festival and celebration-like dynamics within the competitive circuit. Competitors show up in their newest costumes, vendors have their most extensive supply of products, and the newest styles and trends in dresses and costuming are prominently showcased.

## **Competitors**

The competitions that are of most interest and appeal to vendors are of interest and appeal to most competitors for the exact same reasons. Just like vendors, competitors are concerned with the total number of dancers at a competition (and,

more specifically, in their particular events) and not the number of overall entries. Competitors pay the same entry fee for their events, regardless of the number of competitors they dance against and the number of rounds required to narrow this field down to a six couple final round. Smaller events often have a straight final, providing but a single opportunity for a couple to take the floor, while the largest events in the world can easily start with over 500 couples, require preliminary rounds on a preceding day, and have six rounds and up. More experienced competitors and those looking for bigger tests of the dancing thus look to the larger competitions as opportunities to test themselves, and showcase their developing dance prowess. Ultimately then, the larger events are not just straightforward competitions but also festivals and celebrations of dance, occasions when the most and the best dancers and dancing are displayed and are celebrated.

### **It's a Vacation**

As much as competitions are regular, par for the course events in the lives of most competitors, they are also a break from competitors' day-to-day non-competition routines. Much of the festival and celebration-like dynamics of ballroom competitions stems from the fact that, for many competitors, their time at a competition is a break from their day-to-day routines and a chance to get together, "catch up," and "hang out" with friends and acquaintances they do not get to spend much time with outside of the competition setting. For most amateur competitors (whether part of an amateur partnership or dancing pro-am), for instance, their time at a competition is usually free from their daily work and family concerns and responsibilities. As such, outside of the

often comparatively brief time they spend preparing and competing, the rest of their time at a competition can be used for local sightseeing, rest and relaxation, and socializing with other dancers and competition personnel. In a relatively parallel vein, for most professional competitors their time at a competition is free of their regular teaching, judging, and practicing schedules and, like the amateurs, provides opportunities for tourism, pampering, and socializing.



**Photo 7.1: It's a Vacation** – Banquet meal for package holders at the 2004 Seattle Star ball, Seattle, WA

Asked about his favorite parts of being involved in ballroom, Kent, a previous professional national champion and currently an active pro-am competitor, responded “this,” as he gestured to our surroundings in a plush hotel lobby, further elaborating

with “the travel, the nice hotels, this lifestyle.” Kent’s comments suggest the leisurely perspective many competitors experience regarding their time at competitions. Trying to schedule a follow up interview with Ray Rivers, a former World finalist, and a world-class coach and adjudicator; in San Diego, for instance, was proving most difficult when Ray asked me if I would be at the Emerald Ball up in Los Angeles the next month. When I confirmed that yes, I would, he suggested that we do the follow up there, citing that he would have a much more open schedule then. Living in the same city then, it was only when attending an event, a mere hour and a half drive north, that Ray and I could actually find a mutually workable time to sit down and talk.

Tellingly, the scenario I describe regarding my follow up interview with Ray is far from an isolated or unique case. My first scheduled interview with three-time Blackpool and World Amateur Champions Franco Formica and Oksana Nikiforova, for example, did not work out in London, two weeks prior to Blackpool, as we had originally scheduled. Amid their preparation and training for their first Blackpool championship they lost track of the interview, but were able to make time at Blackpool and, again, for a follow up interview at the GOC. Similarly, four-time Blackpool Professional Latin Champions Juka Haapalainen and Sirpa Suutari were having trouble finding time to do an interview with me during my second fieldwork trip to England and, when they found out that I would be going to the GOC the next week, suggested that it would be much easier for them to find the time to sit down there and asked “would that be okay?” As things turned out, my interview with them at the GOC

ended up taking so much time that we were not able to complete it on the day we had scheduled so completed it on the following day as well.

World and Blackpool Amateur Latin Finalists Peter Stockebroer and Kristina Juel took time to sit down for an interview at the GOC with me that same year without issues. When I was in Denmark a couple of years later, at their home studio for three weeks (after Blackpool), Peter invited me over to their house for dinner but, with late developing plans post-Blackpool, never managed to find the time to actually have me over. Similarly, my interview with nine-time undefeated US Amateur Latin Champions, and World and Blackpool Amateur Latin Finalists, Eugene Katsevman and Maria Manusova took place at an IDSF competition in Palm Desert and not at their studio in New York when I was visiting for a couple of days. And, as a final example of this dynamic, my interview with five-time Blackpool and seven-time World Professional Latin Champions Bryan Watson and Carmen Vicenj did not take place on any of my four trips to their home base of London but, instead, at Blackpool.

The point of all of these examples is not, of course, simply to point out that ballroom competitions tend to allow for more available free time than the day-to-day dealings of ballroom competitors, coaches, and judges. Instead, what I am trying to highlight is the break from most dancers' day-to-day structures and routines that are inherent to the competition setting and which thereby play into the festival and celebration-like dynamics of ballroom competitions. But if competitions allow for less scheduled and routinized action and activity, this is only one piece of what makes the festival and ceremony-like to members of the ballroom community. Where the



vacation-like aspect of ballroom competitions contributes to competitions' festival and celebration-like facets from a structural standpoint, competitions' reunion and party-like aspects make a comparable contribution from a social standpoint.



**Photo 7.2: It's a Reunion** – Professional Smooth competitors Christian Clayton and Catherine Vaughn (left), after having recently moved to Maine, catch up with fellow competitors and former studio mates Eddie Alba and Susannah Cuesta (right) from Southern California, amidst other competitors warming up and spectators walking about, in the hallway just outside the ballroom at the 2004 Seattle Star Ball, Seattle, WA

### **It's a Reunion**

It is important to realize that the festival and ceremony-like aspects of ballroom competitions are only hinted at by their “it’s a vacation” aspects. More than just structural vacations from day-to-day non-competition routines, ballroom competitions are also the consummate social scenes within the ballroom world as well.

It is far from the exception, for instance, to have friends in the ballroom scene who one hardly gets to see, if ever, outside of competitive venues. Because of the scheduling pressures typically experienced by most dancers in their day-to-day lives (as just noted above in “It’s a Vacation”), the socializing dynamic allowed for by the far less restrictive competition schedule provides a social appeal, draw, and outlet most reminiscent of reunions. Beyond the structural vacation from day-to-day routines, the festival and celebration-like dynamics of ballroom also arise in response to and via the compressed temporal window for socializing that is both represented and provided by the competitions themselves. Especially as dancers move their residences from place to place over time—be it in response to non-dance job pressures and opportunities for most amateurs or professional, teaching, and partnering opportunities for professional dancers—and as they make friends within the competitions venues and circuits, the ballroom competition may very well emerge as the only place that various ballroom people get to see and visit with each other.

To provide a personal example of these dynamics, let me turn to two of my closest friends in the ballroom world, Jim Gray and Sunnie Page who, as a couple, were the second and third people I ever interviewed for my dissertation research. I met and interviewed Jim and Sunnie at a BYU summer ballroom camp in Provo, Utah in 2001, while they were still amateurs competing in the *Novice* division. Now professional competitors almost five years later, we have since shared many meals, phone calls, and hotel rooms—both in the US and in England—but have never seen each other outside of a competition except for last year when, coincidentally, they



happened to be in Los Angeles and we were able to go watch the live broadcast of the finale episode for the first US season of *Dancing with the Stars* on July 6, 2005 and again on January 5, 2006 when we went to see the live premier of the second season.

Numerous examples of this “reunion-esque” dynamic abound in my personal experiences within the competitive ballroom world alone. I met my very closest ballroom friend, ballroom costume designer and head of sales for Doré, Dawn Smart, at the Yankee Classic in October of 2001. Despite the fact that we now talk on the phone several times a week, the only time we have seen each other outside a competition setting over the past five years was in June of 2002 when we were both in New York City for Louis van Amstels’ show, *Latin Fusion*, which was being performed at Center Stage.

A closely related example comes from my friends Felipe and Carolina Telona, US National Professional Rhythm runners up. I stayed with Felipe and Carolina at her parents’ house in Toronto for the 2003 Can-Am Dancesport Gala (from April 24-27) and then stayed with them again, in Los Angeles at his parents’ house the very next week for the Emerald Ball (from April 30-May 4). I periodically talk to them on the phone, and have spent late nights talking in hotel rooms with them, but have never seen them outside of the context of a competition. Another, almost parallel, example of this nature comes from my friends FJ and Catherine Abaya, US Professional Rhythm Competitors, who put me up in their guest room and loaned me their second car when I was in town of Seattle for the 2004 Seattle Star Ball, and whom I have also never seen except for within the competition context.

A final personal example of the reunion like dynamic of ballroom competitions concerns JT, who was living in San Diego, and competing in the professional Latin division when we first met, became friendly, and I first interviewed her. Since that time JT moved to New York and switched styles before going on to capture the title of US National Professional Rising Star Smooth Champion in 2005 (at the Emerald Ball). In the several years since JT moved from San Diego to New York we have seen each other many times, sitting down for meals, getting in a social salsa or two, just hanging out, and even sharing a hotel room but, as with both Felipe and Carolina and FJ and Catherine, only at competitions.

Before moving on, I want to reiterate the point that these examples have been used to illustrate, which is that in amid the hectic routines and the high mobility common among ballroom competitors, competitions represent a nexus of many, perhaps even most, social relations between dancers and other who are part of the ballroom scene. Providing face-to-face contact between people who otherwise may only rarely, if ever, see each other, competitions provide opportunities for friends and acquaintances to visit and catch up with each other, reestablishing and reaffirming their social ties and bonds. Indeed, and as I quickly learned early in my fieldwork, conducting interviews at a competition in even remotely public areas guaranteed several interruptions from the various passers by who inevitably stopped to greet and catch up with the dancer(s) I was interviewing.<sup>3</sup>

## **It's a Party**

A final facet of the festival and celebration-like dynamic of ballroom competitions worth noting is that of being a party. The same structural dynamics that can make competitions vacation like provide the opportunity, the same social dynamics that can make competitions reunion like provide the means, and the break from day-to-day pressures and routines often provide the motivation. The more invested a competitor is in the competitive side of their dancing, the greater the internal pressure they place on themselves to perform well when competing. While the personal side of these dynamics are really the stuff of Section IV, on “Self,” let me just point out that competitors who do not find ways of dealing with this pressure are most unlikely to remain competitors for long.

After the rigorous preparation for a competition and the outlay of physical, mental, and emotional effort that can be part of competing, some competitors prefer quiet time, perhaps merely to read a book or simply to eat a donut that had, just an hour before, been on the “forbidden” list. Many competitors, however, prefer to celebrate by way of partying. Also playing into the “partying” feel, flavor, and mentality for some is the simple fact that, having chosen a form of dancing that requires close and near constant contact and interaction with another person, ballroom competitors are typically of both a social and an expressive bent. These characteristics—although inevitably varying from individual to individual—provide more than sufficient grist for what is often a fairly active party mill.

The nature of what constitutes an actual party within the ballroom scene spans a wide range. The specifics of each individual party are not what are at issue here, however, only the fact that the competitions often serve as the venues for a variety of party-like practices and engagements. From the sedate wine and cheese after parties to drinks at the bar and from the rambunctious in-room drinking to partying out by the pool, members of the ballroom community partake in many festival and celebration-like behaviors and activities within the competition context.

The same people who are national and international champions dealing with pressures that few but the most elite athletes rarely face at their age on the one hand, are also typical high school and college aged young adults on the other. The competitors who were competing in an IDSF Grand Slam event just hours earlier, for instance, are the same dancers who cram 40 into a major outdoor hotel Jacuzzi until they got kicked out by hotel security at four in the morning. Yet it is not only in the more coherent and organized sense that competitions provide and play into the party-like feeling and atmosphere. Especially when they are in the US, for example, trying to find time to sit down and catch up with some of the European competitors I am friendly with can prove exceedingly difficult as they are always being dragged off by other dancers to go to the pool, for food, or a smoke.

Overall then, there are a number of factors that both feed into and reflect the festival and celebration-like aspects of competitive ballroom. In particular this section has shown how alternative measures of competition “size” matter in different ways to both vendors and competitors versus competition owners. In this same line I have

pointed out the use and importance of smaller events in acclimating competition-initiates to the competitive scene, while also highlighting how event size both drives and echoes the festival and celebration-like facets of competitions. Larger events with more vendors and competitors are more festival and celebration-like thus drawing more vendors and competitors and being contributing to increasing festival and celebration-like dynamics. Most notable among these dynamics are the ways in which competitions not only resemble but also (and often) actually function as vacation, reunion, and party for members of the community. It is not without reason that the official name for the Blackpool competition, and as it is printed on competition programs, shirts, and merchandise, reads “Blackpool Dance Festival.”

### **Competitions as Ritual**

In the previous chapter I was exploring the dynamics of spectacle, art, and sport as they inform, and are manifested, in ballroom competition. In this chapter so I have focused on ballroom competitions as complex events manifesting a wide variety of dynamics of festival and celebration. And, as these proceeding materials all help demonstrate, to exclude any of these dimensions would ignore a significant constitutive element of ballroom culture. Yet the very fact that the non-outsider generally knows what to expect when they step foot into a dance studio, and even more so a competition, speaks directly to the highly ritualized nature of much of ballroom life and to the degree of ritualization at play in many ballroom practices.

Obviously the ritual involved in ballroom is not the paradigmatic example of religious ritual. But the competitive facet of ballroom does not mean that ritual is either lacking or, indeed, even central to the competitive element. “Competitive performance,” as Parish notes, “can be ritualized or ritualistic--have many qualities of ritual, including being performative, having a relatively high degree of formality (inside of which creativity occurs), relating self to something larger than self, transforming persons, and so on” (personal communication April 2006). As the following materials will demonstrate however, this hybridity between ritual and competition is only half the story. Indeed, although religious meaning is lacking from ballroom structure and ritual,<sup>4</sup> competitive ballroom not only has and functions in accordance with, but even revolves around and is dependent upon its own rituals and ritual structure. “Ritual,” as Blackmer notes, “permeates the world of the dancer, whether student or performer, amateur or professional” (1989:26).

From the shoes and clothing one puts on to practice, to the way one warms up; from the way one gets ready to compete to the way one stands around before taking the floor; from the manner in which couples advance through the rounds of competition to the coordination between scrutineer, MC, and DJ, ritual permeates the ballroom world at the personal, partnership, and group levels. While dancers engage in any number of personal rituals, I want to focus on some and highlight the most prominent ritual dynamics of competitive ballroom; prominent because they are widely shared.

## **What is Ritual?**

Like competitive ballroom itself, ritual cannot be reduced to a specific type of object or activity. Following Rappaport I contend that “no single feature of ritual is peculiar to it. It is the conjunction of its features that is unique” (1996:428). In a tightly overlapping formulation Grimes makes this same point, noting that “what we label with the single term ‘ritual’ is a complex phenomenon requiring multiple methods to understand it” (1996:283). Similarly, while an in depth analysis of what ritual is (and what it is not) is beyond either the scope or the aims of this section, I think there are a couple of important points to be made in this regard. First, it is important to recognize that ritual “is not an entity to be discovered. Rather, ritual is an analytical category” (Kertzer 1996:339). Here too Grimes makes this same point in his contention that “ritual is not a single kind of action. Rather, it is a convergence of several kinds we normally think of as distinct; it is an ‘impure’ genre” (1996:283). Which brings me to my second point: that if ritual is that multiplex in its own right than how much more so must competitive ballroom be if ritual is only one—even if a complex one—of its cultural facets.

Yet if ritual is no specific thing, this is not to say that it does not have specific features; features that are at least as important for understanding ritual as for identifying it. In two closely aligned formulations, for example, Kertzer defines ritual as “symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive” (1996:340) and Davis-Floyd defines a ritual as “a patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactment of a cultural belief or value” (1996:148). Both Kertzer’s and Davis-Floyd’s understandings

of ritual foreground a specific set of elements, suggesting that rituals are best understood as recurring, consistent, and representational socioculturally grounded practices. I think it is also important to highlight three issues here: first, rituals, in being practices, are participatory; second, that rituals are not only about religion, spirits, or magic<sup>5</sup>; and third, that rituals are purposive, they are meant to affect a transformation of some order. Rituals, after all, do not happen if no one participates in them; and people do not regularly participate in rituals toward no ends what so ever.

### **Recurring and Consistent**

An activity must be both recurring and consistent to function as a ritual. If an activity is often repeated but happens in a different way each time then, it cannot be considered a ritual. Similarly, if an activity has a set the nature but only happens on a sporadic, non-regular basis, it cannot be considered a ritual. “In order to be considered a ritual,” says Myerhoff, “an action must be replicated many times, mechanically, unvaryingly, almost obsessively, with mindless attention to the smallest detail” (1974:238-239). At the micro level of analysis Myerhoff’s position speaks to the very nature of the seemingly endless hours of rehearsal that lay behind each minute on the competition floor. It is only by exhaustive repetition—practice the same minute shifts in weight and connection—that dancers come to step out on the floor and perform the most involved and intricate techniques without a thought. Indeed, conscious thought of the myriad variables involved in their movement serve as nothing but a hindrance as what had become almost organic movement is disrupted by intellectualization and



abstraction. Myerhoff is equally applicable at the macro level, as all but newest competitors can walk into almost any ballroom competition and understand the divisions, processes, and procedures involved in going about competing—and usually without giving these a second thought.

Ballroom competitions thus provide a strong example of how “any type of behavior may thus be said to turn into a ‘ritual’ when it is stylized or formalized, and made repetitive in that form” (Nadel 1954:99; cited in Myerhoff 1974:239). It is not, after all, the specific details of how ballroom competitions are run that make them into rituals. Rather, it is the specificity of roles and procedures involved in ballroom competitions coupled with the replication of these roles and procedures that “ritualize” these competitions. Every competitive dancer knows which dances they will need to dance for instance, in what order, and within what range of tempi. The International Standard competitor knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the order in which they will dance their dances is: waltz, tango, Viennese waltz, foxtrot, and quickstep. And, even if they do not know the numbers of the acceptable tempi, they will still have an innate feel and sense for the acceptable tempo range of each of these dances, with the waltz, tango, Viennese waltz, foxtrot, and quickstep being played at 28-31mpm, 30-32mpm, 52-58mpm, 28-30mpm, and 48-52mpm respectively.

If the order of dances, the type of music played for each, and even which dances would be included at all, was not fully predictable, it might be much harder to say whether ballroom competitions should be classified as rituals or not. But this is not the situation, as the set of dances included in each division, the sequence in which

these dances are danced, and the accepted range of tempi for each dance are all “givens” within the competitive ballroom circuit. The outsider or the newcomer might only notice that everyone already seems to know where they are supposed to go and what they are supposed to do. To the insider, however, the configuration of dances, sequences, and tempi illustrated below (in Table 7.3) represent and serve as unvarying markers for culturally salient practices. As worded by Rappaport, “at the heart of ritual—its ‘atom’ so to speak—is the relationship of performers to their own performances of invariant sequences of acts and utterances which they did not encode” (1996:440).

**Table 7.3: Competitive Dance Sequences and Tempi by Ballroom Style**

<b>Sequence</b>	<b>International Standard</b>	<b>International Latin</b>	<b>American Smooth</b>	<b>American Rhythm</b>
First:	Waltz (28-31mpm)	Cha Cha (32-34mpm)	Waltz (28-32mpm)	Cha Cha (28-32mpm)
Second:	Foxtrot (28-30mpm)	Samba (48-56mpm)	Tango (28-30mpm)	Rumba (28-32mpm)
Third:	Viennese waltz (52-58mpm)	Rumba (28-31mpm)	Foxtrot (30-34mpm)	Swing (ECS) (34-36mpm)
Fourth:	Tango (30-32mpm)	Paso Doble (60-62mpm)	Viennese waltz (50-54mpm)	Bolero (24-26mpm)
Fifth:	Quickstep (48-52mpm)	Jive (40-46mpm)		Mambo (48-51mpm)

Finally, in the few instances where there is variation from this pattern, such as Viennese Waltz being excluded at Blackpool, it is well known and easily counts as ritual in its own right. Indeed, many of the best dancers in the world told me that they think they do their best dancing at Blackpool since they know exactly what to expect from year to year—versus at Worlds, which are conducted in different locations each year.<sup>6</sup> As a final note in this regard, the procedures for judging, for advancing to

further rounds, the roles of the judges, DJ, scrutineer, and MC all unfold in exactly this type of way as well.

### **Performative (and Dramatic)**

Without performance there is no ritual — Roy A. Rappaport (1996:432)

In looking at the performative (and often dramatic) character of ritual I am not merely reintroducing the performance-like dynamics of competitive ballroom dancing. The point here is that performance is an integral dynamic of ritual in its own right, and that the ritual and ritual-like facets of competitive ballroom remain opaque if the performative and dramatic nature of ballroom-specific ritual is left unaddressed. “Performance as well as formality is necessary to ritual,” notes Rappaport, being “the second *sine qua non* of ritual, for if there is no performance there is no ritual” (Rappaport 1996:428; original emphasis). Rituals, as I have already suggested, do not happen without participation; they do not—indeed cannot—happen on their own; fully contingent upon being practiced (i.e. performed) by persons.

While some rituals may be more quiet or subtle affairs, by and large most ritual is marked, both for the self and for others, by its “loud,” obvious, and self-announcing nature. As Myerhoff contends, ritual “is a conspicuously artificial affair” (1996:395; a point mirrored by Kertzer’s observation of ritual’s “frequently dramatic character” (1996:340). Not to belabor the point, but neither of these positions argues that ritual must be, or always is, blatant and obvious, only that there is a tendency in this direction and that rituals are always obvious fabrications. Myerhoff’s conspicuousness

and Kertzer's dramaticism both relate and tie back into the fact that rituals are neither piecemeal nor aimless; they are deliberate, intentional, and meant to *do* something. Aside from predictability then, the repetition intrinsic to ritual helps mark it *as* a ritual and not just a variation of other practices. Ballroom competitions are replete with such conspicuous and dramatic markers, including:

- The set up of the dance floor, surrounded by various forms of seating
- Specific areas by which competitors are intended to enter and exit the floor
- A podium, with microphone, on a raised dais from which the MC conducts the competition
- Special, often multihued, floor lighting
- The rainbow of colors, fabrics, cuts, designs, rhinestones, fringing, and feathers of competitors' costumes (or the traditional tail suit of the gentleman in Standard)
- The men's meticulous grooming and the women's elaborate coifs, false eyelashes, and false fingernails
- Most competitors' fake tan and stage-like make up
- Judges standing along the edges of the competition floor—with their backs to the audience, obstructing spectators' view of the floor—with clipboards and scoring sheets in hand<sup>7</sup>

All of the items listed, especially when taken together (which is how they are performed), both draw attention to the ritual activity itself and, even more importantly, serve as conspicuous markers that something of significance is going on. This marking is important in a number of ways. First, the non-ballroom passerby who might stop to watch a couple practicing in the hallway, or to watch a moment or two of a televised competition, still easily recognizes that there is clearly “something going on” when they wander passed a competition. Of far greater significance, however, these same markers serve notice to the dancers, officials, and spectators alike that what is happening is culturally substantive and of impact. Indeed, it is these markers—including their overall repetition and consistency across time and place—that cast competitions at the center of the ballroom universe. Competitions are where

champions rise and fall, where new trends in fashion and dancing emerge or fail, and where the models of what constitute good dancers and good dancing are established and displayed.

As a final point I want to highlight Myerhoff's point that "in societies without writing, official statements about a person's status and skill are often given in dramatic, ceremonial form" (1974:46). Clearly the dancesport community is far from being without writing, and email, text messaging, international cell phones, and website-based forums have all played a role in the relationships, interactions, development, recording, and dissemination of dancesport. At the same time, however, what matters most—what sets the context within which dancesport life unfolds—is still what happens in relation to the competition floor. Whether one sits or stands around the floor, stands on the edge of the floor and marks the dancing, or dances on the floor not only provides incontrovertible evidence but also defines if one is a spectator, judge, or competitor for a given event.

More specifically speaking, who is it—which actual person—walks out onto the floor when the judges are called, stands on the edge of the ballroom floor, with a judge's clipboard in hand, and proceeds to mark the couples as they dance? The answers to these questions are unmistakable; as such evaluations are not open to interpretation. A person either walked out onto the floor when the judges were called or they did not. They stood on the edge of the floor or they did not. They had a judge's clipboard on which they marked the event or they did not. There is no gray zone of the "well, they weren't really holding their clipboard up high enough to be a

real judge” variety. There is thus no doubt regarding the status of someone who meets this “dramatic, ceremonial form” as a judge—including all the ramifications of that status within the full sociocultural context of competitive ballroom dancing.

The marking and differentiation of status seems even more blatant among the ranks of active competitors. Dancing on the competition floor provides a plethora of Myerhoff’s “dramatic, ceremonial forms,” each providing, and in fact constituting, “official statements about a person’s status and skill” (1974:46). The nature of their costuming is probably enough, on its own, to quickly classify someone as a Standard, Smooth, or Latin/Rhythm<sup>8</sup> competitor. Which dances they compete in, to which music, and at what tempos, makes any such classification automatic; as would the movement styles, techniques, and choreography they employ.

At a finer scale of analysis, it is blatantly obvious which couples step out onto the floor in proceeding rounds, and making the quarter-finals, semi-finals, and finals as may be the case. And, in the finals, the couples results are embodied in the final line up, with the winners standing first in line,<sup>9</sup> the runners up second in line, and so on down through the last place finalist (typically sixth). Ritual, as Leach asserted over a half a century ago, “serves to express the individual’s status in the structural system in which he finds himself for the time being” (1954:11; cited in Rappaport 1996:429). While there may thus be any number of disagreements as to whether competition results were “fair,” “correct,” or the way they “should” have been, there can be no doubt as to the “official statements about a person’s status and skill” which have been “given in dramatic, ceremonial form” (Myerhoff 1974:46).

## **Representational**

The performative and dramatic aspects of ritual are not for entertainment alone; they are also both representational and transformational. It is important to consider each of these dynamics in sequence, however, as the efficaciousness of ritual—what it is that rituals actually “do” and how they do “it”—cannot make sense without first examining what these rituals are about. Put differently, rituals cannot be effective if those that they are meant for do not understand them or what they are about. As Davis-Floyd points out, for example, rituals work “by sending messages in the form of symbols to those who perform and those who receive and observe it” (1996:149). Clearly then rituals cannot work in the absence of shared symbolic content; messages cannot help but fail when what is represented is unknown or not understood.

## **Judges as Elders/Judges as Shamans**

Within the ballroom world, the symbolism of the line up (as noted above) communicates the relative aptitude of ballroom dancing skill, ability, and performance that was produced and displayed by each couple at that competition—as judged in accordance with the appropriate rules and procedures. Yet as straight forward as this may seem, it depends on certain symbolic understandings that are easily taken for granted. To start with, an absolute outsider, unfamiliar with any of the symbols involved (including language), might well have no way of knowing that they were watching a competition. Perhaps the “judges” are simply ballroom elders making sure

that the ritual dances are performed correctly? Far from being far-fetched, this is, among other things, exactly what the judges *are* doing! Except, of course, that the status of these “elders” is not contingent upon age, but upon other, achievable, qualifications. Having made her competitive mark and retired quite young, for example, Charlotte Jorgensen is far younger than many of the competitors she now regularly coaches and judges.

Insofar as ballroom judges *are* repositories of dance knowledge, ballroom lore, and historical anecdotes, the judge as elder analogy certainly holds up. Yet judges are more than just resources for ballroom related wisdom and learning; they are also the coaches who affect change in competitors’ very ways of moving. As coaches, judges are guides through the landscape of ballroom’s cultural values and practices, providing insights regarding ballroom’s social structures and advice about how to negotiate the politics of ballroom competition. As arbiters of ballroom statuses and conduits of personal change it also strikes me as an apt analogy to think of judges as shamans. Just as more and more powerful shamans are sought out for increasingly particular insight and advice, or in order to affect ever more efficacious changes, so too do ballroom competitors seek out the counsel and guidance of the most proficient coaches.

But what if our hypothetical outsider did not have conceptual categories of ritual elders or of shamans as lenses through which the ballroom competition could be viewed? Perhaps they “see” a ritual being performed after which the ritual performers are called forward and presented to the rest of the congregants by rank of seniority or



“tribal” status? Each couple is clearly wearing different costuming than the others, so perhaps certain sumptuary laws are in effect which, if our outsider knew “better,” could be “read” for each couple’s status? Or maybe our outsider does or does not see a ritual? Maybe they merely see a performance? And, whether ritual or performance, they do realize that there is a competition involved, but think that it is a costume contest of sorts? That all of the dancers performed (be it a ritual or not) and were then ranked according to each couple’s costuming? And how does our outsider know that it is the last place couple that is called first and the first place couple that is called last?

As such, if our outsider somehow managed to guess, or even deduced, that it was the dancing which was being judged, how would they know how to interpret the line up? Without knowledge of what the line up is meant to represent, might they not very well think that the results were the exact opposite of what was actually the case? The point of all of this hypothesizing is not, of course, to try and guess what such an outsider might actually think but, rather, to highlight the importance of symbols and symbolism in transmitting and communicating the meanings and significance of what is being represented in ritual.

## **Symbols and Symbolism**

Following up on his contention that “no single feature of ritual is peculiar to it” (1996:428), Rappaport asserts that “ritual is that frill of decoration that communicates something about the performance or the performer” (1996:429). Rappaport’s communicative frills are, of course, the symbols and symbolism embedded in ritual. Unlike decorative embellishments, ritual’s symbolism informs, recruits, evokes, and

modulates culturally salient models and meanings. To provide one example, the costumes worn by ballroom competitors are certainly meant to draw the eye and attention to the dancers and to embellish their movements. But these same costumes are also culturally loaded objects, physical elements of systems of meaning and significance. The costume is part of the dancing; communicating information about the nature of the dancing, the dancers, bodies, and gender (among other things).

As such a large topic, and one deserving of consideration in its own right, the specific meanings involved in, and with, costuming are the focus of Chapter 9. For the moment, however, it should be clear enough that the short revealing dress of the Latin lady has, and conveys, very different models and meanings of femininity—both to herself and to others—than does the elegant ballroom gown she would wear as a Ballroom competitor. “Most simply,” as Davis-Floyd notes, a symbol “is an object, idea, or action that is loaded with cultural meaning” (1996:149), and that is exactly the case with the ballroom costumes in question.

To provide another example, take the case of the judges’ clipboards: really nothing more than thin pieces of wood or plastic with integrated clips at one end that hold some sheets of paper to the top surface. Clearly there is nothing intrinsically meaningful about these objects, especially as students may use them to take notes, artists to sketch and draw, teachers to take roll, contractors to mark construction progress and parameters, and, in many families, there may very well be such a contraption attached to the door of the kitchen fridge with a list of items that continues to expand up until the next grocery outing. Holding a clipboard clearly does not *make*

a person *into* a student, an artist, a teacher, or a contractor though, anymore than it means that anything written on it must be part of a grocery list. It is in exactly this way that holding a clipboard in no way makes someone into a ballroom judge or imbues them with the background, knowledge, or skills that would entail.

Within the context of a competition, however, the significance of the judge's clipboard far exceeds its properties as a physical object. Within this context the clipboard signifies the judges' qualifications and credentials to serve as a judge, their authority to do so, and also their obligation to do so. Just as not anyone can hold up a clipboard and say they are now a judge; neither can any judge contribute their assessments to any competition event that they feel like. And, on the flipside, the judge—with clipboard in hand—judging a particular event can not decide that they cannot make up their mind or do not feel like marking anyone in an event. So, at the same time that the clipboard itself has no significance, within the appropriate ritual circumstances (i.e. used by the appropriate practitioners, in the appropriate setting) this simple object not only signifies who is a judge but actually invests them with the power and obligates them with responsibility to judge that event.

Myerhoff suggest that “one may view symbols and the rituals in which they are embedded as providing order, meaning, and moral coherence, and at the same time providing regulation and restraint” (1974:233), and I think this well fits and explains the symbolism of the judge's clipboard. It is only within the competition context, for instance, that the clipboard simultaneously signifies, authorizes, and obligates. “Symbols,” as Myerhoff also notes, “convey meanings which are activated. They are

*experienced* rather than merely thought about when used in rituals” (Myerhoff 1974:231; my emphasis, *original emphasis*). Certainly judges, dancers, and audience members may all think about who is judging an event (versus who is not) including such things as judges’ own dance backgrounds, results, and judging histories. But, with clipboard in hand, these judges are actually experienced as judges as well. They are the ones who will be judging that event.



**Photo 7.3: The Ever-present Judges’ Clipboards** – From left to right: Victor Kanevsky, Boston, MA, 2004; Showdance Panel, Hollywood beach, FL, 2005; Jim Gray and Sunnie Page, Irvine, CA, 2005; Wolfgang Opitz, Boston, MA, 2004; and Donald Johnson, Palm Desert, CA, 2005

Others, with identical qualifications, backgrounds, and skills may assess the exact same performances, as may competitors and audience members—indeed few people watch a competition without making at least some choices between which couples they like better than others—but those with the clipboards are the ones whose marks are counted in determining which placements are ultimately announced as the results of the competition. And, perhaps most importantly, this signification, authorization, and obligation are perceived, experienced, and understood by all parties alike; by competitors, spectators, and the judges themselves.

It seems easy enough to say that the meaning of the judge's clipboard or of the competitor's costume does not inhere in the items themselves. A judge is still a judge without their clipboard, just as a dancer is still a dancer without their costume. Indeed a group of dancers can all dance their routines, following all of the regular rules and regulations, a group of judges could mark who they thought best, and the opinions of these judges might (or might not) be of interest or significance to these couples (or to anyone else for that matter). Even if danced in the same facility as a normal competition, this event still would not "count" in the same way. As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, perhaps the most prevalent feature of ritual is repetition. If our no-costume-and-no-clipboard contest happened, with competitors and judges repeating their dancing and evaluation over, and over, and over, chances have it that these events would start to matter, that their cultural significance, and hence symbolic force, would start to rise.

As things stand, however, competitions take place in certain venues, under certain circumstances, with certain key personnel, and are publicly accessible (if pricey) events.<sup>10</sup> The repetition of this pattern provides a conceptual map for what happens—and how—under these circumstances. Over time then, and through association, the trappings of competition start to count as culturally communicative symbols (also read as Rappaport's 'rituals frill of decoration'). The communicative efficacy of these items is of a particular nature, however, as the majority of items we each handle on a daily basis are rarely considered to be of ritually symbolic significance. "Symbols are conceptions made concrete and tangible, often (but not

always) in the form of an object,” notes Myerhoff, and this matches with everything in our clipboard and costumes examples, yet, as she goes on to point out, “These conceptions are of a special kind—highly emotional” (Myerhoff 1974:237). Undoubtedly, and like any other cultural value, the emotional charge of a judge’s clipboard or of a competitor’s costume is highly variable. But these symbols do have significance for judges and competitors. Why, however, is a different issue; it is not a question of symbolism, but of symbolic significance. And what is significant about symbols within ritual contexts is their ability to affect transformation. Far from being a *type* of meaning, symbolism is a *mode* of meaning.

### **Transformational**

“Social rituals,” as Mary Douglas has pointed out, “*create a reality* which would be nothing without them” (cited in Kertzer 1996:342; emphasis added). This generative view of ritual closely parallels Myerhoff’s contentions that “symbols are basically sources of information, ‘models-of’ as well as ‘models-for’ reality; that is, they do not merely *reflect* but actually *shape* other aspects of life” (1974:230; original emphasis), and that, “ritual is a form by which culture presents itself to itself. In ritual, not only are particular messages delivered, but the ritual also *creates a world* in which culture can appear” (1996:397; emphasis added). The point of these formulations is that ritual-reality is no less real for being constructed; that far from being only about reality, rituals generate and are part of it. Perhaps even more accurately stated: since rituals are real, so too is ritual reality.

“The performance of ritual,” posits Rappaport, “establishes the existence of conventions and accepts them simultaneously and inextricably” (1996:433). The performing of ritual thus provides not only tacit acknowledgement to that ritual (including all of its trappings), but participatory testimony as well. It is in this manner that we can say that “all rituals are efficacious to some degree merely by their taking place” (Myerhoff 1996:407). Those performing a ritual know that they have done so and, even if they are unconvinced of that ritual’s efficacy, they are still aware of their own participation, and thus the reality of the ritual. Yet we mean more than this when talking about ritual as generative of reality. Despite claims such as Myerhoff’s that rituals “are not purposive and instrumental, but expressive, communicative, and rhetorical acts” (1996:407), I think that Rappaport has the right of it when he argues that “ritual not only communicates something but is taken by those performing it to be ‘doing something’ as well” (Rappaport 1996:429).

Why would rituals exist and be performed if people did not think they did anything, in at least some manner, shape, or form? Far from being rare and esoteric rites, performed by only select groups of people, ritual, in all of its forms, is the stuff of everyday life. Some places and settings have more or less, as do various communities; and certainly some people find rituals more compelling than do others. In all cases, however, people participate in ritual, and “through ritual the individual’s subjective experience interacts with and is molded by social forces. Most often, people participate in ritual forms that they had nothing to do with creating” (Kertzer 1996:340). If religious rituals are the most commonly recognized, it may be only

because the subjectivity inherent to religious precepts is widely recognized (at least by those outside the religion and, quite often, by those inside it as well).

Insofar as many people regularly look to religion for meanings, I would suggest that various religions can best be viewed and understood as *deliberate meaning systems*. People regularly turn to religion, after all, not only knowing that religion has meanings to offer but actively looking for those meanings. I would suggest that other activities, however, when pursued with sufficient conviction, are best thought of and should be considered to be *unintentional meaning systems*. What I mean in designating these as unintentional meaning systems is not that the activities are unintended, but that one does not participate in them intending to redefine one's systems and structures of meaning. Few dancers, if any, start their dancing with the expectation, let alone intention, that their dancing will come to reframe their personal meaning systems.

Yet it is not without reason that Blackmer makes his observation: "it seems to me that professional dancers...are members of a vestigial religious order" (1989:109). One of the first dancers I interviewed, for instance, related how she used to love to go snowboarding, had rode a motorcycle, and even went skydiving. As she became more interested and involved with ballroom dancing, however, she began to cut back and eventually stop these other activities because of what a possible injury to her ankle, knee, or leg would mean for her dancing. It is exactly this type of orientational slippage that I have in mind then in describing dance as an unintentional meaning system. As with any system of meaning system, which elements get internalized, and



to what extent, are never given. Yet the more involved one becomes with any meaning system the greater the likelihood that, especially with exposure over time, more and more commitment will engender more and deeper internalizations.

Just as Myerhoff says that symbols are a ‘highly emotional’ type of conceptualization (1974:237), so too are rituals emotion laden conceptual models. “In the performance of ritual an exchange takes place,” argues Kertzer “...and the emotions aroused in ritual infuse the cognitive view fostered by the rite, rendering it compelling” (1996:347). As such, the greater one’s exposure to and performance of ritual, the more that the emotions aroused in that ritual, and by it, get linked with, meld into, and infuse the schemata from which that ritual has grown and of which it is a part. Note, this is a very different—and much larger—proposition than saying that exposure breeds acceptance. Far from arguing that one merely becomes accustomed to the content of ritual (although this is inevitably the case as well), the point here is that ritual participation informs evaluations and conceptualizations external to ritual itself. Attending and participating in more and more dance competitions, for example, does much more than merely acclimate one to what they should expect at ballroom competitions; although it certainly does that as well.

As I pointed out at the start of this section, rituals generate reality as much as they reflect it (e.g. Kertzer 1996:342; Myerhoff 1974:230 and 1996:397; Rappaport 1996:433). The same competition that displays the dancing is also the very ritual by which the dancing is recognized, and wherein the same results that reflect the best dancing are the very placements by which the best dancing is recognized as such (i.e.

the best). As much as the competitions thus reflect the practices and values of the total competitive ballroom scene, they are also the very “sites” where what counts as the best dancing are established for the rest of the ballroom world. Far from reflecting static norms, competitions are the very places where evolving styles and expertise are measure against one another and from which new models and standards get (variably) dispersed and assimilated. “Rituals,” as Kertzer so aptly points out, “do not simply excite, they also instruct” (1996:347).

### **Liminality**

The ultimate efficacy of rituals resides in their ability to effect transformation. The transformative nature of ritual, however, is based on their ability to propagate liminality. These threshold states, most tightly linked to rites of passage, are intrinsic to the structure and conduct of ballroom competitions; especially in relation to dancers’ advancement through the competitive rounds and their results. The vast conceptual and experiential distance between day-to-day perspectives of the ballroom studio and the time-out-of-time quality experienced at competitions derives, I would argue, from the liminal nature and qualities inherent to ballroom dancing as both ephemeral are and competitive dance.

The status experienced by ballroom competitors, while competing, is well described by Turner’s formulation that “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (1995:95). While on the floor, when dancing in front of judges and audience, no placements have yet been made; no couple has yet won

anymore than anyone else. Almost without a doubt, some couples will have danced better than others; and often by quite a wide margin at that. But, as the dancers are in the process of actually dancing, the results themselves do not yet exist, and it is in this way that stepping out onto the competition floor affects a liminal state—and status—for the dancers. They do not yet know how they will dance; they do not yet know how the audience will respond; and they do not yet know how the judges will mark them. Everything is seemingly “on hold” as the hyper-now of the competition unfolds—everything but the dancing itself that is.

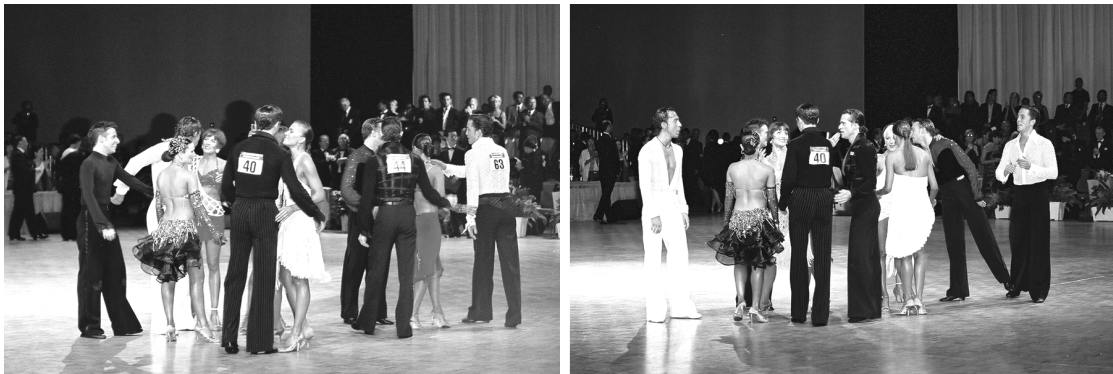
Paralleling exactly such states of transition, transformation, and indeterminacy, Turner describes liminality as:

“A moment in and out of time,” and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. (1995:96)

This definition and description well matches and illustrates the lived experience of ballroom competitors. These dancers (as already noted in this chapter) are away from their day-to-day schedules, routines, and responsibilities. They are also away from their day-to-day social roles, statuses, and interactions. And, regardless of any social distinctions and differences that may exist off the floor, all competitors take to the floor as an undifferentiated group. Yet the purpose for which they take to the floor *as a group* is to differentiate between the very statuses that are absent in the vast majority of on-the-floor interactions

“Liminality,” as Turner notes, “implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed” (Turner 1995:97), and here too ballroom competitions well match this

description (and provides excellent examples). Making it to the quarter finals, the semi finals, and the finals would not really matter, after all, if everyone made it. Indeed, it is only insofar as some people do not make it into higher rounds that “making it” takes on value. Thus, while all couples may well take to the floor as competitors, the fact is that none could advance if others did not; that none could place first if others did not fail to do so. To use Turner’s words then, the time on the floor is a prime exemplar of *communitas* during a time of liminality.



**Photo 7.4: After the Dancing** – The 2004 World Professional Latin Finalists all congratulate each other after completing their last dance. They will then leave the floor and, at the end of the night, be called back onto the floor for a line up as their placements are announced.

World Champions have no more rites than the lowest level dancers competing on the floor with them, and dancers’ time on the floor *is* time-out-of-time and separate from the day-to-day social structure of the ballroom world; e.g. dancers regularly end up competing against their friends and may very well end up competing against their own teachers and coaches. Yet this generalizing moment of activity, and of time-out-of-time—wherein and whereby all of the dancers equally count as and, if fact, equally *are* competitors—is also all in the service of setting social positions and status for the

day-to-day, time-in-time conduct and structure of the ballroom world. Competitors' placements at competitions are the very stock by which their prestige and status rise, their own expertise is assessed, and their appeal as instructors, performers, and competitors grows in cultural capital.



**Photo 7.5: Finalist Line Up** – awaiting their results at the 2004 Yankee Classic, Boston, MA

The quintessence of the preliminal-liminal-post liminal shift—i.e. the transition from structure to communitas back to structure—can be seen in the finals of the most prestigious competitions; Blackpool, Worlds, and, to a slightly lesser extent, the International and the UK. The best dancers in the world come into these competitions with known rankings, but those rankings have no structural meaning once the competitors step out onto the competition floor. Neither the dancers, nor the



audience, nor the judges know what the final outcome will be, as it is at these major events that champions are crowned and are defeated. Even if results among a stable set of finalists seem consistent at certain moments in time, this is only at certain moments. As much for the dancers as for the audience, who the dancers are, in a structural sense, is in flux; and, indeed, nothing symbolizes this more than the moment before the final results are announced. Dancers and audience alike know only who was in the final, not what their placements will be. Social structure remains suspended for a timeless instant, until the results are announced and, in their announcing, reset the social structure and restart social time.



**Photo 7.6: 2004 World Professional Latin Results** – The 2004 World Professional Latin results line up. Repeating World Champion Bryan Watson hoists their trophy high overhead as Carmen looks on with her bouquet of flowers.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Seven

<sup>1</sup> Vending fees can be on a straight vendor fee basis or, more commonly, on a base fee plus a percentage of each vendor's sales at that event. Vendors are also typically required to purchase a full page advertisement in the event program for that competition. Since the price of both vending fees and program advertisements tend to vary according to the appeal and size of various competitions, the fees associated with vending at larger competitions do actually tend to run higher than for smaller events. Still, vendors are required to pay some type of fee regardless of the size of the competition they are vending at, and whether or not they make any sales.

<sup>2</sup> Food costs at a competition tend to be rather high as hotel restaurants are not typically bargain eateries and as room service charges—when there is insufficient time to go sit down for a meal—tend to drastically inflate these meal expenses.

<sup>3</sup> In an interesting twist, later on and further into my fieldwork, interruptions to my interviews came not only from those stopping to greet my interviewees, but also from those stopping to greet me as well.

<sup>4</sup> Clearly the music, technique, and performance of ballroom competition lack the meanings typically implicated in religious ritual, as does the prize structure. Nonetheless, dance can, and for many does, serve as an orientating system of meanings and motivations, albeit not ones that “speak” to the existential concerns typically addressed in and by religion.

<sup>5</sup> For several examples of non-religion based ritual see Bergesen 1996 [1984], Davis-Floyd 1996 [1994], Goffman 1996 [1967], Grimes 1996 [1990], Kertzner 1996 [1988], Wallendorf and Arnould 1996 [1991], and Winn 1996 [1991].

<sup>6</sup> I also want to point out that it is not only the competition venue itself that represents a known quantity at Blackpool, but also everything from surrounding lodgings and food options to the size of the floor and the type of music played.

<sup>7</sup> Most recently, a few competitions have started using wireless PDA type devices for judges' markings, but the ritualized symbol, function, and effect are all still (largely) the same.

<sup>8</sup> There are a couple of reasons why Standard and Smooth competitors can usually be differentiated from each other based on costuming alone (at all but the lowest ages and levels, where costuming is not allowed) whereas Latin and Rhythm cannot. Probably the most obvious discrepancy between the costuming of Standard dancers versus Smooth dancers is that Standard dresses almost always have some type of floats, and typically offer the most coverage of any ballroom costuming while Smooth dresses do not have floats and often seem to represent a cross between Standard and Latin dresses in both cut and design (although favoring Standard). The same floats that provide additional movement and shape in Standard—where partners never break the hold of their frame—would quickly emerge as impediments of the highest order in Smooth where partners transition in and out of frame amidst numerous side by side and individual elements, spins, and turns. Similarly, Standard men's attire consists *is* a ballroom tail suit while the Smooth men's costuming is consists of specially tailored vests or dinner jackets (in order to provide a straight shoulder line while the arms are raised, into dance frame, and not when hanging at the sides as is the case with commercial garments). Additionally, the shoes designed to be worn for Standard and Smooth are different (although much closer to each other than either is to Latin/Rhythm shoes. Also worth noting here is that, just as with the dresses, Smooth shoes are a cross between Standard and Latin one's, but leaning toward Standard). Simply stated, there are no parallel points of comparison to differentiate between Latin and Rhythm competitors' costumes or footwear.

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<sup>9</sup> The only exception to the ordering comes when a podium is used for the first, second, and third place finalists, in which case the first place couple is elevated the highest in-between the second and third place couples.

<sup>10</sup> In saying that competitions are publicly accessible even if expensive I am not discounting the often tremendously great weight of economic reality. To be sure there are probably many people who have enough interest to go watch a competition—at least insofar as the recent success of ballroom themed movies and TV shows would seem to suggest—if price was never an obstacle. The point I am making, however, is simply that no group of people are excluded from being in a ballroom audience as a matter of principle or procedure.



## CHAPTER EIGHT: AESTHETICS 1 – Conduct, Competition, and Consequences

Have you ever been channel surfing and come across the feathers and rhinestones of a ballroom competition? Have you seen the movie *Strictly Ballroom*, *Shall We Dance*, *Dance with Me*, or *Mad Hot Ballroom*? Have you seen one of the myriad TV commercials with salsa or swing dancers? Have you ever seen the dance scenes in mainstream movies such as the tango scenes in *Scent of a Woman*, *True Lies*, or *The Wedding Planner*? What about the swing scene in *Blast from the Past*? And why was *Championship Ballroom Dancing* perennially one of PBS's top rated shows? And what explains the run away success of *Strictly Come Dancing* in the UK and South Africa, and *Dancing with the Stars* in Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. The answers to these questions—or at least the beginnings of such answers—lie in the field of aesthetics.

While visual anthropologist Howard Morphy makes a significant point in noting that “the concept of aesthetics can be applied at many different levels: from the visual properties of a particular artwork to the affective sensual experience of being in the world,” (2005:64) I also think it important to differentiate between visual (and other sensory) assessments and evaluation and kinesthetic ones. This is not to say that visual cues do not trigger bodily reactions, as indeed they may, and often do. Nonetheless, there is still a difference of kind between the evaluative principles and frames applied to appearances and the bodily reactions and experiences that such assessments may induce. It is in this train of thought that I find it useful to analytically

differentiate between these two facets of aesthetic perception and awareness, while still recognizing the intrinsic connection between these dynamics. As such, this chapter deals with the cultural values that frame and drive the appearances and mannerisms of ballroom and salsa, while Chapter Eleven, on embodiment, deals with what Murphy terms the “affective sensual experience” of such cultural values and evaluations.

In focusing on aesthetics then, this chapter examines what is often the most obvious and prominent features of ballroom and salsa dancing. Yet as this chapter begins to demonstrate, however, the aesthetics of ballroom and salsa dancing do not only reflect the values of these dance communities, but are also generative thereof as well. Indeed, the aesthetics of ballroom and salsa are, as Bourdieu says of the *habitus*, “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (1990:53). As such, this chapter does two things: first, it examines the value systems reflected by the aesthetics of competitive ballroom and salsa; but second, it also analyzes how such aesthetics also feedback into, and help drive, these value systems. More specifically, this chapter unpacks the aesthetics of the dance genres under interrogation, explicating the reasons, values, and consequences associated with each. More importantly, however, the significance and impact of these aesthetic commitments is also assessed, as are the processes by which such values are learned and transmitted.

## What is Beautiful?

“The whole question of what is beautiful,” notes dance scholar and world famous dancesport coach and adjudicator Ruud Vermey, “is related to socio-cultural issues and value” (1994:56). With firm roots in the dancing and etiquette of the royal French court in the 1500s, International Ballroom is based on and evokes a very different aesthetic than the International Latin dances largely inspired by Afro-Cuban rhythms and movements. Yet to say that many of the values and aesthetics of ballroom in the twentieth century evolved from and evoke some of the practices, social mores, and graces of the French royal court of the fifteenth century is, on its own, merely a historical point. It is how such conduct, composure, and costuming are regarded that reveals issues and items of culture significance. The same linking of dance and proper social behavior typical of fifteenth century France (e.g. Arbeau 1589), for instance, was still very much en vogue in the early twentieth century as the full title of Helene Davis’s 1923 *Guide to Dancing* clearly demonstrates: *Complete Guide to Dancing, Ball Room Etiquette and Quadrille Call Book*. Indeed, the first two sections of Davis’s text following the preface are titled, and explicitly deal with, “Deportment” (1923:11) and “Etiquette for the Ballroom” (1923:15).

Yet noting historical continuity does not countermand the notion that ballroom dancing, as Bourdieu’s says of any *habitus*, is “an *acquired* system of generative schemes” (1990:55, emphasis added). This last piece is important for two reasons. First, just because an initial source or inspiration can be identified, this does not (in any way) mark current permutations as inevitable; it merely identifies historical

inspiration and relation. The ballroom of today, for example, may well trace certain characteristics and mannerisms back to the French royal courts of the fifteenth century, but this does not mean that the current form of ballroom dancing is in any way a “natural” evolution of its predecessor. Second, the social manners considered part-and-parcel of ballroom dance represent just as acquired a scheme of values and aesthetics as the dancing itself, and as the following account well illustrates.

### **The First Japanese Embassy to the USA**

In 1860 the Tokugawa shogunate sent the first in a series of embassies abroad to Washington DC, and US Secretary of State Cass held a ball in honor of the Japanese Embassy. As the following observations and descriptions of the ball’s festivities by Japanese Vice-Ambassador Muragaki make clear, the Japanese and the Americans had clearly acquired quite different schemas regarding proper and courtly activities and conduct:

Soon we were led away to another large room, its floor was covered with smooth boards. In one corner, there was a band playing something called ‘music’ on instruments that looked like Chinese lutes. Men were in uniform with epaulets and swords and women with bare shoulders were dressed in thin white clothes. They had these wide skirts around their waists. Men and women moved around the room couple by couple walking on tiptoe to the tune of the music. It was just like a number of mice running around and around. There was neither taste nor charm. It was quite amusing to watch women’s huge skirts spread wider and wider like balloons as they turned. Apparently, high officials and older women, as well as young people, are very fond of this pastime. The men and women went to the table for refreshments, then coming back for another dance. This, we were told, would continue all night. As for myself, I was astonished by the sight, and wondered whether this was a dream or reality...Admittedly, this is a nation with no order or ceremony, but it is indeed odd that the Prime Minister should invite an ambassador of another country to an event of this sort!” (Miyoshi 1979:71)

Clearly the very urbane and elegant affair intended by Secretary of State Cass—and probably experienced as such by both him and the guests from the US—

was perceived and experienced quite differently by the Japanese dignitaries in attendance and for whom the ball was being given. What was taken to be (and enjoyed as) the refined manners and elegance of ballroom dancing by those from the US was considered crass and vulgar to the Japanese as Vice-Ambassador Muragaki's additional comments make clear: "For the warriors and officials of higher ranks and their wives and daughters to mingle together and dance and enjoy themselves in self-abandon is an outrage in decorum that no self-respecting samurai would ever tolerate" (Miyoshi 1979:72).<sup>1</sup>

### **Natural, Proper, and Moral**

The most significant issue uncovered by Japanese Vice-Ambassador Muragaki's description of the ball Secretary of State Cass held in honor of the Japanese Embassy to the US is not that those from Japan and the US held different values about dancing and decorum. Of far greater significance in Muragaki's account of the ball, is the language he uses to describe what he sees. Different practices are not simply observed and recorded as being "odd" or "incomprehensible," or "different," but as "an outrage in decorum that no self-respecting samurai would ever tolerate" (Miyoshi 1979:72). Deeply embedded in these comments are culturally salient schemas about how things "ought" to be, how people "should" conduct themselves, and about right and wrong.

Perhaps of most significance then, is the realization that "people often do not experience their aesthetic beliefs as merely arbitrary and conventional; they feel that

they are natural, proper and moral” (Becker 2001:75). As the example of the first Japanese embassy to the USA makes clear, the models, norms, and values associated with ballroom dancing were not experienced as separate or disparate from other facets of the Japanese dignitaries’ cultural backgrounds and belief systems.<sup>2</sup> Becker’s point that aesthetic beliefs are typically experienced as natural, proper and moral is of particular significance when considering the importance and communicativeness of *physical culture* (Polhemus 1993:4).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is precisely in this way—via the communicativeness of physical culture—that dance factors into the construction and identification of gender (Thomas 1993),<sup>4</sup> as materials in both this chapter and Chapter 11, on embodiment, explore.

### **Values in View: Modern Media and Dance**

Dance conveys schemes and values—about both gender and other cultural material—to vast segments of society, segments which are (often) far more extensive than those conscious of such influences. Dance, after all, reaches more than just dancers; and in myriad ways. Mostly through cinematic dance performances, for example, Jean Kelly and Fred-Astaire emerged, for generations of Americans, as nearly archetypal models of “the” high-class woman and man. Movies such as *Saturday Night Fever* and *Flashdance* explicated connections between dance and sexuality. Dance, which can only be realized through bodily enactment, “often attracts attention to the dancer as self, but more often it calls attention to one of the two types of human bodies—male or female”<sup>5</sup> (Hanna 1988:xiv).

More recently 1987's *Dirty Dancing*, set in the Catskills, highlights (among other things) the link between sexuality and both social and performative dancing. 1992's *Strictly Ballroom*, set in Australia, highlights issues of partnering and romance in regards to competitive ballroom dancing. 1997's *Shall We Dance*, set in Japan, explores cross gender friendship, shadow identity, and trust as pertain to social and competitive ballroom dancing. 1998's *Dance with Me*, set in Texas, links both ballroom and salsa dancing with national identity, professional identity, sex, and sexuality. 1999's *That's the Way I Like It*, set in Hong Kong, links dance with fashion, sex appeal, and relationships. 2000's *Center Stage*, set in New York, explores dance relative to body image, personal ambition, work ethic, and relationships. 2001's *Save the Last Dance*, set in Chicago, addresses dance relative to racial identity, personal ambition, and romantic relationships.

More recently, an American remake of the original Japanese *Shall We Dance*, this retelling being based in Chicago, was released in 2004. Also released in 2004 was *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*, a retelling of the *Dirty Dancing* story. Tellingly, the scenarios and plot lines in each of these movies clearly rely upon "the potential of dance to convey sexual imagery that confirms or challenges attitudes about being a man or a woman" (Hanna 1988:xvi). Part of what makes this set of materials particularly interesting is the degree to which the messages being conveyed, via dance, are equally viable in such disparate venues as Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States.

More importantly, however, the gendered and sexual imagery and communicativeness of dance has not only been used in dance-based movies. 1992's *Scent of a Woman*, for example, uses a pivotal tango scene to convey casual and confident masculine sexuality and charisma, while 1994's mainstream action movie *Lies* also used tango to portray masculine control, dominance, and appeal. 1999's *Blast from the Past* uses a key swing dancing sequence that demonstrates masculine dance prowess as sexually appealing, while 2001's *The Wedding Planner* set in San Francisco, uses ballroom dancing as pivotal to the realization and expression of romantic and sexual attraction. There are, of course, many, many more movies that make use of dance in some ancillary capacity, but I think these examples suffice in demonstrating that, as much as ballroom dance may not have been the primary focus of mainstream media, its symbolic potency, especially in regards to gender, has not been lost on those trying to convey messages about gendered physical ease, appeal, and heterosexuality.

The current (2006) release of *Take the Lead* is based on the true life story of Pierre Dulaine, who started the American Ballroom Theatre's "Dancing Classrooms" program for New York City school children which was also documented to rave reviews in the 2005 documentary film, *Mad Hot Ballroom*. Focused on high school students, *Take the Lead* again features issues of gender and sexuality, but also highlights the manners, decorum, and self assurance aspects of ballroom dance as well. Documenting younger fifth grade school children, *Mad Hot Ballroom* still incorporates gendered themes, but primarily in the context of proper "ladies" and



“gentleman.” Personal confidence, assurance, and effort are stressed in both of these films, but no more than respectful interpersonal interaction, especially across gender lines.

Perhaps even more telling, however, is the undercurrent of partnered-dance imagery that has been present in televised advertising. This trend is particularly interesting when one considers the often exorbitant sums of money spent on developing and airing ad campaigns. Recent television commercials—for products ranging from shampoo to credit cards, from clothing to foodstuffs, and from arthritis medication to exercise equipment and diet supplements—have all invoked dance to convey messages, *to non-dancers*, about youth, energy, life style, desirability, sexuality, and appearances (to name just several of the most typical and prominent themes).

Naturally there are greater ramifications than those I have herein briefly outlined, but contemporary media clearly uses dance to convey culturally salient content; content far more pervasive than just dancing and venues for dancing. And these trends ignore the recent explosion of televised ballroom related dance competition. Whether the wildly successful *Strictly Come Dancing* in the UK, or the break out success of its US adaptation on ABC, *Dancing with the Stars*, millions of people have been tuning in to watch ballroom related programming on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the second season of *Dancing with the Stars* consistently rated within the top 10 shows in the weekly Nielson ratings, with as many as 20 million plus viewers tuning in to watch. Fox’s *So You Think You Can Dance* featured two wildly

popular ballroom contestants and one of the five primary choreographers and judges was local San Diego studio and competition owner Mary Murphy.<sup>7</sup> There was also the short lived *Ballroom Bootcamp* series on TLC, as well as the return of ballroom coverage to PBS in the form of *America's Ballroom Challenge*. Through all of these venues messages about artistry and athleticism are being disseminated through the symbolic capital of ballroom dance—messages about what counts as artistic, skill, ability, or talent for a man or a woman.

Separate from and prior to the specific elements that judges evaluate in dancers' performances, are the images and the "feel" of watching dancers in motion. It is these images and these feelings that make dancing efficacious in the modern media, that attract people to dancing, and that audience members react to as much as anything else. Indeed, masterful dance technicians are, at times, criticized by various members of the dancesport public as being too clinical or surgical in their performance; their practice being recognized but their performance being cast as overly sterile and lacking in feeling. What all of this suggests is that, just as Barthes says of wrestling (1957), ballroom and salsa dancing not only have, but in fact embody, their own mythologies. Where Barthes says that, "in the ring...wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of Justice which is at least intelligible," (1957:25), however, the ballroom and salsa versions would "read" more along the lines of: 'on the dance floor...dancers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Male

from Female, Grace and Ease from Awkwardness, and unveils the form of Gender and Beauty which is at least intelligible.’

### **The “Mythic” in Dance**

Just as Barthes says of wrestling, ballroom competitions can be seen as “the spectacle of excess” (1957:15). It is not, after all, only the thousands upon thousands of dollars in costuming, shoes, rhinestones, and feathers which are in excess though, and not even the stage-style lighting and music, but the very movements, postures, and facial expressions of the dancers as they dance. Indeed, it is in their on-floor movement and performance that the ballroom dancer often “offers excessive gestures, exploited to the limit of their meaning” (Barthes 1957:16).<sup>8</sup> To assume that it is only in motion that dancers express their dance would be a mistake, however, as dancers’ costuming—the topic of Chapter Nine—is itself communicative of the underlying “mythology.”

To again translate Barthes’ into ballroom, his observation that “as soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of their roles,” (1957:17) is equally applicable just by substituting “on the floor” for “in the ring.” Admittedly there are some differences as dancers are less sequestered from the audience in dance than in wrestling, but the underlying idea holds true: as dancers step onto the floor, their costuming already informs the audience of the dancers’ roles. This “informing,” however, is not done in a subtle way. Tuxedos, full length ballgowns, and short dresses with deeply plunging necklines, for instance, do provide overwhelmingly obvious messages about gender roles and types; just as dancers’

physiques and posture provide overwhelmingly obvious messages about physical grace and ease. There should be no doubt, then, that “each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant” (Barthes 1957:17).<sup>9</sup> While it is thus true that the dancers’ dressed body, like the wrestlers’ physique, “therefore constitutes a basic sign” (Barthes 1957:18), this is still only part of the picture.

Just as it is wrestlers who are wrestling and not their audience, so to is it dancers who are dancing and not their audience. This is important because, as much as many dance audience members dance themselves, it is not the act of dancing itself that they can participate in as spectators. Certainly their own experiences with dancing may deepen their appreciation and their ability to empathize with the feel of dancing, but their primary experience of dance, as an audience member, is not of dancing—it is of the image of dancing. As such, I find Barthes’ assertion (made in reference to wrestling) fully applicable for ballroom: “what the public wants is *the image* of passion, not passion itself” (1957:18; emphasis added). The ballroom audience wants to *see* the flirtation between partners in their cha cha, and the romance between them in their rumba; their elegance in their waltz and their passion in their tango. The point here is that it is what the dancers convey and what the audience sees *in the dancing* that matters—not the reality of flirtation, romance, elegance, or passion between dance partners. It is this dynamic “voluntary ostentation of the spectacle” (Barthes 1957:19) that audience members often watch for, notice, and care about *as* audience members; and why audience opinions and tastes may, at times, clash with the results handed down by the judges.

While any “game” involves both expressive and model characteristics (Roberts, Arth, and Bush 1959:598), competitive ballroom may well be on the extreme end regarding expressive characteristics. The same themes played up in the media are continually presented, re-presented, and reinforced along multiple channels within the competitive ballroom world. The gentleman of Ballroom (read as Standard) is marked as refined and elegant in his grooming and attire: he is meant to look like the traditional Hollywood leading man of previous generations; clean cut and shaven, simultaneously competent and slightly reserved, deliberate and measured in speech, and conduct. His dances of waltz and foxtrot match this elegance and refinement, his Viennese waltz captures the splendor and courtliness of Austrian balls, his tango reveals underlying power and passion which he can still channel into precise and methodical gestures and actions, his quickstep reveals a gaiety of spirit as well as an agile and capable physical prowess encased within his “proper” clothing. Incomplete as a ballroom dancing “unit” without his partner, however, the basic dynamic of this partnering suggests not only a compatibility but in fact a complementariness between male and female.

The Ballroom lady is marked as proper in her grooming and attire: she is meant to look like the traditional Hollywood leading lady of previous generations; radiant and composed, simultaneously able and demure, soft and gentle while also quick witted and spoken, proper and elegant in thought and action. Her ballgown is long and flowing at the same time as her back may be bared. Her hair is of a distinct shade (black, blond, or red) and never non-descript or in between (e.g. a brown). She

has long hair, but always coifed in an elaborate “updo” that reveals the line of her neck and the entirety of her face. Her ballgown may be made in a voluminous variety of fabrics, cuts, colors, and embellishments; a striking contrast from the constant white shirt and black tailsuit of her partner, and is thus shown to have a distinctiveness of personality and demeanor that her male counterpart lacks.

How these Ballroom dances get danced—that is the nature of the partnering involved—is equally telling and evocative. Arguably the most sensual of all the ballroom styles to dance, the constant body contact and thigh between thigh movements of Standard do not translate into fully visual cues except for those who can relate from a common personal experience. Elegant lines and shapes suggest a certain formality, at the same time as proper Ballroom hold prevents smoldering looks between partners<sup>10</sup> and a predominantly upright stance suggests a parallel uprightness of character and manner. The seeming ease and effortlessness of well executed ballroom appears as long, flowing, gliding strides across the floor, with physical mobility perhaps being evocative of social means as well. Finally, the basic model of “the man is the frame and the lady is the picture” is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in Standard—where the man cannot break frame and where his primarily black and white silhouette is set off by the color and movement of the woman’s dress—an image and model linking ballroom back to the chivalry that was arising in Europe at the same time as ballroom dancing was becoming en vogue with the aristocracy and in the royal courts. None of these images or evocations, however, is what is at issue in a ballroom competition.

## **Judging: What is Being Assessed and Evaluated?**

So what *are* judges actually looking at and evaluating in ballroom competitions? A large number of variables factor into ballroom judging, and many of these factors are (commonly) recognized within the ballroom world. An excellent summary of many such variables is Dan Radler's on-line article, *How a Dance Competition is Judged*,<sup>11</sup> wherein he mentions: posture, timing, line, hold, poise, togetherness, musicality and expression, presentation, power, foot and leg action, shape, lead and follow, floor craft, and intangibles. While all of these variables may be taken as "givens" among those familiar with ballroom dancing, many people newer to, or less familiar with, the ballroom scene often fail to recognize this wide-ranging variety of variables that regularly factor into judges' assessments.

At one major competition, for instance, I was sitting behind the family and friends of a competing couple who were unaware of all the dynamics assessed and involved in judges' marks. When their couple did place highly in their event, the group in front of me verbalized their feelings that the judging was "clearly rigged," attributing this bias to their couple's not being "circuit regulars." In speaking with these people, it became quite evident that they were unfamiliar with the myriad variables involved as, when I mentioned such things as foot placement and foot pressure, their response was "they [judges] look at such things?" This example, of course, succinctly speaks to the way in which "politics," (as already noted in Chapter 4) are often used as a scapegoat for unpopular or unwelcome results.

## Posture

Posture, as Radler notes, makes the dancer “look elegant and exude confidence,” also improving both “balance and control.” Posture thus helps a dancer look the part while standing still but also execute the part in a visually pleasing manner. Most people can turn around, but it is the balance, control, and poise with which they do it—all posture based—which set the dancer apart from the non-dancer.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most striking display I ever saw of this dynamic took place on my first visit to the Blackpool Dance Festival in May of 2003. Never having been to the British Open Championships before, I took the train up from London the day before the event was scheduled to start in order to get “the lay of the land.” After having squared everything away at the bed and breakfast where I was staying, I went for a walk to get my bearings, see what the area was like, have a snack, and orient myself as to the competition venue and surroundings. Nothing really stood out in my mind, as I got the sense of a somewhat quaint resort town, now past its prime.

All of that changed the very next day, however, as thousands of ballroom competitors from around the world descended on Blackpool and, literally overnight, almost everyone in the vicinity of the Winter Gardens (the facility where the competition is held) seemed to have perfect posture. Far from being a minor or hardly noted detail, the contrast—from just 24 hours earlier—was as striking as it was remarkable. Where the day before the teenagers in line in front of me at the pizza place would slouch, settling heavily down into one hip, the teenagers in front of me the next day stood straight, tall, and stretched, all while fully at ease and engaged in



playful banter with their peers while waiting to be seated. Where the day before the adults sitting on the outdoor benches and in the Italian restaurant across the street from the rear entrance to the Winter Gardens had sat with slightly rounded shoulders and mildly dropped chins, the adults seated on the outdoor benches and in the Italian restaurant the next day all sat straight and erect, with their chins parallel to the ground; not tilted down towards it. Of course not all the dancers at Blackpool had perfect posture, and of course there was internal variation as well, with some dancers clearly having much better posture than others. Yet that impression of perfect posture stood out to me that first day, especially in contrast to the regular English townspeople of the proceeding day.<sup>13</sup>

Dancers are not, of course, born with superior posture, but in the course of learning ballroom dancing the alignment of all of one's body "blocks"—head, shoulders, torso, and hips—are essential mechanical fundamentals. More than just this, however, the stacked alignment of these elements is trained, drilled, and practiced not as static posing but as a process active alignment facilitating proper ballroom dancing and movement. Dancers are trained to move around their spines as it were, using the spine as a cylindrical fulcrum *around which* to twist and turn without distorting its vertical alignment. While some particular tricks or "lines" in the Latin, Rhythm, and Smooth dances may briefly violate this principle, it is only briefly and specifically as a point of contrast to this standard. Similarly, almost all tilting and bending is, when carefully analyzed, actually movement that hinges at the dancers' knees or hips without actually disrupting spinal alignment. Perhaps no dance better

showcases dancers' posture in motion then the quickstep, as Photo 8.1, below, where even when airborne and progressing at great velocity (note, for instance, the movement of the lady's dress in each frame) proper posture is maintained throughout.



**Photo 8.1: Posture in Motion** – Professional Standard competitors Urs Geisenhainer & Agnes Kazmierczak at the 2005 Embassy Ball, Irvine, CA (left); World Professional Standard finalists Victor Fung and Anna Mikhed at the 2004 USDSC, Hollywood beach, FL (center); Professional Standard competitors Francesco Flumiani and Roberta Sun at the 2005 Embassy Ball, Irvine, CA (right)

## Timing

Seemingly one of the more straightforward elements being judged, timing matters simply because the enterprise of ballroom dancing (like most forms of dance) is about bodily movement in relation to sound, rhythm, and music. As such, movement that does not correspond to the music in the manner prescribed in and as ballroom dancing, is visually and conceptually jarring to the viewer familiar with the genre. As previously noted, how someone moves to certain music in an inherent part of what makes a rumba a rumba and differentiates it from a mambo. Or, to provide a

parallel example, the couple slow dancing to rap stands out, just as the couple dancing hip hop to a romantic ballad. Part of the aesthetic of ballroom therefore—and thereby an integral element of judgment and evaluation—is the coordination of movement to the music, the timing.

Yet it is only at first blush that timing seems to be one of the more straightforward elements to assess. While it is true that not a lot of expertise is needed to differentiate between a dancer completely off time and one who is on time, not all dancers who are “on time” manage this to the same lengths or degree. A powerful example was presented to me when I asked Frank, widely recognized as one of the top Latin coaches in the world today, why he had placed the reigning world champion third at a specific competition. Frank’s response to me was as straightforward as it was telling, “sure he danced great,” said Frank, “but he used the same rhythm the entire time, whereas Kent used all three timings.”<sup>14</sup> It should almost go without saying then, that if a world-class coach, respected worldwide, can criticize the timing used by a reigning world champion, that timing is obviously far from simple factor in judges’ assessments of dance.

One of the stranger comments I heard about timing comes from Dan, a popular coach and adjudicator, and a previous Blackpool champion, when asked his opinion about many of the music selections used at competitions in the US for American style mambo. The issue at hand was that many of the songs being played seemed to call for a break on1 whereas ballroom mambo specifies a break on2. Dan conceded that this was often true, but went on to say that this just made it a better challenge for the

couples to dance “on time” to the prescribed on2. The fact that Dan says that this is simply a better challenge is deeply telling of how myopic the focus on “correct” timing has become in ballroom—taking on autonomy separate from the musicality (as discussed below) of actually dancing *to* the music.



**Photo 8.2: Examples of “Line” in International Latin** – as danced by Professional Latin competitors Jonathan Roberts and Anna Trubenskaya (both of *Dancing with the Stars* in the US) at the 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA

## Line

Related to but different than posture, line references the stretch and extension from toe, to head and fingertips. Not just the upright carriage of posture, line includes the extension of arm and hands, and legs and feet, in the various poses produced in dancing. Is a dancer’s arm extended but their wrist and hand awkwardly and needlessly break the line of their arm? Does a dancer perform a kick, but without

pointing their toes to properly extend their leg line through the foot? These are the physically small yet visually powerful elements of line. Note, for example, how Anna points her foot to extend the line of her left leg; and how Jonathan makes a perfectly horizontal line with his arms and shoulders in the left frame of Photo 8.2, above. Similarly, the right frame captures how Anna pushes and elongates all the way through her toes in extending her body into Jonathan as he twists and compresses into a complimentary line.



**Photo 8.3: Example of “Line” in American Smooth** – as danced by US Professional Smooth finalists Hunter and Maria Johnson at the 2004 USDSC, Hollywood Beach, FL

The same dynamics are implicated in all of the different ballroom styles, as illustrated above in Photo 8.3. Note, for instance, the extension from Maria’s right

foot, on the floor, all the way through her pointed left toe, and the extension of her right arm and wrist, in opposition to her left arm connection with Hunter. Similarly, note the “X” like shaping of Hunter’s body, as he extends from his right foot through his pointed left fingers and the stretch of his body from his left toe through his right arm connection with Maria. Also note how, as a couple, Hunter and Maria generate several other sets of common lines: There is an almost seamless line starting with the point of Hunter’s left toe and extending all the way, through his connection with Maria, and out through the extension of her right arm and wrist; the curve of Maria’s and Hunter’s backs closely parallel each other; and the extension from Hunter’s right foot through his left hand provides a rough approximation of Maria’s extended leg line.

## **Hold**

Hold is the visual aspect of the dancers’ frame. The same dropped shoulders that compromise the communicative efficiency of the dancers’ frame also breaks the shape of their hold and bodily positioning relative to one another. Even with proper posture and good line, an improper hold in closed dance position disrupts the continuity of a couple’s silhouette, thus generating a less pleasant and “messier” appearance and shape.<sup>15</sup> Below, Photo 8.4 depicts four examples of proper hold, maintaining the proper frame between partners even as their combined shapes twist and tilt for added visual impact.



**Photo 8.4: Examples of good hold** – Left to right: World and Blackpool Professional Standard finalists Mirko Gozzoli & Alessia Betti at the 2005 British Open Championships, Blackpool, UK; World and Blackpool Professional Standard finalists Jonathan Wilkins & Katusha Demidova at the 2005 British Open Championships, Blackpool, UK; World and Blackpool Professional Standard finalists Jonathan Crossley & Lynn Marriner at the 2005 British Open Championships, Blackpool, UK; US Amateur finalists Max & Lesya Sinitsa at the 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA

## Poise

As used by Radler, poise is used to refer to “the stretch of the woman’s body upwards and outwards and leftwards into the man’s right arm to achieve balance and connection with his frame, as well as to project outwards to the audience.” This dynamic is clearly seen below, in the two frames of Photo 8.5. The left frame, providing a full body perspective, illustrates how Klair’s “up and out” stretch to her left fills her back into John’s right hand at the same time as it brings her ribs and torso into even greater contact and compression with John’s body, thereby enhancing their ability to move and function as a unit on the dance floor. Also in line with Radler’s formulation, note how this same action allows more projection from both dancers as they are poised to move forward.

The right frame provides a tighter framing of proper poise, and from the opposite perspective. Here we can again see how Alessandra’s “up and out” stretch, to her left, fills the frame provided by William’s right arm while generating closer contact, connection, and compression through their torsos. Here too this action allows Alessandra to project and connect with audience members in her line of sight, as her poise creates freedom and ease of connection with William’s overall frame.



**Photo 8.5: Examples of “Poise”** – Amateur Standard competitors John Selby & Klair Cristiani at the 2005 Desert Classic, Palm Desert, CA (left); World and Blackpool Professional Standard finalists William Pino & Alessandra Bucciarelli at the 2005 USDSC, Hollywood Beach, FL

From what I have seen in the ballroom world, however, I think that there is also a broader understanding and usage—in practice even if not in formalized



definition—of poise, that concerns a certain bearing, calmness, and composure in all situations and at all times. One of the more prominent and common examples that comes to mind concerns collisions on the competition floor. Causing a collision (or even not avoiding an easily avoidable one) is an issue of floorcraft which is a separate variable and one that I shall return to shortly.

But what of the person who is collided with through no fault of their own. The fact that they were involved in this collision does not, in itself, effect them, but how they handle themselves in response to such a collision can matter quite greatly. A couple that gets flustered and lets the collision disrupt their performance exhibits poor poise whereas the competitor who picks up as if nothing had happened to them exhibits excellent poise. All other factors being equal in the dancing of these two couples, the couple demonstrating the better poise has the edge in the judges' eyes, demonstrating better command of themselves and their dancing.

Even when the competing itself is over, however, poise can still factor into a dancer's long term success as the case of amateur competitor Francis makes all too clear. When Francis was announced in second place at a national competition she had expected to win, she did little to hide her disgust with the judges' results, either as she was walking across the floor to accept her position or standing in the line up as he runner up. Her lack of poise in this situation has cost Francis greatly as, according to both a number of judges as well as several of her competitive peers, she has consistently been placed lower than her dancing would seem to merit.



**Photo 8.6: Togetherness** – World and Blackpool Amateur finalists Eugene Katsevman & Maria Manusova at the 2005 Embassy Ball, Irvine, CA (left); World Professional Standard finalists Victor Fung and Anna Mikhed at the 2004 USDSC, Hollywood beach, FL (center); Professional Rhythm competitors Hayk Arshakian & Albina Basharian at the 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA (right)

## Togetherness

Togetherness refers to the seamless integration of movement, action, focus, and feeling between partners. More than just the lack of gapping in the connection between leader and follower, togetherness also refers to partners' attention to and focus on each other. Even dancing with perfect timing and perfect technique, partners can still look like two great dancers dancing the same routines without looking like a partnership; they can look like exceptional dancers dancing next to each other without really looking like a couple. The thousands of hours of floor time that many couples invest in lessons and practices are as much about developing togetherness then, as they are about the other facets of dance factoring into judges' evaluations.

Since togetherness really takes place in the interaction between partners, it is not all that amenable to photographic illustration. That being said, I think the three frames of Photo 8.6, above, at least suggest something of the dynamic involved. At first blush the non-dancer might think “but none of them are even looking at each other!” But the more seasoned ballroom insider will inevitably be seeing something quite different in these same frames. In each case there is an almost palpable unity and melding of the dancers’ actions and movements; and there is a mutual focus and feeling to their dancing. In looking at each dancer there is not only a shared focus with their partner, however, but a supreme awareness of their partner—and not only as their partner but also in relation to themselves as a partnership; a mutually constituted unit of ballroom dancing.

### **Musicality and Expression**

More than just timing (upon which it is built), musicality involves characterizing the music through dance. Just as not all pop songs with the same beat structure sound the same or evoke the same feeling and mood, so too with ballroom music. No matter how technically perfect, the dancer who dances their rumba, or their foxtrot, in exactly the same way, no matter the song, fails to demonstrate musicality. While musicality starts with choreography that matches musical phrasings, it goes much further than this, playing on the particular flavor and accents of any given piece of music. Closely related to such musicality is expression, the ability of a dancer to use their body, in conjunction with the music, in a manner that accentuates the character of each dance. Radler provides the following three examples of such musicality and

expression: “for instance, in foxtrot, the stealing of time from one step to allow another to hover; or a quick speed of turn in an otherwise slow rumba; or the snap of a head to suddenly freeze and then melt into slowness in tango.”

## Presentation



**Photo 8.7: Fun on the Floor/Presentation in Action** – US Professional Smooth finalists Steven Dougherty and Eulia Baranovsky at the 2004 USDSC, Hollywood beach, FL

Presentation involves the flavor of the image which competitors project, through their dancing, to audience members and judges alike. Do the competitors make their dance look effortless or difficult? Do they make it look like they enjoy dancing? Do they look like they are comfortable and confident on the dance floor? These are the types of elements—that although far too many and too difficult to specifically delineate—that an observer can still easily recognize and evaluate in a competitor’s dancing.

By way of example, the four frames of Steven and Eulia in Photo 8.7 all come from the 2004 US Professional National Smooth Championship. The sheer ease, enjoyment, joy, and exuberance they seem to be expressing, for instance, gives no hint that this—their national title competition—was being held in a smaller ballroom and

on a smaller floor than had been intended; that the hotel had just reopened after hurricane Frances (and with hurricane Ivan already on the way) and, as a result, that the main stadium and competition floor had not yet been put in place and set up.

While Steven and Eulia provide an excellent example of the skills and characteristics of top notch presentation, I want to provide two other sets of examples: one taken from Rhythm and Latin; and the other from Smooth and Standard. I would like to suggest that these extended materials are particularly important in any discussion of dance aesthetics—and surely of ballroom aesthetics—as it is through their presentation that other values and aesthetics are portrayed.



**Photo 8.8: Examples of “Presentation” in Rhythm & Latin** – Left to right: 11-time, undefeated US Rhythm Champions Bob Powers and Julia Gorchakova at the 2004 USDSC, Hollywood beach, CA; Professional US Rhythm finalists Felipe & Carolina Telona at the 2003 Can-Am Dancesport Gala, Toronto, Canada;; Professional Latin competitors Thomas & Isabella Lewandowski at the 2005 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA

The four frames in Photo 8.8, above, all demonstrate performance in the Rhythm and Latin dances along these same, interrelated channels as, in each case, the dancers’ smiles and expressions leave little doubt as to their own enthusiasm and enjoyment. Additionally, each couple makes their dancing look as effortless as it is enjoyable—the key to a convincing performance as laborious execution is antithetical

to the fundamental image and aesthetics of ballroom dance. The same effortlessness of execution coupled with the ease and enjoyment of movement and expression are as applicable and important to presentation in Smooth and Standard dancing, and as the four frames of Photo 8.9, below, all show.

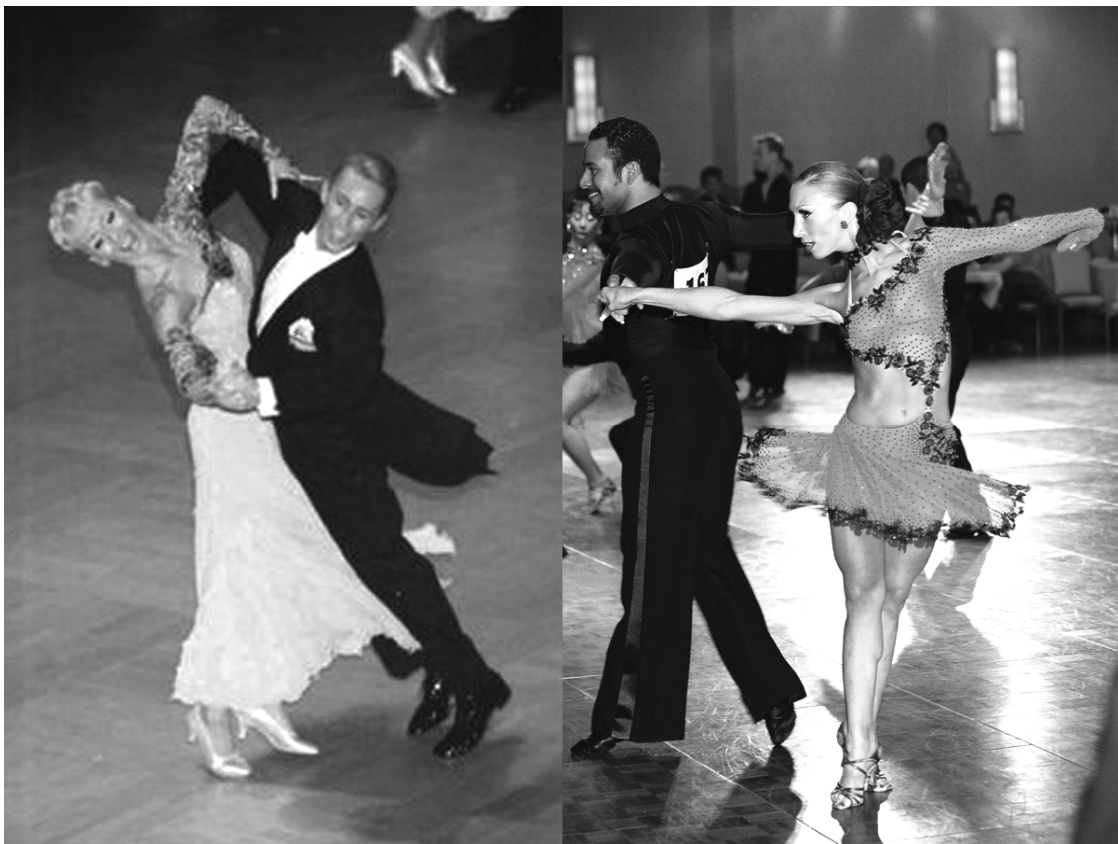


**Photo 8.9: Examples of “Presentation” in Smooth & Standard** – Left to right: US Professional Smooth finalists Mazen Hamza & Irina Sarukhanyan at the 2005 Yankee Classic, Boston, MA; Blackpool Professional Standard champions Timothy Howson & Joanne Bolton at the 2005 British Open Championships, Blackpool, UK; US Professional Smooth finalists Hunter & Maria Johnson at the 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA; US Professional Smooth Rising Star champions Tony Schepler & JT Damalas at the 2004 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA

## Power

Power is the energy *in* a dancer’s movement, not the energy expended in executing that movement. Most obvious as speed, power also shows up in longer strides in the moving dances. Far from muscular exertion, however, power is primarily built through proper technique. To illustrate the proper harnessing and channeling of energy Radler provides the following example by way of illustration: “powerful movement is an asset in waltz or foxtrot, but only if it is channeled into the correct swing of the body, and not just by taking big steps.” The left frame of Photo 8.10

shows exactly the dynamic that Radler has in mind, as it is clearly the swing of Chris and Hazel's bodies that are generating their abundantly evident power; not their steps—as the side by side positioning of each of their feet makes abundantly clear. The right frame of Photo 8.10 provides a complimentary example from the Rhythm/Latin dances, illustrating the power of a properly executed New Yorker (the name of the action depicted here), as the degree of torque and snap used by Carolina gets visibly translated into the extreme spin and flare of her costume's skirt.



**Photo 8.10: Power in Action** – World and Blackpool Professional Standard champions Christopher Hawkins & Hazel Newberry at the 2003 British Open Championships, Blackpool, UK (left); Professional US Rhythm finalists Felipe & Carolina Telona at the 2004 Yankee Classic, Boston, MA

## Foot and Leg Action

Foot and leg action are, perhaps, among the most opaque judging criteria to the non-dancer or the just beginning dancers. The untrained eye may decide that a certain dancer's leg movements look "better" to them, but often cannot pinpoint how or why. The knowledgeable dancer, however, quickly takes note of: turned out or parallel foot placements; use of the inside edge of the foot; pointing the foot onto the outside edge, taking toe leads in the latin and rhythm dances but heel leads in the standard and smooth dances; proper use of ankle rise; and the proper articulation of toes, ankles, knees, and hips. Although really best appreciated in the dynamic of movement, the quality of Ieveta's foot and leg use and action are still evident in the three frames of Photo 8.11—particularly in the visible foot pressure she maintains into the floor even through her fully flexed foot.

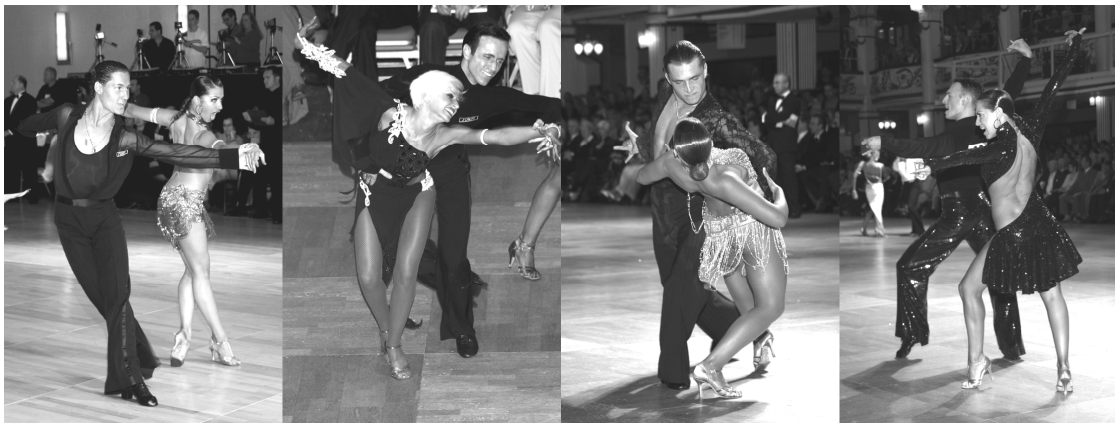


**Photo 8.11: Foot Use** – World Professional 10-Dance finalists Gherman Mustuc & Ieveta Lukosute practicing their Latin routines at the 2005 USDSC, Hollywood beach, FL



## Shape

Shape is actually a combination of two elements. First, shape is concerned with the visual contours characteristic of each dance. Amateur dancer Spratt 74, for instance, comments on being able to look at ballroom photos online, and “tell right away what dance they were trying to do by the shape of their arms and legs.” Radler provides a more specific example of exactly this element, asking: “in Paso Doble does the man create the visual appearance of maneuvering his cape? Does the lady simulate the billowing flow of the cape through space?” The other aspect of shape concerns the functional contouring of the dancers’ bodies needed to facilitate proper dancing. Again providing a specific example, Radler provides an illustrative question, asking: “in foxtrot, does the man use the appropriate shape on outside partner steps to enable body contact to be maintained?”



**Photo 8.12: Examples of Latin “Shape”** – From left to right: Valentin Chmerkovsky and Valeriya Kozharinova dancing the most recognizable cha cha figure, the “New Yorker,” at the 2005 Yankee Classic, Boston, MA; Paul Richardson and Olga Rodinova dancing a “Samba Roll” in shadow position at the 2005 British Open, Blackpool, UK; Evgeniy Smagin and Rachel Heron dancing the matador inspired shaping of the Paso Doble at the 2005 British Open, Blackpool, UK; Eugene Katsevman and Maria Manusova demonstrating the flamenco inspired elements of the Paso Doble at the 2005 British Open, Blackpool, UK

The four frames of Photo 8.12 show some of the classic shapes and shaping of the Latin dances. Where the ballroom outsider might only see a pleasing line (or not, depending on their personal tastes), the briefest glimpse of each of these frames is enough for the ballroom insider to know that these couples are dancing Cha Cha, Samba, Paso Doble, and Paso Doble respectively. And, inline with Radler's second use of "shape," take note of the second frame from the left. It is Paul's use of appropriate shape that invites and allows Olga to maintain body contact, without stepping on or into him, as they both progress back toward their right sides while in rotation towards their left sides.

### **Lead and Follow**

Proper leading and following is based on clear communication being provided by the leader at the appropriate time, and responsive execution on the part of the follower. More specifically, how is the information being provided by the leader and how is it being received by the follower. As Radler asks, is it the leader's body that is requesting certain actions from the follower, or is the leader only using hands and arms in attempting to communicate what is wanted? Similarly, is the follower sensitive and responsive to the leader's movements and suggestions, or is extra assistance required of the leader?

### **Floorcraft**

Floorcraft is a couple's ability to effectively use the floor and execute their dancing in traffic (i.e. among other dancers). As Radler relates, proper floorcraft is

demonstrated both in the ability to avoid collisions but also in the ability to continue the flow of one's dance even when blocked by other couples. I do, however, find Radler's suggestion that good floorcraft demonstrates choreographic command to be a misleading formulation. Many lower level competitors, for example, compete without set choreography, simply leading and following their limited repertoire of syllabus figures. And, in a related vein, because social ballroom dances almost always involve larger numbers of couples on the floor and of more disparate levels, floorcraft can be all the more important in these situations. Similarly, whether it is in salsa, swing, or Argentine tango—where the overwhelming majority of dancing is social lead and follow—floorcraft is critical. What Radler does suggest, and which in some ways actually proves my point for me, is that floorcraft demonstrates “the ability of the man to choose and lead figures extrinsic to their usual work when the necessity presents itself.”

### **Intangibles**

In describing the last of his variables, “intangibles,” Radler includes “basically whether they look like ‘dancers’.” While not specified in Radler's article, it is important to realize that such a variable does not come into play only after the dancers have started dancing. At the very least judges start to evaluate the couples as soon as they step onto the floor. Even more common, judges will take notice when a dancer nears or lines up in the on deck area, and it would be far from uncommon or unlikely that a judge would start to make such an assessment as soon as a competitor enters the ballroom altogether. Is a dancer slovenly sitting at their table? Are they late to the

floor because they did not have their shoes on yet? Does a dancer seem disorganized as they are getting ready? Is a given dancer fighting with their partner as they rehearse on the side? Any of these things already start to influence a judge's assessment, suggesting a lack of professionalism, confidence, and competence.

A contrasting image can be made by a dancer who projects a calm, competent, and confident demeanor, even before taking the floor; and this too can be achieved in a number of ways. Perhaps the dancer is brushing their shoes, making last minute grooming adjustments, stretching, or quietly rehearsing in a very workman like manner? Perhaps they are conversing with fellow competitors in a very (at least seemingly) relaxed manner? Perhaps the dancer is standing with their partner, heads down, in quiet meditation or prayer? Good or bad, the judges are likely to start forming an opinion of the dancers that will soon be taking the floor.

None of this means that judges have (necessarily) made any decisions yet. But has a couple caught the judges' attention already? If so, in what manner? Especially with multiple couples on the floor, all of which need to be assessed in a brief span of time, how is a judge likely to proceed? In earlier rounds there may not be enough time to assess the actual dancing of everyone on the floor. But this is not what earlier rounds are really about. Earlier rounds ask for judges to recall those dancers who they want to see advanced into the next round. Good dancing can, certainly, persuade the judge. But it is not always this clear cut or simple. Perhaps there are too many couples on the floor to assess in the time given? Or perhaps a couple is positioned in such a manner that it is easy to lose track of them? This is where having caught a judge's

attention, in a positive manner, can work to a dancers' advantage. Whether the judge actively looks for them on the floor or "passes" them onto the next round—where a closer look can supposedly be taken—this is where a positive pre-dance impression can pay telling dividends.

## **Visibility**

One related element—implicit in but also separate from other variable already mentioned—is that of visibility. A dancer will not (indeed, cannot) be marked if they go unnoticed. This reality is as significant as it is simple, driving much of the competitive dancers' conduct. Just some of the activities that can be driven by the importance of visibility include taking lessons from different instructors, costuming and choreography choices, and frequency of competition. As noted above, however, visibility is not just static—type also plays an important role. Kind, as much as quantity, comes into play. It is important not simply to make an impression but to make the right kind of impression. The issue thus becomes not just "is a dancer visible," but "in what way is a dancer visible?"

Take the dancer Rob, a highly visible competitor who, in addition to competing at many events, also brings a several students, each with multiple entries, to most of these competitions. Beyond just being visible, Rob's visibility is "positively" derived, as he is seen as contributing to the larger system. And this dynamic becomes all the more significant when the overlap between event organizers and judges is taken into account. Perhaps Rob brought a number of paying students to Steve's competition and then, a few months later, Steve is judging Rob at Fred's event. In the very first

place, Rob is likely to be noticed by Steve, being that much more unlikely to be overlooked on the floor despite any issues with crowding or floor positioning. Beyond even this, and all other factors being equal, Steve is likely to assess Rob's dancing in a different light than the dancing of someone they have never seen before. What of another judge who recognizes both Rob and all the other couples on the floor? What of yet another judge who recognizes none of the couples? What of a judge who recognizes everyone except Rob? Clearly these different judges will vary regarding the very light by which they see the couples on the floor...and the same couples are not the same couples after all when viewed from these different frames of reference.

Yet visibility is not merely a binary variable—it is not simply a matter of being visible or not. What, if instead of having visibility from bringing students to numerous competitions, Rob was recognized for visibly resenting his placements at a previous competition? Would this not be likely to shift Steve's predisposition, as a judge, to Rob? And what of judges who knew every other couple on the floor, or no other couples? What if Steve had been one of the judges marking Rob at this previous event or, even if not, maybe Steve just saw Rob's reaction to results from other judges? What if Steve was, in fact, one of the judges who placed Rob in that position? While judges can differ widely in their actual judgments they are also positioned—structurally—not to appreciate visible objections to judging decisions. How then is a judge likely to view a competitor whose visibility comes from displays objecting to judges' decisions? While visibility is quite far from being *the* deciding issue in ballroom competitions, neither should its importance be underestimated.

These examples are, of course, far from comprehensive, as numerous other causes and consequences of visibility abound. What of the competitor who, standing in the on deck area, takes a swig of water between rounds, swishes it around their mouth, and then spits it out on the ground? What if this happens right in front of some of ballroom's biggest benefactors? What type of impression is this likely to engender in any judge who sees such an action? What impression is such an action likely to engender in the event organizer, likely to be a judge (and one whom the competitor will continue to encounter within the competitive circuit) themselves? Beyond direct observation, however, it is important to realize that the ballroom scene—at whatever level one may focus—is largely a self-contained system and, as such, it is problematic to assume that a judge who did not see the water-spitting incident will, necessarily, be uninfluenced by this behavior. Whether in casual conversation or specific comment—and whether from a fellow judge, a student, one of the patrons, or just a random bystander—it is far from unlikely that a given judge might hear of such an incident.

### **Fitness**

Fitness as another illustrative example of how visibility and judgment within the relatively circumscribed dance community are often played out. Take the case of Kris, whom I sat down to have bite with at the 2002 USDSC. Kris was afraid to take advantage of the desert buffet due to the number of judges who might see. This scenario is far from atypical as many judges regularly do take notice of such things. Now certainly judges do not always notice such things, but this is far different from suggesting that such behaviors escape the scope of judges' notice. In actuality, many

people (other than judges) may notice; and this may end up as active gristle for the ballroom gossip mill. And such information is, in fact, exactly the type of intangible that can enter into judges' assessments. Yet such information also lacks universal applicability as well.

A consistently fit and trim competitor, who always dances a clean, inoffensive routine, can be seen living on candy and donuts to no ill effect. An inconsistent performer, however, or one who is even a shade out of shape, lacks such leeway. None of this is to suggest that diet, itself, is what judges are judging but, rather, that all other factors being considered balanced, the poorer diet may be construed as being indicative of a less serious or less committed dancer, also off their peak fitness or with comparable inconsistencies in their performance.

A similar example of benefit of the doubt—or lack thereof as the case may be—comes from Betty. After giving birth to her son, the judges accepted her still recovering figure with little issue when she first returned to the competition floor. When she started to put a little weight back on, however, after originally dropping her extra maternity weight, judges took notice. More than one judge commented that there was no way she could be carrying that extra weight if she was practicing “as much as she should be.” The issue then was not the weight, per se, but, rather, what it seemed to implicate regarding her seriousness as a competitor—the weight, in these judges eyes, would have taken care of itself if Betty was practicing, “as much as she *should* be.” Clearly these judges have a standard in mind, and perceive Betty to fall short of it.



This, in turn, serves as conceptual background—one of judging’s intangibles—that shade the assessments (at least by some) by which Betty’s dancing was then judged.

Other less than obvious factors have been described to me as “being there,” “being young,” and “producing”—all three being items which, for instance, were mentioned to me by Mark, a past world champion, when I asked his opinion about the results of an event we had seen earlier that night. Also, often closely aligned to “being young” are other variables such as being new, inertia, and paying one’s dues. So what are each of these, how are they assessed, and how do they play themselves out in the judging process?

### **Being There**

The first, and most ephemeral of the three, is “being there.” Being there is far from a quantifiable item, but this does not make it any less real, or obvious, to those familiar with dance. It is about being “in the moment,” about being aware of and reacting to everything around you—not in a technical sense, which would fall under the purview of floorcraft but, rather, concerning emotion, attention, and intention. Is the dancer *in* their actions, *in* their body, *in* the tips of their toes to the tips of their fingers? Or, instead, are their actions merely executed by rote, by habit? Years of practice are needed to make dancing look effortless, to make one’s routines second nature—something that one dances through rather than needing to concentrate on. Yet there remains a distinct and salient difference between dancing one’s routines and dancing by routine—of dancing in the moment instead of routinely.

Some of the elements that can differentiate “being there” and dancing in the moment include various vocalizations and expressions. As one judge related to me, “I was on a lesson with a couple last week and, at one point, stopped to ask the male in the couple if he was gay. He said he wasn’t to which I replied, ‘Well I am, so why were you always winking at me [in your routine]?’” The young man in question had not been reacting to his environment, nor had he been actively thinking about or processing his actions; they had become mere habit. This brief exchange helps highlight the qualitative difference between this competitors’ wink and the more spontaneous wink, done in the moment, where the competitor actively realizes and engages the person in front of them at the edge of the competition floor.

The more familiar one becomes with any form of movement the more readily one can distinguish between the authenticity of being there, in the moment, versus staid, unaffected execution; and such differences in execution can be seen in competition, in practice, and in social dancing. Which dancers, for instance, are dancing *with* their partners and not merely “with” them? For some judges this assessment is already narrowed down based on choreography – which couples are actually connected and dancing together and which ones have more side-by-side choreography? But even this is not simply a binary attribution. Some couple may have side by side or separated choreography yet clearly be looking at and/or moving in relation to each other while the next couple may have almost identical choreography but clearly be dancing to their routines instead of to each other. This is, of course, a more gross level of “being there,” but it is part of the picture; and this same dynamic

shows up in social dancing when dancers get caught up in executing their patterns or styling over dancing *with* their partner.

Although focusing on one's partner ramifies differently in social and competitive situations, and although dancing with your partner is only part of "being there," this is a dynamic that is regularly assessed and judged in competition. A social dancer may pass up a partner saying, "they're a good dancer, but I never feel like their dancing *with* me," while a judge may feel like the connection between partners is lacking and shows them to be dancing next to each other rather than together and, especially given the emphasis typically placed on partnering, this element is often a telling one.

Whether about choreography or sufficient attention to, and connection with, one's partner, these are just part of the picture regarding "being there." The same execution that may be clean, sharp, and technically sound may also come across as cold, clinical, unemotional, detached, undemonstrative, or impassive. So, while a given judge may be impressed with the technique involved and exhibited by a given dancer or couple they may also find the same portrayal unconvincing or un-engaging for its seeming detachment, its failure to "be there."

## **Being Young**

In contrast to "being there," "being young" is a rather straightforward variable. At the same time, however, its significance varies. First let me unpack the comment made to me that the youth of the competitors in question contributed to their placement. What was this about? In this case, what was meant was that this couple

was on their way “up” – that they were still young and still rapidly improving. While not a defining variable, this seems to be one of the “all other factors being equal” type issues. If two couples are otherwise relatively equal, the younger couple, still on their way up, seems to be rewarded—almost as an encouraging pat on the back, extorting them onward and upward.

While very real in its own right, the ‘encouragement of youth effect’ is far from comprehensive. There are, for instance, several adult age divisions worldwide for amateurs, as well as similar divisions for pro-am dancers in North America. In each of these instances “being young” does not seem to be a factor. Similarly, in the upper ranks and towards the end of ones career, the often-converse dynamic of having put in ones dues seems to rise in prominence—a dynamic I will expand upon shortly. Indeed, while the dynamic of encouraging youth seems to be in place and in play, alternative dynamics also seem to factor into considerations of age: (1) being “new,” (2) inertia, and (3) paying one’s dues.

### **Being New**

Being “new” is very much in line with being young. Just as the young couple will often draw otherwise balanced marks as a means of support and encouragement, so to may the “new” couple. Such newness, however, must be balanced against proving one’s worth. The new couple needs to show that they are “for real,” that they are serious about working together, and that they will “produce.” When all of these other qualities are in place, however, being new can work in one’s favor. The new couple, like the young one, is seen as representing a movement towards the future and,

if they “produce”—a concept to which I shall shortly return—are likely to be supported on their way, both with encouraged and with marks.

## **Inertia**

Support for the new and the young plays into an inertial dynamic often-evidenced in competitive dance. As one succeeds (i.e. places well) one is seen—by competitors, audience, and spectators alike—as being one who succeeds. And, like youth or newness, past success is likely to weigh into consideration when other factors are in relative balance. This tendency has a number of ramifications. Those who have had success at any given level of competition, for instance, tend to meet with a similar modicum of success at the next level as well. Much of such continuing success is, of course, a matter of earned progression. At the same time, however, recognition as a successful competitor—even if at a different level—is often an important hedge. This inertial effect also tends to interdigitate with that of youth; being the new kid on the block, at a given level, may mean that one has inertia from earlier levels at the same time as one is seen as a fresh young face at a new level.

Similarly, and again tying into the youth dynamic, success at lower age brackets and competitive divisions often correspond to future successes at higher levels. Much of this is, of course, merely natural progression; those who are further ahead earlier on are naturally quite likely to be further ahead later on. At the same time, however, there is also an inertial element at work, almost an expectation factor; those who succeeded earlier on are expected to succeed later on—meaning that they enter consecutive levels being seen as successful competitors.

At a lower level of analysis, event selection—which competitions will be entered and traveled to—is another arena often ramified by inertial success. While larger championships are the places “to be seen” they are, by the same token, the easiest places to get lost in the shuffle, both on and off the floor, amongst all the other couples that are also there to be seen. As such, smaller events serve as ideal venues for couples to make their (at least initial) mark; to *actually* be seen. Given the circumscribed nature of the competitive dance world many of the judges who get to see competitors at these smaller events are also the same judges at the larger venues. What this means is that choosing a smaller event provides favorable circumstances to “show up” so that, when later stepping into the larger arena, one is already cast as a successful competitor in the eyes of those judges thereby already familiar with them.

It is important to note, however, that many, many dancers are not as deliberate as this implies, nor are they necessarily concerned with such (potentially) political maneuvering. What this means is that for many dancers—perhaps most—they enjoy dancing and competition. Those who do not, after all, rarely compete. The vast majority of dancers will use other criteria for selecting the events they attend; price, location, and scheduling just being a few of the more common factors typically involved in such decisions. But this does not mean that there are not, also, many dancers aware of such event selection related dynamics nor that no dancers proactively think through, strategize, and utilize such factors to their own ends. Inertia management, if not widespread, is still far from being deviant.

Finally, it is worth noting that inertia is not only an aid to continuing success—it is also an obstacle that, at times, can prove too much to overcome. If one has a history of poor results then even an excellent showing is often not enough to garner corresponding results. Just as a boxer, challenging for the championship belt, is said to need to demonstrate a *convincing* win to unseat a reigning champion, so too in competitive dance. Dancing better, no matter numerous claims to the contrary, is not always enough; at least not in the short term. The vast majority of the world-class dancers I interviewed contend that better dancing will prevail “*in the long run,*” but were also highly cognizant of the difficulties associated with shaking up the standing order. Indeed, many of them saw this as a just and important aspect of paying one’s dues.

### **Paying One’s Dues**

Running largely inversely to “being new” is “paying one’s dues.” In its most basic form, the notion here is that between otherwise equivalent competitors a demonstrated pattern of effort is rewarded. A trend that, as already mentioned, runs counter to that of “being new.” In the one instance something fresh is provided encouragement whereas in the other it is a history of effort that is being rewarded. As confusing and contradictory as these factors may be, the fact is that both are in play and both are recruited and utilized by different judges, in different times, situations, and circumstances.

Despite the entire range of both explicit and implicit variables involved in judging, in many cases a judges’ decision is quite clear-cut; such as when presented

with dancers demonstrating drastic differences in ability and skill. It is when no such drastic distinction is in play that most of the distinctions I am highlighting here start to enter into the picture. And, from this perspective, it is important to realize that no judging criteria or variables operate in a vacuum. Even clear of other external stimuli, the plethora of facets through which judging is refracted provides a complex and often intertwined perspective as the factors of “being new,” “inertia,” and “paying one’s dues” well demonstrate. These three elements, for instance, may be integrated as follows: success at a lower level may be considered as “paying one’s dues” and provide “inertia” as being a successful competitor, at the same time as one is considered “new” at a higher level (or age bracket) of competition.

This example is, of course, only one possible permutation wherein different dynamics are brought to bare. Other permutations may be more contradictory, may recruit more variables, or, alternatively, may be entirely straightforward. In any given contest, different competitors will display and demonstrate different arrangements of such variables that may be recruited on their behalf by the judges in question. What is at issue here is not the exact combination of variables that contribute to a given case but, rather, the fields of salience that *may* be recruited in any given situation.

A final point worth making is that “paying one’s dues” actually functions along two different, although sometimes overlapping, lines. In its relatively straightforward sense, the vast majority of judges have been successful competitors themselves so appreciate, and therefore reward, continuing effort. Aside from this relatively straightforward dynamic, however, paying one’s dues can also be taken



quite literally—*paying* one’s dues. Judges are, themselves, coaches and, quite often, also event organizers; and their interrelated roles, as judges/coaches/organizers, are how they make a living. It is not surprising then that they quickly come to recognize those competitors who are regularly *paying* their dues into the system.

## **Producing**

“Producing” is, perhaps, the most ineffable of the “intangible” variables involved in judging. At the least complex level producing has to do with consistency. Can the judge count on you to “produce” a certain quality of dancing? A judge may, after all, only have several seconds to evaluate a given couple, especially in earlier rounds. One ramification of this is that if a couple is “known” to reliably produce a certain caliber and style of dancing they will be readily credited with producing that level of dancing and as such, if a judge happens to glance over during a rough element it is assumed to be the exception rather than taken as that couple’s norm. Obviously this element of producing—reliability based benefit-of-the-doubt—is a fickle one as a couple can just as easily be passed over if they are “known” not to produce.

Aside from just being reliable, however, “producing” also represents a nexus of all of the other variables already mentioned. Since a couple can be reliable yet far from impressive, producing also involves being able to be counted on to be impressive (in whatever manner and level is appropriate)—it is consistently showing up, presenting the image of excellence, and then living up to it. If a judge “knows” that you will produce he or she inevitably looks at you as someone who produces.

## **Making Judgments**

As the extensive list of both explicit and tacit judging criteria makes clear then, “judging involves more than individual taste, more than personal opinion” (Vermey 1994:41). Long before judges need to evaluate a competitor’s dancing, they have to know about all of the elements they are looking for. Naturally some people have a “good eye” for dancing and, even without any background, can pick the couple who will win and even choose what element sets them apart. By and large, however, this is far from the case. Where the newcomer may be impressed by pure speed or strings of tricks, the more experienced and informed observer looks to the overall quality of movement, the characterization of each dance, and the partnering taking place. Thus, before a judge can evaluate a couple’s dancing, they should be knowledgeable about what it is they should be looking at;<sup>16</sup> and this is why the judging exam is really a teaching exam, one that requires knowledge of the different figures and the prescribed techniques appropriate to each dance.

Even in the face of appropriate background and training, however, judges may have as few as six seconds to look at each couple before deciding whether or not to recall them to the next round. Because it is impossible to analyze and assess all of the judging variables in such a short amount of time, “judges will mostly observe and consider parts of the product, except of course when competitors are known to them, and this begs the question of whether judges can be so objective as to ignore former knowledge and not be influenced by it” (Vermey 1994:19). As Vermey goes on to state:

The only way to overcome this problem would be to insist that judges were not teachers and were external to the training process. But until such a move is taken, the objectivity of judges' decisions will be in question, and thorough and fair assessment will not be possible. The 'politics' of the competitive dance situation will continue to thrive and, in doing so, feed the competitive element even more.<sup>17</sup> (Vermey 1994: 19)

So why, you might ask, is the issue of actually making judgments a section here, in a chapter on aesthetics, instead of in the chapter dealing with politics? In the first place, what is being judged in ballroom is aesthetic; judging is about the evaluation of aesthetic values “dressed up” in, and as, technical merit and proficiency. There is nothing inherently better about a particular style of dance or a particular manner of execution. It is true that some dancing may objectively be more fluid than others, but to count as better dancing requires that value be placed on fluidity (or whatever other characteristic one chooses to focus on). Coming from a social salsa background, for instance, the first time I saw competitive ballroom mambo it struck me as nothing but an overly physical, rough, choppy salsa. The frame of reference for my evaluation, however, was based on salsa aesthetics, not ballroom ones. Now, several years later, and with far more experience and exposure to ballroom, I can now see clean, clear timing where before I only saw choppiness to me.

Alternatively worded, what counts as good ballroom mambo makes poor club salsa, just as what counts as good club salsa makes poor ballroom mambo. This is not because mambo really *is* better in a ballroom or because salsa really *is* better in a club, but because what counts as good dancing is different in each *social* setting, “what is taken, in any world of art, to be the quintessential artistic act, the act whose performance marks one as an artist, is a matter of consensual definition” (Becker 2001:69). What counts as artistic and aesthetically pleasing to a salsa dancer may not

to a ballroom dancer (and vice versa), because, in each—as in any art world<sup>18</sup>—“the possibility of artistic experience arises from the existence of a body of conventions that artists and audiences can refer to in making sense of the work” (Becker 2001:72). It is exactly such discrepancies in assessing what counts as art that lead Olga, a professional Blackpool champion, to speculate about the value of institutionalization. International standard, she contends, is so “set” that judges are able to compare “like versus like,” which limits the “gray zone.” As Olga goes on to point out, this is a very different situation from international Latin where judges are, in essence, being asked and required to compare “apples versus oranges.” It is this situation in Latin Olga says which leaves the “gray zone” wide open for biases—both personal and political.

### **But When Does the Judging Begin?**

As just noted above, in addition to the subjective nature of the myriad criteria involved in ballroom judging, familiarity compounds the difficulty of providing a truly objective evaluation. As Vermey, himself a world-class ballroom coach, adjudicator, and dance scholar points out, “judges know and are familiar with the dance programmes of professional dancers [and elite amateurs] through television appearances, coaching, and watching and judging competitions. *So when does the judging begin?*” (1994:42; emphasis added). There is no easy answer to this question in the competitive ballroom world. Aside from the opportunities for judges to watch and assess competitors’ routines noted by Vermey, there is also a general understanding that, from the time one takes the floor, judging has begun. The general

idea here is that entering the floor and presenting one's self as a champion is part of the game too. All well and good, except that many judges and competitors alike note, and comment, that seeing a couple fighting backstage or in the hallway while warming up also factors into judges' impressions. The nebulousness of when and where judging starts and stops has several ramifications for the ballroom world; ramifications that are only compounded by the public nature of ballroom life.

### **Ballroom's Public Nature: Visibility Bites Back**

As is true with most social dynamics, intentional actions often have interesting if unintended consequences. Take the case of the competitor visibly displeased with their competition results. Or, more specifically, take the case of judges displeased with the display of that competitor's displeasure. While this competitor has visibility in the eyes of these judges, it is not of a positive nature and, as mentioned above, is likely to constitute one of the "intangibles" which factor into this judges future assessments of this competitor. So this competitor is unlikely to ever receive "benefit of the doubt" or "all other factors being equal" type decisions, even from the most fair minded of judges. But what is the outcome of such a bias? This competitor will no longer receive the same marks as an equally meritorious peer and this discrepancy is the very fissure within which unintended outcomes take seed. Some competitors will understand their own culpability regarding their newfound difficulty getting marks and while others will not. Some competitors will eventually become dejected from not receiving the marks they feel they have earned and eventually stop competing. Other competitors

will keep going after their goal with an ever-increasing intensity, being forced to higher and higher levels of excellence to overcome the bias against them. So, while a judge may just intend to signal their disapproval of what they consider to be a competitor's bad manners, any such action may also give rise to ultimate consequences of a far different nature.

Despite various behaviors and examples to the contrary, however, most dancers are typically quite aware of public positioning and visibility—both their own and others. Perhaps the most important dynamic of this positioning is the role it plays in social gravity (see Chapter Five). Another element of public positioning and visibility is that people have ideas about who should be there, wherever “there” may happen to be; and such ideas about belonging always run along both individual and categorical lines. Categorically speaking, there are always fields of appropriate belonging, and people typically expect others to fit into some permutation of such categories. In the ballroom world, for instance, such fields include social dancers; dance competitors; studio owners, managers, and receptionists; DJ's; teachers; coaches; judges; scrutineers; vendors; photographers; and videographers just to name some of the most common.

Returning to one point already noted, the omnipresence of the ballroom public cannot be underestimated in accounting for any untoward behavior. Certainly there are any number of people who just behave poorly, and this is a point to which I shall return shortly. The point I am trying to make here, however, is that the ballroom scene can be such a total surround as to be inescapable. In many ways similar to the way that

privacy exists only by social convention in small, traditional social groups, the same is often the case within the ballroom community—especially at competitions. Whether in the sport hall of most European comps or the hotel settings of most North American ones, privacy exists, if at all, only by social convention. Hallways, changing rooms, restrooms, local restaurants and eateries, nearby stores and shopping centers, and the surrounding streets and sidewalks are not “away” from the scene, as other dancers, judges, and vendors also, and inevitably, frequent these locations. Ballroom’s inescapable social surround plays itself out in myriad ways and with equally wide-ranging implications at both the individual and collective levels.

One interesting question that thus arises, especially given both the high visibility and the possible consequences, is why some competitors continue to exhibit what many consider to be such questionable behaviors. In turning to this question, let me point out some of the dynamics that may be at work. One of the more far-reaching facets of ballroom life that comes to the fore, is exactly how much of ballroom life is publicly lived. Coaching, teaching, and practice all typically transpiring on the studio floor, and only very rarely<sup>19</sup> happen in private. Any and all behavioral miscues are therefore quite likely to be subject to observation. Now add in the fact that both lessons and practices are activities that lend themselves to inevitable and, at times, great frustrations. The studio setting then, is one that can be rife with frustrations; amidst often quite competitive individuals and passionate personalities. Inevitably this mix gives rise to, at least at times, less than idyllic reactions and behavior which, taken

in conjunction with the public nature of the studio, account for any number of occurrences.

Yet beyond the immediate public of the ballroom studio is the extended public of the larger ballroom scene. Everyone who was present at the time of any given occurrence is inevitably connected to other individuals involved within the scene. And, *because gossip has to do with being part of the network*, it is rare indeed that any such information does not quickly start to travel.<sup>20</sup> This set of dynamics alone, however, do not account for the full range of interactions in question, for while it may speak to 99% of ballroom life, it does not address its most public face—competitions. So the question remains, why do some competitors continue to exhibit what many consider to be questionable behaviors, especially given the possible repercussions, in the high visibility arena of ballroom performances and competitions?

Even more than the studio, ballroom competitions highlight exactly how much—and to what extent—ballroom life is publicly lived. Even if everyone does not really know everyone else (although it can certainly feel and seem like that at times) everyone does know someone. The interconnectedness of the immediate and extended publics of the ballroom are not only still at play at competitions, but all the more concentrated via both physical and temporal proximity. You no longer have to wait to phone or e-mail a friend about what you “just” saw, you can now tell them in your room, in the changing room, in the ballroom, in the bathroom, over a meal, or just in passing down the hallway. More specifically, the built in proximity of ballroom competitions contributes through two mutually facilitating mechanisms: simple



opportunity and immediacy of re/action. With the concentration of individuals present at a competition there is simply more opportunity both to see something and to have someone to tell it to. Layered on top of this is also an immediacy factor. With time, all but the most shocking or otherwise memorable of events recede in one's awareness. The general proximity characteristic of ballroom competitions, however, provides not only possible material for comment, but also the geographic, temporal, and social opportunity.

### **Being Alone in Public**

A large number of the competitive ballroom dancers I have interviewed and spoken with have mentioned a strange inversion of the "always in public" nature of ballroom living, that of an almost constant feeling, in one dancer's words, of always "being alone in a crowd." What does this mean, however, and why does it seem to be such a widely distributed and shared sentiment? As the comments and explanations of many competitors indicate, this dynamic is the result of one simple fact, namely that they are participating in a competitive genre of activity. As such, and despite the regrets voiced by several competitors, there is a lack of forthrightness built into the social interactions of the ballroom community and a dancer (or a couple) can never quite really trust others within their competitive arena. Is Fred's advice really his honest opinion or is it misinformation? If you confide in Jane regarding problems your having with your partner does she jump on that apparent weakness and then come out "all guns blazing at you" on the competition floor?

One of the consequences of this dynamic is that the friendships that do form are exceedingly rarely with one's real competition. A Rhythm couple and a Latin couple can easily be friends then, as they never go head to head on the ballroom floor. And the same applies to a Standard couple and a Latin couple—unless, of course, either also do 10 dance—or a Smooth couple and a Rhythm couple and so forth. But dancers can also easily be friends within their same division, just so long as there is some type of barrier to any “real” competition between the two. Let me turn to Greg and Russell to provide a concrete example of exactly this type of within-style friendship. Russell had just broken into the semi-final at Blackpool for the first time when Greg was winning the same event. To the non-ballroom initiate the difference between a semi finalist and a finalist—even the winner—might not seem so great. Within the ballroom ranks, however, such a difference in the ranks of adult competitors is typically quite a large one. Indeed, the vast majority of Blackpool semi-finalists never even makes the final, let alone wins what is the most prestigious and coveted ballroom title in the world. Due to the results gap between them then, the fact that they competed in the same events all the way through the semi-finals was not an impediment to the close friendship shared between Greg and Russell.

Yet Greg and Russell are the exception, especially as the dancers one has the most consistent contact with are specifically those who *are* one's closest competitors. No competition equally attracts competitors of every level and the larger events often have different divisions and styles dancing on different days. What this means is that the dancers most likely to have overlapping schedules for travel, training, and

competitions are others in a similar structural position—one’s closest competitors. This then, is the underlying dynamic of why so many competitors made comments about feeling like they were alone in a crowd: the same structural positioning that produce the most congruence in shared schedules and experiences between dancers and couples are the exact same criteria which call into question the intentions and sincerity between these same dancers and couples.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Eight

<sup>1</sup> The distinction being made here is, of course, as much historically situated as it is culturally. Cultures are not static, after all, but change across time. Indeed ballroom currently enjoys great popularity in Japan, sending a sizable contingent of dancers to Blackpool each year and with a large portion of the London-based coaches spending part of their summer coaching in Japan. Indeed, the “high class” antagonism to ballroom expressed by Miyoshi seems at odds with current standards such as those revealed by past World and Blackpool Professional Latin runner up Karen Hardy who, in recounting the “memorable moments” of her career, relates how “our [with partner Bryan Watson] outstanding success also lead to us being personally introduced to many distinguished and famous people one being, Prince Tennoheika of the *Japanese Royal Family*” (Hardy; original emphasis).

<sup>2</sup> This same dynamic is equally at play in contemporary ballroom and salsa, as neither ballroom nor salsa dancing is experienced as entirely separate from and unrelated to other facets of dancers’ lives. As the chapters in Section Two all demonstrate, the very structures of these dance communities are inextricably intertwined with daily considerations, relationships, life, and living—and this is true for culture no less than for community. The values held and adhered to by dancers are not divorced from, and cannot be understood except in relation to, both dance and non-dance.

<sup>3</sup> The work of both Bateson and Mead (1942) and Mead and Mcgregor (1951) regarding Bali provide classic anthropologic examples of this same point.

<sup>4</sup> Also see Geertz 1973; Hanna 1979c and 1988; and Radcliffe-Brown 1922.

<sup>5</sup> This dichotomization of sex/gender into male and female, taken for granted by western society (as well as many others), is a vast and erroneous oversimplification. Such a binary attribution is fallacious on biological grounds alone (Hubbard 1998:31). As far as manifest sex is concerned there are actually five possibilities, not just two (Fausto-Sterling 1998 [1993]; for other explorations of non-binary-sexing also see Devor 1998:133-135, Kaschak 1992:38, and Vines 1993:104). Commenting on the typical societal response to those who deviate from binary sex assignment, Rhode notes that “we want individuals to fit neatly into our dual sexual categories, not to straddle the borders” (1997:24). Yet even this realization is insufficient for, as Macdonald notes, “many aspects of sex differences, such as hormonal differences, are a matter of degree rather than kind” (1993:190). This same point is mirrored by Ruth Hubbard’s recognition that “in fact, women and men exhibit enormous overlaps in body shape and form, strength, and most other parameters. The diversity within the two groups is often as large as

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the differences between them” (1998:31).

<sup>6</sup> Increasing this exposure, appeal, and popularity are other versions of these shows in Australia, Germany, Holland, New Zealand, and South Africa.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Murphy is the owner of Champion Ballroom in Hillcrest, co-owner of the San Diego Dancesport Championships and the Holliday Dance Classic (held in Las Vegas, NV), and most recently has been one of the primary choreographers and judges on seasons one and two of the US television show *So You Think You Can Dance?* on FOX .

<sup>8</sup> For the dance context in question “excessive” should be understood relative to daily non-dance practices,

<sup>9</sup> Just as Barthes notes that “in the body of the wrestler that we find the first key to the contest... Wrestlers therefore have a physique...who display in advance, in their costumes and attitudes, the future contents of their parts” (1957:17), so too with ballroom, where dancers’ bodies, attitudes, and costumes already index their roles on the dance floor.

<sup>10</sup> There is some variation in this within the Tango, but even here the vast majority of a dancer’s visual attention is never directed toward their partner.

<sup>11</sup> Reprinted, by permission of the author, as Appendix 5.

<sup>12</sup> The obvious exceptions to this are other athletes, such as ice skaters, from whom the same type of posturally based poise, balance, and control are also required.

<sup>13</sup> I should also point out that, while it is still there for the viewing when I think to look for it, this same element no longer stands out in my mind the way it did that first time I went to Blackpool. Now that I am far more accustomed to regularly seeing and interacting with elite dancers, and have spent more time living in that world, their posture has become something I take for granted and no longer notice within ballroom settings.

<sup>14</sup> The fact that Frank uses only the gentlemen’s names when really referring to a competitive couple is a fairly common practice within ballroom, and obviously one with significant implications for gender as I shall take up in Chapter Ten.

<sup>15</sup> It also seems to me that, aside from the directly visual disruption in shape provided by a poor hold, as experienced dancers and teachers themselves, most judges are also probably reacting to a poor hold—be it consciously or unconsciously—based on their own experiences and understanding of what it takes away and disrupts in the bodily communication and feeling between partners.

<sup>16</sup> Vermey makes this same point in noting that “judging has two spheres, two tasks, one which explicates (knows factually) and the other which evaluates (estimates the worth or value of)” (1994:41).

<sup>17</sup> As the scandal surrounding the results of the 2002 Winter Olympic Ice Dancing competition demonstrated, however, even this is not a cure all.

<sup>18</sup> Becker makes this same point in noting that “every cooperative network that constitutes an art world creates value by the agreement of its members as to what is valuable” (2001:76; also see Levine 1972, and Christopherson 1974).

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<sup>19</sup> There is also a status bias here, as only the best of competitors or those otherwise well connected with studio owners will ever have exclusive access to such private floor time.

<sup>20</sup> This dynamic is, of course (and like many others), one that is being transformed by the continuing growth, emergence, and popularity of the internet, mobile phones, text messaging, and related mass communications.

## CHAPTER NINE: AESTHETICS 2 – Costumes and Visuality

Dress is clearly neither culturally nor politically neutral. It is loaded with significance. Clothes are stuff that ‘speaks volumes.’ But what they say is never entirely clear. We must interpret the language of dress in any given situation.

Keenan 2001b:181

Chapter Six considered the spectacle, art, and sport dimensions of dancesport as a metagenre; Chapter Seven the festive and ritual dynamics of ballroom competitions as socially structuring events; and Chapter Eight the images, perceptions, and visual qualities that are valued and evaluated in competitive ballroom dancing. This chapter revisits each of these topics, but through the concrete example of ballroom costuming. Much of ballrooms spectacle comes from the costuming involved, after all, as equally good dancing in day-to-day street clothes just does not have the same impact. Similarly, ballroom costuming is designed and intended to maximize and facilitate the artistic and expressive impact of ballroom; enhancing the apparent motion of ballroom athletes while simultaneously standing up to the physical rigors and stresses involved. At the same time there are significant differences in the costuming worn by dancers in the different divisions and styles—on both aesthetic and functional grounds—but also in the costumes that the same couples wear for different competitions. There can also be no doubt that ballroom costuming simultaneously responds to and constructs the visual images and impressions that lie at the center of competitive ballroom

## **Costumes Don't Dance on Hangers**

Just as Castro (1991) and Savigliano (1995, 1998) have pointed out for Argentine tango, and Mitchell (1994) has pointed out for Flamenco, the institutionalized practices of ballroom establish a conceptual framework for movement and meaning. Never, however, are these movements and meaning intellectual abstractions. They are about real bodies in real life. While the experiential side of these bodies is the topic of Chapter Twelve, this chapter focuses on the visible use, adornment, and presentation of those bodies—including the meanings that are thus being enacted, encoded, reinforced, challenged, presented, and performed—within the context of competitive ballroom dancing.

“Clothes,” as fashion theorist and cultural geographer Alison Goodrum points out, “are activated by wearing them, just as bodies are actualized by the clothes they wear” (2001:92). Goodrum’s point provides an important starting point, as in no place is clothing ever only about itself; functional or communicative, dress is always more than simply self-referential. What makes clothes into *clothes*, after all, is that they are designed for bodies and worn by bodies, not simply folded and put in a drawer, hung on the wall, thrown on a bed, or put on a hanger in the closet. Sociologist William Keenan makes a parallel argument in defining “bodies, as the elemental canvas of the dress arts,” which, as he goes on to point out, “are imprinted with potent social and cultural identities through the medium of clothing” (2001a:22).

There is no doubt that the “the relationship between our bodies, their clothes and the manifestations of identities is a complex matrix of exchanges and interchanges

within the social world” (Goodrum 2001:87-88). At the same time, however, some of these relationships will be more prominent than others in any given situation. Within ballroom there are two such (for lack of a better term) dominant relationships—one common to almost all cultural settings and one that is ballroom dance specific—and it is only in their intersection that ballroom costuming can really be understood. In ballroom, as in any social setting, “dress is both an indicator and a producer of gender” (Barnes and Eicher 1997:7). Yet while ballroom costuming can only be understood in relation to gender, gender alone does not explain ballroom costuming.

**Table 9.1: Basic Costuming by Ballroom Style and Gender**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Standard/Smooth</b>	Ballgown	Tails/Suit
<b>Latin/Rhythm</b>	Tight short dress	Tight shirt and pants

Unique to ballroom, and a distinction more significant than anything but gender, is the style of dance. Here “style” does not mean a dancer’s personal way of moving (although that too can be important), but the larger, structurally central issue of what division of dances a dancer trains and competes in. Internationally this distinction is between Standard and Latin, with the two American style divisions of Smooth and Rhythm being added into the mix in the US.<sup>1</sup> While the International and American dance styles do differ, there are strong aesthetic similarities between each pairing, with Smooth being the American style counterpart to International style Standard on the one hand and Rhythm being the American style counterpart to



International style Latin on the other. What this means for costuming, at the grossest level of description, is illustrated in Table 9.1, above.

The point of depicting these intersections is not, of course, to suggest that ballroom costuming is in any way this straightforward. Still, this general categorization does help depict the framework within which ballroom costuming is culturally conceived, achieved, and perceived. Far from being abstract categories though, the intersection of dance style and gender dictate costume choices; choices which, in turn, reflect and reveal dancers' sociocultural group memberships. "Dress serves as a sign that the individual belongs to a certain group," note as Barnes and Eicher, "but simultaneously differentiates the same individual from all others: it includes and it excludes" (1997:1). With only the brief descriptions provided so far to go on, for instance, it should not be difficult to take a quick glance at the photo on the following page and determine which style is being danced on the basis of costuming alone.

As Photo 9.1 thus helps illustrate, the same dress that marks its wearer as a woman also marks her as a Standard dancer but, at the same time, just as surely marks her as "not man" and "not Latin dancer." As Eicher and Roach-Higgins have aptly pointed out, and as Photo 9.1 makes equally clear, "we can expect to dress to precede verbal communication in establishing an individual's gendered identity as well as expectations for other types of behavior (social roles) based on this identity" (1997:17). Gender and dance style are communicated not only at the same time, but

via the very same symbols. Before delving into this topic more deeply, however, I want to refine the intersecting fields of gender and style.



**Photo 9.1: Garry and Rita Gehkman Dancing International Standard – 2004 USDSC**

The groupings used in Table 9.1 can be subdivided between American and International styles, and expanded to include footwear and hair styling:

**Table 9.2: Elaborated Costuming by Ballroom Style and Gender**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Standard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ballgown with floats</li> <li>• Solid piece shoe, either “nude” or matching dress w/~ 2.5” heel</li> <li>• Hair up; black or blonde</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Tailsuit; white bowtie</li> <li>• 1” standard heel in either black leather or patent</li> <li>• Short hair; no facial hair</li> </ul>
<b>Smooth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ballgown with no floats (may have some open cut outs)</li> <li>• Closed toe shoe, either “nude” or matching dress w/~ 2.5” heel</li> <li>• Hair semi-up; black, blonde, red</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long sleeved shirt with vest or dinner jacket; tie matches dress</li> <li>• 1” standard heel, either black or matching man’s pants</li> <li>• Short hair, no facial hair</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short dress, often w/fringe, feathers, and beading</li> <li>• Open toe shoe, typically “nude” or matching dress w/~ 3” heel</li> <li>• Hair up or down; black, blonde, or red</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tight pants and shirt</li> <li>• 1.5-2” Cuban heel, either black or matching man’s pants</li> <li>• Short or long hair; little facial hair</li> </ul>
<b>Latin</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortest dress, often w/fringe, feathers, and beading</li> <li>• Open toe shoe, typically “nude” or matching dress w/~ 3” heel</li> <li>• Hair up or down; black, blonde, or red</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tight pants and shirt</li> <li>• 1.5-2” Cuban heel, either black or matching man’s pants</li> <li>• Short or long hair; no facial hair</li> </ul>

I want to examine this expanded set of intersections between costuming and gender in light of two important points. First, and as Keenan delineates, “clothes are society’s way of showing where we belong in the order of things, our role and society in the social pageantry” (2001a:4). It is in exactly this way that the stylistic variations, listed in Table 9.1—while always enacted through the lenses of individual tastes and preferences—situate dancers within the social field of ballroom dancing. Citing Butler (1990), Goodrum makes the second point I want to consider here; namely that “gender is encoded via the repeated stylization of the body and of action within a rigid frame” (2001:91). Far from merely providing classificatory criteria, then, the costuming

variables noted in Table 9.2 provides dancers with tightly scripted modalities for enacting gender.

Imagine two couples. The first couple consists of a woman dressed in a full length ballgown with a heavily stoned bodice, full sleeves, a full satin skirt, and with full floats running between the back of the dress and her wrists. She is wearing closed satin court shoes with a 2.5” heel that have been died to match her dress, and her hair is pinned up (using 50+ bobby pins) in an elaborate updo to which at least half a can of hairspray has been added. Her partner is dressed in a custom made black tailsuit, offset by his bright white shirt, collar, bow tie, and cuffs. His shoes are shiny black patent leather, with sued soles and a low, normally shaped heel. He is clean shaven, and his short hair is shiny and immobile with professional grade gel. Now consider this couple standing next to our second pair of dancers.

The second couple consists of a woman dressed in a short, slinky dress; tightly fitting her body with a plunging neckline, and revealing her bare arms, back, and legs. She is wearing strappy, open toed dance shoes in a nude satin with a 3” heel, and her short, brightly colored hair hangs freely, if neatly groomed. Her partner is dressed in tight, high wasted pants, and his long sleeved black shirt tightly clings to his torso. He wears black leather shoes with a 1.5” Cuban heel; and his hair may very well be pulled back in a short ponytail.

While all four dancers will seem tanned, the Latin competitors will probably be more so, and while both women will have fake eyelashes and heavy makeup on—necessary to be seen from far away and under the bright lighting of the competition

floor—the Latin woman’s make up may be stronger and a bit edgier, her fake lashes may even have small rhinestones in them, and her fake nails are likely to be noticeably longer. But what comparisons can be made between these four dancers? What similarities are there? What contrasts? While there are clear differences that separate along gender lines, such as dresses for the women versus pants for the men, there are also differences that mark by style including the tighter fit of the Latin competitors’ clothing, their deeper tans, and higher heels, and their looser hair styling. But so what?

Certainly, as Goodrum warns, “fashion has no absolute or essential meaning” (2001:101), so it is important not to over generalize what is being communicated by the costumes of our four dancers. That being said, an unmistakably “important sociocultural aspect of dress,” is, “that it is imbued with meaning understood by wearer and viewer” (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997:15). Thus, while the complete outsider might look at out four dancers as two women and as two men, the ballroom insider is much more likely to look at the four dancers as a Standard couple and a Latin couple. The point here, of course, is not that the ballroom insider is not fully aware of the genders of the dancers but that the more salient difference for predicting where these dancers each fit into the sociocultural ballroom milieu is based on dance style, not gender. It is in exactly this way that gender, even as the more hegemonic discourse (i.e. more easily taken for granted as a category for classification), may not be the more salient variable between Standard/Latin and Female/Male, as in the example provided above. At the same time, however, gender and style are mutually informative dynamics of role, place, and identity within the ballroom world.

A dancer is not male *or* a Latin dancer, female *or* a Standard dancer. Each dancer is either female or male *and* dances a particular style; and, as noted above, each of these intersections corresponds to particular codes of costuming. Men cannot only be said to dress and dance differently from women any more than Latin dancers can only be said to dress and dance differently from Standard dancers. From one perspective then, every ballroom woman dresses and dances as a female Latin (or Rhythm, Smooth, or Standard) dancer, and every ballroom man dresses and dances as a male Latin, (or Rhythm, Smooth, or Standard) dancer.

Or, on the flipside, every Latin (or Rhythm, Smooth, or Standard) dancer also dances as a female or male Latin (or Rhythm, Smooth, or Standard) dancer. Ballroom costuming, as Keenan says of clothes in general, thus serve to “unite and divide us at one and the same moment, making us members of this group but not that one, conferring upon us this sort of identity but not that one, indicating affiliations of this kind but not that kind” (2001a:32). While every dancer may thus be dressing according to powerfully gendered models, it is inescapably true that different images of “femaleness” and femininity are implicated and invoked by the different types of women’s costumes, just as different images of “maleness” and masculinity are implicated and invoked by the different types of men’s costumes.

### **Seeing and Being**

“Our clothes,” notes Keenan, “mark us out in social and cultural terms. To ‘look the part’ is to fit into a definable social niche” (2001a:31), and this is exactly

what we see with dancesport competitors' costuming. But this is only half the picture. Clothing, after all, is not only how one represents one's self to others, but also to one's self. If "dress is generally indicative of behaviour and belonging, social placement and taste culture membership" (Keenan 2001a:26) and is also "the best available prelude to action and reaction. It tells us, by and large, where bodies and selves belong in sociological terms" (Keenan 2001a:27), it does this as much for one's self as for others. And it is in this way that costuming serves as a nexus of intercontextualization for an array of social, cultural, and psychological processes and dynamics.

The same costuming that identifies a dancer's social position as a female Standard competitor, for example, is equally informative of this structural positioning to the dancer herself as it is to other dancers. "Dress," as Keenan says, "is key to the social construction of...our self-image" (2001a:32). But this only scratches the surface of the implications for her costuming. Beyond situating herself socially (both to herself and to others) this dancer's costuming is also informs cultural expectations—again for both herself and others—regarding a wide array of values and behaviors. Additionally, however, and perhaps even most importantly, there is also a self-reflexive dynamic at play in both the social and cultural positioning informed by this dancer's costuming. She not only knows the social and cultural implications of her costuming, but also what others know those implications to be as well. Dress thus functions not only as a self-defining and self-constructing device and process (although it does, of course, function in this way as well), but also as a cultural field of interpersonal interaction.

Viewing costuming as a cultural field of interpersonal interaction helps unpack several concomitant processes and maneuvers. Complementing the presentational and situating dynamics of costuming, sociologist David Martin notes that “dress mediates how we see ourselves and how others see us” (2001:xv). But Martin continues this argument by pointing out that “if we want to pass muster we had better make the right choice” (2001:xv). I would suggest that the second half of Martin’s postulation is as significant as the first. How people dress—especially in the industrialized west—is a far cry from being some gigantic sociocultural paint by numbers. If culture provides an array of options and parameters for social positioning and expectations for dress, persons are still agents with their own perspectives, values, and agendas. It is thus that our dancer does not draw on her ballgown merely because she is a standard dancer, but also because she wants to be seen as one—and seen as one doing what it is that a standard dancer is supposed to do!<sup>2</sup>

While I think Goodrum suggests an overly-agentic view of fashion when she points out—citing Bourdieu (1986), Craik (1994), and Mauss (1973)—that “fashion is purpose-built to secure certain effects. Techniques of fashioning the body are a visible form of *acculturation* in which identities are created, constructed and presented through the habitus of clothing” (2001:87; emphasis added), she still makes an apt point. People do not merely act within cultural field of interpersonal interaction; they act to certain aims. Our dancer does not merely want to dress like a Standard dancer, after all, but to be *seen as* one. As already note, however, such wanting is in fact a duality: dressing as a Standard dancer—in order to be seen as a Standard dancer—



presents our dancer as a Standard dancer both to herself and others after all; and it is in this way that dress can be said to “(re-)present us to ourselves and to the world,” and that “body-selves are made up to ‘look the part’” (Keenan 2001b:181).

Yet insofar as being seen *as* a standard dancer is important to our dancer, all of the trappings implicated in being seen as a standard dancer take on value to her as well. But, as I have been pointing out throughout this chapter, our dancer is not only a Standard dancer, but a female Standard dancer—a multiplex role with its own codes of conduct and costuming. It is thus that, at the same time our dancer wants to be seen as a Standard dancer, she is doing so through a cultural lens that has gendered implications, and it is in exactly this way that costuming (in this case for ballroom) both responds to and creates its own cultural value. What this means in practice, is:

Acquiring knowledge about gender-appropriate dress for various social situations extends to learning rights and responsibilities to act ‘as one looks.’ Accordingly, gendered dress encourages each individual to internalize as gendered roles a complex set of social expectations for behavior. These roles, when linked with roles of others, represent part of social structure. (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997:19)

Wanting to be seen as a Standard dancer, then, our dancer learns how to dress like one but, at one and the same time, she is also internalizing gendered value structures. In learning, trying, and then enacting her role as a Standard dancer, our dancer comes not only to identify within this gendered value structure, but to interact with other ballroom persons accordingly; which only reinforces the selfsame value structure.

Looking at these dynamics from a slightly different angle, sociologist Dana Wilson-Kovacs contends that “the cultural practices that define the body influence its representations and contemporary ideas of femininity and masculinity. These ideas are

reflected, in turn, by bodily display and conveyed through our choice of dress” (2001:159). In line with this formulation, we can say that the ballroom world offers different sets of cultural practices—of which being a female Standard dancer is but one—and that each of these cultural models are not only personified via costuming, but also influence the ideas of the individuals enacting these models. The crux of this interaction lies in the fact that in following certain models of dress one does not only learn to see one’s self through this model, but to be one’s self as well.

### **Clothes = Costumes**



**Photo 9.2:** Toni Redpath (left) and Katazyna Kozak (right) as spectators at 2004 USDSC, Hollywood Beach, FL

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Marion in press), despite the tremendously visual spectacle of ballroom competitions and costuming, it is important to recognize that *all* clothing is costuming. Off the competition floor as much as on it, “dress behaviours and bodily adornments most assuredly typify and represent the quintessential ‘routines of social life’” (Keenan 2001a:36). As such, it is not only competitors’ competition costumes that instruct and inform dancers’ social interactions but, in fact, their entire repertoire and manner of dress within the ballroom world. Which of the dancers depicted in the photograph above, for instance, seems more likely to be a Latin dancer: Toni Redpath, on the left, or Katarzyna Kozak, on the right?

The answer is Katarzyna, on the right. And this answer seems to be an easy one to arrive at, even for non-dancers, after having been shown only a few sample photographs of both Latin/Rhythm dancers and of Standard/Smooth dancers competing. Indeed, the only times when any non-dancers have chosen Toni, it turns out that they thought I was asking a trick question and, in fact, that their initial impression and gut instinct had also favored Katarzyna. So why is it so easy for people who do not know that Toni retired an undefeated US Professional Smooth Champion and that Katarzyna is a past US Professional Latin finalist and Blackpool Professional Latin Rising Star Champion to select Katarzyna as the Latin dancer? Even more importantly, why is this association so robust that even people who do not know anything about ballroom dancing can make this assessment correctly after having just

seen a couple of contrasting photos of entirely different Standard/Smooth and Latin/Rhythm dancers in competition (in the appropriate costuming for each)?

The underlying point here is that who dancers are as competitors is inseparable from who they are “in the round.” As such, what counts as appropriate competition costuming for various dance competitors is not—and cannot be—isolated from their identities as ballroom dancers. If, as argued above, being seen as a particular type of dancer informs being a particular type of dancer, this is still the case off the competition floor. The ballroom world is one that most serious competitors live in, albeit not exclusively so. What this means is that the communicative field of dress is no less subject to cultural conventions off the floor than on it, and that the same style specific gender models implicated in competitive costuming ramify onto clothing in general. It is all dress that “constitutes one of the most basic methods through which we are able to place ourselves and others in the social world” after all, and that serve to “socialize the body into a cultural being” (Goodrum 2001:86-87).

It is not only on the ballroom floor, then, that the Standard/Smooth dancer is expected to be the proper and distinguished ballroom gentleman or lady; or that the Latin/Rhythm dancer is allowed—or even expected—to be more “fiery” and overtly sexualized. A particularly telling example<sup>3</sup> of the different gender models and expectations comes from Charlotte Jorgensen who, as a very highly placed amateur Standard dancer, came *to watch* a competition while “wearing a skirt with slits all the way up both sides and thigh high leather boots.” Going on to describe people’s reactions, Charlotte recounts that “It shocked people. They said to me ‘You can’t wear

that!” The point, of course, is not what Charlotte was actually wearing, but that this outfit violated the norms and conventions she was subject to as a Standard dancer. As I have pointed out elsewhere, and directly related to Charlotte’s example, “within ballroom, one’s appearance as a dancer is typically culturally glossed as one’s character as a dancer and, as such, is subject to different evaluative frames for Ballroom and Latin dancers” (Marion in press).

With all of this now in mind, I want to briefly revisit the Toni and Katarzyna, the subjects of photo B. The definition of dress given by Eicher and Roach-Higgins’s as “an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings” (1997:15), highlights the socializing and communicative functions of clothing, even as the nature of such socialization and communication remain culturally variable. Given this premise though, it becomes much easier to see how even the non-dancer can make the correct selection for who is a Latin dancer when looking at the photographs of Toni and Katarzyna. Even without knowing about ballroom costuming, or having additional information about the gender models implicated, the non dancer can extrapolate from competition photographs, such as in photo 9.3, below, and can *see* the closer association and relationship between Latin/Rhythm costumes with Katarzyna’s outfit and Standard/Smooth costumes with Toni’s.

Part of what makes dress such an efficacious medium of communication is that “some of the information that is transmitted from person to person by dress is not easily translatable into words” (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997:15) and, as such,

bypasses linguistic filtering. The ease with which non-dancers can select Katarzyna as the Latin dancer with only a couple of pictures, such as those in Photo 9.3, upon which to make their determination strongly evinces this exact point:



**Photo 9.3:** Gleb Makarov & May-Ling Hutchins dancing American Rhythm at the 2005 Emerald Ball, Los Angeles, CA (left) and Giampiero Giannico & Ieva Pauksena dancing International Standard at the 2004 USDSC in Hollywood Beach, FL (right)

Taking Photo 9.3, Photo 9.2, and the reaction to Charlotte’s outfit thus highlights the significance of costuming—by which I mean all clothing—within the ballroom world, and makes it clear that:

The femininity of the ballroom lady in her elegant full-length ball gown...is clearly not the femininity of the Latin lady in her short, skimpy Latin dress...and it was exactly this type of norm that Charlotte had violated.

As such, it is not only that the ballroom and Latin competitors put on different costumes and perform different roles—which they obviously do—but that what it means to dance as a male or a female, and by implication to be a male or a female, evokes different images, connotations, and elements. (Marion: in press)

### **Not Only Competitors Wear “Costumes”**

In looking at how competitors’ clothing is costuming as much as their competitive costumes (albeit far from as spectacularly), it is important to recognize that it is not only competitors’ who are wearing costumes in the ballroom world. All clothing is communicative and socializing; all dress serves to socially situate according to cultural values. Eicher and Roach-Higgins appropriately note that “the dressed person is a *gestalt* that includes body, all direct modifications of the body itself, and all three-dimensional supplements added to it” (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997:13; my emphasis, *original emphasis*), not only certain categories of dressed persons. Therefore, while the competitors’ costuming may be the most evident and most culturally elaborated costuming in the ballroom world—and their competitive costumes in particular—this is far from the only costuming that is involved or that matters in the ballroom world.

For example, how are the spectators dressed? Are they wearing jeans and tee-shirts, tuxedos and cocktail gowns, or are they dressed somewhere in between? Each of these wardrobe styles contributes to very different competition atmospheres. Whether explicitly recognized or not, how an audience is dressed is, in and of itself, a significant and constitutive element of the context through which the dancers, officials, and other audience members all experienced the competition. While the range of differences that set a college competition apart from Blackpool is

monumental in the extreme, the difference between spectators in school tee-shirts and sweatshirts versus tuxedos, Armani suits, and silk ties should not be underestimated as a powerful element of the distinction. This same dynamic, albeit at a smaller scale, is also part of what sets the afternoon and evening sessions at most US pro-am based competitions apart, lending greater prestige to the evening sessions.<sup>4</sup> Simply stated, the fact that spectators dress in a certain fashion is of great significance in setting the tone and mood of a competition.

A variant of this same audience dynamic is also in play for the competition officials since, while far fewer in number, the relative visibility of each official is far greater. If competitors and audience members perceive cues from the dress of competition spectators, this is only all that much more the case for judges and other visible officials. Whether picking up one's registration materials at will call or just purchasing a competition program at the registration desk, interacting with an official in professional attire is different experience from interacting with an official in casual attire. Similarly, seeing the judges arrayed around the floor in slacks and blouses versus jeans and tee shirts changes how these judges—even as the exact same people, with the exact same credentials and qualifications—are perceived and experienced. Listening to the MC announce the competition results from atop the dais *is different* if she or he is wearing shorts instead of a suit.

The question that begs to be asked here is why? Why should what a judge or an MC is wearing have the impact it does? Competitors, even when off the floor, are members of the category being evaluated and judged in the ballroom world, so it



seems easier to understand why their appearance matters to the extent that it does. Ultimately, however, three factors need to be figured into this picture. First, dance is never detached from other social and cultural norms and standards—a topic to which I will shortly return. Second, and as previously noted, the communicative functions of dress are experienced universally (even as the particulars of such communication remain culturally variable) so are applicable to everyone. Finally, because competitive ballroom dance is driven by the engine of visual aesthetics, participants in the ballroom world are likely to be hyper aware of visual cues and communication.

In saying that competitive ballroom dance is driven by the engine of visual aesthetics, I do not mean that other, non visual aesthetics do not play important—even pivotal roles—in competitive ballroom dancing. Indeed, the dancing itself, its execution in action, is far more dependent on the aesthetics of touch and kinesthetics. Yet as a competitive activity, judges make their determinations and audiences choose their favorites based on what they see. In theory could not a judge dance with each dancer to evaluate them instead of watching? Going back to the 14 judging criteria suggested by Dan Radler discussed in the last chapter, all are judged visually, but also note how many are primarily visual in nature to begin with: Posture; Timing; Line; Hold; Poise; Togetherness; Musicality and Expression; Presentation; Power; Foot and Leg Action; Shape; Lead and Follow; Floorcraft; and Intangibles. Overall, then, those who watch and are involved in the practices of competitive ballroom dancing learn to key into and interpret visual cues and, as such, are culturally primed to take notice of—and meaning from—the visual symbolism and communication of clothing.

Before moving on to look at the connections and relationships of dance to non-dance, I want to call attention to one other form of dress that is of tremendous significance within the context of ballroom competitions. As Eicher and Roach-Higgins point out, “some types of *political dress* are neither body-hiding enclosures nor uniforms. Instead, they are *small* attached, inserted, *hand-held*, suspended, or *rigid preshaped objects*” (1997:21; emphasis added). What are the judges’ clipboards (as introduced in Chapter Seven) if not exactly this type of political dress in both form and function? Certain qualifications are needed to be a judge, but it is the clipboard in their hand that not only confers the authority and responsibility to judge, but that visibly signifies this political authority.



**Photo 9.4:** Clipboards on the competition floor—Victor Kanevsky judging at the 2005 Yankee Classic, Boston, MA (left); Jim Gray and Sunnie Page dancing International Standard at the 2005 Embassy Ball, Irvine, CA (center); and Donald Johnson judging at the 2005 Desert Classic, Palm Desert, CA (right)

Further compounding the significance of the judges’ clipboard is its extreme visibility. As depicted above in Photo D, it is impossible not to see the judges while

watching the dancers since the judges are standing on the competition floor itself. The left frame of world class coach and judge Victor Kanevsky shows how, depending on where a spectator is seated and a judge's positions on the floor, the judge may be front and center in the spectators' view. Especially given the audiences' seated position and the judges' standing position, the actual marking on the clipboard is also thus at the eye level for the spectators.

The right frame in Photo D shows past US Professional Latin finalist and Blackpool Professional Latin Rising Star Champion Donald Johnson in the foreground, and past Russian Professional Latin Champions, and World and Blackpool Professional Latin finalists Sergey Ryupin and Elena Khvorova in the background. This particular event, the Desert Classic, was one of only two competitions that Sergey and Elena competed at in the US in 2005 (the other one being the 2005 USDSC). The point of this frame, of course, is that it would be impossible to take advantage of the opportunity to watch Sergey and Elena without being blatantly aware of Donald, on the floor, as a judge, with his clipboard in hand.

Finally, the center frame, featuring Professional Standard competitors Jim Gray and Sunnie Page, helps illustrate how it is not only audience members who are always faced with the judges' clipboards. Yet as the position of the clipboard in the lower right of the center frame also suggests, as much as competitors may not be able to avoid seeing these elements of political dress, it is the evaluative gaze enabled and empowered by the clipboard that establishes the evaluative gaze; the very perspective

that gets internalized in the process of developing as a ballroom competitor—and as taken up in the fourth section of this dissertation, on self.

### **Dance and Non-Dance**

All dance worlds—of which ballroom is only one—have their own styles of movement and of dress. Yet as Brinson notes, however, “style is an aspect of dance that separates it from the nondance world, but the inherent meaning refers back to the nondance world” (1985:209). As previously noted, for example, audiences and judges dressing in more formal attire conveys greater prestige and social gravity to a competition. I would suggest that one of the primary reasons for this is that it mirrors the meanings of such clothing in the non-dance world.

If the ballroom world is a cultural world onto itself—as I generally take to be the case—this does not mean that the ballroom world exists in a different sociocultural universe with its own set of laws and forces. If different stellar bodies display different characteristics this is because the same forces of gravity, magnetism, stellar fusion, electrical bonding, and so forth are acting on different configurations of space and matter, and not because the forces are different. It is in exactly this way that the ballroom world should be understood as unique, yet only explicable within a context larger than its own parameters. International forces of economics, politics, and globalization manifest and are felt within the ballroom world in unique ways, for instance, yet cannot be understood within the context of ballroom alone. Ballroom

competition and costuming exist as unique *configurations* of aesthetic values practices; not *as* unique aesthetics and values.

A brief exchange I had in a San Diego salsa club with Theresa, an experienced local salsa dancer, provides an apt example of how these dynamics come home in personal lives. Describing where she had found the pair of shimmery, gold, snakeskin print pants to a mutual friend of ours, and how much she loved this pair of pants, Theresa then added: “don’t get me wrong, I wouldn’t be caught dead in them by the light of day.” She went on to describe how she had grown up in an Italian and Jewish neighborhood “so it was all about the boobs,” but that now that she was “here [the (Latino-based) salsa scene], where it’s all about the butt” she was going to “work it.”

### **It’s in the Details**

In concluding this chapter on costuming aesthetics, and this overall section on culture, I want to suggest that, in many ways, the internalization of cultural content—as further examined in Section IV, on self—takes place at the level of, and through, details. Members of the ballroom community live through cultural values through the specific acts and practices that demarcate and define ballroom life—as numbers get pinned to a competitor’s back, as fake tans are sprayed on, as cuff links are fastened, and as dresses are zipped and hooked. “Dress,” as Barnes and Eicher point out, “is not only visual; it may also include touch, smell, and sound. It has an impact on the viewer, but also on the wearer” (1997:3). The smell of fake tanner, the feel of fake eyelashes and nails, the weight of rhinestone encrusted dresses, and the sound of a

dresses beaded fringe are the minutiae of experience which dancers wrap around themselves in constructing and living cultural lives.

A new but enthusiastic college ballroom team member offers the following example of the fine scale details that a dancer may absorb as they pursue their dancing. In an online discussion (on the Dance Forums website) of ballroom shoes, Daisy writes that:

I always know what colors, heels, widths, fabrics, etc. they have in certain styles...for instance, when I went to the Ohio Star Ball, I was trying on a pair of Tina's to get the right fit, and the guy handed me the box and I sat down to try them on and without looking at what heel height was on the box, I walked back to him, holding up the shoe, and I said "You accidentally gave me 2" heels...I wanted the 2.5" to try on" and he said "those ARE 2.5" in heels" and I said "Impossible...the 2.5" heel doesn't come in tan leather, it comes in tan satin...and these are leather!" The man was astounded, but shook his head, laughed, told me I was right and went back to get me a pair of 2.5" heels.

Even more experientially than this, however, it is in learning practices such as how to put on competition make up—in learning how to achieve a look that will show up to good effect under stage lighting and to audience members and judges from 50 feet across the ballroom floor—one concomitantly learns to see, and thus experience, through ballroom eyes. It is exactly this that Photo 9.5, the final photograph in this chapter, depicts.



**Photo 9.5:** US Professional Rhythm finalist Kristina Pchenitchnykh<sup>5</sup> helping new Rhythm professional Julie Goldman apply her make up at the 2004 Seattle Star Ball, Seattle, WA

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## Endnotes: Chapter Nine

<sup>1</sup> Other countries may have additions of their own, such as the New Vogue and Street Latin categories in Australia, but Standard and Latin dominate the world scene while the American styles, already dominant in the US, have some exposure via franchise studio instruction abroad.

<sup>2</sup> Martin is making a like point in noting that “dress mediates how we see ourselves and how others see us, and if we want to pass muster we had better make the right choice” (Martin 2001:xv).

<sup>3</sup> For other uses I have made of this example, see Marion (in press) and Picart and Marion (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> The differences between afternoon and evening sessions is actually an interesting intersection of social, cultural, and psychological variables—of which attire is but one small piece—and, as such, is a topic that I will take up in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> Since then also a South African Professional Latin Champion with a new partner.

## SECTION IV: SELF

As much as “ethnomusicological research has reminded us that music-making must always be regarded as intentional action, and that the actors’ reasons for what they do must be taken into account” (Blacking 2001:21), the same is equally true of dance. Even in relation to deliberate and chosen participations people are not cultural automatons but, rather, agentic beings with their own experiences and drives (e.g. Paul 1990:433, 435; Schneider 1995:7) which, often times, do not align with all that much congruity. Social and cultural institutions, structures, and practices do not arise, exist, or get experienced, after all, save in relation to individual human actions and motivations. This does not mean that any individual operates outside of sociocultural constraints, but does point to the importance of human action as a unit of analysis (e.g. Cole 1996; Wertsch, Del Rio, and Alvarez 1995). This framework is much in line with the Russian cultural-historical school’s emphasis on activity based psychological analysis (e.g. Vygotsky), and also seems to underlie anthropological perspectives that cast embodiment as “the existential ground of culture and self” (Csordas 1994).

More concretely, however, focusing on personal-level experiences unpacks how social and cultural pressures, understandings, and influences are actually lived; how selves experience, interact with, and act upon the world. One of the most powerful ways in which such articulations takes place is through what Mauss first referred to as the “technique of the body,” and it is in this vein that the focus of Chapter Ten is on embodiment in dance. Starting with the role of embodiment in dance of in Chapter Ten, Chapter Eleven then presents several sets of case materials



based on formal and informal interviews as well as self-narrative materials to explore how individual practices and perspectives are informed by and articulate with their sociocultural surrounds. Finally, Chapter Twelve focuses on ballroom competitors' psychologies of self, self-evaluation, and competition. Following Barthes approach to the body "as a locus of mindful human articulations" (Foster 1986:237n3), dance serves as a powerful place for exploring the simultaneously physical and psychological underpinnings of persons. As a "social and sensual logic" and "bodily craft" (Wacquant 2004:7) dance is not only a site of community and culture, but also of self.

## CHAPTER TEN: Meanings in Motion: Embodied Selves

Human movement is *the* means of contact between human beings and their environment, the basis of human history.

(Brinson 1985:213, original emphasis)

Building on the idea, introduced in Chapter One, that activity is a valuable “site” for anthropological inquiry, this chapter focuses on what persons actually *do*. The actual practices and activities of people’s lived lives is of immeasurable significance in understanding their experiences and their constructions of both personal and collective meanings and identities. Although a number of scholars have started to look to the body as a site of culture (e.g. Blacking 1977, B. S. Turner 1984, Featherstone et al. 1991, Csordas 1994a, Wulff 1998, Downey 2005, Wacquant 2004, Jackson 2004), the interconnection of body and ego has remained largely under appreciated, as the role and significance of the body for experiences and understandings of mental and psychological perspectives have, unfortunately, been undervalued in western thought (Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

“The rational view of knowledge is based on the claim that data received through our senses are unreliable,” notes Vermey, “while intellectual knowledge is superior. In such cases, learners are not perceived as creators of knowledge, but receivers of already existing knowledge” (1994:73); and it is this Cartesian split that has served as the longstanding basis for why dance is rarely taken seriously within the academy. The problem with this position, of course, is that it overlooks “the role of the

body in constructing and maintaining our experience of the world, our culture, and ourselves” (Jackson 2004:1), *including* Western views of objectivity, science, and rationality. “Reality,” as Blackmer points out, “begins with the body, which gives us shape, existence, and boundaries. It is the carrier of our being in the world, the *sine qua non* of living on the earth” (Blackmer 1989:28). The body is *the* medium through which life is lived. As Stromberg points out, “cultural influence works not, as has often been assumed, through the mind alone but through the body as well” (1986:13).

Yet just as the body is inescapably implicated in human culture and knowledge, the converse is also true. “The body is not merely a natural object,” as Cowan aptly notes, “but one socially and historically constituted” (1990:21).<sup>1</sup> While never separate from physical bodies, views of the body are always contextually construed, inevitably arising in the dialogue between the physicality of bodies and the values and understandings—both personal and cultural—by which those bodies are attended. “Use of the body defines the self of the performer for himself and for others” (Rappaport 1979:200), and such uses of the body are never only natural. Physical mannerisms and proxemics are, after all, integral elements of sociocultural discourse (e.g. Levy 1973 and Hall 1988 respectively). As such, any robust understanding of humans cannot ignore the psychophysicality of human experience.

“All members of the species,” as Blacking points, “are basically as capable of dancing,<sup>2</sup> singing and making music, as they are of speaking a natural language” (2001:19), and it is along these lines that several dance theorists have suggested that dance is best thought of and conceptualized as a natural language. Just as languages

differ, however, so too do dances (and other physical activities); and just as linguistic fluency is irreplaceable for fully textured cultural understanding, the same is true of commonly practiced physically participatory activities as well. It is exactly along these lines, for instance, that Wulff points out that “studying a mostly non-verbal bodily activity, like dancing, that people spend almost all their time doing, is easier with some dancing experience” (1998:10). Indeed, the importance of a common participatory frame for this type of fieldwork is also well represented in Wacquant’s work on boxing (2004), Downey’s work on capoeira (2005), Palmer’s work on competitive cycling (1996), and Jackson’s work on clubbing (2004).

As highlighted in Chapter Six, however, ballroom is both sport *and* art, and, “unlike students of opera, drama, or painting—who can study and practice from scores, scripts, or canvases—dance students have to rely almost exclusively on personal contact with practitioners” (Hammond 2000:138). The distinction here is crucial, because while it is true that opera, drama, and painting are all fully embodied practices, their embodiment is not as dependent on interaction; i.e. they are not as interactively embodied. Neither the degree nor the importance of physical touch in and for dance should be underestimated. Instructors regularly manipulate students’ bodies; they also place students’ hands on their own bodies, having students feel the muscular and skeletal orientations, shifts, contractions, and expansions that are all part of dance movement. Even more so than in most other dance forms, however, is the inter-physicality of partnered dances such as ballroom and salsa, where the dancing itself

requires interpersonal touch and physical coordination or, in Hammond's words, "personal contact with practitioners."

## **Re-Embodiment**

The array of mass communication and media technologies in popular use today is immense; it includes quad-band mobile phones, wireless computer networks, email and listserves, web based email, online bulletin boards, blackberries, Bluetooth technology, Blogs, satellite television, digital cable, and satellite radio to name just some of the most popular. All of these technologies have been intended—to at least some extent—to keep us more connected and informed than ever before in human history. And, to some extent, and in some ways, these technologies have succeeded in bringing people closer together and making the world smaller. But the same technologies that allow us to stay "in touch" with others around the world, are also what disrupt our reaching out and physically being "in touch" with our social surroundings. As Freud says of the technologies of the telephone and the cable, for instance, the satisfaction of staying in touch by email, mobile phones, and text messaging are all only partial responses to distances created by other technological advances (1961:39-41), and these improvements in science and technology have failed to increase either the degree or the amount of "pleasurable satisfaction" people experience (Freud 1961:39).

Where I used to strike up interesting conversations in the gate area while waiting for boarding to start, I now see three people in adjoining chairs, all talking on their respective mobile phones. If their phones allow them to be in touch with those on

the other ends of their calls, it is at the expense of being in touch with the people right beside (and perhaps even touching) them. Why get together with someone at work to go over an idea with them in person when you can just call them on the next floor? Why call them when you can send them an email? Why use a full email when you can just “chat” online? But maybe your workplace does not allow chat software on the company server; what will you do? Maybe go up to the next floor after all? Nope, no reason to when you can just text message them. And so it goes.

I work in front of a computer all week, sitting on my bum staring at this headache-inducing screen with one eye on my boss. I quite like my job, it's not that so much, it's just that it's so still, but you can never really relax because it looks like you've fallen asleep or something. Then I get to go out at the weekend and dance and it's stunning, just moving and the music and the heat and my body feels like mine again. (cited in Jackson 2004:20)

While this comment was made in reference to clubbing, in many ways the same holds true for both ballroom and salsa dancing as well. Admittedly club dancing is more free form, requiring no training and, initially, offering more potential for individual expression. But it is also these same characteristics that can make it prohibitively intimidating for many people to just “jump in” as it were, especially for those who are, or have become, alienated from their bodies in an ever more technological world of work, leisure, and home—each of which continues to become ever more technology focused and driven. In such cases both ballroom and salsa offer distinct advantages to the non-dancing newcomer.

Where club dancing's free form expressivity meets the needs of many, the structured introduction and socializing of a salsa or a ballroom class offers a much less “all or nothing” mentality to become involved. The other students in ones class are

usually of a similar level, there is an instructor providing guidance and examples to follow, and the lights in the room are usually all the way up.<sup>3</sup> The presence of prescribed steps and patterns may thus serve as, and represent, a less threatening foray into physicality—it is not, after all *them*, or *their* dancing which are on display, but merely them learning the steps of ballroom or salsa dancing. Most social ballroom dances and most salsa clubs offer a complimentary lesson (with cover) at the beginning of the event as well, and this both surrounds the newcomer with others of similar ability and provides social introductions as well; and in a way not facilitated by the clubbing environment.

One final difference, and perhaps the biggest one at that, is that ballroom and salsa require touch and contact *along prescribed lines*. I can recall how uncomfortable I was just taking frame with my instructor during my first few dance lessons; and, based on the many dancers I have spoken with both formally and informally, I am far from unique in having this experience. Especially among the hyper-sensitivity to inter-sex touching during the 1990s, gendered contact became, literally, a touchy subject. Yet as Blackmer points out, “an individual’s connection to the world, the awareness of oneself, is dependent on touching and being touched” (1989:23; based on Rose 1980:8-9). Partnered dancing thus filled a niche, allowing contact—indeed requiring it—but within a set framework; a framework that made touching safe.

Given the often nebulous nature of what was “acceptable,” the prescribed lines provided in partnered dancing thus served a dual role. On the one hand the partnering of partnered dance provided actual touch; the same touch which most directly

connects people. At the same time, however, partnered dancing had prescribed roles, roles within which “what is acceptable?” did not constantly have to be questioned. Within the dances prescribed lines, a man could touch woman without risking offense while, at the same time, a woman could touch a man without being concerned that it would be read as an invitation to greater personal contact. None of this is to suggest that everyone is initially comfortable with the contact of partner dancing, but that these dance forms *do* provide a context within which these people can become more comfortable with it.

Where I was first hesitant to even take frame with a new woman, or where my hands were positioned along her shoulder blade, I no longer give such things a thought in social dance situations.<sup>4</sup> I was reminded of the initial discomfort and the time such ease in physical contact may take to develop while serving as a volunteer Teaching Assistant for a UCSD dance department course on Latin world dances (not to be confused with International style Latin). At one point some of the women in the class complained to me “why can’t the guys in the class just lead things the way you do?” When I watched to see what was going wrong, I could see that the majority of what these women were complaining about was a hesitation to touch and physically guide them. I ended up telling the women to “cut the guys some slack,” and explaining how especially “in today’s hypersensitive society,” a lot of beginning guys were very uncomfortable holding/touching an “unknown” woman.

I then turned toward the men and pointed out that two issues presented themselves. First, the women in the class, as well as out in the social clubs, would



much rather feel securely held instead of feeling like she might end up being dropped at any given instant. Second, that the women who objected to the level of touch required for partner dancing would not be enrolled in this class (or stay enrolled) or be the ones showing up to dance at the salsa clubs; and that while none of this should be taken as suggesting that anyone *wanted* to be touched, it did demonstrate that they did not overly object to this level of physicality. The underlying point to this whole situation was, of course, that being touched/held in a dance appropriate way is not, on its own, an invitation to more; and this is exactly why and how partnered dance helps de-alienate people from the communicativity of contact.

An important point to make here—and why I make use of the term *re-embodiment*—is that I do not mean that people are somehow otherwise not embodied, disembodied, or alienated from their bodies. All physical practices, including sitting at the computer screen and talking on a mobile phone, are, of course, embodied. As such it is inaccurate to say that dance is a means of generating or bringing about embodiment. Similarly, it would be inaccurate to assume that the person working at their computer or talking on their mobile phone feels some sense of bodily alienation; i.e. that somehow their body is not their's. What is the case, however, is that the people leading modern western lives typically take little notice of their bodies (on a day-to-day basis) save when something goes wrong. Practices like dance therefore provide opportunities for re-embodiment, wherein and whereby awareness of and attention to the body can be re-awakened.

In learning to dance, then, a person learns to move again; not merely in instrumental ways, but in socially expressive ones. As you learn the steps *you* learn a new way to move, “it is not a leg, but *YOU* that is moving. It is *your* leg, your arm” (Vermeij 1994:61; original emphasis). Indeed, it is in learning dance in prescribed manners that people do not merely release themselves expressively, but do the work of learning awareness and control of their bodies anew—discovering self along with body. Rather than the ecstatic burst of Jackson’s club dancers, with ballroom and salsa “dance training is a slow process of rediscovery, so that consciousness is not obliterated in a frenzy of possession; instead it does the leading, the dismembering, the investigating, it contains and controls” (Blackmer 1989:41).

Leisure pursuits, of which dance is but one, are always about more than (just) leisure; as noted by Ortner, “the point...is to find something that one cannot find in modern life, that indeed has been lost in modern life” (1999:36). Certainly what it is that is “missing” differs over time and between individuals (Ortner 1999), but it seems to me that much of the appeal in dance is that the “body” in dance (just as Ortner sees with mountaineering) is non-modern. “A dancer’s training,” as Blackmer suggests, “is an investigation, a venture into one’s animal ancestry...One returns to the realm of the physical aspect of instincts, and of their chthonic energy” (1989:41). Many coaches, for example, end up dropping words from parts of their teaching, using just sounds to communicate basic rhythms and flows of movement; the “Ta, Ta, ticki-ticki-Ta” of a cha cha or the “Fwooooshhhh” of the rise, spin, and fall characteristic of a correctly executed Waltz spin turn. Beyond the rediscovered and reawakened charge of physical

contact, then—perhaps as a direct function of it—is also the rediscovered and reawakened charge of one’s own physical “being.”

A recent television ad for an arthritis medication, for instance, showed partnered dancing as the visual image of how one could be enjoying life if not troubled by arthritic pain. Certainly some of the embedded imagery and marketing here is deliberately trying to link both physical ease and companionship through the use of partnered dance, yet this image only works in this ad campaign because it “speaks” to us. The images used in advertising are deliberately chosen, and only stay on the air, if they work and, consciously or not, part of the power held in the images of this television ad lies in the fact that, for many, “dance is an effort at healing, but one which...includes the spirit as well as the body” (Blackmer 1989:35). It is not only a lack of pain that this ad evokes, but enjoyment and connection as well. And, in reality, Blackmer suggests that physical activity generally makes people feel better because “it heals the separation (or out-and-out split) between body and non-body” (1989:48) which, if started by and as a consequence of industrialization, has only continued to widen in the face of mass media and telecommunications.

Overall then, dance, like many other physical pastimes, allows people to reconnect with their physicality. But dance and other expressive movement styles may go further, allowing people to experiment with and use their bodies in a non-instrumental manner. But just as dance is therefore a special subset of physical activities, so too are partnered dance forms—such as ballroom and salsa—a special subset of dance. It is partnered dance, after all, that people now only come to be aware

of their bodies but, specifically, of their bodies in interaction with others. Thus, while any type of physicality may help, partnered dance forms are especially efficacious in facilitating the very re-embodiment that modern modes of work, transportation, leisure, and home life may make all the harder—and thus all the more valuable—to attain.

### **Bodily Awareness: Learning to Feel Like a Dancer**

The first step towards re-embodiment is learning to truly feel one's body, to become aware of and not take it for granted as seems to be so typical of western, and especially US, culture and society. Yes there are people who spend hours in the gym training and crafting their bodies but, all too often, this is for aesthetic purposes alone and their actual attention to the inner workings and feelings in their bodies slide out of focus and attention as soon as they step foot outside the gym. And this is where and why dance is a particularly efficacious means of and mode to re-embodiment, as "*literacy in dance begins with seeing, hearing, and feeling how the body moves*" (Foster 1986:58; emphasis added). Indeed, the degree of implicit kinesthetic knowledge and understanding amassed by long trained dancers is often astounding; yet even from the beginning, "regardless of its aesthetic and technical allegiance, almost any dance class cultivates an awareness of the basic attributes of movement" (Foster 1986:58).<sup>5</sup>

The dancers I have been dealing with in this dissertation, however, are not those who merely show up to a couple of dance classes and attend a few dance parties

at a local studio. They are committed dancers who, be it as amateurs or professionals, as ballroom competitors or accomplished salsa dancers, wish to hone their craft. But even here, except for some who may come from a different dance background,

Those wishing to become trained dancers begin with little or no ability to control their bodies, beyond what is instinctively acquired. They cannot really feel themselves, they do not yet possess their bodies or their physiological centers. (Blackmer 1989:48)

If something of an overstatement, Blackmer's point is still an apt one for describing the totally new awareness, understanding, and sense of mastery involved in dance training. When I was first starting out with my own dance training, for instance, I remember being told things like "stand over your foot" or "stand on the inside edge of your foot." Stand over my foot? Where did they think I was standing? What did they think I was standing on? It has only been through continued time, learning, and practice that I have come to understand the real centering over the front half of the middle of the foot that is meant, one that starts with the contraction of the *Latissimus Dorsi*, on the same side of the body as the standing foot, which compresses down, through a properly aligned and settled hip, and through appropriate ankle tension presses down into the floor with perfect balance, centering, and alignment.

Similarly, my initial attempts to lift the outside edges of my feet off the floor met with little success; but how else was I to stand on the inside edges? If I wanted to stand on my toes I lifted my heels, right? And if I wanted to stand on my heels, didn't I just lift my toes off the ground? Here too it has only been with continued time, learning, and practice that I came to realize that what was really involved was actually the opposite of what I had been trying to do, that rather than trying to lift the outside

edges of my feet what I should be doing was applying pressure to the floor, that is settling my body weight, over and through the inside edges of my feet. As both of these examples suggest,

The physical organization of a dancer's body is of course no different from anyone else's, but in dance one must be *aware* of the division into front and back, right and left (two quite different personalities), and above and below...For a dancer, the organization of muscles is of particular importance. To function optimally each muscle must contract and relax alternately. (Blackmer 1989:66; emphasis added)

What may not be explicit in Blackmer's description, however, is that one becomes aware of is not knowledge. I was told exactly what to do by first instructors after all. What I did not know was the how of it; I did not yet have the requisite internal awareness. Such awareness is a trained skill and, as such, is always open to additional growth and development. Dancers continue to develop this awareness throughout their lives; with many a retired champion asserting that they understand movement far better now than they ever had while at the peaks of their competitive careers and winning their various titles.

I recently had an experience along these same lines (although obviously on a much smaller scale) regarding my own dancing. I had heard many, many times, for example that I needed to be dancing through my back more, or using my back more, or (in an interesting construction) that I needed to dance my back more. While I knew I did not have this close to as developed as it needed to be, I had thought I had the basic idea. It was only during a recent lesson with new coaches, however, that it really clicked, and I realized "Oh! So that's what they've meant!" The point here being that in continuing to learn, train, and grow as a dancer one's awareness continues to develop; a dancer's bodily awareness is not like a car's gas tank which, when full, is

full. Long after a dancer has stopped competing, they still have the bodily awareness developed through years of training wherein and whereby a dancer's bodily awareness is formed and honed.

### **Physical Change: Learning to Dance**

As Wulff notes on the very first page of her text, "learning to dance and dancing are muscular experiences that never go away completely" (1998:1). Just as the non-dancer learns and develops new bodily awareness along their journey into becoming a dancer, so too do they develop their body anew. It is not only muscular awareness that develops, but new muscles. It is not only new conceptualizations of bodily control and movement that develop, but new neurological linkages. "Dancers," as Wulff points out, "can remember steps for years, saving them in their 'muscle memory'" (Wulff 1998: 104). Indeed, in a couple of the more interesting cases I encountered, dancers who had suffered some type of brain trauma easily recalled steps and patterns learned long ago at the same time as they struggled to retain newly learned information.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in some cases dancers whose bodies could no longer execute physically demanding new choreography could still perform even more taxing movements which they had learned decades past. But dancers do not simply arrive at this point; it is a gradual process of growth and development.

Despite its sometimes gradual progression, the physical changes brought about in a dancer's body should not be underestimated. Referring to the elongation and stretch through the spine typical of most Western dance forms, for instance, Blackmer notes that "after some training, a dancer may gain as much as two inches in height as a

result of this ‘pulling up’” (1989:70). Inseparable from any height thus gained, is the body tone and posture that are equally inherent to this internal elongation; and it is, in fact, this bodily change that underlies the aesthetic value of posture noted in Chapter 8. But, as also noted in Chapter 6, posture is only one of several carriage-related aesthetic variables physically achieved by the dancer. A dancer’s weight is also brought slightly forward, for example, and this “brings a physical focus into the center line of the body both vertically and horizontally” (Blackmer 1989:72).

This last point—that dancers move from their center (Blackmer 1989:74)—is far from being either a trivial or even only a technical one. Certainly “dancers use their body all the time when they work,” but, as Wulff also (and aptly) points out, “dancers also use their bodies *differently* than other people when they do not dance” (1998: 102). What this means is that the spinal elongation and the forward shifting of weight noted by Blackmer are not simply affectations enacted while dancing but, with time, training, and practice become integral to all of a dancer’s movement and not simply their dancing. Indeed the hundreds and thousands of hours spent in the studio are all aimed at making the techniques of dance movement deeply ingrained, automatic elements of bodily composure and utilization. This learning, embedding, and automation of bodily techniques and processes is what many athletes know as “muscle memory,” what Wacquant refers to as “bodily capital” (2004 *passim*), and what Dennis, one of my early San Diego salsa mentors, calls “sweat equity.” While all addressing the training of bodily processes, however, there are different connotations



and implications for these three terms: muscle memory, bodily capital, and sweat equity.

The term ‘muscle memory’ helps highlight the automation of bodily responses that is the goal of ongoing practice. On the competition floor, for example, the ballroom competitor neither has the time nor can afford the conscious attention to all of the elements of technique that are being judged. Simply stated, it is not possible to keep all of the aesthetic factors noted in Chapter Eight in mind all at once. And, to whatever extent any of these values is the subject of conscious thought, attention is taken away from floor one’s partner, the audience, judges, other competitors on the floor, and the music one is dancing too. Imagine the outcome if someone running to catch a train had to consciously think through and coordinate the oppositional actions of their arms, legs, and torso—including the pendular trajectory of the striding foot, which then lands heel first with the body weight being rolled from the heel, through the middle of the foot, onto the ball of the foot which then pushes back and extends through the toe as the body passes over what has now become the standing leg. Clearly if deliberate and conscious thought was needed to run, this hypothetical person would be a miss their train amidst the mass of uncoordinated limbs.

Walking and running work best, and are executed the most easily, with little (if any) deliberate attention. Similarly, accomplished volleyball, tennis, lacrosse, soccer, and water polo players do not try to calculate how to apply the strength, arm actions, spin, and trajectory needed to score; they simply aim for their target and let their bodies do what their bodies have been trained to do. The same holds true for the

dancer who has also trained their body so that their muscle memory knows how to do what is wanted and needed when called upon. But just as not all ball players are equally trained, practiced, and skilled, this is equally true for dancers, and this is where Wacquant's concept of bodily capital adds to the picture. If the term 'muscle memory' highlights the automation of bodily practices, 'bodily capital' shifts this focus to the embedding of bodily practices as, with time and practice, the body and its modes of utilization change.

The 'bodily' part of Wacquant's 'bodily capital' is straightforward enough, although the significance of this element should not be underestimated. As with boxers (Wacquant 2004) or *capoeiristas* (Downey 2005), "dancers are totally dependent on their bodies" (Wulff 1998: 103). What the 'capital' part of Wacquant's 'bodily capital' gets at then, is the practice specific value that accumulates—almost as if by accretion—in the body of the practitioner. It is not only skill that develops with practice, after all, but task specific patterns and articulations of skin, muscle, tendon, and bone as well. A dancer's bodily capital is not only their knowledge of dance, or even the automation of movement stemming from his or her muscle memory; it is the embedded patterning, development, and linking of body and practice.

Compared to a non-dance, for example, the dancer does not only develop new ways to use their ankles, but actually develops their ankles themselves. Indeed the amount of power, balance, and strength developed in an accomplished ballroom competitor's ankles is hard for the non-dancer to recognize, let alone fully appreciate. The best example I encountered in the course of my field work was an active

professional (Standard) ballroom competitor who was also a Tae Kwan Doe student and competitor. Recovering from a moderately serious ankle injury, this dancer was ready to—and did—return to full contact Tae Kwan Doe sparring and competition several months before he felt that his ankle was strong enough to begin practicing ballroom at the “all out” level that was necessary to prepare for competition.

In sum, then, it is neither skill nor body alone which is developed through a dancer’s physical practice but, rather, the dancer’s skilled body. “dancing ability is not just a meaning constructed on the body,” as Wade notes, “but a material product of working *through* the body...the motor skills of the body are altered, changing the person’s embodied physical capital during his or her lifetime” (Wade 2000:22, emphasis added). Whether Wade’s ‘embodied physical capital’ or Wacquant’s ‘bodily capital,’ the point is that physical practices, such as dance, are about physically embedded skills; skills which simply cannot be reduced to knowledge alone, but implicate physical development along with the wherewithal to utilize it.

Yet if ‘muscle memory’ accounts for the automation of physical practices, and ‘bodily capital’ for their physically embedded nature, the term ‘sweat equity’ best captures the role and importance of physical skills as behaviors and movements acquired and developed in use and practice. Dennis’ use of the term ‘sweat equity’ is meant to capture how real-world salsa ability cannot come from dance classes and lessons, but only from the time spent on the floor, actually dancing. Dennis’ underlying point, of course, is that in class knowledge and ability does not, automatically, transform into the on-the-fly ability of the experienced dancer, the ability to change

and adjust to one's partner and to floor conditions as needed in the moment; a skill that can only be developed via experience in the very setting for which that skill is being developed.

This same understanding of situation-specific experience and development lies behind ballroom competitors' practice rounds, meant to emulate competition floor conditions. Dancing one's routines to music, all the way through regardless of mistakes, and negotiating the presence of other couples on the floor is, after all, quite different from technique specific practice and training. Dean Abraham, co-owner of Dance Options at Cheam in South London, for example, comments on how "before big comps people come for the atmosphere and to psych each other out as much as for the practice" and, similarly, international coach and judge Richard Porter comments on how dancers get pushed by competitors via practice rounds, noting how a couple "maybe come in and don't really feel like it, but then see a couple you're afraid of really working it," so practice hard as a result.

Yet even practice rounds cannot duplicate the full physical conditions of competition though, with the presence of judges and audience all around the floor, the sound of the audience and the MC, and the need to evaluate energy expenditure so that one dances hard enough to make the next round but without peaking too early. Talking to her coach upon returning from an out of state competition, for instance, amateur Latin competitor Stacey commented that she had been tired that evening so had not danced well; to which her coach's response was: "That's no excuse. That's when you have to pour it all on and more so!" Among the reasons that many competitors will

travel widely to even minor competitions, then, especially earlier on in their competitive careers, is that no amount of practice or even practice rounds can duplicate the experience—and hence experiential learning—of actual competition floor time. It is only as competing starts to become as second nature as dancing itself that a dancer's competitive dancing can fully showcase his or her ability.

Physical skill is best understood, then, as a complex of bodily change, awareness, and ability, wherein each of these elements is inter-implicated in the others. Wacquant (2004) provides an excellent explication of the bodily understandings (based on his sociological explication of boxing) that underlie terms such as muscle memory, bodily capital, and sweat equity. In Wacquant's words:

Theoretical mastery is of little help so long as the move is not inscribed within one's bodily schema; and it is only after it has been assimilated by the body in and through endless physical drills repeated *ad nauseam* that it becomes in turn fully intelligible to the intellect. There is indeed a *comprehension of the body* that goes beyond—prior to—full visual and mental cognizance. Only the permanent carnal experimentation that is training, as a coherent complexus of “incorporating practices” can enable one to acquire this practical mastery. (2004:69)

As Wacquant makes clear, practical and theoretical mastery are far from one and the same, and only bodily practice generates the experience required for practical mastery of a physical skill. A ballroom judge or teacher may have “an eye” for dance, seeing what needs to be changed or fixed in a dancer's dancing, and a theoretical expert may be able to quote “the book” (i.e. various technique manuals) at will, but actual physical experience and practice is needed in order to develop a dancer's own dancing.

It is not for lack of words that dance teachers physically manipulate their students' bodies, but because the correct positioning, alignment, and engagement of joints and muscles must be felt if a student is to truly understand them. Learning

movement in dance is not, after all, only—or even primarily—about learning movements but, rather, about (practically) learning a *way* of moving. As Wacquant makes clear:

Training teaches the movements—that is the most obvious part—but it also inculcates in a practical manner the schemata that allow one to better differentiate, distinguish, evaluate, and eventually reproduce these movements...Every gesture thus apprehended-comprehended becomes in turn the support, the material, the tool that makes possible the discovery and thence the assimilation of the next. (2004:118)

For physical practices, then, movements are trained as *a model for movement*. The reason to start with easier patterns and skills is not, after all, simply to match the beginning students' lower ability levels, but to help them learn how to move in a manner that more difficult elements are based not only on, but also in.

The point of all of this is that dancers are not simply people who dance, but people who have trained themselves to dance. As much as the image presented by the accomplished dancer is one of supreme ease and effortlessness, in fact intense dedication, effort, and training underlie this image; dedication, effort, and training that change the dancer's body at the same time as they change the dancer's awareness. A dancer, as Blackmer contends, "is not a natural man, but one highly trained; discipline of the body, not denial of it, is his way" (1989:18), and, as she goes on to note, "Through discipline and a kind of asceticism, with sweat and perseverance, dancers shape their bodies, bending them, at least for a time, to the ego's will...through fashioning their bodies dancers transform themselves physically and spiritually" (1989:19).<sup>7</sup> Such training and shaping, however, does not take place without its share of physical pain and injury.

## **Pain and Injury**

“Although some dancers get through a dancing career with few minor injuries,” notes Wulff, “almost all dancers get injured – and have pain. To endure pain is regarded as necessary in a dancer’s career” (1998: 107). And how could it be otherwise? The dancer, as previously noted, trains their body to do what it has never done before. They continuously push, pull, and stretch muscles, joints, tendons, and ligaments in new ways; ways that their bodies have never experienced before. A Standard dancer’s arm, for instance, may need to be held in a set position—to maintain their frame—for extended periods of time that all of their previous non-dance experience never prepared them for. A Latin dancer’s back may never have been used to generate so much of the body’s movement. Careful attention to, development, and use of the different edges and balance points in the feet are likely new unless one has previous training in dance or gymnastics. The repetitive impact of the foot into the ground and as a source of power resembles that of a gymnast or a runner. In each case there is a fine line for the dancer, like any athlete, to negotiate. Training too little or too lightly brings little gain, if any, while training too much or too heavily may result in serious, even debilitating, injury.

Part of the dancer’s craft, then, is learning to listen to their body; to gauge the degree of stretch and strain it is experiencing, the amount of pain and soreness it feels, and to weigh and evaluate these against its own abilities and limits. If a dancer’s training involves developing a new awareness of one’s body (as it does), a significant element of this involves learning how to listen to pain and injury. “To the careful

listener, pain speaks in different timbres,” notes Blackmer, “A stiff muscle can be pushed; a short tendon stretched, but not too much. Certain other sensations which also read as pain must be obeyed as a red flag to stop” (1989:61). From personal experience, for instance, I have had to learn to distinguish between different forms of pain in my back. Am I feeling muscular soreness from working on using my back in practice, or is it more serious; a nerve radiating off my spinal column being pinched by a vertebrae that has over-rotated out of spinal alignment? A dancer’s success does not come without pain, as it is pain that helps attune the dancer with their body more than any other process:

The path to physical awareness is paved with pain; it is the constant companion of the dancer, faithful from the beginning to the end of his or her dancing days...for the dancer, it could be said that pain is the *via regia* to physical knowledge: in the effort to build a communication system, nothing establishes the telephone line between a part of the body and the brain more quickly or effectively. (Blackmer 1989:54; original emphasis).<sup>8</sup>

What is critical here is that a dancer’s awareness of and familiarity with pain is not simply an ability to withstand or work through it; although this is also true of many dancers. Instead, what is at issue is that as a link between mind and body, dancers learn how to differentiate between different types of pain; they learn when resistance suggests attention to the way certain muscles are being used and when resistance offers a warning against serious bodily injury shortly ahead. As a dancer, then, “one learns when to rest, when to push, when to wrap an ankle in a poultice of onion, when to apply ice, when to soak in hot water, when to see a physician, and when to ignore medical advice” (Blackmer 1989:61-62).



This is an important point, since if a dancer's success does not come without pain, part of the dancer's task, then, is to learn to listen to and understand their pain; making a trusted informant of it, if not a friend, as it were. If a dancer can learn to listen to the strain of their body, they learn exactly what muscles are being engaged and in what ways. During an informal follow up interview with Franco Formica and Oksana Nikiforova after they had won their second Blackpool Amateur Latin title, for instance, they indicated that this second championship had been *physically* easier for them since they had spent much of the previous year training with a conditioning expert from the national ballet, showing her what muscles they used the most. Franco and Oksana knew what muscles they used, of course, through careful attunement to their bodies—listening to the fatigue and soreness of their muscles after major competitions and in practice.

At even the lowest levels, however, the feedback provided by varying degrees of pain can be an invaluable tool in a dancer's development. Waking up with sore muscles, for example, can tell a dancer if they had really used their back during practice the previous day, just as throbbing feet can inform the dancer that they have left everything they had on the practice floor. As past Blackpool and World Professional Latin runner-up Karee Hardy notes, for instance:

At the studio pain was just part of your dedication to dance. If I didn't go home unable to walk down the stairs of the studio, or not long for my bath, where I would painfully sink into the bubbles at midnight, then I had simply not worked hard enough. (Hardy:web)

More acute pain, however, is typically an advanced warning of potentially dire consequences to follow. As such, the pacing of pain is important for a dancer; it is

needed if the dancer/body is to grow and learn, but too much is a major problem (Blackmer 1989:56). “A little stiffness can be tolerated and worked out the next day,” as Blackmer duly notes, but “too much means the dancer can’t walk or move correctly for several days and slips back severely in training” (Blackmer 1989:56). As many an armchair athlete well knows, infrequent exertion is the surest route to injury, and this is another factor that feeds into dancers’ regular and ongoing practice; “a strenuous daily class causes little injury,” as Blackmer well notes, while “a strenuous class once a week can be murder!” (1989:56). Part of the importance of regular practice, then, and perhaps an underappreciated one outside the ranks of more accomplished athletes, is that it helps separate pain from injury; allowing for instruction from the former while preventing debilitation from the later.

Some degree of pain is almost always part of the picture for those who take their practice of dance seriously, whether a new dancer or an experienced professional. Walking back to her car after her first night of serious salsa dancing at a downtown club, for example, Betsy says: “I never realized how sensitive my feet were!” And, on the other side of the dance-experience spectrum, Blackpool and World Professional Latin runner up Karen Hardy comments:

Here at the studio pain was just part of your dedication to dance. If I didn't go home unable to walk down the stairs of the studio, or not long for my bath, where I would painfully sink into the bubbles at midnight, then I had simply not worked hard enough.

Repetition was paramount to perfect a movement. A fall resulting in a nasty bruise or twist was just part of perfecting an impossible step that you knew the world would love and all soon try to follow. (Hardy)

It is along these same lines that I have heard coaches regularly make comments such as “if you’re doing this right your feet should definitely be cramping by now” even for competitors at lower levels of competition.

Yet such day-to-day bruises, blisters, soreness, and aches of the committed dancer are, unfortunately, not the only pains that dancers contend with. Although written in the context of ballet, Wulf’s assertion that “the threat of suffering setbacks in one’s career because of injuries, or even worse, having to stop dancing prematurely, is constantly there” (1998: 105) is equally applicable to ballroom and salsa as well. And, even if irregular occurrences, serious injuries are non-anomalous among serious dancers. As Blackmer points out, beyond the more manageable everyday aches and pains,

Serious injuries too—a sprained ankle, a torn knee cartilage, split Achilles tendon, ruptured spinal disc, swollen painful feet, etc.—are the frequent dark companions and teachers of a dancer. There is really nothing ‘natural’ about the body of a dancer; its development, like psychological work on oneself, is an *opus contra naturam*, a work against nature. And nature often responds to the presumptuous efforts to improve on her creation by punishing the ego’s hubris. (Blackmer 1989:60; original emphasis)

The reality of such debilitating injuries may be ignored by most dancers on a day-to-day basis but, when it intrudes, it cannot be ignored. A dancer’s career can end in an instant but, more importantly, this can often mean that their most self-definitional engagement can come crumbling down with a crashing halt. Who is the dancer if they are no longer a dancer? Obviously each person, in their own circumstances, needs to find their own answer to such a question—when their body can no longer do what they ask of it due to age if not sooner due to injury. Physical

limitations cannot help but impact a dancer's identity; but age provides time to adjust where as catastrophic injury does not.

Kenny provides an interesting example of the massive realignment in thinking that a serious injury can induce, even when successfully rehabilitated and recovered from. A Blackpool and World finalist, Kenny suffered an unanticipated and potentially career ending joint injury. Quickly finding the best specialist in the country, Kenny was seen and admitted for surgery within 24 hours of his injury. When I interviewed Kenny after a successful rehabilitation and return to competition, he commented that where he used to avidly read the sports section of the newspaper out of general interest, he now avidly followed the coverage of athletes' injuries. What Kenny's case helps illustrate is that, aside from physical consequences and learning, dancers attachment and connection with their bodies means that changes in body often affect changes in a dancer's interests and perceptions.

If injuries can be learned from, showing where bodily alignment and exertion have been misappropriated (Blackmer 1989:60), they also serve as a reminder of a dancer's career mortality. In ballroom and salsa, however, the looming threat of serious injury is compounded as it is not the dancer alone, but also their partner who is directly impacted. Where Wulff notes that for ballet dancers "an injury, moreover, not only harms the injured dancer's career [or at least has the potential too], but also potentially that of his or her partner" (Wulff 1998: 106), this is likely to be even more so the case in ballroom and salsa, where one's partner is inevitably part of one's career and identity as a dancer. Kenny's injury, for instance, did not only call into question

the future trajectory of his dance career, but that of his partner as well. Especially for those at the top (like Kenny and his partner), the pool of viable partners is likely to be quite limited and the loss of a partner is at least as likely to represent the downturn in a dancer's career as an opportunity for future progress.

Because dancing is so dependent on the dancer's body, even when injuries are recovered from they can have significant and lasting impacts on the trajectory of a dancer's development (and career) as a dancer. Originally a 10-dancer (as is the case for many European dancers), Brenda was involved in a major accident while on a bus trip with her ballroom club in 1983 (when she was 23). Brenda does not remember whether they were on their way to from a competition, and cannot recall if it was five or six people from the club who were killed in the accident. Brenda's right arm was severely injured in the accident, but she counts herself lucky since the doctor who treated her on the scene turned out to be a hand specialist. Originally told that she would probably never be able to use her arm again, Brenda's right arm was in a cast for a long time. Because she could not use her right arm to practice Latin while it remained in a cast,<sup>9</sup> she started "really working on Standard" and, because she "met with a lot of success quickly," that is where she stuck even after her arm eventually healed.

Also telling regarding the extreme embodiment of dance are Brenda's initial comments to me regarding the bus accident that, "thank G-d, none of the injuries were 'major'"...despite the several deaths which were, as when ever any young person dies, tragic, and several broken bones. Elaborating on this Brenda says that she thinks that

being permanently crippled is probably the very worst thing that could ever happen to a dancer. Given the details of the bus accident in question, the implication of these sentiments suggest that, for a dancer, being permanently crippled could be viewed as even worse than death.

### **...And Pleasure**

As the preceding section has shown, pain, injury, and physical limitations cannot help but impact a dancer's experiences and identity as a dancer—but there is also an important flipside to this point. First, as Wulff notes, “if pain is a part of the everyday life of dancers, there is also the *pleasure* of being able to move and control one's body beyond ordinary motor activities” (1998: 107). If physical limitations prove a greater impediment to a dancer's bodily fulfillment, the converse is also true: physical ability and excellence offer a type of bodily fulfillment as well. After our first lessons with a new pair of coaches, for instance, my current dance partner and I went out to get a quick dinner before going out to a local salsa club. Both of the lessons from both of the coaches were exceptional, with one being the best lesson in my life—it was the first time I had truly understood and *felt* what it was to truly dance from my back. As we were sitting and eating my partner looked over at me and said “you look like you're in love.”

While this might seem an odd analogy to the non-dancer, the several dancers whom I have related this story to each nodded their heads in understanding and agreement, each having had their own experience of finding that their body could “do

more” and be used in ways that they had never experienced before—and each had also been suffused with the pleasure of this deeply-bodily discovery. Building on Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of flow, Wulff takes note of this dynamic in pointing out how,

Moments of flow – when dancers feel completely in control of their bodies, and experience power as a consequence – are the rewards, and one important reason, for struggling with seemingly endless hardships; practicing almost every day for decades, coping with pain, and in most cases remaining unknown. (1998: 107)

Just as pain, injury, and physical limitations cannot help but impact a dancer’s experiences and identity as a dancer, then, this is also true for physical exertion, development, and mastery. Where pain and injury heighten awareness, ease and ability heighten enjoyment. In either case, however, bodily sensations shape the dancer’s experience of both body and dance, and hence of their own experience of their own body and identity as a dancer. And, building on this, there is also something to be said of the pleasure in dance (separate from endorphins) that arises from feelings of heightened awareness of, sensitivity to, expression through, and control over one’s body.

### **Somatipsychicism**

The idea of psychosomatic phenomena is now commonplace in the west and has corollaries among many other cultures as well—the general idea being that internal/mental states can underlie distresses experienced by the body. The general idea of biofeedback relies on the same undergirding understanding, in this case in so far as mental processes are accepted as being able to influence even autonomic

physical processes such as heart rate. Yet just as much as inner states can serve to frame the body, so too may the body frame inner states and, given such interconnections, changes in ego and identity are inescapable in the face of bodily change (and vice versa). As Bourdieu well knew, “*what is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is*” (1990:73; emphasis added).

As Blackmer suggests, as a dancer learns to listen to his or her body through dance training, they are also expanding their consciousness which, in turn, corresponds to a strengthening of ego (1989:61).<sup>10</sup> The basic idea here is that as a dancer learns to dance, they do not learn about dance simply in the abstract, but also as it applies to them as a dancer. As I learn how it feels to move in certain ways, it is *I* that am learning this and, as I gain in experience and mastery of such movement—in and through my body—*I* am the one who gains this experience and mastery. In a like vein, and equally applicable to both cognitive and embodied skills, based on his own work with capoeira Downey notes that “skills become part of what Iris Young, (1990:16) calls the ‘general structures of experience’ that distinguish a person’s way of being in the world” (2005:34).

I would suggest that “the importance of *touch*, of tactile awareness both within the body and between the body and the outer environment—the sense of ‘spatial separateness’ which seems to be necessary for the definition of ego” (Blackmer 1989:29), may be particularly significant regarding *partnered* dance forms, such as ballroom and salsa, wherein interpersonal contact is the primary means of



communication between dance partners, is a basic tool of dance instruction and, perhaps most importantly, is definitive of the dance genre itself. While “the body and its sense of touch is very important for the development of the ego” (Blackmer 1989:31) in general, then, quite a sizable proportion of all of a partner dancer’s training and practice is geared towards developing their awareness of touch, including its innate sensuality and communicativity. As such, the role of touch for partner dancers is likely to be even more telling regarding their sense of self, especially seeing as how “different physical techniques, broadly understood, affect a person’s sensual experience, including the most basic perceptions” (Downey 2005:210).

### **Body and Ego**

While not identical, body and ego are inseparable since, as Blackmer points out: “The awareness that ‘I’ am this body, ‘I’ am finite and separate from other bodies, forms the skeleton of the ego” (1989:29). Related to dance, Part of what is at stake here is that dancing takes intention and effort; and effort does not come about by chance. Being a salsa or a ballroom dancer is therefore deliberate; the result not of chance but of choice. And it is the ego that makes this choice, and therefore the ego that is invested in the bodily processes and developments related to dancing and to being a dancer. If it is *I* that am invested in my dancing, then my dancing cannot help but feedback into my (i.e. *I’s*) sense of self. It is along exactly such line that Wade posits that “dance...involves bodily effort,” which involves “an enactment of meanings which adds to their emotional intensity” (2000:22). Ultimately, then, body and ego are often linked for the dancer and, *as the body changes, so must the ego!*<sup>11</sup>

While the linking of body and ego is a basic process, the emphasis on bodily activity (in this case ballroom) can also give rise to over-identification between dance and identity. Although ballroom and salsa dancers dance as themselves (versus, say, as Romeo or Juliet in a classical ballet), ballroom audiences and observers can and do still often confuse these dancer's dancing as the person dancing. As much as dance may even filter through almost all aspects of a person's identity this is a far cry from conflating dance as the entirety of their identity and character. Good dancers can be mean people as easily as kind, and poor dancers can be generous as well as rude. Many a ballroom or salsa fan have lost their heroes in the face of wildly disappointing personal encounters, while other fans have found even greater respect for idols who have spoken or acted with the utmost humility.

This conflation of dance and identity is not, however, only a one way affair. Dancers too often fail to separate their personhood from their dancing as evidenced by such comments as "that judge hated me" in reference to a low competition mark. But how would that even be possible? Unless that judge is someone a dancer has had lessons with, or met in some other capacity, the judge in question probably does not even know the dancer, so how then could that judge hate them? But such perceptions are not all that hard to understand. At least in that moment, after all, dancing is likely to be among a dancer's most salient values and self-identifying elements, so any criticism of his or her dancing is experienced as a criticism of self. The simple comment of "that judge hated me" in response to a poor mark is thus actually telling of a much deeper and more complex dynamic, namely that "the process of making a

dance and making a dancer are bound together...the dancing body as well as the dancing subject comes to be endowed with a symbolic significance that permeates its very existence” (Foster 1986:3).

Although I most fully develop ideas about meanings and identity in dance in Chapter Twelve, the linkage between body and ego being discussed here demands and deserves some additional comments regarding the role and impact of dance on identity. Returning to the previously noted idea that the effort involved in learning to dance is significant, Wade notes (in reference to salsa) how “the active embodiment of dance as a consciously learned skill,” is an important part of what empowers its “potentially transformative charge” (2000:209). Since it is the self that actively invests energy in learning to dance—and thus in developing one’s self as a dancer—it is inevitable that a dancer’s development *as a dancer* must in turn be informative of his or her sense of self.

While this general dynamic of self investment and feedback is true of any chosen activity, “dance in particular,” as Wade suggests, “lends itself to processes of embodied appropriation and the transformation of identity” (2000:210) But why is this case? Wade’s answer is that “although all human activity is by definition embodied, dance can involve a particularly potent dynamic of the interplay between creating and releasing physical and emotional tension” (2000:210). In and of itself this both sounds and feels right to me but, at least as far as ballroom and salsa are concerned, I think it is more complex than just that. As stressed in Chapter 6, competitive ballroom is simultaneously spectacle, art, and sport. As such ballroom dance offers several

avenues for connecting embodied experience and identity, all of which interact with and enhance one another. Similarly, and as stressed in Chapter Seven, ballroom competitions also add elements of festival, celebration, and ritual to dancesport's linkage between body and identity. Overall, then, partnered dancing (such as ballroom) provides multiplicity of potent overlapping and reinforcing avenues for Wade's "processes of embodied appropriation and the transformation of identity."

While all activities—including sitting at home watching television—are embodied, the re-embodiment, bodily awareness, and bodily change that are all part of dance are particularly potent dynamics for the intensification of embodiment. In turn, this intensification of embodiment produces an intensification of self via the self-awareness, self-feeling, and self-control that are inherent to becoming and being a dancer. Even if the dancer may, at times, view and use their body as a tool for their craft, the self is primarily experienced as being in control of their body; not controlled by their body. Indeed, this dynamic is a key part of why physical injury (and, to a lesser extent, age) is so threatening to a dancer—inverting the dancer's locus of control between self and body, and thereby disrupting the dancer's self-concepts, understandings, and identity. Control of the body and not by it is thus an important element of a dancer's sense of "being in the world."<sup>12</sup>

### **Posture and Identity**

Perhaps one of the most basic and telling ways that the dancer's body informs the dancer's identity concerns posture; the dancer's bodily alignment and carriage. As Downey aptly notes, "people in a range of cultural contexts perceive links between

character and posture” (2005:129), and, in fact, the “links between bodily straightness and social virtues such as dignity, honesty, forthrightness, pride, and courage are surprisingly pervasive” (2005:130). Indeed, Downey’s treatment of this subject in his work on capoeira (2005) is exemplary, so it is in relation to these materials that I want to examine the interrelationships between posture and identity in dance. It is important to realize, and I want to make it explicitly clear, however, that posture may impact identity along two separate paths.

First, bodily carriage and attitude can directly influence and impact a dancer’s identity. Even if initially a deliberate posture learned as part of a dancer’s training, the way one holds one’s self is a part of who one is and, with time, what was once a dancer’s deliberate eventually becomes a taken for granted default posture. The trained dancer does not, after all, make a conscious effort not to slouch at the table while eating. Secondly, however, a dancer’s posture can influence other people’s reactions to the dancer—reactions which are then art of the experiential milieu within which the dancer negotiates their identity. Although distinct avenues by which posture and identity are connected, these two paths are not divorced from each other. Indeed, in so far as posture shapes identity along internal channels it colors the lenses through which external channels are experienced and incorporated and, in so far as posture shapes identity along external channels, it provides a range of perspectives from which internal channels may be experienced and incorporated. Along either path or in interaction between the two, however, the fact remains that “the connection between posture and character...arises from habits and styles of moving” (Downey 2005:119).

## **Internal Channels**

The most direct manner in which bodily experience and sensation influence personal identity is through shaping the embodied self's self representational and perceptive schemata. As Jackson says of clubbing, "introducing people to new sensations creates new embodied metaphors" (2004: 129), and it is in exactly this way that physical practices such as ballroom and salsa influence not only new experiences but new models of perception and understanding for all other experiences. As Downey points out, "people wear their flesh in distinct habitual styles; they inhabit different skills that shape their perceptions" (2005:34). How one is in the world is inseparable from how one perceives the world.

People are not simply "a way" in the world, of course, so do not only perceive it in one way either. That being said, bodily existence is the most fundamental way that people "are" in the world, making the body the most basic and consistent lens of personal experience. Yet bodies change which means, as this chapter helps highlight, that personal perceptions—and hence one's person—change as well. How the body "is," and how it is used, does not always shift along predictable or easily traced pathways. People can, and do, start and become involved with new and unanticipated (even to them) activities.

In my own case, for example, I started graduate school with little to no interest in dancing in general, and certainly none in ballroom or salsa dancing. I even recall an episode from soon after I first moved to San Diego when several friends and acquaintances from the undergraduate and graduate anthropology programs at San

Diego State University and I were at an outdoor street festival where a salsa band was playing.<sup>13</sup> I remember standing there just biding my time until we could move on while several of our group members started dancing in place to the music and my friend Andi, dancing right beside me, asked “how can you not dance to this?” Personally I had neither any interest nor inclination to dance to that music at that time. It should go without saying, then, that my current interest, involvement, and dancing could not have been predicted by any of the members in our group that day—myself included!

The point here is that given the myriad activities available in western society today, what will be of interest to someone and where they will invest themselves is far from given. More importantly though, as people do engage in new activities, such “training can lead a person to ‘occupy and inhabit corporeal space’ that might otherwise be habitually neglected” (Downey 2005:126). My own sense of my body and my body in interaction with others—both of which are implicated in not only my sense of self but in my “self” as well—have changed through my experiences with dance and my training as a dancer. “Through clubbing,” notes Jackson, “people experience new socio-sensual models, these models are embodied over time as practices and gradually slip back into the everyday lives of clubbers” (2004:133), and the same, I would argue, is true for any physical activity, as is certainly the case for ballroom and salsa. A final point to be made regarding the internal channels through which body informs the self concerns not only the opening of new (using Jackson’s term) socio-sensual doors, but also the closing of old ones.

Just as new ways of moving and of “being” that are developed and acquired in dance gradually slide out of dance-only contexts, so too do non-dance ways of moving and “being” that are changed in dance eventually shift back out to non-dance contexts as well. In developing as a dancer, then, one dynamic of what happens is that “as we develop our styles of moving, customary postures, and habitual activities, we may gradually forfeit the ability to move in unaccustomed ways” (Downey 2005:35). Some of the more obvious examples of this process come from dancers who (for various reasons) attempt to dance “down” in level. The quality of movement evinced by a dancer “sandbagging” an event cannot, for example, be missed by knowledgeable observers. Similarly, some newly relocated dance instructors do, at times, try to pass themselves off as new students in order to scope out the different studios and instructors in town. It is rare that it takes even a full 10 minutes for an experienced instructor to see that their new “student” is already an accomplished dancer. At a recent lesson one of our coaches tried to demonstrate to my partner how she (our coach) would move compared to what she saw my partner doing. While the point our coach was making was well demonstrated, as my partner lamented to me over dinner later that evening, “even when she [our coach] does it wrong it looks good.”

### **External Channels**

While bodily “being” and posture clearly influence identity via internal channels, external channels also play a role in such shaping of identity. Beyond modulating internal experiences (and hence constructions) of identity, “posture and personality can influence perception through the behavior that they induce” (Downey



2005:34). It is not only the self after all that experiences, acts in accordance with, and reacts to the body and its associated postures and movements, but all others selves that one encounters as well. Since identity construction involves one's perceptions of how others perceive one, how one's bodily "being" and posture feed back to one via others' actions and reactions influences one's identity. It is not merely internal confidence in one's abilities as a salsa dancer that make a dancer comfortable in a new setting, but experiences of others' reactions to one's dancing as well. These experiences do not simply convey the idea that "*I think I'm a good dancer*" to the self, but rather the notion that "*others think that I am a good dancer*" which, in turn, provides the self with experiential grounds for the self-conceptualization "*I am a good dancer.*"

In a related vein, the Standard dancer and Latin dancer do not simply experience themselves as different dancers through their different bodily enactments, they also perceive themselves as different dancers based on other's reactions to their different bodily enactments. A Standard dancer, for instance, does not stand, walk, talk, practice, dress, and dance *like* a Standard dancer but *as* a Standard dancer. And, in standing, walking, talking, practicing, dressing, and dancing like a standard dancer one interacts with others as a Standard dancer, meaning that others interact with one as a Standard dancer which, in turn, means that one interacts with others as someone who is perceived and interacted with as a Standard dancer. It is through this interaction between internal and external channels, then, that "the physical demands placed on us by the aesthetic standards we strive to attain with our bodies affect our character through our experiences of self-making disciplines" (Downey 2005:130).<sup>14</sup>

Returning to or hypothetical Standard dancer, it is worth noting that “bodily uprightness, and a corresponding stately rigidity of the spine, has for centuries been associated in many European societies with a dignified, properly cultivated individual” (Downey 2005:130; attributed to Vigarello 1989; cf. Elias 1978). Keeping in mind the link between dance and decorum hearkening back to the French Royal Court (as per Chapter 2), reveals a longstanding history of association between the bodily postures underlying Standard ballroom dance with dignified and properly cultivated character. The bodily postures and movements of the Standard dancer (including their costuming and grooming) are different than the bodily postures and movements of the Latin dancer. In turn, such differences in bodily practices contribute to and inform different identities. As goes the body, so goes identity; changes in identity following from changes in body.

## **Change**

“Taking one’s own body on as a project brings about change, in part,” notes Downey, “because the ‘project’ always accompanies the person incessantly demanding that one modify everyday actions to successfully reform” (2005:131). Since the “I” of self is an embodied “I” in the course of regular living, changes in body regularly change identity through both internal and external channels (as noted above), including feedback between both channels. Because the body is an inescapable vessel and interface for the self, bodily practices and projects that change the body (such as dance) cannot help but affect change in identity as well. Downey attests to exactly this dynamic—the inseparability of body and identity—when he posits that

“one can change one’s body only by transforming one’s character at the same time, behaving consistently in new ways” (2005:131). If it is inevitable that a change in body brings about a change in identity, however, this is not to say that changing the body is an efficient way to change identity; as, in fact, “changing one’s mind may be far simpler than shaping one’s body” (Downey 2005:131).

This is not to say that changing one’s mind—which, and following Downey’s use in this case, I take to be the way one thinks about and the world—is necessarily easy or necessarily comes about quickly. But, and this is key, it is possible to change one’s mind either easily or quickly (or both); and even if changes in identity are likely to be deeper and of greater significance than any given changing of the mind, changes of mind can (and often do) bring about changes of identity.<sup>15</sup> Anything beyond more superficial changes to one’s body, by way of contrast, are never fast and are rarely easy. “A phenomenological analysis of bodily transformation,” as Downey points out, “reveals that changing habits and everyday action, although possible, is actually very difficult; embodiment is no easy path of access to a person” (Downey 2005: 131). The resistance of the body to change thus has two important ramifications for its relationship to identity: first, and as just noted, changing the body is a rather difficult avenue to shaping identity; and second, changes to identity informed by bodily changes are as difficult to disengage as they were to come about in the first place.

The fact that changes to the body—and hence changes to identity via the body—are difficult is also what makes such shifts durable. This explains why bodily regimens are deliberately used, beyond task specific training, as part of various orders

(including military and monastic) despite the resistance of the body to change. Similarly, this dynamic helps account for the often great camaraderie between members of sports teams; especially camaraderie at levels that seem excessive for the degree of shared interests and values otherwise shared between teammates. It is this very dynamic that historian William McNeill is addressing with his theory of “muscular bonding” which he describes as “the human emotional response to moving rhythmically in dance and drill” (1995:vi).<sup>16</sup> “Moving our muscles rhythmically and giving voice,” as McNeill goes on to point out, “consolidate group solidarity by altering human feelings” (1995:viii).<sup>17</sup>

As McNeill’s theory of muscular bonding thus suggests, the efficacy of dance (and drill) to bring about change in both thought and identity is not *only* linked to bodily change itself, but also to the emotional concomitants of bodily movement as well. “Feelings,” as McNeill is well aware, “are inseparable from their gestural and muscular expression” (1995:152). This linking of feeling and physical form is, at heart, the foundation for all psychosomatic processes, whether couched in those terms in Western theories of psychology or other cultural constructions of the link between thought and bodily symptomatology. As the materials that I have been discussing—on body and ego, posture and identity (along both internal and external channels), and change in body and identity—all suggest, however, is that there is a corresponding dynamic to psychosomaticism of *somatipsychicism*. Just as thought can influence bodily experience, so too can bodily experience influence thought; “the feeling of an

emotional response,” as Jackson clearly notes, “is intimately linked to how that emotion is expressed on a physical level” (2004:137).<sup>18</sup>

## **Engendering Gender**

Despite the designation of ‘gender studies’, which seems to indicate attention to how men and women are constructed socially and culturally, often in relation to each other, studies on gender have focused on women. This has also been the case in studies on dance and gender.

Wulff 1998: 109-110<sup>19</sup>

Dance, as I suggested in Chapter Two, has been given short shrift in the social sciences. Nowhere, however, is this more evident or more un-fortuitous than in scholarly investigations of gender. While this is not surprising in light of the overall extent to which dance has been understudied and under theorized within the social sciences, it is particularly unfortunate regarding gender, where dance represents an under-examined vein of valuable content. Since dance can only be realized through bodily enactment, it emerges as a particularly efficacious medium for the transmission of meanings that, because of their intrinsic embodiment, often pertain to sexual identities. While dance inherently implicates the embodied “self” of the dancer, “more often it calls attention to one of the two types of human bodies—male or female” (Hanna 1988:xiv), and it is this dynamic that undergirds “the potential of dance to convey sexual imagery that confirms or challenges attitudes about being a man or a woman” (1988:xvi).<sup>20</sup>

As an often emotion laden and hypocognized activity<sup>21</sup> dance is deeply intertwined with gender. “Who performs what and how in dance” Hanna points out

“tells us many things” (1988:148). Messages are thus conveyed about artistry and athleticism—what counts as artistic for a man and what for a woman? What counts as skill, or ability, or talent for each? Are there differences and, if so, what are they, why are they there, and what do they mean within their larger cultural surround? “Movements,” as Hanna has pointed out, “carry the inner feelings and cultural overlays of sexuality and sex role identities” (1988:134). “Whether a ritual, social event, or theater art,” she notes “dance has important yet little-recognized potential to move and persuade us about what it is to be male or female” (1988:3). The motions of dance are, as already noted, part of larger complexes of culture and communication (Brinson 1985:214).

Hopefully a brief personal anecdote will serve to highlight the (unfortunately) conceptual transparency of the inter-implications between dance and gender. In 2001 I went to a movie with a fellow anthropology graduate student and, while waiting in line to purchase our tickets, we got around to discussing our respective research projects. What most startled me was that she seemed surprised that I considered gender an important part of my research into the ballroom and salsa dance communities. Her surprise struck me as particularly significant for two reasons: first, she had on previous occasions voiced her dislike of any form of dancing where she, as a woman, must “follow;” and second, she had also expressed dissatisfaction with the convention in competitive ballroom of a couple being designated by the number on the man’s back. Since both of these phenomena where dance and gender serve as intercontextualizing

frames of reference for each other, how was it that she thought my project would not involve gender?

As a plethora of scholars have already noted,<sup>22</sup> gender is never an autonomous system, unconnected from other social, cultural, and psychological facets of human life.<sup>23</sup> Definitions and understandings of self—within which gender is highly implicated—are, of course, integrally linked to cultural discourses. Even more importantly, perhaps, is that bodily practices and discourses are often involves at least some degree of transmission and enactment below the level of conscious processing.<sup>24</sup> This is especially significance since, while most learning is conscious, that which transpires subliminally often involves emotional conditioning (D'Andrade 2000:64, based on LeDoux 1996). It is thus that embodied discourses—such as those implicated by dance—often emerge as particular stable behavioral and cultural patterns. And, since the vast majority of daily operations are organized and operate outside of awareness this can, in turn, lead to the activation of goals and procedures which are, themselves, outside of awareness (D'Andrade 2000:67, based on Mandler 1984). It is by way of such dynamics that dance—as an often emotion laden and hypocognized activity<sup>25</sup>—is most implicated in gender.

Values (gender related or otherwise) do not, of course, manifest themselves directly but, rather, come to matter via their instantiation through action systems. By looking at concrete activities (such as dance) the values associated with that action systems emerge as both data and variables for social analysis. Many indigenous societies have both men's dances and women's dances, for instance, yet as several

feminist scholars have warned (e.g. Nicholson 1986; Rosaldo 1980), rather than assuming the significance of such a distinction, what is called for is an analysis of the significance of this bifurcation within its own context.

Why is there a split? What is the content/purpose/subject of women's dances? Of men's dances? What cultural collateral does such content, purpose, or subject hold within that particular society? When are the different dances performed? What is the significance of this timing? As Hanna importantly points out, "who performs what and how in dance tells us many things" (1988:148). All of these are questions, amongst many others, which must be asked since, as Evelyn Blackwood points out, people "operate within...a matrix of...practices that inform women's and men's actions and behaviors" (2000:17).

There are multiplex reasons why dance is a (potentially) potent venue for gender models and modeling. Hanna (1988:12-23) suggests that there are (at least) six significant factors: (1) it is captivating; (2) it is language-like; (3) it is open-ended; (4) it is multisensory; (5) it is persuasive; and (6) it is accessible. Individual lives are, as I have argued elsewhere (Marion 2000), about the meanings that are constructed through personal experiences and, by serving as a locus of factors necessary for "salientation" (Marion 2000), dance emerges as a particularly efficacious medium for the transmission of meanings which, because of their intrinsic embodiment, often pertain to sexual identities. Research that casts dancing as a (purely) social phenomenon—whether sociological, political, psychological, or anthropological—fails to address the level at which such social and cultural practices are actively



engaged by people: as individuals. Even the intersectional themes of more contemporary research approaches often overlook the individualized meanings—including conceptions of gender—that dancing has for dancers. Certainly such phenomena are social, but they are not *just* social. It is here that the qualitative data of personal observation, communication, and interaction help illuminate the hues that color people's lived lives.

“Dance” as Peter Brinson points out, “derives from, and maintains, strong continuing links with surrounding circumstances of life,” (1985:209) and needs to be understood as being “more than a part of human movement. It is a part of human culture and human communication” (Brinson 1985:214). As such, dance often plays a role in many functions of social processes, i.e. commercial, political, and propagandist (e.g. Strathern 1985)—all of which also have implications for gender (e.g. Heng and Devan 1992). Nor can dance (necessarily) be separated from music and language (e.g. Brinson 1985, regarding case by Blacking 198; Kaeppler 1985)—also aspects of social life with gender implications. While the intersection of language and gender seems widely accepted within the academy (e.g. Chaika 1994) the idea that dance—like language—serves as a means of cultural communication<sup>26</sup> receives short shrift. Yet this is an important conceptualization in understanding the role of dance in both exemplifying and constructing gender.<sup>27</sup>

Given this frame of reference we begin to see that dance matters (in this case regarding gender) long after “native” dance forms have been acknowledged. Ballet, for instance, has been critiqued as males' view of females<sup>28</sup> as opposed to modern

dance as females' view of females (e.g. Blackmer 1989:35; Hanna 1988:132); with ideals of antigravity and ethereality versus gravity and natural movement at issue (Blackmer 1989:37). At least part of the "immediate wallop" that dance can have in "commenting on sexuality and in modeling gender," Hanna suggests, stems from its "attention-attracting motion, language-like qualities, replete multilayered meanings, multisensory assault, composite of variables that change attitudes and opinions, and accessibility and humanity" (1988:22).

Unlike many other leisure pursuits (e.g. mountaineering), women have always been involved in 'ballroom' and salsa and the institutionalization of gendered rights and duties in these dance forms is well demonstrated by the lead/follow division—and concomitant expectations—that are part and parcel of these dances. The man not only has the right to lead, he is obligated to do so. If the man does not lead, the woman cannot follow and if the woman does not follow the man cannot lead. A naturally progressing outcome of this is that even when learning a given dance, say the cha cha, what it is that a man and a woman learn is not identical.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, however, a man and a woman's bodily experiences of learning to dance, and of dancing, are different as well, inevitably giving rise to different identities as dancers.

### **Biological Sex as Experiential Filter**

As Spiro points out in *Gender and Culture* Spiro (1979), a person's physical body provides the primary filter for all of their experiences. Ortner (1974) provides a related point in noting that a woman's physically embodied experiences are part of

what shapes her psychic structure. By providing different experiential filters for males and females biological sex thus predisposes the sexes to different experiences.<sup>30</sup> “Our bodies,” as Downey points out, “structure what we perceive” (2005:31). This position is not as overly-deterministic as it might first appear to be since what is being asserted is not that sex is the cause of different identities, in and of itself, but that as a filter sex leads to different experiences which, in turn, provide the building blocks for different identities. Men and women have different anatomies after all, meaning that dancing in a closed frame, for instance, chest to chest and with thighs passing between each other, is a different experience for men and women. Pointing out that biology predisposes different experiences is not only about sex of course; tall dancers have different experiences of dance than do short ones, naturally slim people have different experiences of dance than do naturally heavy ones, and so on. Yet given the strict sex-based division of dance rolls in competitive ballroom dance, however, sex represents an inescapable biological filter on a dancer’s experience of dance.

The notion that biological sex represents a primary experiential filter does not, of course, divorce sex from the cultural scripts of gender that get mapped onto it. Men and women have different centers of gravity, for example, which provide for different embodied experiences of the same bodily actions—but which bodily actions are seen as manly or womanly in the first place, remain cultural elaborations. Yet to say that such physical aesthetics are socially prescribed does not mean that it is any more feasible not to accept, or at least function under, the cultural meanings that get mapped onto physical bodies. A male or female ballroom dancer may, for example,

consciously recognize and even reject the larger social and cultural models of male and female attractiveness that are celebrated and perpetuated in Western media. At the same time, however, their very participation as a ballroom dancer places them in the middle of an aesthetic system that largely overlaps with these same mental models. Just because a dancer (or anyone else) recognizes that such conceptualizations of attractiveness are not natural does not mitigate against the pervasiveness or significance of these models.

### **Gender, Dance, and “Hegemony”**

Even if a person, in this case a dancer, rejects commonplace definitions of physical beauty at conscious cognitive level, if that person is trying to function within a system that says that appearance is meaningful, how can they treat it as anything else? It is via this dynamic that attractiveness—as it is socially and culturally defined and appreciated within dance—thus becomes part of many dancers’ self-definition “vocabularies.” To the extent that these models and conceptualizations for self-worth are thus linked to dancers’ physical and bodily participation in dancing (which, as noted above, lends even greater emotional charge), they are likely to become linked to dancers’ identities, deeply impregnating individual psyches. Indeed the pervasiveness of such ideas about body-image can be profound, co-opting personal frames or reference—in this case for dancers—regarding self-image and self-definition (e.g. Bartky 1979; Chernin 1981; Wolf 1991; Yu-Ling 1996). Indeed is precisely by defining the topics and terms of negotiation that hegemonic norms and values have

sway.<sup>31</sup> It is the intrinsic insidiousness of such co-optation that Parish is describing when noting that:

Cultural images of self and society that achieve hegemony—that stand as powerful and pervasive self-images and societal images from which people take meanings that integrate them into social practices—may animate behavior and attitudes long after a deliberate, conscious ideology has been exhausted and abandoned. (1996:229)

And, in fact, since the gender models of ballroom and salsa are so deeply entrenched in the dance forms themselves they function as bi-directional filters on perceptions and conceptualizations of male/female, man/woman, and masculinity/femininity; pervasively shading past experiences while also coloring new ones as they are constructed.

Because gender models (including their associated aesthetic schemata and coding) are so intrinsic to the bodily practice of ballroom and salsa—and since bodily experience and change is so powerfully charged regarding identity—the gender models embedded and embodied in ballroom and salsa are felt and lived; even if and when they are consciously questioned! As Parish points out, after all, “hegemony takes form in the feelings that *suffuse practice*, not just in terms of those conscious values that are codified as ‘official’ beliefs” (1996:228; emphasis added). Further reinforcing the hegemony of gendered norms in ballroom and salsa is the reality that “in relationships of power, the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal...The subordinate thus has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship” (Ortner 1995:175). A female dancer is not going to be thrown off the dance floor for refusing to wear makeup, earrings, or false lashes, after all—but such violations of the prescribed and accepted aesthetic standards will show up in the

judges' marks. To the extent that this woman competes because she has any interest in competing, then, she not only has personal reasons and incentives to follow the gender models in question, but—through the chosen commitment system (as per Stromberg 1986) of dance—is personally invested in them as well.

### **Heteronormativity in Dancesport**

Intrinsic to the gender models ballroom and salsa is the deeply embedded heteronormativity of pairing of male (leader) and female (follower). The heteronormativity in question, however, is an interesting one, focusing, as it does, primarily on gender roles and relations and remaining largely unattached to issues of sexuality. At the same time as the pairing of male and female is cast as the overwhelming norm for partnering—and as the only acceptable standard of partnership for all dancesport competition sanctioned by the national membership organizations of the IDSF and WD&DSC—this seem (at least primarily) to be driven by aesthetics and not sexuality. This distinction between gender role (under the rubric of aesthetics) and sexuality lies in the fact that the norm for partnering is that *all* men are cast as leaders and all women as followers regardless of sexuality.<sup>32</sup> Indeed when I first started my fieldwork, in fact, half of the men in the World and Blackpool Professional Latin finals were homosexual.

The overwhelmingly dominant aesthetic of partner dancing (and especially ballroom), then, is the pairing of male and female—and many, many hours of ballroom coaching go into trying to choreographically and stylistically design and

depict the “male/female relationship” between partners. With the single major exception of Rudd Vermey who feels that a man and a woman dancing together is already “man” and “woman,” the gendering of partners’ on the floor relationship and interaction is an important element and emphasis stressed by almost all of the elite coaches worldwide, straight and gay alike. The heteronormativity in ballroom is a complex one though, and not without its own conflicts as well. In general sexuality is not part of the norms in question, but the most traditional and oldest of the codified competitive styles, Standard, has proven the most resistant to accepting gay men as viable examples of the “properly gentlemanly” character of a ballroom champion. This is in contrast to the acceptance of gay men as Latin champions.

While a commonly voiced belief among some dancers suggests that the greater flamboyance characteristic of Latin better suits gay men, this essentializing stereotype overlooks (or ignore) reality; the majority of men dancing Latin are not gay. What seems closer to the truth is that the more overt sexuality of Latin (versus Standard) allows for sexualized identity (of any nature) in a manner that the more “refined” identity-image of Standard does not. As such, the stereotyped hyper-sexuality of homosexuality finds a better fit in Latin dancing. Or, alternatively, one could argue that participating in the public hetero-normative sexuality of Latin dancing can be viewed as a cultural compensation for private non-heterosexuality.

None of this actually speaks to real numbers, of course, only to those whose sexuality is known within the community. Given the tight knit and continuously overlapping nature of the ballroom community, however, as well as the ‘lived in

public' nature of most of ballroom life, few secrets (if any) remain secrets for long. What seems a more compelling argument is simply that homosexuality is more accepted by the judging establishment within Latin dancing—for whatever variety of reasons this is the case—thereby making Latin a more likely dance-path for those who, in their personal lives, do not act out the same heteronormative pairing that they do on the dance floor.

What I actually found the most compelling question under the larger rubric of sexuality relating to heteronormative gender roles and patterns though, was the visibility of homosexual males among the ranks of even elite Latin dancers and the almost complete absence of homosexual females among this same population (with only one widely known exception). Given a lack of accomplished and known non-heterosexual female ballroom dancers it was not possible to pursue this topic to the extent that I would have liked, but in speaking to many dancers—including several of the elite competitive males in question—something of a model emerged for trying to understand the apparent discrepancy between non-heterosexual male and female interest and participation in competitive ballroom. The underlying and differentiating dynamic seems to be one of aesthetics, as homosexual male dancers commented on appreciating the appearance and shape both of female bodies and the interaction between male and female bodies on the dance floor.

Whether an outcome of non-dance cultural norms or otherwise, heterosexual women and homosexual men seem to express a far greater non-sexualized aesthetic appreciation for the beauty of women's bodies in general, then heterosexual men and



homosexual women do for men's bodies. Applied to the apparent discrepancy between homosexual male and female ballroom competitors, then, it seems likely that homosexual men were more inclined to still appreciate the aesthetic possibilities, creations, interaction, and performance of partnership with a woman than homosexual women would be to have parallel aesthetic interests and appreciations for a man. While further work is needed to more fully flesh out this model, it comes from and fits the data I already have, and "seems right" to the competitors I have suggested it to, homosexual males among them. Returning to the larger gender role implications heteronormativity, however, I want to focus on different understanding of equality in looking at men's and women's roles in ballroom and salsa.

### **"Equality of Equivalence" in Ballroom and Salsa**

I think that many of those who take the traditionally male and female roles of lead and follow, respectively, as sexist anachronisms make the mistake of confusing kind with value. A leader cannot do any more actual ballroom dancing without a follower than a follower can without a leader after all; both are indispensable. Whether the social dancing of the local salsa club or the athletic performance of contemporary dancesport, the basic models of contemporary ballroom and salsa are equally invocative and evocative of male and female roles and character. That men and women are seen as having different roles in partnered dancing, and that different norms of physical expression, appearance, and aesthetics apply to men and women should not, however, automatically be cast as unequal or chauvinistic. Differences are

not, *a priori*, asymmetrical (e.g. Nicholson 1986:92, 103; Rosaldo 1980). What seems closer to the case for partner dancing is what Spiro (1979) terms not an equality of identity but, rather, an equality of equivalence. Men and women in ballroom and salsa are different from each other. They dance different parts, with different roles and responsibilities, and in response to different gender models. Both male and female are valued, however, and the female member of a partnership may be more famous or elevate the status of a new partner just as much as vice versa.

### **Shared Movement**

As I have just suggested, men's and women's bodies give rise to different experiences in dance, and that men and women have different roles—albeit not necessarily unequal ones—informed by different gender models in ballroom and salsa. Important to both of these dynamics is a simple and basic fact of both ballroom and salsa, namely that it is an embodied practice that is shared, especially between males and females as each others' partnering counterparts.<sup>33</sup> Personal proclivities and preferences notwithstanding, “culture is still a guiding factor in all body language, and this is particularly true of body zones” (Faust 1970:37), and the ballroom and salsa cultures are cultures of close proximity and touch, especially between male/female partnerings.

Indeed all of the dynamics of embodiment discussed in this chapter—re-embodiment, bodily awareness, physical change, somatipsychicism, and gendered movement—develop within a context of close physical inter-sexed proximity and

contact. Re-awakening one's own physicality and use of one's body takes place within a context of gendered closeness and touch, as does the development of one's bodily awareness. Cross-sex proximity and contact also provides the context for the dancer's own physical development and change, thus framing the somatipsychic shaping of a dancer's identity. Finally, the cultural models of ballroom and salsa frame and inform the gender roles for men and women as dancers and, like most such cultural models, it is really a range of "acceptable" roles and enactments that are prescribed; not singular, unitary, or monolithic referents.

Thus, the nature of the movements shared in dance informs dancers' experiences, understandings, and feelings about any given genre of dance; at least as much as do that dance style's the more visible aesthetic dynamics. If Latin dancing is more obviously sexual and seductive in its costuming and choreography, it lacks the degree of very real intimacy and sensuality inherent to the full body contact and thigh between thigh movements of dancing Standard. Yet, at the same time as Standard has the innate intimacy of constant front-to-front full body contact, partners never look each other in the eyes; while the less physically connected Latin allows for visual communication and appraisal between partners in a manner unavailable in Standard.

Whether in full body contact or shifting between more and less physical proximity and touch, however, all partner dancers become highly attuned to sensing the movement of others around them. Watching expert ballroom dancers on a crowded competition floor or expert salsa dancers in an almost wall-to-wall dance club can be as impressive for the floorcraft and floorskills that these dancers exhibit as it can for

any technical or artistic virtuosity in their dancing. Referring to this seemingly intuitive awareness of physical bodies and movement around them, Wulff takes note of how “dancers are, for example, extremely skilled at communicating without looking at each other, which is something they learn in dancing but carry over to how they move and behave when they are not dancing” (1998: 108).

### **Proximity**

No discussion regarding of shared movement would be complete without considering the issue of personal territory and no discussion of such proximity would be complete, of course, without taking note of Edward Hall’s ideas about territoriality and his proxemic zones. As depicted below in Table 10.1, Hall splits distance into the four categories of public, social, personal, and intimate distances, ranging from farthest to closest respectively, each of which he further breaks down into zones of close and far. Part of what makes partnered dancing so emotionally charges and compelling, then, is that it takes place within intimate distance, even when viewed from a public distance. Comfort with “self,” comfort with “other,” and comfort with close proximity between “self *with* other” are all this part of being a ballroom or a salsa dancer; part of the embodied experience informative of both personal and social identity.

**Table 10.1 : Edward T. Hall's proxemic zones**

	Close	Far
<b>Intimate distance</b>	Actual contact “‘Overwhelmingly’ aware of your partner” & can be embarrassing for non-intimates (Faust1970:30)	6”-18” Hand holding distance
<b>Personal distance</b>	1’6”-2’6” Can still hold hands – wife can be w/in; = advance by another woman. (Still = intimate zone.)	2’6”-4’ “Limit of physical domination”
<b>Social distance</b>	4’-7’ Impersonal business distance	7’-12’ Formal business/social distance
<b>Public distance</b>	12’-25’ Informal gatherings	25’+ Political distance → also has a safety/security factor. Bodily discourse more opaque/less transparent → “At this distance the actor’s [or dancer’s] gestures must be stylized, affected and far more symbolic than they are at closer public, social, or intimate distances” (Faust 1970:35-36).

Building off Hall’s model, however, Swedish dance scholar Cecilia Olsson (1993:114; cited in Wulff 1998:108), adds an additional proxemic zone, that of *proxemisk enhet*, or proximity unity, “to signify the zone of closeness, or artistic rapport that springs up between dancers... ‘as if they were one person’” (Wulff 1998: 108). This deep, deep level of shared movement is intricately bound up in and informative of dancers’ practice and experience as they progress in ballroom or salsa. In the moment of dance—be it in practice or competition—through years of time spent together in practice and training, dancers may feel and react as one, instinctually together. Looking at photos of dancers in motion, for example, can show how every line of two partners’ bodies perfectly match each other, serving as visual evidence of the intimate bodily rapport developed between partners. While it is therefore true that “dancers internalize the dance, they ‘become’ the dance” (Wulff 1998:102), in

partnered dance forms (such as ballroom and salsa) a defining feature of the dance form that they practice, internalize, and become is external to “self.”

How all of these embodied elements of dance first enter a dancer’s life, the shape and sway they come to hold, and the process by which this shaping takes place are the subject of the next chapter, wherein I use specific cases to begin tying together how personal practices are informed by, and in turn informative of, chosen participation and activity as a chosen commitment system.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Ten

<sup>1</sup> At least as far as understandings of and meanings for the body are concerned since “one’s own body and other people’s bodies are only ever perceived through categories of perception” (Bourdieu 1997:92).

<sup>2</sup> As Blacking points out there is, in fact, evidence of ability to dance several thousand years before *homo sapiens sapiens* (2001:19; also see Blacking 1976 and Livingstone 1973).

<sup>3</sup> This last point should not be underestimated, as the darker club atmosphere insinuates a certain intimacy which the dance newcomer may not yet be comfortable with.

<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with competitive settings, where I may very well think about such positioning, but here my concern is based on visual aesthetics and communicative contact and frame.

<sup>5</sup> Blackmer is getting at exactly this same dynamic when noting that, “if the dancing space and dancing time are other-worldly, there is nothing out of this world about the matter of the dancer—his or her body” (1989:26).

<sup>6</sup> The less severe case concerned a dancer with epilepsy while the more severe case concerned a dancer who had been involved in a severe car accident and had suffered several concussions.

<sup>7</sup> Although overly separating “self” from body, Blackmer’s point here does get at how dancers also see and use their bodies as a tool for their craft.

<sup>8</sup> As Blackmer explains it, “pain wakens a hitherto dormant message path—jolts it out of sleep like an electric shock. Once felt, the sensation of the muscle is connected to consciousness and can be retrieved” (1989:54). Indeed, “perhaps the most pertinent and painful source of information about the structure of the body comes from sore, stiff muscles which have been used to excess, or in an unaccustomed way,” notes Blackmer (1989:56), and, as she describes the experience of undertaking a new physical activity (in this case using a brush scythe) and the her resulting discomfort: “my body had become a kind of map which I could read to determine how best to use my available strength and

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eliminate unnecessary strain” (Blackmer 1989:56). It is in exactly this way that dancer’s often use the pain and strain of their bodies as an organic feedback device to determine how to most effectively and efficiently utilize their bodies and to establish which muscles are engaged, and to what extent, by certain lines, figures, and movements.

<sup>9</sup> The woman’s right hand and arm serve as the single most common communication channel used in the lead and follow of Latin (and Rhythm).

<sup>10</sup> For more on Blackmer’s ideas regarding the role of ego in dance see Blackmer 1989:76.

<sup>11</sup> Using “ego” in the sense of ‘sense of self’ here and not its ‘executive system of the psyche’ sense.

<sup>12</sup> Although it would be impossible for me to pick apart all of the ways in which Steven Parish has contributed to this dissertation, I feel particularly indebted to him for providing me with the language to make explicit this particular point which had previously only been an implicit one.

<sup>13</sup> I did not in fact know what salsa music was at the time, let alone that this was salsa. It is only in hindsight and picturing the dance steps being danced by my best friend in the group at the time—and in light of my current experience, exposure, and knowledge—that I can easily identify the band’s music as having to have been salsa.

<sup>14</sup> Based on the understandings that “bodily flexibility and rigidity are often linked to character” (Downey 2005:130) and that “desirable character traits are often instilled through bodily practice” (Downey 2005: 131), an interesting avenue for future research concerns an investigation of the basic bodily postures of different dance forms and the general values and value structures of those dance forms’ culture of origin.

<sup>15</sup> Many psychotherapeutic approaches in use today base their efficacy on this general principle, namely that changing how one thinks about the world also changes who one is.

<sup>16</sup> Although McNeill’s concept of muscular bonding refers to both dance and drill, he is well aware of the far greater social, cultural, and emotional charge available through dance; noting that, “obviously, the impact of marching in unison is much more subdued than the emotions aroused among dancers” (1995:9).

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) conceptualization of the *habitus* rests on the same general notion that patterns of bodily discourse are at their most irretractable they have receded from conscious thought.

<sup>18</sup> Given the greater stability of the body (relative to thought)—at least in popular Western conceptualizations—the role and impact of *somatipsychic* processes and dynamics is a topic deserving far greater attention in the social sciences; especially among psychological anthropologists.

<sup>19</sup> As Wulff (1998: 110) points out, however, there have been a few recent works on dance focusing on men such as those by Burt (1995) and Franko (1995).

<sup>20</sup> Annick Prieur’s understanding that appearance, at least within appropriate contexts, is considered reflective of sexuality (1996:88) seems to be based on this same dynamic.

<sup>21</sup> Feelings and beliefs matter to people, and thus to their lives, since “human social life,” as Michelle Rosaldo points out, “depends upon our forms of feeling and belief” (1980:408).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Anselmi and Law 1998:6; Blackwood 2000; Butler 1990; Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung 1991; Chow 1991; Collins 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Davis 1983 [1981]; Dugger 1991; Flax 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1973; A. Garcia 1991; Gutmann 1997; Heng and Devan 1992; Johnson-Odim 1991; Kimmel and Messner 1995; Kondo 1990; Landrine, Klonoff, and Brown-Collins 1992; Lazur and Majors 1998; Macleod 1991; Mohanty 1991a:55, 1991b; Murray 1999; Nencel, 1996; Nicholson 1980; Peletz 1995; Prieur 1996; Sparks 1998; Staples 1982; Stoler 1991; Zavella 1991; and Zinn 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, a vast and undulating web of human institutions and experiences are implicated in gender and, as such, a multiplicity of social systems—including their cultural and psychological concomitants—must therefore be taken into account in conceptualizing gender. Yet gender is far from being the only overly determined system—dance too is such a system, as Chapter Six’s discussion of metagenre clearly indicates, and as the role and salience of dance in various identities—whether exemplified via nationalized discourses of the Argentine Tango, the Brazilian Samba, or the Dominican Merengue that can also be part and parcel of dance—clearly demarcates dance as a similarly multiplexed system.

<sup>24</sup> This is because consciousness, far from being a default setting for mental processes, represents as arena of upper level trouble shooting (D’Andrade 2000:66; based on Minsky 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Feelings and beliefs matter to people, and thus to their lives, since “human social life,” as Michelle Rosaldo points out, “depends upon our forms of feeling and belief” (1980:408).

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Bellman 1974; Blacking 1973 (passim); Gell 1979; Hanna 1979b and 1979c (passim); Kaeppler 1972; Martin and Pesovar 1961; Metheny 1965; Royce 1977:192-211; Singer 1974; Spencer 1985:35; Williams 1978, 1982; and Woodward 1976.

<sup>27</sup> “The individuals who create social relationships and bonds,” notes Rosaldo, “are themselves social creations” (1980:416). This notion is also central to praxis theory in recognizing the mutually constitutive nature of both structure *and* agency (e.g. Blackwood 2000; Ortner 1984)

<sup>28</sup> Also see Hanna (1988:128-129) regarding the misogyny of contemporary ballet (e.g. Gordon 1983).

<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that this role differentiation is equally accepted or practiced by all dancers but, rather, that any variances take place within—and are influenced by—these institutionalized standards. (For more on the distribution of statuses—and the influence they have on those who agree and disagree, acknowledge or do not acknowledge, and are aware or oblivious to such distributions—see Swartz and Jordan 1976 and Swartz 1991.)

<sup>30</sup> Biological sex is certainly not the only biological filter of this type and, as Shirley Ardener points out, “as predispositions that may or may not be transformed into manifestations through the mediation of culture” (1993:3) it is only in interaction with culture that biological factors typically provide their filtering effects; and, as Judith Lorber notes, for instance, “gendered people do not emerge from physiology or hormones” (1992:97).

<sup>31</sup> Such hegemonic control of discourse is the same dynamic that allows sexism to permeate the social and cultural structures of the same places where feminism has had its greatest impact. (For more on the premature “burial” of sexism as a real—and still very much pertinent and persisting—dynamic within contemporary American society see Rhode 1997 regarding.)

<sup>32</sup> This distinction tends not to be a skill-based one either, as the top dancers’ knowledge and execution of either role is typically superb.



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<sup>33</sup> I do not mean to suggest that same-sex partners cannot dance skillfully or that their dancing is in any way “less” ballroom or salsa than the dancing of a traditionally gendered couple. At the same time, however, I think it is important to recognize that the dominant frames of reference—both historically and in practice today—still take man/woman to be the fundamental partnership in partnered dancing, the basic unit upon which the dance styles are based.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: Case Studies

As a transition between the socially and culturally informed embodied practices of Chapter Ten and the deep identity, meaning, and motivation of Chapter Twelve, this chapter uses a variety of case materials to look at what it is like to live ballroom and salsa informed lives. At my proposal defense, Roy D'Andrade suggested that looking to why people started dancing would shed light on some of the meanings dance had for my respondents and, of course, he was right. More than just illuminating regarding meanings, however, the question of how people got started with dance proved an effective springboard for talking about dance and how it fit into (or did not) the rest of people's lives. The three different types of case materials I use in this chapter all start from this point and, as the following sets of materials all demonstrate, are rich indeed.

The first type of case materials I present here come from four brief, structured interviews. The first three cases—those of Tessa, Karen, and Estelle—are representative of serious amateur ballroom competitors in North America, but who have come to ballroom as young adults. The fourth case, Nathan's, represents and provides comparable and comparative material for a social salsa dancer who also got started as a young adult in North America. While the brevity of these first four cases undoubtedly leaves something to be desired, their consistent structure allows for easy comparison in a way that longer cases would not.

The second type of case material I use in this chapter comes from a self-narrative written by Edie Lewis, one of the most widely recognized salsa professionals in the world today. Since these materials were self-edited by Edie and since I have not spoken with her in person (although we did exchange emails earlier in my research) my analysis of her narrative is slightly more perfunctory. Still, I find her case materials useful in three ways. First, they provide a comparative format of data: written self-narrative in contrast to interview. Second, they provide a contrasting frame of reference: world famous professional salsa dancer in contrast to amateur ballroom competitors and an amateur social salsa dancer. And third, they represent rich materials for looking at how non-dance cultural conceptualizations also bleed across and inform persons' (in this particular case Edie') perceptions of dance.

The last type of case material presented in this chapter is selected from unstructured interview materials, where the basic question of "how did you get started dancing?" served only as the springboard for relatively organic sets of questions and responses building on various issues and topics suggested by what my respondents had already said. Most of the unstructured interview material I present here comes from elite ballroom competitors; dancers who are "in the mix," as it were, for the most prestigious national (American style) and international (International style) ballroom titles.

Embedded in this trajectory of the case materials presented in this chapter, then, is also the increasing relative skill of the dancers being represented. Tessa, Karen, Estelle, and Nathan are all serious about their dancing, but all also have

significant non-dance obligations, not the least of which is their employment. Edie, by contrast, is a professional salsa dancer, so there is no separation between her dancing and her livelihood. Still, Edie—like Tessa, Karen, Estelle, and Nathan—came to dancing as an adult, whereas the elite ballroom competitors considered in the last set of case materials in this chapter all started their dancing much earlier. Overall then, the materials in this chapter can primarily<sup>1</sup> be broken down along three different lines: (1) data type (structured interview, written narrative, or unstructured interview); (2) dance genre (ballroom or salsa); and (3) dancer’s status (“regular”<sup>2</sup> or “elite”). Table 11.1 shows these intersecting case variables, helping to illustrate how the different axes presented in this chapter intersect with each other, and provide multiple channels for continuing comparison and analysis:

**Table 11.1: Intersecting Case Variables**

	<b>Salsa</b>	<b>Ballroom</b>
<b>“Regular”</b>	Structured Interview Data (Nathan)	Structured Interview Data (Tessa, Karen, Estelle)
<b>“Elite”</b>	Self-narrative Data (Edie)	Unstructured Interview Data

## **Structured Interviews**

The following four cases come from (for lack of a better term) “regular” ballroom competitors and social salsa dancers; not beginners, but far from being the elite dancers at the center of the world stage. If not the pinnacle of their dance genres, I still think it is important to start with these dancers, as they represent the majority of those filling the ballroom studios and salsa clubs across North America, and thereby

driving both the ballroom and salsa industries throughout the US and Canada. One last point I want to make is that the structured interviews presented here are selected from the supplementary data—separate from the 200+ formal interviews I conducted—which I gathered for the dual purposes of expanding the ethnographic base of my research and for checking the validity of my extended and far more free-form interview-discussions. I use four of these shorter structured data sets here for two reasons as well: first, due to their comparative brevity I can present each case in its entirety; and second, because of their tightly structured content these materials lend themselves to comparisons with each other.

### **Tessa**

Tessa is a 24 year old woman who works as a full time dental hygienist while going to school, part time, at the University of Saskatchewan. Her job takes about 35 hours a week, and earns her in the vicinity of \$55 thousand Canadian per year. She averages about seven hours of class time a week (currently in physics) and hopes to apply to dentistry school in a few years. She is not religious, and hobbies—in what little spare time she has—include photography, step aerobics, yoga, and music (she plays the trumpet, flute, and saxophone). Her family (she mentions her mother, father, brother, and step-dad) live six hours away, and she sees them three or four times a year at competitions and Christmas. She is single, and has no children or pets. Responding to the how, where, when, and why of getting started with dance, she responds:

**Tessa:** I started dancing around the age of eight, but that was mostly jazz dancing. I gave up jazz around 16 to get a job, and then in University (University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada), I started taking ballroom for two main reasons: first, the only other person I knew in Edmonton was taking the U of A Dance club classes, and second, I missed dancing. So I started ballroom and Latin dancing in 1998, aged 18.

Next, asked what role dance currently plays in her life, and how it fits in with the rest of her life, Tessa responds:

**Tessa:** I am an amateur competitor right now (Latin and Standard international style, silver/gold). At the U of A, I taught and helped teach the beginner and intermediate classes as a volunteer. Dancing is a major part of my identity. Every decision I make is influenced by dancing. I work to support my dancing, I spend almost every night practicing, the apartment I live in has a small dance studio in it for my practice. I spend more a month on dance than I do on rent.

What I find noteworthy in Tessa's response is her explicitness with which she recognizes dancing not simply as something that she does but, in fact, as part of who she is, noting that "dancing is a major part of my identity," and how, "every decision I make is influenced by dancing." Prompted to elaborate on the best and worst parts of dancing, Tessa offers these comments:

**Tessa:** The best part is learning. You get to learn how to relate and work closely with someone else, which forces you to learn about yourself. I have learned so much about myself, and have evolved so much just from working with my partner. The personal lessons I learn from dancing absolutely make me a better person. Communication with other people is not easy, but I learn how to communicate more effectively throughout the dancing process. You also learn to move your body in ways you didn't know it could, and there is ALWAYS sooooo much more to learn. No matter how far you've come, you can always learn more, do more and push yourself more. I love the challenge.

There are two 'worst' things about dancing: first, the cost, and second the physical strain. I have immense student debt that I could pay off much quicker if I didn't dance—but then I wouldn't be as happy, so that is out of the question. And I worry about the physical strain—I sometimes get shin splints, hip and foot pain. I worry about my body giving out some day and forcing me to stop dancing. But it is more than worth it. It isn't like I lose sleep over either of these, I believe life is for the living, therefore I will live the way I want to.

In relating what she finds most positive about dancing, there is a clear relationship back to Tessa's awareness of the role dance plays in shaping her identity.

When Tessa says “learning,” she does not mean patterns and steps. She talks about interpersonal awareness, interaction, and communication which all give rise to intrapersonal awareness as well.

There is also an interesting interplay of words and concepts at work in Tessa’s formulation that “you also learn to move *your* body in ways you didn’t know *it* could.” There is an association of self with body, but also a distancing of body from self. In the first place, “you” and “your” are already not in the first person. Second, even in this case usage, an alternative formulation could have been: ‘you also learn to move *your* body in ways you didn’t know *you* could,’ thereby implying a tighter link between body and self. And both of these versions bear contrasting with conceptualizations such as: ‘I also learn to move *my* body in ways I didn’t know *I* could,’ or, implying an even tighter connection between body and self, ‘*I* learned to move in ways I didn’t know *I* could.’ This element suggests a continuum of identifications between self and body (in this specific case within ballroom dancing), which, when taken in light of the arguments about embodied identity in Chapter 10, make sense of Tessa’s conceptualization given her starting age (18) and level of involvement (dedicated, but on top of 35 hours/week of work and seven hours/week of class, plus homework).

Tessa’s comments on the negatives of dance for her follow in these same lines. First, the financial costs of dance are figured against debt and enjoyment—and not against what she cannot do, dance-wise, without additional money. Second, the physical cost of dance is recognized, and the possibility that she might not be able to

continue at some future time. But Tessa's concern is not the avoidance or deep seeded fear of the person who more fully identifies as a dancer, of the dancer who's very self concept is threatened by physical ailments and injury.

Working off this general background of how Tessa started dancing and how she felt about dancing itself, I wanted to open up the field and explore what role dancing played in Tessa's interpersonal relationships. Tellingly, I think, Tessa provides the lengthiest of her responses to this subject:

**Tessa:** My mother loves the costumes and glamour, but she's annoyed that I live so far away (I live in another city so that I can be close to my partner for practice). I don't think she understands what I am doing, not really. She thinks it is frivolous in a long-term life plan. Plus she wants grandkids, which isn't going to happen any time soon.

Already, then, we see conflict between Tessa's interests and her mother's. If Tessa's mother finds appeal in "the costumes and glamour," she is also "annoyed" at the six hours of driving distance between them, and does not understand what dancing really is about for Tessa. Tessa's comment here also bring the issue of pregnancy front and center and, while this current comment does not make it clear, one of her responses, below, suggests that Tessa is not against having children at some later point, but that in the here and now, her focus is on dancing.

**Tessa:** A lot of my friends don't understand either. Very few have ever come to see me dance. They really don't understand how much dance means to me, and in my life, my friends often come 2<sup>nd</sup> to dance. Understandably, they don't like this, and I am not as close to most of my friends as I could be. It doesn't help that I've moved about six hours away from them to dance either. Any new friends I would make are automatically alienated by my dancing because that is what I do every night—I really have very little spare time to nurture a new friendship.

Here, in addition to the travel distance that she had already mentioned, Tessa also takes note of the time commitment involved in her dancing. But more than the



opportunity cost alone, it is also clear in Tessa's response that she is aware of the conscious choice she has made in this regard, a theme that she continues regarding romantic interests:

**Tessa:** I don't have a boyfriend now, and haven't for four years. I don't see how I could. I spend so much time with my partner (practice, lessons, hotels at comps, etc.) that I don't know how I could fit in a boyfriend. Plus, whenever I have had a romantic relationship while dancing, the boyfriend tends to be jealous, which I find really unattractive. Anyone who is going to be with me would have to understand that dance is my life. My partner and I have discussed this, and he says about the same. When either of us decides it is time for a family, we will have to stop dancing together in order to make time/prioritize romance and families.

The same time that she does not have available—and is not willing to make—for friends, is equally the case for a romantic interest. But just as important as not being willing to take time away from her dancing, Tessa also makes mention of the all too common conflicts generated by conflicting commitments between a dancer's partner on the one hand and their romantic partner on the other. Such conflicts are not, of course, inevitable; but they are closer to the norm than the exception. The dancer who practices with their partner two nights a week is much less likely to encounter outside relationship problems, for instance, than the dancer who practices with their partner for two or three hours a night, five or more days per week. Aside from case of personal insecurities and jealousies, the sheer amount of time that partners spend with each other can often make outside relationships impractical, at best, for the dedicated competitor. Summing up all of these considerations, Tessa concludes thus:

**Tessa:** Overall, dancing is not good for my interpersonal relationships, but it has made a best friend out of my dance partner. And I love dance so much, that it really doesn't seem like a big sacrifice right now.

Clearly, then, Tessa is someone who is aware of the costs of her dancing but, more so, finds her overall situation to be a fulfilling and worthwhile trade off. I think

this last point is particularly significant, as it indicates that people pursuing activities the mainstream typically classify as “leisure pursuits” or “hobbies” are not unaware of the opportunity costs of their involvements but, instead, find benefit or value in their involvement that surpasses whatever detractions there may be. Especially in a world of ever more options—and often including conflicting ones at that—it is particularly important to realize that many choices are *not* made in the dark regarding costs and consequences, but that different calculations of value and reward can lead in very different directions.

So how would Tessa describe her ideal partner, and why would this be her deal, given the importance she places on her partner and their relationship?

**Tessa:** My ideal is a productive, successful and fun partnership. The closer the meeting of the minds, the better. This is my ideal because I like to feel connected to my partner, and I like to succeed, since I am a competitive person by nature.

I feel that I have a pretty close to ideal partnership right now. We adore each other, get along famously and laugh all the time. We have fun, but we are also very focused. We wouldn't dance if we didn't love it, but we are also there to always improve. We both love travel, and don't mind having to travel all over to compete and take lessons. When we get bad results, we can use each other to pull ourselves out of the depression, and when we have good results, we can celebrate each other. Sometimes we are too goofy in practice and don't get much done, but we don't sweat it too much—it is all in fun. The only way it could be better is if we were even more focused and if he had a more flexible schedule.

Here, Tessa suggests fun, love of the activity, efforts to improve, and travel as shared and successful values and dynamics of her partnership. Most interesting is the position Tessa takes regarding positive results when, she says, “we can celebrate each other,” and not: ‘we can celebrate with each other.’ Possibly a grammatical slip, I think there is more to it than this, and Tessa's construction reflects the deep value, regard, and

importance that she holds for her partner. As such, she is not just celebrating with him when they meet with success but is, in fact, celebrating him—as her partner—as well.

On the topic of competitions, our exchange continues as follows:

**JSM:** *What are your thoughts on and experiences, if any, with politics—be it within your studio or at a competition—and your dancing?*

**Tessa:** I find most competitors to be surprisingly amicable. We are all friends, and there really is a lot of support. I have never personally encountered anything really negative. Gossip is rampant, of course, as you'd expect in any small community, but nothing really vicious, you just have to be careful what you say and to who. The only really odd situation I have found myself in has been in the new city I live in. Here, the dancing is very social and American style. There is almost NO international style or competitive dancing. We dance international, and often get positive comments from people, but we also have gotten negative comments. Some people have tried to draw us into a debate on the merits/detriments of either style, but we steer clear—it comes down to personal choice. We chose international and competition, they don't, and that is OK. It would be nice not to feel like aliens inside this dance community though, we kind of feel on display all the time, and that isn't half as nice as it sounds!

This response provides some interesting dichotomies. Everyone is “friends” offering “a lot of support,” but “gossip is rampant,” and requires that you “be careful what you say and to who.” Trusting Tessa's assessment that the gossip is “nothing really vicious” this scenario still suggests that, at the same time as gossip can be about belonging, and at the same time as other competitors are generally (and even “surprisingly”) friendly, this generalized good-will only goes so far. If everyone could really be trusted, then what would it matter “what you say and to who”? I think Tessa's description does an excellent job, then, of illustrating how one can still be alone in a crowd as discussed at the end of Chapter Eight.

The other two dichotomies that Tessa brings to the forefront are those between American and International styles of ballroom and between competitors and non-competitors. One either dances American or International (or both); there is no

“intermediary” style. And, while I do not think that the demarcation between competitive and non-competitive dancers is always as clear as may be thought, there is also an unmistakable difference between those who train to compete and those who only social dance. These intersecting variables thus provide two intersecting fields of ballroom activity, as illustrated here in Table 11.2:

**Table 11.2**

	<b>American</b>	<b>International</b>
<b>Competitive</b>	C-A	C-I
<b>Social</b>	S-A	S-I

Far from being a ballroom dancer then, a dancer is, primarily, one of four types: American style competitor (C-A); American style social dancer (S-A); International style competitor (C-I); or International style social dancer. Of course this taxonomy can be broken down further—between Smooth and rhythm in the American style, and Standard and Latin in the International style<sup>3</sup>—but the point remains that such classificatory distinctions are part of dancers’ folk models for ballroom dancing and, as such, serve as fields for shared understandings and identifications as well as divisions and conflicts.

Trying to quantify the logistics involved, my next prompt asked about the time and money Tessa regularly dedicated to her dancing.

**Tessa:** Roughly, I spend about \$750 a month on dance. That includes shoes, lessons, hotels, airfare, entry fees, practice space—everything. We take about eight hours of lessons a month at \$60 each (five hours away from where we live). We travel three-four times a year for competition; think airfare, hotels, meals, entry fees, fake tans, dry cleaning costumes... Our practice space is ridiculous at \$15/hour. We practice two hours a night, five-six days a week.

These numbers both reflect and suggest Tessa's dedication to her dancing, as well as further illuminating some of the ways by which this interferes with her interpersonal non-dance relationships. Additionally, Tessa's response begins to suggest the scope of details and logistics—"think airfare, hotels, meals, entry fees, fake tans, dry cleaning costumes"—involved in competitive dancing, even for the "everyday" (versus elite) competitor. Finally, asked what she might do with the money if she did not dance, Tessa responds:

**Tessa:** If I wasn't dancing, it would all go towards my student loans and more schooling... Would also probably buy more camera equipment; like a lot of dancers, my secondary passion is photography, especially dance photography.<sup>4</sup>

Next, asked about her favorite places to dance, Tessa responds:

**Tessa:** I love to compete at Snowball (Vancouver, February). I feel like the judging there is really international in scope, and when we do well there, I feel like we really have accomplished something, like it really means something. Often at the smaller Alberta comps, I feel that the judging is really odd, some couples that I don't like at all place first and then amazing couples come in last—I don't understand it sometimes. But at Snowball, it almost always makes sense to me. Plus, you are dancing on the floor that the world's best IDSF competitors will be dancing on—and that is such a heady feeling—I mean, I idolize those dancers! The atmosphere is really laid back too, so you will see the big-time IDSF competitors just hanging around, checking things out. I have seen Eugene Katsevman and Misa Cigoj just sitting in the stands, spectating!

This response is richly laden with important understandings and implications for competitive ballroom life. First and foremost, this response uses the Snowball and IDSF as "givens" which, to the competitive dancer, they probably are. The non-dancer, however, might have trouble knowing that "Snowball" is the name of a competition, that "comps" is a contracted form for "competitions," and that the Snowball is one of only two competitions in North America to host IDSF qualifying events. Going further, the non-dancer would have no way of knowing what the IDSF

is, that the majority of competitions which happen world-wide do not have IDSF qualifying events, that points from IDSF qualifying events count towards couples world rankings, that the IDSF does not concern professional competitors, that IDSF are purely International style events, or that the judges for IDSF events each represent different countries.

All of this information is taken for granted background to understanding how and why Tessa says that the judging “is really international in scope” and why she feels like she and her partner “really have accomplished something” when they place well at this event. Additionally, her comments about “dancing on the floor that the world’s best IDSF competitors,” that this is “such a heady feeling” feeling for her, and why she would “idolize those dancers,” only makes sense if one understands that these are among the most elite ballroom dancers—that these are the very best amateur dancers in the world, and already far surpass all but the very top ranks of professional dancers as well.<sup>5</sup> Tessa also defines the atmosphere at Snowball as “really laid back” on the basis of “big-time IDSF competitors just hanging around, checking things out.” This assessment suggests both the orienting presence that these elite competitors have within the ballroom world, as well as the hero worship dynamic in which these dancers are often held. Tessa idolizes these dancers for a reason, after all.

Finally, in dropping the names that she does, Tessa communicates several other elements of her own positioning and preferences. Just as in her use of “Snowball” and “IDSF,” Tessa lives in a world where these names are understood, as are the meanings attached to these names. Far from being the random names that they

would be to the non-dancer, both Eugene and Misa have very specific skills and styles for which they are recognized and known. As such, Tessa's mention of these two dancers suggests something of her personal tastes in dance styles and aesthetics. Finally, for those who know that Misa is a 10-dancer but that Eugene is a strictly Latin competitor, these two names suggest that Tessa's dance interests lie more towards the Latin side (than the Standard).

Continuing on to her least favorite places, Tessa answers:

**Tessa:** I can't come up with a least favorite—anywhere we truly dislike, we would never go back to. There was a comp in the past, the Calgary Open, that had very poor organization (often 2 hours behind or ahead), and really high entry fees, and we wouldn't dance there if that were still like that, but it is much better now—cheaper and better organized. I love to dance anywhere—there is no place I don't like.

Trying to dig deeper into the importance of ballroom for Tessa, and along what lines, I next asked, “What are the most significant things and/or event that have happened to you through dancing? Why were these so significant for you? What differences (if any) have resulted?” to which she responded:

**Tessa:** Personal development has been the biggest. I learned to deal with crushing results (even when we felt we danced well). I learned to communicate, to listen and not just wait for my turn to speak. I have learned a lot about what I want from life. I am happier and calmer, and much more in control of my life because of dancing.

Tessa's response clearly ties back into her earlier comments about the learning and self-growth that she considers to be part and parcel of her dance training and experiences, as well as the self-empowerment and self-control that she attributes along these same lines. Psychological resilience is part of dealing with competition as well as what are, at times, quite frustrating practices. Communication, listening, and speaking up for one's self are all part of the ongoing interactions inherent to working with a dance partner (as well as coaches). The dedication and sacrifices required all

provide a sizable commitment against which a dancer can weight their overall interests. Finally, the ability to differentiate what one has control over (e.g. one's dancing, who one takes lessons from) and one what does not (judges' marks, flight delays) and the ability to apply one's self to what one can influence can be seen in Tessa's self-assessment of being "calmer, and much more in control of my life because of dancing."

As a final topic here, I want to discuss insider and outsider distinctions in the ballroom world. As such, many of the dancers I have spoken with have commented on how different it feels to dance where they are a "regular" versus some place totally new to them or where they are not a regular. In exploring what dance communities different people felt themselves to be part of, then, I was also interested in how and why they said that they felt like they belonged to these communities, including how they had become a part of it and what that felt like. Finally, and in contrast, I asked dancers about their experiences as an "outsider" and what that had been like. Tessa's experiences and perceptions of the insider/outsider distinction within ballroom are as follows:

**Tessa:** I consider myself a part of many dance communities. The U of A dance club community for one. I spent four years in this club, and still go back for social events and we train with the dance directors of this club still. I still get invites to the TA parties there. This is a very friendly, fun community, young and vibrant and just taking off in the competitive dance scene. I became a part of this first as a member and later as a TA and instructor.

Tessa's campus participation serves as her entry both into ballroom dancing and into the dance community. Here, Tessa's experience mirrors those of a wide swath of ballroom dancers and competitors throughout North America, as many people had



their first exposure to and started dancing through their university clubs or teams, especially those starting in their late teens to mid twenties. There is also a thread of continuity here, as Tessa progressed from member, to TA, to instructor in her club; still goes back for social events and, even now, she and her partner continue to train with the club's dance directors.

**Tessa:** I also am a part of the competitive scene in Alberta. We compete at at least three Alberta comps in a year, and we see other Alberta competitors on the road in BC or Ontario. This crowd is just as fun and friendly for the most part, but gossipy. I became a member of this group through competition starting around 99-2000 season.

This part of Tessa's response reveals a different dynamic of ballroom participation and belonging. Where Tessa's club membership was local and defined by participation in dance classes and social events, she belongs to Alberta's competitive scene by dint of competing there *and* on the road against these same couples. And, as Tessa is explicitly aware, belonging to this group is based on competitive participation, as she "became a member of this group *through* competition" (my emphasis).

Finally, relating her perceptions and experiences of the ballroom community at the University of Saskatchewan, Tessa comments:

**Tessa:** I don't really consider myself a part of the dance community at the U of Saskatchewan, where I partake of social lessons and socials. I still feel like an outsider because everyone stares at us while we dance, we get all these comments on our dancing from other members and generally, we are just different from the other members. We are technique driven, and driven to excellence, they are socially-focused, technique is non-existent and they are very anti-competition. I often feel like a circus animal there. I am sure that the other members don't mean to make us feel this way—we are just new (been members just over a year) and novel to them. We get mostly positive comments, but it still puts us on the outside because we aren't like them.

Here we see the social side of the dance-specific distinctions illustrated in Table 11.1—where Tessa and her partner are International style competitors (C-I in 11.1), those around them are American style social dancers (S-A). It makes sense that Tessa would “often feel like a circus animal” in this situation, as she and her partner do not overlap with their local scene on either axis of ballroom participation. Yet, at the same time as Tessa’s preference for competition and International style dance distance her from this community of dancers, it is these same proclivities that connect—and identify—her, with others (such as the competitive one in Alberta).

## **Karen**

Karen is a 30 year old woman who only admits to being 22 in public, and often gets away with it. She did her undergraduate work at Princeton, has a Ph.D. in social/health psychology from Pitt, and currently works as a senior research coordinator for a company that creates multimedia education tools for children with chronic illnesses. As a teenager she was first a gymnast and then a diver but, at 16, had Hodgkin’s disease—a form of lymphatic cancer—which, due to complications, forced her to stop diving.<sup>6</sup> She reports that her current physician cannot believe she is still walking on a hip which, originally, her doctors merely hoped to avoid replacing before she turned 30 (which she now has) and, relating her response to a disbelieving doctor, she says: “I told the doc, “The walking is not so impressive. You should see the split in my cha cha. Now that is impressive.””

By way of providing a little more background information, Karen comments:

**Karen:** I am an only child of overbearing parents, and my overbearing husband just moved to MO to take a job as a theater history professor. He is also a dancer, as are his parents, although they do American style. I am a recovering Catholic from a very blue-collar town, although my parents were teachers; both of them were the first college educated ones in their family.

This brief response fills in some of the perspective from which Karen's comments should be understood but, more than that, again points to the categorical division between the International and American styles in many dancers' experiences and conceptualizations of ballroom dance. What follows are my prompts and Karen's responses for the set of issues explored for Tessa:

**JSM:** How, where, when, and why did you start dancing?

**Karen:** I started dancing to make grad school less aversive. I needed something to keep my PhD from consuming me. I started at the age of 24, but I wish I had started much younger. Someone in my apartment building put up a flier for the CMU ballroom club, and the rest, as they say, is history.

After injuries forced me to end a promising diving career, I always felt like there was a tremendous void in my life. Although on a conscious level, I did not get into dancing specifically to fill that void, it has definitely served that purpose for me.

I am not a dabbler. I have never been someone to do things half-heartedly. With me it is all or nothing. My personal motto is "If it is worth doing, it is worth overdoing." First, there was gymnastics, then diving, and then dance. I think I have always defined my identity in terms of the activities that I do, and I really like being "a dancer."

Picking up themes similar to those in Tessa's responses, Karen starts dancing through a university ballroom club, and recognizes the relationship between her activity—which at this time is dance—and her identity. In Karin's case, however, there seems to also be a need for intense physical activity and learning and, as such, her dancing fills what she had as experienced as "a tremendous void in my life" after having to stop diving when she was 16. Karen's phrasing suggests a deep need for physical activity, development, and exertion; not just along any lines, however, but in an expressive medium as well. Note that something was missing from *her life*, that her

earlier activities were gymnastics and diving, and that, even if not consciously intended, it is dance that she chose as an activity in graduate school, and dance that filled the eight year void since she had stopped diving.

**JSM:** In what ways are you involved with dance—social dancer, amateur competitor, professional dance teacher, professional competitor, vendor, etc.—and how does dancing fit into the rest of your life? What styles do you dance/compete and why?

**Karen:** I am involved with dance in ways almost too numerous to mention. First and foremost, I am an amateur competitor. I used to compete in prechampionship Latin and Standard with my husband until he moved to MO. Now I am training two or three new partners, which is a whole drama unto itself. I would like to compete with one of the new partners, but it is too soon to make a decision. I also think it is better for my marriage if my husband and I do not compete together, as it really put a strain on the marriage. I consider myself primarily a Latin dancer because I enjoy it. I did standard because my husband wanted to, but my heart is primarily in the Latin; although I will probably continue as a 10-dancer.

Amateur competitor is, in Karen's own words, "first and foremost" among her many involvements with dance, and this verbal assessment is mirrored by it also being first in the long list of involvements that she ultimately provides. Karen identifies what styles of dance she practices, as well as her own personal preference—including a self conceptualization in line with that preference. Additionally, if Tessa's account spoke to the difficulty of balancing a romantic partner *with* a dance partner, Karen's account highlights the difficulty of having a romantic partner *as* a dance partner; a point of view shared by many.

Karen continues on with more of her dance involvements:

**Karen:** I am vice president of the local Pittsburgh USABDA chapter because I lack the ability to say no. Mostly, that involves very little work on my part (thankfully).

I was the Region 2 representative for the youth and college network of USABDA. That involves trying to promote youth and college dancing in the vast wasteland that is the Midwest; including, but not limited to, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska. We are trying to create an information network, so one of my primary jobs is to appoint state coordinators in each of the states in my region. I have been

reasonably successful, although South Dakota has only four USABDA members in the whole state.

Beyond taking for granted that anyone studying ballroom in the US would know what USABDA is, the details Karen relates foregrounds the immense discrepancy in numbers and concentrations of ballroom dancers across the US. While the majority of ballroom dancers in the US are not registered with USA Dance (the new name for USABDA), the four registrants in South Dakota is a small number in the face of the tens of thousands of active ballroom dancers estimated to be in the US.

**Karen:** I coordinate the formation team at “Some Midwest University” (my official title... the unofficial title is team mommy). I donate my Sunday afternoons to this endeavor. We are a rag tag outfit of people who have learned all of their dancing from me. They never practice, don’t remember the routines, and most of the time can’t even figure out where to stand on the floor. But I love them and will probably never give it up. I also do all of the choreography, which I greatly enjoy. That was my childhood dream... to be a choreographer, so in some small and bizarre way, I have fulfilled that dream. As a random aside (which may actually be useful to you, given the nature of qualitative research), one of the best things that has ever happened to me in my life came as a result of the formation team. The previous team coordinator moved to San Francisco, and could not take his cat with him. So I inherited the cat and the team. The cat is so wonderful, especially now that I am living on my own. So in a sense, he gave me the gift of unconditional love (however cheesy that sounds to say). Another good thing about the team is that they really appreciate me, even though they don’t show it by practicing and being as dedicated to the ballroom pursuit as I am. When I recently moved, 15 team members showed up to help. All I had to do is stand around and direct traffic. It was fabulous.

Here we see that, even for the self-identifying competitor, there is much more to ballroom dancing than competition alone. Karen’s dedication to and commitment to non-competitive ballroom involvements is not insignificant between her roles as Vice president of the Pittsburgh chapter of USABDA, Region 2 representative for the YCN, and coordinator for Carnegie Mellon University’s formation team. Indeed, her chosen leadership roles—including her description of her recent move as allowing her to “stand around and direct traffic,” being “fabulous”—at least suggests that some degree

of these dance involvements may be in response to her experiences with “overbearing parents” and an “overbearing husband.” If this last suggestion seems something of a reach, notice the almost instantaneous transition Karen makes here between her team and her husband, albeit along a different axis:

**Karen:** It is sometimes difficult to make any progress with a team that is not as dedicated as I and whose standards are not as high as mine are (although you would be hard pressed to find anyone who matches me on either of those things). That has plagued my partnership with my husband as well. He just doesn’t have the same level of drive and commitment that I do (although he is quite committed, as committed as he is able to be). So one of the things I struggle with is to remember that, fundamentally, it is just dancing. It pains me to say that, but it also helps me to keep my perspective.

In these comments Karen highlights her own perfectionism regarding her dedication to and standards for dance. Yet where Karen finds it “difficult” when her team falls short of her expectations, these same dynamics “plagued” her partnership with her husband. Karen finds herself struggling to remember that “it is just dancing,” but her following words suggest that she does not really believe this, since it “pains [her] to say that.” Insofar as this mental mantra helps in keeping her “perspective,” it seems that Karen may, in fact, really be responding to the idea that dancing is not *everything*, but if she truly felt that she would find it problematic, let alone painful, to say that dancing “is *just* dancing.” Karen’s words, no less than her actions, suggest a much deeper attachment to and meaning for dance in her life—and how could it be otherwise, if dance is what filled an eight year void in her *life*? For Karen then, dancing is *not* only dancing; it is much more (even if I do not have the data to say precisely what).

**Karen:** As for how it fits into my life, I got my job through ballroom dance. My CEO is a former dancer. The chair of our board is a dancer. Our lead programmer is a dancer who does cucarachas in staff meetings. I work, and I dance. That is what I do,

and why dancing defines me. My schedule usually goes something like this: Monday: CMU comp team practice from 8-10. Tuesday: private Latin lesson, and standard group class. Wednesday: Latin group class and CMU ballroom club (and maybe salsa dancing later). Thursday: more practice. Friday: off or club dancing. Saturday: off or show. Sunday: formation team practice 1-4, practice night at the studio 7-9. Go home. Collapse. Start over.

More important than the dance intensive schedule Karen describes, is the connection she makes between her work and dance, including the people she works with and their in office actions, before saying “I work, and I dance” when she has already linked them together. In reference to both work and dance—which she has already linked—Karen notes “that is what I do, and why dancing *defines* me.” This position resonates, of course, with Karen’s earlier position of defining her identity in terms of the activities that she is involved in. Finally, Karen completes her response to the prompt as follows:

**Karen:** As many people do, I fell into competing in the styles that I do (International Standard and Latin), but knowing what I do, I am very happy with where I am. I will never be a US champion (because I am not a 10 year old Russian girl who practices 40 hours a week), but I like the discipline of the international styles.

This last part of Karen’s response is telling. First, it reiterates that Karen competes in both Standard and Latin, makes clear that this was not originally due to a deliberate choice, but also makes clear that the discipline she finds in the International styles appeal to her perfectionist tendencies. Also at work in this statement, however, is Karen’s recognition that her competitive aspirations are not blind to the reality that a very young start by the most dedicated is almost the only chance for national and international success among the International competitive fields of today.

**JSM:** Like anything in life, dance can be a “mixed bag.” What do you consider the best part of dancing? How and why is this such a positive? What do you consider the worst part of dancing? How and why is this such a negative?

**Karen:** Positive- the way that I feel when I am dancing. Working very hard on the details of a rumba walk. I could spend hours (and I do) just doing walks, trying to dance my body more, trying to achieve the best that I can, knowing that there is always room for improvement. Also, all of the great and crazy people I have met through my experiences.

I like forgetting about everything else going on in the world and just focusing on the dancing in that moment.

Negative- The politics of it all. Having a hard time being seen because we are small. Focusing so much on the technical side of things only to be beat out by someone who wiggles their asses more. Have to depend on another person, since I come from an individual sports background.

Aside from a brief comment about the “great and crazy” people she meets, the positives in dance that Karen mentions are about the physical process and experience of improving the quality of her ballroom movement. This process and challenge are not only about the external results of competitive success though, indeed Karen does not even mention competition here, but seems to describe what Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997) identifies and terms as the “flow” of optimal experiences. Note, for instance, that Karen’s exact words are: “I like *forgetting* about everything else going on in the world and *just focusing* on the dancing *in that moment*.” She does not talk about using dance as an escape, an outlet, or a counterbalance for anything else in her life. Instead, Karen’s words specify forgetting everything else *as* she focuses on her activity *in* the moment.

**JSM:** What do other people in your life think and feel about your dancing? What role has dancing played in your interpersonal relationships, i.e. friends, family, romance, etc.? How and why has dancing played this role?

**Karen:** Some people think that dancing is incredibly glamorous, and that my life is terribly interesting. Others think (quite rightly) that I am completely obsessed by it, especially if they see me doing crusado walks behind by grocery cart.

Here, and as Tessa said regarding her mother, the glamour of ballroom is the very first item mentioned in response to this prompt. Karen also realizes that others



correctly think that she is “completely obsessed” and, in a comment that a ballroom outsider would never understand, mentions a type of progressive step used in the International Latin style samba. Karen’s response continues:

**Karen:** It has played a big role in my relationship with my husband. He and I started together and have, until recently, competed together. I think a lot of the problems that we have in our relationship spill over into the dance and vice versa. It is impossible to tell which direction the spillage is occurring. That is why I am looking into the possibility of another partner (which actually, primarily happened because he moved to MO to take a job there).

This segment of Karen’s response shifts tracks and, while not going into specifics, focuses on the difficulty of separating romantic and partnering relationships. The bidirectional influence between partners is a common feature of dual romantic/dance partners as few, if any, can separate what happens “on the floor” from what happens “off the floor” in the terminology most common among dancers. This inextricability of romantic and dance relationships actually tend to confound problems in either arena. Problems at home spill onto the floor, for instance, thus creating more problems which may be taken home. Karen finishes her answer to this prompt:

**Karen:** Dancing has been pivotal in my social life. Most of my best friends are dancers, probably largely due to the time factor. I have retained a few pre-dance era friends, but I have to work much harder to fit them into my life. And since so much of my life revolves around dancing, I find it difficult to connect with people who have no working knowledge of something that consumes me. And I think I bore them with my stories, dramas, gossip, etc.

Added to other materials already noted, we now know that Karen got her dog through dance, works with dance in several volunteer capacities separate from her own intense dance training, got her job through dance and works with dancers, and also has a dance-based social life. Karen also makes the point that, due to time alone, it is hard to maintain non-dance friendships, a point that mirrors the Tessa’s position. Besides

time, however, Karen points out that the lack of shared knowledge and interests between dancers and non-dancers can make new non-dance friendships difficult to find and cultivate.

Asked how she would describe her ideal dance partnership, and why this would be her ideal, Karen offers the following observations:

**Karen:** I am my own ideal partner. I would want someone who is as dedicated as I am, and who is willing to work to achieve success. But I also want a partner who can admit when he is wrong (which I try to do as much as possible), and can accept criticism, even when it is not sugar-coated (I had a long line of brutal gymnastics coaches, so I am completely desensitized to criticism, as long as the goal of said criticism is to make my dancing better). I would want a partner who is open-minded to anything that may improve the dancing. But mostly, I want a partner I can trust in every sense of the word. Trust that he will be there to support me, both literally on the floor and metaphorically in terms of our growth and development as a couple. I also recognize that I will never achieve this, and I have to figure out which parts of this I am willing to compromise on.

Notice that the first part of Karen's response speaks about qualities related to dance training such as dedication, work ethic, the ability to admit mistakes and accept criticism, and being open to different avenues dance-related development. The second part of Karen's response speaks to the qualities Karen seeks in the relationship between her and her ideal partner, someone that she "can trust in every sense of the word. Trust that he will be there to support me, both literally on the floor and metaphorically in terms of our growth and development *as a couple*." This description makes clear why many dancers equate their partnerships to a marriage and why, for many, their ideal dance partner is also their personal partner as well. But this same phrasing equally suggests why there can be problems and conflicts for dance partners with outside romantic interests.

Moving on, when asked about her thoughts and experiences, if any, with studio or competition dance politics, Karen responds:

**Karen:** The biggest problem in our studio is that the coaches are too friendly with many of the dancers (myself included), and that sometimes obscures the coach/athlete relationship. As for competitions, I am tired of busting my ass technically and losing to Elizabeth S's daughter or to people who smile more and wiggle their asses more but stand on turned in feet. I think it would be nice if we could move to a skating model of comps so each dancer could get some solo time, although arguably, it would change the nature of competitions greatly.

As for judging, I will take lessons only from coaches I respect, not from coaches who are judging the most and in a position to mark me at comps. I want my dancing to be the best it can be, and I have to trust that someday that will be enough.

At one level this response is straightforward, but on another level there are several dance-specific understandings embedded in Karen's words, understandings that would remain opaque to the non-dancer. Unpacking these embedded elements reveals several important cultural understandings.

First, Karen's response takes it as a given that the reader knows who Dan Rutherford is: a past US Professional Rhythm finalist, the coach of the Purdue ballroom team, and a very popular coach and judge in certain regions of the country. Second, one would need to understand that Dan's daughter competes as an amateur and that many people share the belief that her marks have outpaced her ability as a result of who her father is and what measure of political clout he has. Third, one would need to know that turning in one's feet violates one of the most basic concepts of ballroom dancing and that, in theory, only dancing completely off time would really be in a more egregious error and, as such, that a nice smile or some sexual innuendo should not be enough to trump such a lack of basic ballroom technique. Finally, Karen's response takes for granted that ballroom competitions involve multiple

dancers on the floor simultaneously, and that there is no guarantee that every couple will even be seen while they are on the floor.

On the topic of judging Karen responds to the widely held belief and widely used practice of seeking coaching lessons from regular judges on the competition circuit in order to curry favor with them. Karen also makes clear, however, that she will only seek out coaching from those who she thinks can improve her actual dancing (not merely her results) and concludes that she will “have to trust that someday that will be enough”—not exactly a resounding note of assurance from someone whose life is so thoroughly ensconced in ballroom dancing.

**JSM:** what does it take for you to dance? How much time and money, for instance, do you spend on dancing? How much time and money go into other dance related things (i.e., commuting, clothing, etc.)? What would you be doing with your time and money instead if you were not dancing?

**Karen:** I don't even want to think about how much money, but here goes:

Latin private lessons \$200 per month, practice time \$50 per month, standard classes \$50 per month, commuting \$20 per month. Total \$320 per month (probably conservative estimate). I don't know what I would be doing, but I am sure it would be something equally involved, as I am not happy sitting around (maybe hip hop dance or ceramics).

Here we see part of why Karen, for as dedicated as she is, can still only be considered “average” among competitive ranks of dancers. With private lessons ranging from \$50-\$120/lesson, and more, \$200/month is on the cheap end, as is \$50/month in practice time which goes from as low as \$5/day in some places to as much as \$15/hour in more expensive locations. Similarly, contrast Karen's \$20/month in commuting fees with the five hour drive taken by Tessa and her partner to get coaching (especially given current gas prices which, for Tessa, are even higher in Canada). Karen's \$320 monthly expenditure is not, of course, insignificant, as it ads

up to \$3,840 per year, prior to any actual competition costs including registration fees, tickets, transportation, costuming, shoes, fake tanning, fake nails, and so on. By way of contrast, however, US based couples actively training and competing on the international scene—meaning taking coaching in England, Denmark, Holland, Italy, an the like, and competing in several European based competitions in addition to several US based ones throughout the year—spend in the vicinity of \$100,000/year per couple.

**JSM:** Where is your favorite place to dance? Why? How is this place/event different from others? What is your least favorite place that you have danced? Why is this your least favorite and how is it different from others? Why do you still go there (if you do)?

**Karen:** I don't really have a favorite place, but if I did, it would be a place with a nice floor, good music, and plenty of good dancers to dance with. No such place exists here.

Places I don't enjoy dancing are places where old men want to hang on me, where I can't tell a foxtrot from a swing, and where the floor is un-danceable (which for me is really hard to do because I will dance on almost anything).

While this prompt is not one that Karen elaborated on at any length, it highlights that a good floor, good music, and good dancers make for an ideal venue whereas bad music, a bad floor, and “old men” who are not there for the dancing are all unwelcome elements in a dancing venue. This tripartite value makes perfect sense, of course, as it is exactly these three elements—music, floor, and partner—that make ballroom dancing what it is.

**JSM:** What are the most significant things and/or event that have happened to you through dancing? Why were these so significant for you? What difference (if any) have resulted?

**Karen:** The aforementioned dog—I did something for the team and got the dog in return.

Running the formation team—in my less generous moments, I refer to this as my dork outreach program. But the reality is that I have taught a lot of shy, awkward people

how to dance, and I have seen their self-esteem and self-confidence increase. And they really do appreciate me, even if they don't show it through the dancing.

Spending several months as an email buddy to a girl in South Africa as a result of the article on dancesport.uk—that I was able to touch someone half way around the world with my passion for ballroom

Taking lessons with Max—feeling like for the first time in a long time, I was actually dancing. I will always be grateful to him for that.

The four most significant things that Karen says have come about through her dancing are: (1) her cat; (2) the psychological rewards of introducing and teaching others how to dance, especially those who start out less socially confident and capable; (3) having been able to have an impact on a girl in South Africa in response to an online article Karen posted; and (4) taking lessons from a visiting coach who helped her reconnect to the *dancing* in her dancing. Notice that all of these, in some way, involve an interpersonal dynamic which was what, from the beginning, Karen credited as spurring her own intrapersonal development.

Finally, regarding insider/outsider status, where she feels like a “regular,” and her overall experiences with this dynamic, Karen offers the following comments:

**Karen:** There is no place to go dancing in Pittsburgh where I am an outsider. If it is affiliated with ballroom dance in this area, I am an integral part of it. When I do go to places as an outsider, I have no trouble integrating myself. Aside from being outgoing, I am a reasonably good follow, and I find that ballroom dancers as a group are generally very open to new people on the “scene.”

Here Karen points out her own involvement in all aspects of Pittsburgh's ballroom scene. More important than this information itself and Karen's assessment of ballroom dancers' general friendliness, however, is what she says about those places where she is an outsider. Beyond relying on ballroom dancers' good will, Karen notes her own outgoing nature, and that she is “a reasonably good follow.” That dancing ability helps

with acceptance into dance-related domains makes perfect sense and, as the discussion of social gravity at the end of Chapter 5 pointed out, such domain relevant ability is a powerful force in social positioning.

## **Estelle**

Estelle is a 31 years old woman who works as an accountant for the U. S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The only child of a middle class family, she is not married but has a 13 year old son. She has a B.A. from the University of Southern California and does not consider herself religious. Previously competing with an amateur partner, Estelle now competes as an amateur competitor in pro-am.

**JSM:** How, where, when, and why did you start dancing?

**Estelle:** I started ballroom dancing at an Arthur Murray Studio in Orange, California about 5 years ago. I wanted to take dance lessons because my boyfriend at the time had taken lessons while attending USC and was going to be away for several months. I wanted to learn a little so I could show him when he returned. I chose Arthur Murray because they had a big ad in the Yellow Pages—that simple. Really though, I have loved dance all my life and took ballet classes all through my childhood.

Estelle's response features four fairly common narrative threads. First, many people start ballroom because of their boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife. While Estelle's case reverses the direction that is most typical within the ballroom setting (i.e. guys starting because of their significant other) this is a widely seen trend. Second, it is again through college, in this case classes at USC, that Estelle's boyfriend started ballroom dancing himself. Next, non-dancers often make their studio selection with very little knowledge, if any, about what type of studio they are going to. In this case Estelle started out at a franchise studio without knowing any of the implications that could have on the nature of the instruction she was receiving and the costs she

was paying. Finally, many of the women who come to ballroom as adults in the US have both had some type of dance training as a child and express a long time interest in dance.

**JSM:** In what ways are you involved with dance (i.e. social dancer, amateur competitor, professional dance teacher, professional competitor, vendor, etc.) and how does dancing fit into the rest of your life? What styles do you dance/compete and why?

**Estelle:** In ballroom, I started as a social dancer (because I didn't know anything about competition in dance) but when I started taking lessons at an independent studio I was quickly "pushed" towards competition by the teachers there. I have competed in pro-am events and as an amateur. I would really like to continue as an amateur competitor because I really enjoyed that more than any other dancing I've done. I probably will not be able to continue this at this time, however. My time is very limited and I don't think that I would be able to commit the necessary time, unless the ideal partner, with the ideal location and time were to come along. This is a hard realization, because I really loved amateur competitions so much. Amateur partners in my age range are very hard to find. I have been looking for a partner for the better part of three years now. Most men (and women for that matter) my age (late 20's early 30's) tend to be focused on career and family and do not have a lot of time for a hobby like dancing. Dedicated amateurs tend—from what I can see—to be either very young or older. Additionally, because I am an amateur and have a very nice full-time job, own a house and have a family myself, I am also limited because it would be unrealistic for me to relocate, for example.

I compete in international standard. It seems to suit my personality well. I enjoy the structure and discipline of it, really. I actually love the learning process where I can see the progress that I have made.

Estelle's response expands on the point that non-dancers often do not have the background or knowledge to know the ramifications of their studio selection. In Estelle's case, her original choice of an Arthur Murray studio provided her with a social dance background and, in fact, she did not even know about competitive ballroom until she started taking lessons at a non franchise studio.<sup>7</sup> Estelle also points out that competing with an amateur partner, as an adult, can be very difficult as two different work schedules (and perhaps family obligations as well) need to be coordinated in regard to practice times, lessons, coaching, and for competitions. This



highlights what is, perhaps, the single greatest benefit of pro-am competition, namely that dancers who might otherwise not be able to compete have a means of and venue for continuing with their competitive dancing. Scheduling and conflicting time commitments become much less of an issue in pro-am, since the teachers' occupation is specifically to teach and compete with their students.

Estelle also makes important observations about both the difficulty in finding suitable partners and the age stratification that can be seen among available partners. Almost every ballroom competitor will say that the single most difficult aspect of ballroom dancing is finding a suitable partner. While a few successful partnerships function as an almost purely business arrangement this is a miniscule minority. As most of the materials in this dissertation have suggested, and as both Tessa's and Karen's accounts make clear, partnerships are typically very close relationships which, the more serious the competitive partnership, share the majority of dynamics typical of a marriage. On top of this is the age stratification noted by Estelle.

Competitive ballroom dancing is not an inexpensive pastime; especially the more serious one is about competing. What this means is that those with the financial wherewithal to do so tend to be either: (A) younger competitors whose parents pay for them; or (B) older adults who have accumulated sufficient disposable income. Indeed, it is precisely in so far as amateur partners are few and far between, and that the majority of those doing pro-am competition are at a life stage where they are able to afford pro-am, that the average age of pro-am students is higher than any other competitive demographic. Related to this is Estelle's point that with a full time job, a

house, and a teenaged son, she does not have the freedom to relocate in order to work with an amateur partner. In this case too there are parallel age stratifications at issue. Among serious young amateur competitors it is not unheard of, for example, for one child to live in the house and under the supervision of the parents of their partners' parents. In effect, and if they are serious enough, parents who cannot relocate can still have their children partnered with a distant but good match. Conversely, older adults, whose children have since grown up and moved out, are not tied down in the same ways as younger adults and, if retired, do not have work to contend with any longer as well.

In concluding, Estelle identifies herself as competing in International Standard and comments that, (A) it seems to fit her personality, and (B) that she enjoys the "structure and discipline of it." While people end up competing in the various styles for all types of reasons, one such reason is that different styles seem to suit, or match, different personality types; and this seems to be the case for Estelle. At 31, and with a 13 year old son, Estelle is a relatively petite 5'3" with long, straight light brown hair, large, striking hazel eyes, a stunning figure, and easily passes for her early 20s (if not younger). Where many women say they would take advantage of such a physique and show it off in Latin/Rhythm costuming, Estelle prefers the structure and discipline of Standard. The most technically exacting ballroom style, Standard well matches the exacting analytic mindset required of Estelle at work (which she enjoys) as an accountant for the U. S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Finally, Estelle comments on loving the “learning process where I can see the progress that I have made.” As much as Estelle likes the structure and discipline of Standard, her appreciation is not an abstract one; she enjoys developing her dancing skills and being able to see the improving mastery that comes through her efforts. And, as with almost every competitive dancer, visible improvement as the result of effort tends to feedback and motivate continuing effort towards improvement.

**JSM:** Like anything in life, dance can be a “mixed bag.” What do you consider the best part of dancing? How and why is this such a positive? What do you consider the worst part of dancing? How and why is this such a negative?

**Estelle:** The best part of dancing is that feeling when everything is going right and you are controlling the movement of your body and feel completely inside the music. Of course there is also the good feelings that come from achievement and the physical benefits from dancing.

The positive aspects of dance for Estelle involve feelings; feelings of control over one’s body and feelings of being “inside the music.” As with Tessa Estelle’s word choice is interesting, simultaneously indicating a strong connection between self and body, but also hinting at some distance: “you are controlling the movement of your body.” Notice, for instance, that Estelle starts her response in an implied first person: “The best part of dancing is *that feeling* when everything is going right...” She may not say ‘when I feel,’ but the implication is that it is a feeling she has. But she then shifts to “and you are controlling the movement of your body,” instead of something along the lines of ‘and I am in control of the movement of my body’ or some such construction. This type of concomitant connection and distancing is particularly interesting as, on average, it seems to disappear the longer and more seriously a dancer has been competing.<sup>8</sup>

Another interesting element of Estelle's response is her description of feeling "completely inside the music." This is a not uncommon expression among dancers, but seems to catch many of the non-dancers I have spoken with off guard. Non-dancers, for example, will often ask me if I mean 'in sync' instead of "inside" the music. But this is *not* what is meant. The feeling voiced by Estelle is not one of being attuned to or in tune with the music (i.e. synced) in one's dancing, and it is not a sense of drawing the music into one's self and expressing it through dance. Instead, the feeling Estelle is referencing is an expansive one, where the dancer feels like their movement is part of the music and their dancing is carried along by the music. The feeling is not of being bigger than one is, but of being part of something bigger than one is. Of course Estelle did not elaborate in this way before moving on, but many others have, and this seems to be a longstanding and widely held perspective among relatively accomplished dancers.<sup>9</sup>

The last two benefits Estelle mentions are the "good feelings that come from achievement and the physical benefits from dancing." Again, Estelle describes the positive aspects of dance in terms of feelings. The good feelings she associates with achievement clearly tie back into Estelle's previous comments on loving to see the progress she is making. The topic of physical benefits needs to be looked at in a wider context however. Since Estelle is a standard dancer she is already dancing in the most conservative ballroom costuming there is, on top of which she already has a body that many people 10 years younger than her would happily trade for. "Physical benefits" therefore needs to be looked at in two ways. First, it should be understood as meaning

things like body control, stamina, and other physical aspects with a direct bearing on dance performance; and perhaps there is a hint of this in Estelle's linking of achievement in dance with physical benefits.

From a second perspective though, Estelle's comment needs to be understood within the context of popular portrayals of American culture and the mass media, especially in Southern California (where Estelle lives), where physical appearance is revered in an almost idolatrous manner. Add to this the blatant display, observation, and evaluation of physical bodies and appearances that is inseparable from the aesthetics of competitive ballroom, and it makes sense why someone coming to ballroom as an adult (like Estelle) would be hyper-conscious of physical appearance. In fact on another occasion Estelle asked me who a certain dancer I had just been speaking to was and, after I answered, Estelle said "I'd kill to have her body"—in reference to a world finalist with a size zero body.

As far as the negative aspects of dancing, Estelle had this to offer:

**Estelle:** The worst part of dancing is never really knowing how good you are. No one can see themselves dancing from the outside and everyone has to rely on other people's reactions to gauge their level of success. I think this is very hard on the psyches of a lot of dancers who seem on top of the world, "queen of the floor" one minute and a crumbled mess the next because of a bad mark on one night. For someone my level, at least for me, I am always questioning whether what I've been able to do is worth the money and time I spend.

This struck me as a surprising response, especially in light of Estelle's positive comments that she loves the learning process where she "can see the progress" she has made, and that among the positive aspects of dance are "of course" the "good feelings that come from achievement" in dancing. Upon further reflection, however, I realized that, in many ways, the key is Estelle's concluding thought: "I am always

questioning whether what I've been able to do is *worth the money and time I spend.*"

In light of this sentiment we can see that it is not her progress or achievement, as such, that Estelle questions but, instead, if she can justify her considerable sacrifices of time and money against the extent of her progress and achievement.

**JSM:** What do other people in your life think and feel about your dancing? What role has dancing played in your interpersonal relationships, i.e. friends, family, romance, etc.? How and why has dancing played this role?

**Estelle:** For people in my life who do not dance, their feelings range from indifferent to outright negative. For people who do not know me well, there is often an initial curiosity, but for my close friends and family—I think they just cannot grasp why this pastime holds so much fascination for me.

Unlike Tessa or Karen, Estelle reports *no* positive associations or support from other people in her life for her dancing; only reactions ranging from indifference to outright negativity. If acquaintances may express some "initial curiosity" for her interest in ballroom dance, her close friends and family strike Estelle as uncomprehending. I find this significant, as it hints at the internal motivation that is often linked to chosen bodily practices and commitment; and which is not dependent on external understanding, approval, or support by either friends or family.

**JSM:** How would you describe your ideal dance partnership? Why is this your ideal?

**Estelle:** I suppose my "ideal" partnership would involve the "whole package" as they say. A romantic relationship and a strong friendship and partnership with someone who has similar talent and goals. This arrangement is also superior financially as all expenses can be shared. I think also if someone is dancing seriously it is difficult for them to devote time to someone outside of dance.

Estelle's ideal partnership links romance and dance partnering, but also specifies "similar talent and goals." If similar goals can be seen as applying to any life circumstances (i.e. not only dancing), similar talent seems much more dance specific. Where similar talents might (or might not) be a nice addition to a romantic

relationship, it is almost a necessity for any long range dance partnership. Next, in mentioning the financial advantages of such a dual romantic/dance partnership, Estelle is actually making a double attribution. It is widely taken for granted, for instance, that all joint dance expenses such as lessons, coaching, practice time, and entry fees are split between partners (unless specified otherwise beforehand). By making the point that this would be an advantage for her ideal partnership, Estelle therefore seems to be hinting that other expenses such as car payments, the mortgage, and utilities would also be split once the romantic side of the dual relationship had had time to solidify. Finally Estelle reiterates the point made by Tessa about the difficulty of even having enough time for a non-dancer if one is serious about dance one's self.

Regarding the impact of politics on her dancing, Estelle's brief response is as straightforward as it is succinct "Honestly no effect." As far as how much time and money she dedicated to dance, both directly and through dance-related expenses, Estelle responds:

**Estelle:** Dancing takes all my extra time and all my extra money—and even some of my money that is not extra. I spend more than I should and I still am not doing nearly enough. It is very frustrating sometimes.

The only thing, other than saving, that I miss having money to spend on is travel. Unfortunately that is something that I would love to do that I have had to put aside for dance.

While Estelle does not put a dollar amount on her dance-related expenditures of time or money, it would not be an understatement to say that she spends a lot but, given the level of competitor she is, she still feels like she is "not doing nearly enough." The fact that she finds this "very frustrating sometimes" is a feeling known by almost all dancers, as there are very few who have the luxury of training and practicing as much

as they want, whenever they want; let alone still having resources available for other ends.<sup>10</sup> The other interesting element in Estelle's response is that, while competitors do travel for competitions, and sometimes quite widely, this travel is still dictated by competition locations and schedules, so is not the same type of leisure, self-motivated traveling that Estelle is referring to.

**JSM:** Where is your favorite place to dance? Why? How is this place/event different from others? What is your least favorite place that you have danced? Why is this your least favorite and how is it different from others? Why do you still go there (if you do)?

**Estelle:** My favorite place is dance is a studio in LA called Westmor. It's huge and old and ugly—but it has real wood floors and reminds me more of my conception of what a "real" dance studio should look like. There are also a lot of very good dancers and everyone seems to have a very serious attitude about learning to dance.

My least favorite is at a very disorganized competition. It's no fun to dance when you feel like your event is so unimportant that they couldn't even get the time straight or the organizers didn't even realize it was going to happen. I know that nobody really cares about my events but I don't need to be reminded of this!

As far as her favorite place, Estelle's comments suggests that Wetmor's workmanlike appearance and atmosphere, including wooden floors and good dancers who are serious about learning their craft, fits Estelle's conception "of what a 'real' dance studio should look like." Far from the lavish ballrooms of a royal court, the competitive dancer's framework for a real dance studio is based on the suitability of the facilities for ballroom dancing and the seriousness of the other dancers in attendance. A competition might be held in the most elegant ballroom, for instance, but if the floor is hard and sticky<sup>11</sup> few dancers, if any, will want to return.

In voicing her dissatisfaction with disorganized competitions, Estelle is both responding to and referencing an almost class like hierarchy among competitors where professionals are on the top, amateurs are in the middle, and pro-am students are on



the bottom. While this model is a vast oversimplification—especially as far as top level amateurs are concerned relative to the majority of professionals—it does draw attention to the somewhat common trend that regards pro-am students as second class dancers. The context for Estelle’s criticism, then, arises from organizers who pay little attention to the pro-am heats that are the financial base of their event, concentrating their attention on the premier amateur and professional events instead. Few people are in the ballroom during most pro-am events save for other pro-am competitors in upcoming or recently completed events, but an organizer not even knowing that a particular event was being run at their competition places their disregard for pro-am students front and center.

**JSM:** What are the most significant things and/or event that have happened to you through dancing? Why were these so significant for you? What difference (if any) have resulted?

**Estelle:** Where do I start? I would say that 90% of my friendships and personal relationships are now with dancers—amateurs and professionals. The people in your life change everything. I’m sure the course of my life has been altered—how would it have been different?—I’m not sure.

Here, and as Tessa also pointed out, the same time commitments that make it hard for the serious competitor to have a romantic partner outside of dance also make it hard to generate or maintain friendships outside the dance world. Also noteworthy is that it is in response to a question about the most significant things that have happened to her through dancing that Estelle notes that 90% of her personal friendships and relationships are with amateur and professional dancer. Estelle goes on to say that the people in one’s life change it, and makes clear that her associations with dancers have inevitably altered her life; and in ways that she cannot even know. Inevitably this is

true, but it makes explicit that it is not only people's chosen activities alone that change their life trajectories but also the social associations that are intertwined with those activities.

Finally, on the topic of belonging and insider/outsider distinctions, Estelle has this to say:

**Estelle:** I feel I am part of the dance community but definitely not an insider. What I mean is that I did not grow up a dancer, but rather discovered this community as an adult. I don't think I would ever think of myself as first a dancer. I definitely felt more accepted into the inner circle of the "insiders" as an amateur than I was as a pro-am dancer. There seems to be a barrier into that inner circle where "amateur competitors" are more welcome than "students."

Estelle makes a more fine grained distinction here than did either Tessa or Karen, asserting that she feels like she belongs to the ballroom dance community but that she does not feel like an insider within it. In distinguishing herself as a non-insider member Estelle first brings up the fact that she did not grow up within the ballroom community but came to it as an adult.<sup>12</sup> She also mentions that she does not, and never thinks she will, think of herself "first a dancer." This is a striking statement as it contrasts the positions taken by both Tessa and Karen. The last topic that Estelle raises is one that some of her earlier comments foreshadowed, namely that she felt herself to be accepted as more of an insider when she was competing with an amateur partner than with a pro-am instructor.

While the comparative advantages and disadvantages of amateur versus pro-am competition are beyond either the scope or the interest of this dissertation, Estelle's comments provide valuable insight into some of the mental models at play in the dance community. In so far as amateur competitors practice, develop, and compete

with a peer they match the same model as professional competitors. Pro-am competitors on the other hand dance with their instructor, not a peer. Add to this the fact that pro-am students are the financial lifeblood of the US competition circuit and there is also an economic motive for professional dancers to differentiate their status from pro-am students than from purely amateur-amateur competitors.

## **Nathan**

Nathan is a 29 year old man. He was born in Tijuana, Mexico, but grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. His primary language is English, but he also speaks Spanish. He is single (never married), has no children, and is a tax attorney currently employed at an accounting firm. His hobbies include salsa dancing, swing dancing, snowboarding, mountain biking, hiking, camping, hanging out at the beach with friends, surfing, kiteboarding, reading science fiction, lifting weights, cycling and posting on salsa forums. He is not religious and does not attend church, but considers himself very spiritual, having studied a lot of different religions and follow a basic fundamental belief of: “do not hurt other people, live your life in balance, love, forgiveness, and a strong belief that we are all connected in a way that we cannot see.” He grew up “pretty poor” with his family was in poverty for a large portion of his childhood, including three months of homelessness. He finished college about two years ago, has a good start on establishing his career, is currently doing “very well,” and now considers himself upper middle class.

**JSM:** How, where, when, and why did you start dancing?

**Nathan:** The first dance lessons I took were ballroom dance lessons. I was in Tucson, Arizona back in the fall of 2001. There were classes offered by the University of Arizona and I saw a flyer. I always wanted to learn to dance and this seemed like a very good opportunity. I was bored in Tucson. It's a town with about 500,000 people and I had been in Tucson for about two and a half years and I wanted to meet new people and do something different. Before I started dancing I trained extensively in the martial arts. Pretty much all of my free time went into training. I enjoyed training, but then I reached a place where I was bored with the martial arts. It wasn't fun anymore. It was work and I really felt like I needed to explore some other interests besides the martial arts. It was actually a bit scary for me to leave the martial arts behind, because it was a part of my identity. I had a group of friends and I was known as a very experienced martial artist. So, leaving the martial arts and exploring dance meant leaving behind a certain identity.

Nathan's account mirrors several themes already introduced in Tessa's, Karen's, and Estelle's narratives. Nathan's first exposure to ballroom came through his university, and his previous involvement in martial arts was part of his identity both directly and through the social contacts and connections he had garnered via that practice. But Nathan's story takes a different bend:

**Nathan:** I took ballroom lessons for about four months. It really didn't click with me. I didn't have a passion for it. It could have been the instructors or it could have been the other students in the class. I am not really sure, but I did know that I did not want to continue in the classes I was taking. In January of 2002 I saw a different flyer for salsa lessons. Now salsa sounded much more exciting to me. The first time I saw people salsa dancing was at Pepine's in Scottsdale, Arizona. That was somewhere around 1998 and I was about twenty two years old. My sister took me out to Pepine's. My sister had been dancing salsa for about three or four years and always talked about how much fun it was. So I finally went to a club to check it out. I fell in love with it the first time I saw it. I remember sitting on the side wanting to participate so badly, but I did not know the steps. The club was literally jumping. The people were alive and it looked like so much fun. I just had to learn. But at that time I was still training in the martial arts and I wanted to excel and so all of my free time went to training in the martial arts. But eventually I knew that I just had to learn how to salsa dance. So, when I saw the flyer in January of 2002 I was very excited, because I had time to learn and I was ready to move on to something different. Also, I still had a desire to meet new people, I felt very much alone in Tucson. So I took salsa lessons at the University of Arizona and absolutely just loved it! It felt right, I had found my passion! I felt it from the beginning. I made friends with the instructors and I also met a girl that I dated for about six months in the salsa lessons.

The girlfriend worked out very well, because we were both very new to salsa and wanted to learn. I went out every Friday night dancing salsa. That was really the only good night to salsa in Tucson. I was very motivated to learn salsa, because I was taking a cruise to the Bahamas in May of 2002. I wanted to be able to dance on the ship, because the cruise advertised that they would have three dance floors and one would have Latin music. I went on the cruise very excited and couldn't wait to try out

all my new moves. However, almost nobody went to the salsa dance floor. I was very disappointed. I had been trying to get comfortable with salsa so I could dance on this cruise and now no one was there that knew how to dance. I danced with one lady the whole time on the cruise and she did not know how to dance very well. Shortly after the cruise I moved to Phoenix, Arizona and continued taking lessons. I quickly met a group of friends that I am still connected to.

So that's my story of how I started salsa dancing!

Ballroom did not click for Nathan, but salsa “sounded much more exciting.”<sup>13</sup>

What is in some ways the most striking element of Nathan's account is that he “fell in love with it” the first time he saw it, “wanting to participate so badly,” it “looked like so much fun” that he “just had to learn” and still, it took from 1998 until January 2002 for him to take his first salsa class. Far from not making sense within the framework of this dissertation, however, this actually makes perfect sense since, for Nathan, martial arts were his chosen commitment and activity system at that time. And, just like dance, Nathan's embodied practices were deeply interwoven with his identity as a martial artist, an embodied identity that resisted change even in the face of a new activity that he “just had to learn.” Despite Nathan's longstanding practice in the martial arts, however, he eventually makes the shift to salsa where his initial reaction is: “It felt right, I had found my passion! I felt it from the beginning.”

The specific formulation of Nathan's next comment is both humorous and telling as, instead of a more typical phrasing such as ‘things worked out very well with the girlfriend because...’ he says “*the girlfriend worked out very well*, because we were both very new to salsa and wanted to learn.” Whether this is what Nathan meant to say or not, it hints at the trend already noted for ballroom and only slightly less applicable for salsa: it is very hard for dancers to maintain successful romantic

relationships with non-dancers. One of my longtime salsa friends, for instance, has had a stick-it note attached to her computer screen at work for over five years now that simply says “Don’t Date Non-dancers!!!” in large, bold lettering.

**JSM:** In what ways are you involved with dance (i.e. social dancer, amateur competitor, professional dance teacher, professional competitor, vendor, etc.) and how does dancing fit into the rest of your life? What styles do you dance/compete and why?

**Nathan:** I generally just dance socially. I have taught my parents, sister, and some friends, but I only teach people who I know on a personal level. I took a performance class last year that lasted three months. Essentially, it was a group of students wanting to improve their dancing abilities and the instructor created a routine for us and we performed the routine four times at different events. Overall, it was a bad experience, because the instructor did not care how his students looked. He was only concerned about himself and what he looked like.

Here, Nathan makes clear that he is a social dancer, that he has taught close family and friends, and that while he did take a performance class, it was with the objective of wanting to improve his dancing. Nathan also critiques the instructor of his performance class as being a show off who did not really care about his students actual dancing, but this seems to have little to do with Nathan himself aside from hinting at some of Nathan’s aesthetic tastes and preferences in salsa (i.e. away from the flashy “look at me” genre of LA style salsa started and made famous by the Vazquez brothers and their different dance teams). One other item of interest here is not something Nathan says, but actually what he does not say. He never specifies what style of salsa he dances. Far from being an oversight, this is actually an interesting and revealing item, as Nathan’s salsa scene is comparatively small and almost universal in dancing on1. As such, Nathan thinks of and feels his answer to be complete in noting that he dances salsa, and primarily as a social dancer.

**JSM:** Like anything in life, dance can be a “mixed bag.” What do you consider the best part of dancing? How and why is this such a positive? What do you consider the worst part of dancing? How and why is this such a negative?

**Nathan:** The best part about dancing is the thrill I get by dancing! It’s a rush. I absolutely just love it. I love the feeling I get when I am on beat and my partner is on beat and we are both just into the music and the music is really dictating what the moves are and the two of us are just going along for a ride. It’s beautiful!!! To me, it’s art—art in motion. If you speak to artists who paint or draw, or even artists who play instruments they will sometimes tell you that they do not decide how the painting/drawing is going to look like. They simply allow the canvas to develop however it is supposed to develop. So the canvas tells the artist what it wants to be and look like. To me, a dance floor is a canvas and I try not to think about what patterns I want to do. I try and to be present and simply allow the dance floor and the music move me and posses my body. This is probably the most important thing to me in dancing. To simply create art with my body!

Like Estelle, the best part about dancing for Nathan is how it makes him feel.

Also note how Nathan’s descriptions of he and his partner “just going along for a ride” with the music closely mirrors Estelle’s concept of being “inside the music.” Nathan’s description of allowing “the dance floor and the music” to “move” him and “posses” his body follows in a similar line, although this description suggests a drawing into the self of something larger, even a possession by it, but not an expansion and connection of the self with something greater. Still, given the analogy Nathan draws between allowing a painting or drawing to take its own shape, his overall sentiment seems to be in the general direction of being carried along; the same model suggested by Estelle. The feelings that Nathan describes and his assertion that the most important thing to him in dancing is “To simply create art with my body!” suggest some of the reasons underlying his eventual switch from the martial arts to salsa.

Nathan’s response continues:

**Nathan:** Another very important aspect of dancing is the community. I enjoy the friends I have made and the connections. It’s wonderful to walk into a place and have friends happy to see you. It also feels good when you go away for a while and then come back to your salsa community and then have everyone ask you where you have been. This is very important to me, because I have moved around a lot and I enjoy

moving to new cities; however, making new friends can be difficult. Every city I have lived in for the past four and a half years I have met friends in the salsa community. I may move in the near future and I know that I will make friends wherever I go in the salsa community (assuming that there is a salsa community in my new residence).

Nathan makes the most explicit statement of the role and importance of community in dance so far in listing community as one of the most positive aspects of dance for him. Some might argue that, this may simply be a matter of Nathan seeing what he was looking for since, as his narrative tells, part of his initial motivation to start taking dance classes at his university was to meet more people and make new friends. I think this would be a misreading of Nathan's story, however, as he started out with nearly four months of ballroom classes which "really didn't click" for him. Instead, what Nathan seems to be relating is the sense of community that is generated in the sharing of chosen practices.

Additionally, Nathan's description of the almost 'coming home' and 'reunion' like feeling of returning to this community suggests that the bonds forged via shared practice are not merely of association, but emotionally significant ones as well. Finally, Nathan is also explicit in noting that such friendships are derived from the activity itself and, as such, are not location-based but translocal and salsa-based. My own experience of showing up in DC for the 2005 AAA meetings and having someone I had never met but whom I had interacted with online pick me up at the hotel and take me out to the local salsa clubs on two different nights attests to this dynamic. Also in this same vein were my experiences with the salsa communities in Århus and Copenhagen when I was in Denmark in 2003.



After two weeks in Århus at Denmark's top dancesport club I was scheduled to move on to Amsterdam for a week before traveling on Cervia, Italy, for the Italian Open, but my Amsterdam plans fell through at the last minute due to a sudden death in the family of my intended host. Having been dancing and meeting people involved in the Århus salsa scene during the previous two weeks, I showed up to that night's salsa club and explained my situation to one of the people I had met and, through her facilitation, had three offers for a couch "to crash on" by the end of the night (for the following week). Similarly, one of the Århus locals gave me the name of a salsero to contact in Copenhagen for my two nights there before flying to Italy and, sure enough, I again had a couch made available to me through salsa.<sup>14</sup>

**Nathan:** I also really enjoy going to new places and dancing. When I travel I always try and find a salsa club to get my dance on. Its always fun meeting new people and dancing with people that have a different style than myself.

The worst part of salsa? That's a hard question. I guess I would have to say the rude ladies. There are some ladies that are very mean. I try and avoid them the best that I can, but I always seem to run into a rude lady every now and then.

Nathan concludes his list of the best parts of salsa by mentioning the on-the-road camaraderie and exploration that salsa allows for, the same dynamics that undergirded my salsa experiences in both Denmark and DC. A couple of years after he started salsa Nathan still finds little that qualifies as a "worst" part of salsa, only mentioning "rude ladies" after commenting on how hard a question that is to answer. In Nathan's description, "I love the feeling I get when I am on beat *and my partner* is on beat *and we* are both just into the music and the music is really dictating what the moves are and *the two of us* are just going along for a ride," we can see the importance

of connection and shared experience for him as part of what he considers the art of salsa. In light of this commitment to dancing *together*, and his appreciation of the community as part of what he thinks best about salsa, it makes sense that a “rude lady” proves problematic for him within the salsa context.

**JSM:** What do other people in your life think and feel about your dancing? What role has dancing played in your interpersonal relationships, i.e. friends, family, romance, etc.? How and why has dancing played this role?

**Nathan:** My parents are very happy for me, because they know that I have found something that I truly enjoy and am very passionate about. My sister likes it, because we go out dancing together.

As for the romantic side—well, I have met the majority of the ladies I have dated in the salsa scene. Also, whether someone dances or not is an important factor when I am deciding whether I want to date that person.

For Nathan, unlike Tessa, Karen, or Estelle, his family is enthusiastic about his dancing.<sup>15</sup> His parents are supportive because they can see he enjoys and is passionate about it, and it is something he shares with his sister who is a salsa participant alongside him. Romantically, the majority of women Nathan has dated have been “in the salsa scene.” Opportunity and shared interest certainly contribute to this, but the sexuality of male/female dance, and especially the sensuality allowed for in salsa, should not be underestimated either. Whether igniting a spark, fanning existing flames, or providing a sampling of sensual contact and interaction (with any number of partners and within a condensed time frame), salsa inevitably provides an atmosphere conducive to romantic attraction or, at the least, physical attraction. In Nathan’s case, however, “whether someone dances or not is an important factor” in making his decision about dating them or not. Not yet at the extreme of my friend with the “Do Not Date Non-dancers!!!” note posted on her computer screen, Nathan still

recognizes the importance of salsa to him, including the time and commitment thus entailed, and factors this into his dating decisions. More than just potential time conflicts, such choices are about chosen commitments, passionate involvements, and deliberate lifestyles.

**JSM:** How would you describe your ideal dance partnership? Why is this your ideal?

**Nathan:** My ideal dance partner would be my life partner (romantic). I would love to have this type of relationship with my spouse. It would be something that we could do together and experience together. I truly hope that my life partner is as passionate about salsa as I am.

Like Estelle, Nathan's ideal partnership involves the overlap of his romantic partner and his dancing partner. This arrangement seems much more viable in salsa than in competitive ballroom for two primary reasons. First, because one is looking for a socially compatible dancer for salsa versus a competitively compatible partner for dancesport, this is a much less restrictive variable for salsa. Second, as social dancers a couple are far less dependent on each other, even as regular partners, than is the case for competitive ballroom. One person being away for work, for instance, does not compromise the social dancing of their partner, whereas this same absence would compromise the practice of their partner and would make competition impossible. Additionally, and as an outgrowth of this dynamic, the social situation is less structurally stressful than competitive training—having less at stake and only the loosest of long term goals—so proves to be far less of a cause for conflict that might be taken home and a far less reflective field for any conflict from home that may come across to the dancing.<sup>16</sup>

**JSM:** What are your thoughts on and experiences (if any) with politics (be it within your studio or at a competition) and your dancing?

**Nathan:** There is definitely competition that goes on between the different instructors and dance troops here in Portland. To be honest, there are too many instructors and not enough students. So the instructors are competing for the same students. The different dance troops will put on functions at some club and then on the same night a different dance troop will put on a different function at a different club. Also, when a new club opens up everyone goes to that club. However, sometimes one of the dance troops will try and remain loyal to the old dance club and try and recruit people to come back to the old dance club.

As for my thoughts on this matter? I don't really care. I don't get too involved in this conflict. I have taken lessons from almost all of the main instructors here in Portland.

Here Nathan highlights a problem that is, if anything, even more pervasive and destructive in ballroom than it is in salsa—the tendency to fight for a larger slice of a limited pie rather than going outside the tin and bringing in entirely new students. With the massive exposure of ballroom and salsa in movies such as *Dance with Me*, *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*, *Shall We Dance?* (the US remake), *Mad Hot Ballroom*, and *Take the Lead* as well as in the immensely popular TV airings of *Dancing with the Stars*, *So You Think You Can Dance?*, and *America's Ballroom Challenge*, the same effort that has gone into trying to secure the marketing rights associated with any one of these productions could have been far better used in creating accessible dance programs (whether ballroom or salsa) for the masses watching these movies and television shows.<sup>17</sup>

**JSM:** What does it take for you to dance? How much time and money, for instance, do you spend on dancing? How much time and money go into other dance related things (i.e. commuting, clothing, etc.)? What would you be doing with your time and money instead if you were not dancing?

**Nathan:** A month I spend about \$50 in cover charges to dance clubs. I generally buy one salsa DVD every other month—which is generally around \$40. I buy new shoes once a year—and those are about \$130. I spend about \$25 a month on clothes that I wear to a lot of places, but I purchase them with the intention of looking good at a salsa club.

I spend about twelve to fourteen hours a week either dancing or practicing.

What would I be doing with my time if I wasn't dancing? I probably wouldn't go out very much at night and I would get up early to go snowboarding, kiteboarding, mountain biking, surfing, or hiking.

The extra money would probably be spent on my other hobbies such as snowboarding, kiteboarding, mountain biking, surfing and hiking.

If I did not dance I may have never left the martial arts.

Nothing in this response jumps out, but there are actually a few items of interest embedded in this response. It is noteworthy, for example, that Nathan's regular clothing purchases are made with an eye towards how they will look when worn to a salsa club. Also worth noting is the range of physical activities that Nathan foregoes—based on both time and money—in favor of salsa: snowboarding, kiteboarding, mountain biking, surfing, and hiking. This listing supports the idea previously introduced by Nathan that it is the artistic, and hence expressive, side of salsa that most appeals to him, since Nathan does not lack for other physical pursuits. Additionally, Nathan's comments point to the difference in active hours for the salsa lifestyle, going out at night where he otherwise would not, and not getting up early for other physical pursuits where he otherwise would. This type of detail, easily and almost commonly passed over, actually carries significant weight in establishing salsa dancing as a lifestyle—and not just a dance—onto itself.

**JSM:** Where is your favorite place to dance? Why? How is this place/event different from others? What is your least favorite place that you have danced? Why is this your least favorite and how is it different from others? Why do you still go there (if you do)?

**Nathan:** My favorite place to dance was the Viscount here in Portland. It had a very large downstairs floor, and a medium sized upstairs floor. They played mostly salsa, and some cha-cha-cha, merengue, and bachata; however, they did not play Reggaeton. Most of the good dancers would go there and it did not feel like a meat market. And it was not very smoky. However, the club closed and then reopened, but it doesn't have the same feel, yet.

My least favorite place to dance is Fernando's in Portland. The floor is extremely small, the guy to girl ratio is about two to one (I'm a lead), it feels like a meat market, most of the people that go there do not know how to dance; they play way too much Reggaeton and merengue. I only go to Fernando's about once every other month. I only go when I really need to dance. Fernando's goes on Thursday nights. So, it's somewhat convenient to go, because I work Monday through Friday and going out Thursday night isn't too bad, because I only have one more day after Thursday night before the weekend starts. But generally I try and avoid Fernando's, because I generally don't have a good time there.

The descriptions Nathan provides for his most and least favorite salsa clubs are packed with both obvious and embedded significance. The large amount of floor space at the Viscount in comparison to the extremely limited floor space at Fernando's is straightforward enough. While Nathan doesn't specify the ration at the Viscount, it is reasonable to assume that it is, on average, relatively evenly split in the absence of any commentary to the contrary. As such this represents a drastic difference from the two-to-one ratio of men-to-women at Fernando's. On dancing grounds alone, this makes Fernando's only half as appealing a venue for dancing as the Viscount for Nathan (where a woman might find Fernando's twice as appealing based on these exact same numbers). Perhaps contributed to by the imbalanced gender ratio, Nathan finds Fernando's to feel like "a meat market" whereas the Viscount does not. Especially for those not interested in that scene, the meat-market-vibe suggests a predatory dynamic antithetical to the casual and unweighted social interactions typical among more serious dancers.

The presence of good dancers at the Viscount versus having "most of the people that go there do not know how to dance" at Fernando's is as straightforward as the difference in danceable floor space. Less obvious to the outsider is the comparisons in music that Nathan is making between the two clubs, as well as the

significance thereof. First, Nathan's references to the different music selections underscores the fact that the music typical of the salsa scene actually involves several types of music and not just salsa. Going beyond this, the preferences of many salsa (dancing) aficionados is for strict salsa music without the other styles.<sup>18</sup> Non-dancers by comparison (at least those without previous musical training) often cannot differentiate between the different types of dance music that get played in most salsa clubs. More serious dancers—at least across North America and Western Europe—choose salsa as an easy top choice, cha cha<sup>19</sup> or bachata as a somewhat distant second choice, followed by merengue, and most recently, by reggaeton. Most clubs, however, play salsa the most, followed by merengue since, as the simplest of the dances, merengue accommodates the salsa newcomer better than the other dances.

Reggaeton—a newcomer to the North American and European salsa scenes—is a Latin music flavored blend of reggae and rap music, with rap inspired lyrics typically sung in Spanish. A recent musical style, reggaeton is not a formal partner dance and the majority of dancing that is done to it is the same type of grinding typical of any major nightclub. More committed partner dancers find reggaeton crass and unwelcome in salsa venues whereas newer dancers and non-salsa dancers often appreciate the lack of structured movement (which is exactly what the experienced dancers most dislike). This is all embedded background knowledge in Nathan's comparison between his favorite club, the Viscount, where "they did not play Reggaeton," and his least favorite club, Fernando's, where they play "way too much Reggaeton and merengue." This difference in musical selection can also be seen as

both generating and reflecting the “meat market” feel Nathan describes for Fernando’s.

**JSM:** What are the most significant things and/or event that have happened to you through dancing? Why were these so significant for you? What differences (if any) have resulted?

**Nathan:** Leaving the martial arts to free up time for dancing was extremely significant, because the martial arts was part of my identity. I do not identify with salsa the way that I did with the martial arts.

Being able to make friends wherever I go has been important. It has taken a tremendous amount of stress out of my life, because it is difficult leaving your friends behind in a different state, but it helps to know you will be able to make new friends wherever you go.

This response is intriguing, suggesting—as it does—that Nathan has given up martial arts, which he considered part of his identity, for salsa, which he does not. On the surface of it, this seems a perplexing choice. Two explanatory dynamics help account for this apparent discrepancy however. First, not all of one’s identity is self-selected or self-approved. While I am not suggesting that Nathan disapproves of his identity as a martial artist, clearly he was not sufficiently satisfied with that identity not to give it up when presented with the alternative of salsa. Second, embodied processes and identities are often hard and slow to change and deeply enduring. As such, it makes sense that Nathan’s comparatively brief exposure to and experience with salsa has not yet become self-identificatory in the same way as had his many years of martial arts training. Additionally, and beyond taking up the time he used to dedicate to martial arts, Nathan also finds the social networking of salsa to be of the most significance to him. Given Nathan’s frequent moves—especially when considered against his childhood background of financial instability, including a brief period of homelessness for his family—it makes sense that Nathan says that the



promise of new friends inherent to salsa dancing “has taken a tremendous amount of stress out of [his] life.”

Finally, regarding the topic of insider/outsider status and being a “regular,”

Nathan offers the following comments:

**Nathan:** I am a part of the salsa dance community in Portland, Oregon and to some extent Seattle, Washington. The Portland and Seattle communities are fairly similar. They are both full of friendly people. The Portland scene seems to have more diversity in age. I have made friends with people from their early twenty to their early sixties. While in Seattle the community was more centered around late twenties and early thirties. I am a part of the Portland community, because most everyone knows me. I go into a club and give hugs and handshakes to a lot of people. I am sort of a member of the Seattle salsa scene, but it is starting to fade. I left Seattle two years ago and visit every three or four months; however, there are a lot of new faces and a lot of the people I knew no longer regularly go out to salsa clubs.

I became a part of these communities simply by going out regularly and talking to people. I would meet someone and then that person would introduce me to his or her friends. Also, I made a lot of friends in Portland when I took a salsa performance class. I spent a lot of time with the same people and got to know them fairly well. I also take road trips with my salsa community.

It feels really good to part of this community, because I feel accepted.

Beyond providing rough descriptions of the Portland and Seattle salsa scenes, Nathan starts to define himself as part of the Portland scene because “most everyone” there knows him. More than just “knowing” however, the fact that he is close enough to them to “give hugs and handshakes to a lot of people” is significant to Nathan. His word choice here is interesting, as it is not *receiving* hugs and handshakes *from* a lot of people that marks Nathan as a community member in his own assessment but, instead, the fact that he *gives* them *to* a lot of people. The implication I read in this conceptualization is that if feeling socially comfortable enough for *giving* is what is most salient for Nathan this suggests an underlying lack of confidence rather than insecurity—for which *receiving* would probably count most (this reading is supported

by some of the follow up information I garnered from Nathan and to which I shall shortly return). Going out, talking to people, social networking, joint practice, and shared travel are all other elements Nathan identifies as part of how he (or one in general) comes to belong to a community, before concluding that it feels good to be part of the community because he feels accepted. This last piece is, again, interesting, as it is not shared values or enterprise that Nathan says he values in the community, but acceptance.

**Nathan:** Being an outsider is interesting. I go to Phoenix three or four times a year, but I am definitely an outsider. Sometimes its fun, because I get to dance with all new people and I don't have to worry about running into any ex-girlfriends. However, getting ladies to dance with me can be a big challenge. They do not know who I am and they have no idea if I can dance so I get turned down a lot. It sucks, but it goes with the territory.

Finally, in describing his experiences with being a salsa-community outsider, Nathan points out that a lack of social baggage can be fun, as can dancing with new people. The enjoyment possible with an entirely new set of partners should not be underestimated, as it is here that the social dancer *creates* the most as there is no previous familiarity or adaptation between the dancer and any of their possible partnering options. The downside of this that Nathan also takes note of is that, as an unknown quantity, it can be hard to get strangers to dance with you. It is only once a dancer has had a chance to demonstrate their mettle on the dance floor with a sufficiently accomplished partner that they have a “pass” to the appropriate echelon of dancers at that particular venue. It was only after I danced with an excellent dancer in Copenhagen—who had recognized me from a visit to Århus the preceding week—that some of the better salseras at the club started accepting my invitations to dance.

In following up on my more structured questions I found out that Nathan had never really felt accepted while growing up and that while he had a group of “friends,” he really was not part of their group. “I was more of their kicking post” says Nathan, “they let me hang out with them, but I wasn’t really one of them.” Nathan’s family also moved around to a considerable extent while he was a child and he thinks that he attended a total of twelve different schools (not including colleges). It seems that Nathan comes by his feelings “honestly” when he reports having had “issues of acceptance” his whole life, and helps explain why the mobile camaraderie of salsa is of such significance to him. “Salsa has done a lot of things for me,” says Nathan, “I feel accepted in salsa, it is very healing to know that people care about me and think about me on and off the floor.”

Nathan also reports that salsa has provided him with confidence in meeting women. Reaching puberty “very late,” Nathan reports that he was abnormally short while growing up, and was “rejected by women very harshly.” He is now 5’7”—which he considers to be “average height more or less”—but feels like he still carries around the “embarrassment and shame” he felt growing up from “being rejected by women on a very regular basis.” Nathan says that salsa has helped him heal emotionally, and concludes his comments saying:

**Nathan:** Salsa has helped heal this wound. I feel comfortable approaching women and talking to them, women approach me and want to get to know me. Women will occasionally pick up on me at salsa clubs. It makes me feel desirable. Also, women find me desirable as a lead. Many women have told me they love dancing with me and will ask me on a regular basis to dance. It feels good to be wanted.

Reflecting on Nathan’s closing comments, it strikes me that even if he found martial arts to be part of his identity, and even if he does not find salsa to be so, that a large

part of the appeal that salsa holds for him lies in its ability to help redress longstanding emotional injury in a way that martial arts never could. Even if Nathan's original forays into the martial arts were motivated by a desire (whether consciously realized or not) to compensate for his "belittled" masculinity—in terms of late puberty, small stature, and lack of sexual appeal—martial arts could never make him sensually desirable in the way that he can be as a sought after leader in salsa and, as Nathan says, "It feels good to be wanted."

### **Unstructured Interviews**

The case materials in this section are primarily drawn from the 200+ unstructured interviews I have conducted with people involved in the ballroom world. The initial question for my unstructured interview was simply "how did you get started dancing?" or, for people like ballroom vendors who had not, themselves, ever been dancers, "how did you first get involved with ballroom dancing?" The content of these interview-discussions developed from there, as my continuing questions and prompts built on the responses that my respondents had already provided. There were certain questions, such as "when and how did you decide to turn professional?" or "when and how did you decide to retire?" that I made sure to ask—where appropriate—but, overall, what I heard in these exchanges is what suggested the direction that my next queries would take. The nature of these interviews makes them prohibitively extensive to reproduce here in any measure of their entirety. More importantly, much of their content—although certainly interesting in its own right—would not add to, develop, or reframe any of the frames of reference or topics already

introduced in this chapter. Selective use of these materials, however, more than suffices to complement the other case studies already considered in this chapter.

I have selected the data I present here with three considerations in mind. First, I have elected to use materials coming from “elite” ballroom competitors; dancers who are considered among the best in the world in their chosen style. This selection allows for the three way intersection of case materials noted at the start of this chapter (and illustrated in Table 11.1). Examining these three axes—data type, dance genre, and in-dance status—together enables both a more comprehensive and a more nuanced consideration of dancers’ lived lives.

Second, in selecting elite competitors I have embedded a progression of partnered dance mastery within the progression of case types used in this chapter. Tessa, Karen, Estelle, and Nathan may all be superb dancers relative to non-dancers, but none of them are considered extremely skilled members of their respective dance masses. The elite ballroom competitors cited here, on the other hand, all started dancing as children and teenagers, with many of them already competing by age 10 (and some even younger). Third, and finally, in selecting the materials I use here I have elected to use published interview data *when it corresponds* with what I have been told in an interview (with that dancer or, in some cases, by another dancer in an almost identical form). I think this a useful maneuver as it lets me identify the speaker more precisely than I would be able to as an anonymous respondent.<sup>20</sup>

## Getting Started

I interviewed Slovenian judge Milos Poprocky at the 2002 San Francisco Open. Asked about how he got his start in ballroom dancing Milos says that when he was 16 there was an end of year party coming up at his high school and his mother told him he had to go to dance school since he did not know how to dance. As Milos continues to say, however, 16 is now “too old to start” in Europe if one wants to reach “the top.” Sergey Ryupin, Russian National Professional Latin Champion and World and Blackpool Professional Latin finalist, for instance, says “I was 13 when I started dancing, *so as you see I was not that young*” (Allen 2002:web; emphasis added). Sergey’s long-time partner, Elena Khvorova, in contrast says “I started dancing at the age of 9, *but* prior to that I was training artistic gymnastics” (Allen 2002:web; emphasis added).

Already there are some drastic differences from the other cases presented in this chapter. Milos, as both a coach and judge, states quite clearly that, for those who want to challenge for the top ballroom titles, 16 is already too late to get started with their dance training. Sergey’s comment, however, is more telling. Not only does Sergey say he started dancing at 13, but, in adding “so as you see I was not that young,” he emphasizes the point that not only is this not young for a serious competitor to start their dancing but that this is also widely understood. Moving the starting clock back Elena not only says that she started at nine years old, but also makes a point of specifying that she was already training in another physical discipline requiring fluid movement and flexibility prior to starting ballroom.

The couple who took over as Russian National Professional Latin Champions from Sergey and Elena and who advanced even higher as World and Blackpool Professional Latin finalists are Dmitri Timokhin and Anna Bezikova. “I always dreamt of being a figure skater” says Anna, “but for some reason it didn’t happen. I started dancing, but, *unlike most dancers in Russia, quite late, at the age of 11.*” (Boerner 2003:web; emphasis added). In contrast to Anna,

Dmitri...followed a more common path, starting out with folk dancing. “But my mother thought it was not international enough, a world which didn’t offer the chance to travel or make a proper living out of it. So I started Ballroom and Latin classes at the age of 15” Dmitri says. (Boerner 2003:web)

Where Sergey says that 13 was “not that young” for him to start, Anna actually says that 11 was actually “quite late” for her to start, and makes clear that her assessment is representative of the ballroom scene in Russia. Dmitri’s situation is somewhat different, as he already had years of folk dance training before switching to ballroom at 15. The more interesting aspect of Dmitri’s comments, however, is that it was specifically because of its international nature, including opportunities for both work and travel, that his mother wanted Dmitri to make the switch to ballroom.

Dancing for England, World and Blackpool Amateur Latin finalist Rachel Heron started her ballroom dancing at age 10, and her partner, Evgeni Smagin started taking ballet at age seven, and ballroom at nine, before leaving Russia and moving to England at 16 in order to dance with Rachel. Polish Amateur Latin Champion and Blackpool Semifinalist Przemek Lowicki started with ballroom at seven years old while his partner, Jana Pokrovskaya, originally started ballet, in Russia, at six years old. Similarly, Polish Professional Latin Champions and World and Blackpool

Professional Latin finalists Michal Malitowski and Joanna Leunis (Belgian) each started dancing at ages eight and nine respectively. Joanna's start at nine years old, however, equals the *combined* starting ages of English and Blackpool Professional Standard Champions Timothy Howson and Joanne Bolton who started, respectively, at five and four years old. Similarly, English Amateur Standard Champions and World and Blackpool Amateur Standard finalists Warren and Kristi Boyce each started dancing at their parents respective dance schools, Warren at age six in England and Kristi at age four in Estonia.

This conglomeration of names, titles, ages, and nationalities may read as cumbersome to the non-dancer, but it is telling in a number of respects (and, for the ballroom savvy, quite interesting in its own right). Most importantly, these numbers show the consistently (very) young ages that today's elite dancers start their dance training. While starting at such young ages provides years more of training and information, the greater significance is in the additional years of bodily practice. By the time dancers such as Tessa, Karen, and Estelle first start ballroom dancing at their respective universities, elite ballroom competitors may already have as many as 14 or more years of dance experience. More than just additional years of dance experience, however, the years in question are childhood years for the elite competitor—years of great plasticity during which specific ways of moving become deeply ingrained. The hard won skill of the adult competitor is the natural movement of the elite competitor.

The range of partnerships and nationalities (Belgian, English, Estonian, Polish, and Russian) represented in this brief grouping illustrates that starting early is



the norm for elite competitors, regardless of nationality. Additionally, these same materials also demonstrate the position taken by Dmitry Timokhin's mother, namely that ballroom dancing does situate one within an international practice. If Dmitri stayed in Russia dancing with Anna, Sergei and Elena also stayed in Russia, and Timothy and Joanne stayed in England, it is no less the case that Evgeni moved from Russia to England to dance with Rachel and Jana moved from Russia to Poland to dance with Przemek. Where Evgeni moved from Russia to England to dance with Rachel, Kristi moved from Estonia to England to dance with Warren. Where Jana moved from Russia to Poland to dance with Przemek, Joanna moved from Belgium to Poland to dance with Michael.

The point here is not simply that ballroom starts early and is also international for the more elite competitors but that, just as much as the dancing itself gets assimilated by the young dancers, so too does the internationality of the competitive scene. Where a college ballroom recruit might enter Blackpool after four or five years of practice, they will probably not expect to go far. By the time they are the same age, an elite competitor may already have a number of Junior, Youth, and Under 21 World and Blackpool titles under their belt. Dmitri and Anna first competed in the Under 21 Latin competition at Blackpool when they were (respectively) 15 and 13 years old. Compounding all of the other factors already here then, the early start of young competitors makes competition itself second nature to these dancers as well, and probably in a way that few competitors who have started as adults, if any, can ever achieve.

A final point I want to make regarding how these competitors started their ballroom dancing concerns the level of detail they typically provide. If asked for additional details, all of these competitors can (and do) provide them, but how they started ballroom dancing is not salient to these competitors in the same way as it is for those who only came to ballroom (or salsa) later in life. Similarly, where those who started later think about to what extent their dancing may influence or shape their identity, these elite competitors almost never make any comments of this nature unless asked very leading questions to this effect. Dancing is a powerfully constitutive component and influence of these dancers' identities—simply put, who they are as dancers is inextricable from whom they are as persons.

### **Coaches, Practicing, and Competitions**

How often do Tessa, Karen, and Estelle compete? How much time do they spend practicing? How often do they take lessons? As the following accounts quickly demonstrate, there really is no comparison. Asked about his and Elena's coaches, for instance, Sergey Ryupin responds: "Our main coaches in Moscow are Victor Nikovsky and Larissa Davidova, in England - Tone Nyhagen and Donnie Burns. We also work with Alan and Hazel Fletcher, Michael Stylianos, Lorraine and Peter Maxwell" (Allen 2002:web). Where the non-ballroom dancer will notice that Sergey mentions nine coaches in two countries, someone knowledgeable about the ballroom world will not only know who most of these people are but will also understand which "schools" of dance Sergey and Elena subscribe to, where they are positioned politically, and the competitive backgrounds and qualifications of the coaches in

question as well. If Tessa takes the names of organizations such as the IDSF and of competitors such as Eugene Katsevman and Misa Cigoj for granted, Sergey comments are informed by deep familiarity with the competitive ballroom world—and are intended to be understood from within this context as well.

Answering the frequently asked question of how often they practice, English, World, and Blackpool Professional Standard Champions Christopher Hawkins and Hazel Newberry respond:

We train very hard (both in the studio and the gym), and we set aside as much time as we possibly can for our own practice sessions. However, these activities cannot be quantified in quite the regular manner suggested by the question. The lifestyle of a top Professional dancer simply does not permit this - too much traveling, and too many other professional commitments. When we are in UK, we can of course work with our own Coaches, and we are more easily able to schedule practice sessions for ourselves. We do also have a regular trainer who helps us at our gymnasium sessions. Her task is to help us to achieve maximum performance, even at the end of the longest of competitions. We believe that our stamina is one of our greatest assets. Also as part of our own personal development program, we engage in a number of other activities that are dance-related. For example, we take part in other sorts of dance (ballet, jazz, etc.), and we have been learning languages to help our teaching and lecturing - in particular, Japanese and German. (Hawkins and Newberry 2003:web)

In this response Hawkins and Newberry indicate that, as elite competitors, their lifestyle prevents the same type of quantifications that Tessa, Karen, Estelle, and Nathan were all able to provide. Also worth noting, the same international scope of Christopher and Hazel's positions within the competitive circuit that disrupts their practice schedule is also what motivates them to learn additional languages. Another element of this picture is that elite competitors' training, practice, travel, teaching, and competing are all interrelated aspects of their dancing. Asked about their upcoming plans and competitions, for instance, Chris and Hazel say:

We have a busy schedule of teaching, demonstrations and competitions for the rest of this year. In addition to teaching and giving several shows throughout the UK, we

have demonstration and coaching visits arranged to Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Russia and The Netherlands. Our next big competition will be a defense of our World Championship in Miami in September, after which we will go to Japan to compete in the Asian Open, and then back to the UK for the International and the British National Championships. (Boerner 2003:np)

Simply stated, elite ballroom competitors live translocal lives. The same World Championship that is held in England one year will be held in another country such as the US, Germany, Slovenia, or Russia the next. The same competitors competing against each other in Germany one day may very well end up competing against each other again in the US or Japan less than a week later. Not to overemphasize the point, but these competitors' perspectives, experiences, and lives cannot be understood save in relation to this internationality and translocality.

Asked about how many competitions they have danced in, Elena Khvorova responds on behalf of Sergey Ryupin and herself:

We have lost count. Just in the last 3 months we danced 15. From September to June we typically dance 20-25 in an average season. There are some comps we feel we can not miss in any season. The list includes: UK Open in Bournemouth, International in London, British Open in Blackpool, World Championships (although this is only if we qualify as one of the top two couples from our country), German Open in Mannheim, US Open in Miami, World Masters in Innsbruck, Dutch Open in Holland, Italian Open in Cervia and Kremlin City Cup in Moscow. These competition count for the WD&DSC ranking and not going would mean missing out in the worldwide ranking. (Allen 2002:np)

Comparing this with the four competitions a year that Tessa reports competing in suggests to me that the differences in practice and schedule are not just differences of quantity as might initially seem to be the case but, in fact, differences in kind. Notice that it is not merely that Chris and Hazel and Sergey and Elena (amongst many, many others) travel and compete far more often than Tessa, Karen, or Estelle, but that coordinating travel plans, getting ready for competitions, and actually competing are

all actually regular practices for the elite competitor. Far from being the exception from the norm, they are part of it.

On April 10, 2002 I have a comment in my fieldnotes that US Professional Smooth Champions Michael Mead and Toni Redpath had just returned (to San Diego) from New York, would be in town for two days, were then leaving for Hawaii, and then off to Toronto for the Can-Am Dancesport Gala. Just over a month later I have a similar entry in my fieldnotes, commenting on how I (based in San Diego) had not been able to catch up with US Professional Standard Champions and World and Blackpool Professional Standard finalists Jonathan Wilkins and Katusha Demidova (based in New York) at the Can-Am (in Toronto) for an interview, so was now arranging a time and place to meet up with them in London, pre-Blackpool. Certainly Tessa, Karen, and Estelle live ballroom informed lives, yet as these concluding case materials make evident, these are different lives from those of the elite ballroom competitors.

The dichotomization between “regular” and “elite” ballroom competitors is, of course, an artificial one. In reality there is an entire spectrum of ballroom competitors, ranging from the first time competitors on the one end to the multiple time World and Blackpool champions on the other. And, of course the experiences, understandings, and influences of ballroom exist along this same spectrum as well as intersect and interact with individual lives in individual ways. None the less, casting ballroom competitors’ statuses as either being elite or not was of use in isolating a key point—that the meanings, motivations, and identities found, forged, and reflected in dance are

never simply “given.” These relationships and intersections between dance, meanings, motivations, and identities are examined in the next chapter.

## **Narrative**

Questioning what dance means to dancers (as well as fans) rests on the foundation that dancing does, in fact, mean something to them; and often times something quite important. Yet how could it be otherwise? Dancers are not, after all, simply people who have danced, in some situation, and at some time in their life. Dancers are dancers because they choose to dance. The following narrative comes from Edie Lewis—widely known and respected throughout the salsa world by her self-proclaimed title: “The Salsa FREAK.” Edie’s narrative provides fertile ground for examining interplays between body, self, and culture—as well as meanings and motivations—and the use of a personal narrative helps highlight some of the points of interaction between Nencel’s (1996) subjective and discursive; between lived experience and cultural models.

### **Edie Lewis “The Salsa FREAK”<sup>21</sup>**

**Edie:** I started dancing in November, of 1994. I’ll never forget that night.

I got sick of “home life” that evening, and decided to go out to an old “disco/techno/hip-hop” club I heard on the radio a few months before. It was located in Long Beach at the Shoreline Village. When I got there, the place had since turned into a Salsa Club called Canti Tiburone. I went in, and decided to check out the scene. I was the first one there, and except for the DJ and bartender, I was the only person there. The only reason I stayed was because I noticed the music. It was a strange, new Jazzy “Latin-Spanish” music that I had never heard before. I always thought Spanish music was Mexican Mariachi stuff with boots and big hats. (I didn’t get out much...)

This opening already indicates a couple of significant things—that Edie’s first exposure to and experience with dancing was a profound experience for her, and that for Edie, at least, “home life” is a distinct sphere of activity. Clearly the notion of a domestic sphere has more than merely descriptive validity (Nicholson 1986; Rosaldo 1980) in this circumstance; counting both as a conceptual and as a lived category for Edie.

**Edie:** I stayed for the next few songs, and amazingly enough, started really getting into the music! I actually liked it! A few couples came in the room. I watched, wondering just exactly how they were going to dance to this sort of beat. I was awe-struck when they actually started dancing TOGETHER...WHAT A CONCEPT. Oh my God. I was shocked that two people could dance TOGETHER and not have to dance to Country Western!

Here we see two more important themes come into their own—that the conceptual idea of “couples” has salience for Edie and that the embodied practice of dancing *together* is of significance.

**Edie:** Now folks, to give you a little history of my background, I was basically born and raised in hick-town, USA, Colorado. The only dance you danced "together" was to good ole "twang" comin' from them Guitars, some ole' boy singin' with a wad in his mouth, whalin' about some ole' cowboy's dead dog and ugly wife...

I hated that. I never wanted anything to do with country-western music - much less DANCE to it *for crying out loud*. (which is what I would have done, if forced....)

ANYWAY, I was taken away and just thrilled to death watching these people dance to this jazzy Spanish-Latin type music called Salsa! I thought they were SO GOOD!!! I was just thrilled to be there, and watched for about an hour, having a great time, by myself.

These statements highlight that even though dancing together has meaning for Edie, this meaning is one that articulates with other elements and cultural content with which she was familiar and comfortable, in this case with music and a certain rural culture. It also suggests a folk model that, relatively closely, parallels David Murray’s position that “individual tastes are bound up in complex personal histories that cannot

be reduced to single causal cultural factors” (1999:170); a point mirrored by Lorraine Nencel who recognizes that “the continual motion between discourse and subjectivity produces differences between men [and women]” (1996:78).

**Edie:** Then, it happened. Two incredibly beautiful women strutted in the club dressed to the hilt, with looks to kill, and attitudes to match. One was an entrancing, sexy, sleek model-type with a figure any woman would die for. The other was a dark, gorgeous Latin bombshell-type with a long black hair and a lioness prowl about her that every man in the room noticed.

Female body image and “sexiness” take center stage in this segment of Edie’s account. This is more important than it might initially appear since, in addition to accounting for other’s perceptions, it is by comparison and contrast with others that one’s own identity evolves (Hanna 1988:8); and, as this passage also clearly indicates, ethnicity is not divorced from these facets of consideration.<sup>22</sup>

**Edie:** EVERYBODY watched as they entered the room. Then, walking behind the both of them was this flat-topped....man, man/boy, boy/man,.....this Latin...gentleman, toting a cigarette and strutting in like he owned the place. He had the "slickest" mannerisms about him, like someone right out of the Mambo Kings movie. He looked around the room while he walked, hand in his jacket, smoking that cigarette, checking out the place, the women, the wine, waving to the DJ, giving a little smile, and making sure the two women he came with found a table and were well taken care of. He helped the both of them take off their coats, and ordered drinks for all three of them.

Ideas about male body image, “sexiness,” self-presentation, cross-sex conduct are in evidence and, again, ethnicity is implicated in such considerations. Tellingly, too, all of the characteristics that “speak” to Edie so powerfully concern the bodily conduct she is watching. Also important is Edie’s mention that “EVERYBODY” watched, as this highlights not only the attention directed towards these dancers, but her awareness, as a spectator, of other spectators’ shared focus (closely paralleling the



role of the audience in constructing the spectacle of ballroom for itself as described in Chapter Six).

**Edie:** I tried not to stare, but something about them just sparkled. They had something. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but they had something that was confident, and very rare. They had a "feeling"; an aura about them that resonated throughout the room. The feeling they emanated was a connection with the music and the atmosphere. I KNOW every single person in that room could feel it that night. They seemed important for some reason. They seemed they knew ... something. They belonged there, at that moment in time.

Here, the attention drawn by the dancers continues to be portrayed—as it will throughout much of the remainder of this account—as centrally important.<sup>23</sup>

**Edie:** My attention went back to the dancers on the dance floor. A couple songs went by, and I was disappointed that the trio that just came in were not dancing yet. It seemed everyone else was. A terrific fast song came on, and I noticed the gentleman extend his hand to the model-type gal as she sat sipping her drink. He took one last puff of his cigarette, put it out in the ash tray while holding her tiny hand, and both of them walked toward the dance floor. She seemed reserved and quiet at first, looking almost shy. He however, looked at her, then turned into a lion, ready for action. The music was reaching the beginning stages of its climax when they finally started dancing...

Here we see more distinctions in Edie's perceptions between male and female dancers. "She" has a "tiny hand," and looks "reserved," "quiet," and "almost shy." "He," in contrast, "turned into a lion" and is "ready for action." These descriptions—even in the absence of any extended or in depth treatment—evidence deeply ingrained and "backgrounded"<sup>24</sup> models of gender, sensuality, and eroticism.

**Edie:** My heart began to race. I could not believe what I was seeing. The pair had transformed this beautiful sound into human movement, rhythm, flair, style, grace, and absolute passion! I didn't even want to blink my eyes for fear of missing something! During the song, his hands ran through her hair softly, then he touched her face, grabbed her waist, thrust her body and her head lashed back.... it was phenomenal. My mouth was wide open, my head forward, and my palms sweating. Every beat of the music was struck by a flash of a hand, an arm, a fast hip action.... every peak in the rhythm was powered by a spin... then two... then three... then four... then a pause, then what looked like a cross between a Fred-Astaire / Ginger Rogers Waltz and a fast Break-Dance - I was in shock! The woman had so much style, jazz, and sex appeal. It was an absolute thrill watching her. I had never before seen something so fiery beautiful and at the same time partnered so technically perfect on

every beat. The entire crowd cleared the dance floor as they danced. Everyone made a circle around them, and just watched with just as much amazement as myself.

“Passion,” “touching,” “grasping,” and “thrusting,” all evidence the salience of the sexuality to Edie in this dance situation (even if it is unclear whether or not she directly or consciously processed it as such). Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers also emerge as iconic figures from Edie’s account and, as near archetypal personas in western dance, serve as embodiments of certain cultural content—in this case of class, technical proficiency, and exuberance. Yet as soon as Edie has commented on this element of style she is already transitioning back to “sex appeal” as a pertinent dynamic in her experience of this event.

Like any other cultural models, models of movement can distinguish (as they do in this case) between female and male, and such models (as Edie’s case will continue to illustrate) often “serve to remind audience members of their respective identities and roles” (Hanna 1988:77).

**Edie:** When the song was over, the entire room cheered, whistled, and clapped. I just stood there, paralyzed, not understanding, nor realizing what had just happened. I remember putting my hand over my mouth and distinctly whispering to myself, "Oh my God." Folks, you have to understand something. I never saw my mom and dad dance together - ever. I never grew up with dance. The closest exposure to formal or couple dancing for me was watching the Nutcracker on TV every Christmas, or catching a glimpse the country-westerners at the local pool hall in town while driving by. I never really had an interest, nor had any time to go out. I started my "night school" degree program almost immediately. I had been doing nothing but going to school, working, going to school, and working.... for the past ten years! I got my degree at night, and basically had zero social life, nor life of my own. I was so busy working, that ten years had gone by before I even knew it. I had no idea "Salsa music" even existed. I had no idea people even danced to this music, much less moved their bodies in this fashion.....while holding hands.... together!

This passage illustrates the significance of female/male contact (in this case pertaining to dancing) for Edie. Edie’s parents show up as models of social conduct and behavior; models whom (at least in the Western context within which this report

unfolds) have profound impact on shaping Edie's expectations and perspectives. Additionally, work and school show up as distinct spheres of activity, spheres cast as separate from music, dancing, and related activities.<sup>25</sup> The other important dynamic in this passage is that it foregrounds the vicarious and empathic experiences which may be engendered in dance (Hanna 1988:22)—an especially important dynamic in understanding the processes via which dance contributes to constructing gender.

**Edie:** A couple songs went by, and I couldn't understand why they weren't dancing again! I was getting rather upset, when suddenly, it happened again. This time he asked the sexy bombshell Latina gal to dance. I was totally ready for anything at this point. When they started to move, I took a deep breath, looked at them both dancing, shook my head, and whispered to myself, "I can't believe what I'm seeing." The presence the woman projected was incredible. She was dancing, what I was needing. She was living what I was missing. She danced with a passion that I had never seen before. I lived the entire past ten years of my boring life through her at that single moment in time. The guy led her into a spin, then another, then..... SHE JUST KEPT SPINNING!! Three, four, five, .... six, seven.... EIGHT TIMES!!! I almost fell off my chair. It was the most amazing performance I'd ever seen. Then, before I knew it, the guy disappeared for about 5 seconds WHILE THE GAL WAS STILL SPINNING. I was completely confused for a split second, thinking, "Now that was real rude of that guy to just leave that poor woman spinning by herself like that...." Little did I know that he had suddenly appeared with the first gal, and all three of them were on the dance floor!

Here Edie again links sexuality and ethnicity and, also of great importance, she casts this dancing as resonating with deep-seeded needs; needs which, by implications speak to the importance of passion to lived life. Edie's account also evokes a model of what count as acceptable gender roles, in this case male attentiveness to a female companion.

**Edie:** Then, before I knew it, he grabbed both of their right hands, one with each of HIS hands, and started spinning and dancing with the both of them simultaneously! He led the first girl around the second girl, while he danced and held the first girl's hand with his right hand, and the second girl was being spun by his left hand! It was as if he was only dancing with one girl, but both of his hands had each girl and was dancing and doing entirely different moves with each one AT THE SAME TIME - and keeping to the rhythm!!! (talk about confusing... try writing about it!)

I thought to myself, "This is the ultimate. I can die tomorrow, because NOW, I have seen EVERYTHING." "OK God, you can take me now. I have now lived a full life...."

That night, was when I saw Salsa Brava's Luis, Joby Vazquez and Janette Valenzuela for the first time. That night changed my life forever. That night, I decided to change ME. I realized I had been missing "life" ... a "life" that others enjoyed, a life that somehow, I missed. I was missing a world, a mysterious underground world of this so-called "Salsa" music and dance that seemed so familiar, from a distant past, from a place that I had been to, but cannot recall to this day. I needed the rhythm, I needed the passion, I needed my life back again. I needed to finally **START LIVING MY LIFE**.

As a concept “passion” resurfaces in Edie’s account and begins to show up as a locus for the appeal that salsa holds for her. Indeed, “passion” is presented as nearly synonymous with life, not life in a biological sense but, rather, life in the sense of robustly lived experiences. The profound and long lasting impact that such deeply felt meanings can engender emerge in the continuation of Edie’s story.

**Edie:** I started going to that club every week. Unfortunately, the trio never showed up again. I was hoping they would, and was kicking myself for being too terrified to ask them their names and befriending them. I finally got the courage to dance a song later on that evening, but I couldn't figure out how my feet were supposed to go. I was basically a "Disaster on the dance floor". A "Catastrophe" waiting to happen - I just knew it. I had no confidence, no rhythm, no style, no nothing - just a love for the music, and a passion to learn. I didn't know what the difference was between Cumbia, Merengue, Cha, Cha, or Salsa. I thought it was all the same - it all sounded alike to me. I was just thrilled to be in someone's arms, actually coordinating and trying to negotiate steps!

Here—shifting between salsa as spectacle and performance to activity and practice—knowledge of music and dance technique show up as dance-related domains, but self-confidence also emerges as a significant dynamic within this dance-centered scenario. Physical contact also reappears as a significant factor for Edie—“I was just thrilled to be in someone’s arms,” she says.<sup>26</sup>

**Edie:** I didn't know the guy was supposed to lead. I thought we traded-off or something. It wasn't until a kind gentleman in his 50's told me to close my eyes, and just "feel" the music through his body and motions. He held me close, and started to slowly guide me through the steps, like my father used to do when I was about 4 years old. I used to stand on top of my father's big feet, pretending to dance with him. He could lead me anywhere!

That night, the older gentleman and I only danced one song, but I'll never forget that kind man. And I will always thank him for being so patient with me, and showing me

the basics of "following the man." I hope he reads this some day. If you do, "Thank you."

Distinct gender roles within partner dancing show up here, "leading" for the male and "following" for the female; but not as intellectual abstractions—as physically felt and enacted roles and practices. Interestingly, parental modeling is again given salience in Edie's first experience with salsa (perhaps suggesting some link between the *contact* that is so striking and important to her in salsa and early childhood memories?).

Despite the plethora of material presented by Edie's tale, the deep importance of—and commitment to—dancing, to dancers, can also be directly observed in their actions. Certainly the amount of time and money that dancers dedicate to their dancing is impressive;<sup>27</sup> especially in a society that often falls back on these two very items as catchall excuses. Yet as the materials in this chapter also illustrate, to say that dancing has deep meaning to dancers does not mean that it has the same meaning for them. Dance, like culture, is not one thing and, as such, a variety of meanings and motivations are involved and implicated in the intersections between individual persons and their dancing.

As the various accounts in this chapter all help illustrate, dancing can appeal to different people for different reasons, it can impact people's lived experiences and lives in different ways, and it can (re)orient persons' goals and priorities in different ways. In all such cases, and for whatever reasons they may have, dance provides fertile grounds for dancers' interests and commitments. More than just a chosen commitment system, however, (although it is also and importantly this) dancing is an intrinsically physical and deeply embodied practice wherein the physical doing

matters to dancers. As all of the cases in this chapter show, each in its own way, the deep embodiment of dance inextricably links the practice of dance to the meanings, motivations, and identities that dancers find in dance.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Eleven

<sup>1</sup> I say primarily because there are also differences between social and competitive salsa dancers, just as there are differences between social and competitive ballroom dancers. In this case I think adding this division complicates the picture more than it reveals, as all of the ballroom dancers represented here are primarily competitors (even if they also dance socially) and both salsa dancers (Nathan and Edie) are primarily social dancers, even if she has, as a professional, competed in various salsa competitions.

<sup>2</sup> In labeling some dancers as “regular” I do not mean to imply that they are in any way, ordinary, average, or any less interesting than any other dancers. For lack of an established terminology I am simply using “regular” as a designation of a dancer’s status that contrasts with the “elite” dancers who are popularly recognized as among the very best at their craft within their own dance genre.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete break down, the competitive field would also need to be subdivided between professional, amateur, and pro-am competitors as well.

<sup>4</sup> While my own non-dance interests lie along photographic lines as well, I am unsure that the ratio of dancers interested in photography is significantly higher than among non-dancers. What I would suggest, instead, is that given the nature of what ballroom dancing itself is, those with interests in photography are much more likely to be identifiable within the competitive community.

<sup>5</sup> Top rung amateurs, such as Blackpool champions and vice-champions, often start making World and Blackpool semi-finals as soon as they turn professional, with some breaking straight into the finals.

<sup>6</sup> As a side effect of her chemotherapy Karen suffered from “avascular necrosis of the femoral head,” meaning that her hip collapsed, needed surgery, and that she could not continue diving.

<sup>7</sup> As noted in Chapter 5, franchise studios do vary, and there are franchise studios that teach International as well as American style ballroom as well as both competitive and social dancing—just as there are non franchised studios that only teach American style ballroom and only teach social dancing.

<sup>8</sup> World and Blackpool champions almost never utilize this type of construction for instance.

<sup>9</sup> The implication here being that less accomplished dancers are unlikely to possess the skills required for this type of experience within the confines of an elaborately structured dance form. Many people who are regulars in the average nightclub scene, however, report almost the same feeling, such as when they “get carried away by the music.”

<sup>10</sup> This is not, however, to say that there are no pro-am competitors in this situation as there are, in fact, the very few for whom money seems no obstacle. Truly wealthy pro-am competitors have used their financial resources to different ends, such as: (1) putting a highly rated instructor on salary, so they would always be available to that one student; (2) spending twenty six thousand dollars in dresses at

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one competition alone; and (3) enticing a retired Blackpool Professional Champion back onto the floor as one's pro-am partner, including providing transportation by limousine and first class flights.

<sup>11</sup> A hard floor absorbs less impact, thereby transmitting greater shock to a dancer's joints and body, while a sticky floor interferes with proper foot pressure, sliding, and rotation, thereby compromising technique and exerting additional torque on skeletal joints such as the ankle, knee, and hip.

<sup>12</sup> While that was true for many dancers—indeed the majority—a generation ago, the influx of eastern Europeans following the fall of the iron curtain brought about a reinvigorated junior and youth circuit as these émigrés children joined the competitive ranks of the US competitors.

<sup>13</sup> As a side note to Nathan's story, but perhaps important on a larger scale, is the comparison of locations this narrative describes. If most adults' first exposure to live ballroom is at college or in a ballroom studio, most adults' first exposure to salsa is in a club.

<sup>14</sup> While I do think its important to recognize that it was in Denmark that this hospitality came my way, I do not think that random people—with whom I did not share a common interest and bond through salsa—would have offered their hospitality to me, as a stranger, in the same way as my hostess in Århus or my host in Copenhagen.

<sup>15</sup> While I do not have the materials to make an accurate comparison between salsa and competitive ballroom, my anecdotal impression is that friends and families often seem more supportive of social dancing than of competitive dancing, largely because of the much lower costs in time and money required by social dancing.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that, again, the real divide being discussed here is between social and competitive dancing and not between dancesport and salsa per se.

<sup>17</sup> For example—and in line with the materials presented in Chapter 5—some USABDA chapters and some independent ballroom dancers wanted to stage brief in-theatre dance demonstrations in association with screenings of *Mad Hot Ballroom*. They were not allowed to do so, however, since Arthur Murray International had purchased the rights to do promotions in association with this movie. Arthur Murray did not market in the majority of the theatres screening *Mad Hot Ballroom*, however, so no publicity for accessible opportunities to get involved in ballroom dancing were provided. Undoubtedly AMI is in the *business* of teaching ballroom dance and, in and of itself, there is no problem with this. And if AMI purchased the right to promote in association with screenings of *Mad Hot Ballroom* and *did* so, that would at least be making people aware of opportunities for them to start dancing themselves.

Blocking chapters of a non-profit organization from promoting ballroom dance, in theatres where AMI was *not* doing so, however, is not in the best interests of ballroom overall, and is a clear example of trying to guarantee the largest slice of the current pie rather than baking some new ones. And it is exactly this same dynamic, albeit writ local, that Nathan is describing when he relates how different dance troops in Portland (where Nathan currently lives) will deliberately schedule conflicting functions. All but the smallest salsa scenes seem to have this same phenomenon at work where, instead of offering options on adjoining nights, different troops or promoters will go head to head for the dancers coming out on a specific night.

<sup>18</sup> One of my favorite features of the largest salsa congress in the world (the West Coast Salsa Congress), for instance, is that I was able to take workshops and dance for three days straight without hearing anything but salsa except for in some of the on stage performances.

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<sup>19</sup> I want to point out that the cha cha danced in salsa clubs is different than either the American or International style ballroom cha chas. A different step phrasing (breaking on 1 in club cha cha and on 2 for ballroom) and a much slower tempo (for club style) are only the most basic of differences as, although sharing a common ancestry, the two movement styles are dramatically different. If nothing else, keep in mind that club cha cha is meant to be danced on a tightly packed nightclub floor while ballroom cha cha is meant to be seen by judges and audience members 50 feet across the floor.

<sup>20</sup> Additionally, this greater specificity provides identifying information that can be followed up on by scholars and/or dancers who may make future use of these materials.

<sup>21</sup> Now one of if the most widely known figures in salsa today, Edie's narrative is reproduced as it is posted (by her) on her website at <http://www.salsaweb.com/stories/edie.htm>. While Edie's case may be extreme, it is not anomalous. Edie's self-narrative is but one *out of over 135* such narratives posted, in addition to which many others have commented about how various elements of Edie's story resonate for them or with their own experiences as well.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to point out, however, that while "Latina" is obviously a salient category for Edie, Latin gender and gender imagery is in no way a singular, unified, or monolithic entity (e.g. Melhuus and Stolen 1996) any more so than is, say, "North American." Still, salsa can thus be seen as an encounter with the "other" for many non-Latino/a dancers, an encounter which, for some, can be of profound importance and consequences. Also see note 24, below, about constructed categories.

<sup>23</sup> This type of hyper-focus plays a key role for using modeling theory (Bandura 1972) as a means of explaining and understanding the role of dance in transmitting models of sex and gender (Hanna 1988:10). Evaluations of people do not, of course, take place in abstraction since meanings, such as gender, emerge within particular contexts. As such, Edie's assessments do not arise divorced from their situational surround—yet while external contexts and constraints certainly come to bear in determining both an actors intentions and actions, (and oftentimes heavily so) individual persons also have their own agendas despite, as well as in addition, and in reaction to them (e.g. Ortner 1995, Parish 1996).

<sup>24</sup> D'Andrade describes the content of such cognitive background as "things people learn which they cannot state and are not aware of, but which they need to know to be conscious of things that they are conscious of" (2000:46). A closely related point made by Hanna—and one that is particularly telling in relation to dance—is that "much culturally patterned nonverbal communication is out-of-awareness" (1988:42).

<sup>25</sup> I am not suggesting that such spheres really exist as disparate entities or, even, that there are truly things such as these spheres, only that these arenas clearly exist as conceptual categories for Edie as evidenced in her story.

<sup>26</sup> This also opens up room for an exploration of the associations and interrelationships between "passion" and physicality.

<sup>27</sup> When I was Co-captain of the UCSD DanceSport team for 2000-2001, for example, each competition team member paid \$125/quarter in coaching fees, over to \$80 for ballroom shoes, and \$125 each in costume allowance fees. These basic expenses accrued before a single step was taken onto a competition floor; airline tickets to San Francisco and Stanford, van rentals to transport the team to Las Vegas, hotel accommodations, entrance fees, and myriad other expenses quickly add up, especially on a student's often-tight budget.

Time commitments were similarly sizable, with six (or more) hours of team practice per week not being uncommon with regular practice scheduled for 9-11p, on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights.



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Weekends sometimes brought extra practices or workshops and, once the competition season started, especially in the spring quarter, several weekends in a row were regularly taken up with travel to out of town competitions. Such time commitments were not made without a concomitant impact on the academic and social lives of the team members. Commenting on her involvement on the 1999-2000 competition team, for example, Annie complains that she was never free to go to her boyfriend's until after 11:30pm the three nights a week, on top of which she was away at least one day each weekend through the entire month of April.

As significant as the time commitments to the UCSD Dancesport team may have been for its members—and this should not be underestimated—the vast majority of team members were still relatively uncommitted to dance. What of Elly who, a mere month after starting salsa, decided to move in order to shorten the one hour commute between her old apartment and her favorite salsa club? Or what about Elaine who spent two months bedridden, and the remainder of a year in a wheelchair, after being thrown from a thoroughbred horse, before returning to salsa and, after a night of salsa dancing, would find herself sitting in her car, tears streaming down her face purely in anticipation of the sheer agony that moving and walking to the front door would entail?

## CHAPTER TWELVE: The Psychology of Self, Self-evaluation, and Competition

As Spiro (1977) suggests, the apparent variability of human life—cultural and otherwise—in no way contradicts the presence of human universals; and, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Marion 2000), the search for meaning is one such universal.<sup>1</sup> Dancers do not dance because they find it a meaningless pastime after all and, as I have pointed out throughout this text, the same efforts in other arenas of sport and art could bring far greater financial remuneration and prestige. Those who choose to be dancers therefore rarely do so based on larger social pressures and rewards, but because they find personal meaning in dance. I am not, of course, suggesting that dancing has *a* meaning for dancers but, rather, that all those who choose to be dancers construct personal meaning(s) informed by their social, cultural, and personal experiences and practices of dance.

Inevitably each dancer brings to the table their own unique background and experiences, each representing a unique locus of socially, culturally, and biologically mediated experiences. As Jean Briggs points out, “the” individual does not make meaning, *individuals* do (1991) or, recast for a tighter fit, it is not “the” dancer who makes meaning, but *dancers*. There is no such thing as “the” dancer after all, anymore than there is ever an identifiable person who can be said to be the average cultural member. As such, and as the case studies in the preceding chapter already help

illustrate, it is only at the level of individual dancer that what dancing “means” to each person—how it fits into, influences, and shapes their life—can be adequately or appropriately assessed. Such “personal semantic networks,” as Claudia Strauss makes clear, “contain many culturally given elements, but include unique life events and, in any case, represent idiosyncratic combinations of shared elements” (1992:220).

To say that dancers find dance meaningful, then, is not to say that dance necessarily has the same significance for different dancers; or even for the same dancer at different times, in different situations, and within different instances. Meanings in dance, as in life, are never given once and for all; but emerge from the dynamic interplay between personal engagements and social forms. While persons certainly do assimilate what is external to what is internal, they equally assimilate what is internal to accommodate what is external (e.g. Piaget 1985; Piaget and Garcia 1991). In line with Hegelian dialecticism, then, personal and sociocultural factors intercontextualize each other—each influencing, overlapping, and feeding back upon the other.

### **Beyond What Seems To Be: Placements, Results, and Satisfaction**

What seems to be is not always what is. Or, more accurately, what seems to be is never all that there is. Since it is only for a given person and in a given situation that any “fact” comes to have meaning, objective achievement is a poor measure indeed of personal accomplishment and satisfaction. Beyond any such field of idiosyncrasies, however, there are psychologically and situationally structured elements engaged in constructions of meaning, and by extension, satisfaction.

One of the important things I learned early in my research was that what results looked like “from the outside” rarely matched how the dancers themselves experienced them. Competition results turn out to be much more complex than being mere placements and, in point of fact, placement alone rarely (if ever) accounted for dancers’ satisfaction. More specifically, it is simply not the case that the ordinal results of ballroom competitions correspond to matching satisfaction levels as would be the case if placement alone determined satisfaction. A second place contestant may be devastated whereas a fifth place contestant may be ecstatic. A first place winner may still feel unsatisfied while a semi-finalist may be overjoyed. “A person’s objective achievements,” note Husted, Gilovich, and Madey, “often matter less than how those accomplishments are subjectively construed” (1995:603), and, while personal and situational variables are strongly implicated in such subjectivity, so too are more psychologically structured elements such as counterfactuality and, more broadly, both expectations and focus.

### **Counterfactuality**

Satisfaction is relative, and, as related by Husted, Gilovich, and Madey (1995), tends to fluctuate along three axes: (1) how one does relative to relevant others, (2) how one does relative to expected outcomes, and (3) how one does relative to imagined outcomes. Based on past findings in social psychology (Festinger 1954; Suls and Miller 1977; Taylor and Lobel 1989) Husted, Gilovich, and Madey note that, “people’s satisfaction with their objective circumstances is greatly affected by how

their own circumstances compare with those of relevant others” (1995:603) and, along the same lines, that the difference between actual and expected outcomes greatly impacts satisfaction levels (1995:603; e.g. Atkinson 1964; Crosby 1976; Feather 1967, 1969; Olson, Herman, and Zanna 1986). Aside from the considerations of personal comparison and expectation, imagined communities also impacts satisfaction levels (Husted, Gilovich, and Madey 1995:603<sup>2</sup>).

### **Relevant Others**

The importance of how one does relative to relevant others is an issue that James had already brought to the fore over a century ago:

So we have the paradox of a man shamed to death because he is only the second pugilist or the second oarsman in the world. That he is able to beat the whole population of the globe minus one is nothing: he has “pitted” himself to beat that one; and as long as he doesn’t do that nothing else counts. (James 1892:186, cited in Husted, Gilovich, and Madey 1995:603)

Where objective reality suggests that one is at the pinnacle of human achievement, the subjective comparison being drawn can still leave one feeling like they have falling short. And it is exactly in such situations that, “being one of the best in the world can mean little if it is coded not as a triumph over many, but as a loss to one” (Husted, Gilovich, and Madey 1995:603). Husted, Gilovich, and Madey—based on their research regarding Olympic Medalists—suggest that “being one of the best may not be as satisfying as it might seem,” since, “the existence of a rival ‘best’ can turn gratifying appreciation of what one *is* into a disquieting focus on what one is *not*” (1995:608, original emphasis). If Fred and Anne are the ballroom champions, no one

else can be. Or, from the flipside of the coin—and in its most fundamental formulation—if someone else is the champion, you are not.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Relevant others are not, of course, the only source of counterfactual thinking. Expected outcomes provide another axis along which relative comparisons take place and which can serve as grounds for augmented or diminished satisfaction. Coming in second, for instance, is probably not that big a deal if one expects to come in a second. This same placement, however, might be devastating to someone else who expected to place first or prove elating to someone who expected to place third (or lower). This is the same phenomenon that allows a semi-finalist or even a quarter-finalist, who placed beyond their expectations, walk out of a competition far more satisfied than a finalist who placed lower than they had expected to.

Also worth pointing out, however, is that the axis of expected outcome may countermand the axis of relevant others. It is not *necessarily* troubling to come in second to someone one expects to come in second to. Of course how close one is will play into this dynamic as well—perhaps quite largely—and this leads to Husted, Gilovich, and Madey's third access of satisfaction, imagined outcomes.

### **Imagined Outcomes**

As with relevant others and expected outcomes, how one does relative to imagined outcomes factors greatly into one's personal calculus of satisfaction. Surpassing all imagined outcomes is most likely to be euphoric, indeed—and despite

“objective” placement—while someone else placing just higher, but falling short of what they had imagined possible, will likely find the objectively better result rather disappointing. It is also important to note that, while often closely aligned with the dynamic of expected outcomes, imagined outcomes are their own, separate element. George and Joanne may expect to finish second at an event for instance, but this, in itself, does not tell the whole story. Is the couple that George and Joanne expect to place above them a couple that they regularly manage to steal some marks from? Are they a couple that, while unlikely, and therefore unexpected, George and Joanne can imagine beating? Are they a couple who George and Joanne have been chasing, working extra hard and getting extra coaching in an effort to beat? In this case George and Joanne may go into the competition expecting to place second yet, simultaneously, hoping to win and imagining that this is, indeed, a possible outcome.

In such a scenario, and as pointed out by Husted, Gilovich, and Madey, “finishing second is truly a *mixed* blessing,” providing direct benefits such as recognition, but, indirectly, also lowering satisfaction “by the unfortunate contrast of what might have been” (1995:609, original emphasis). This particular element can be quite robust in competitive ballroom dancing where judges’ marks are available for public viewing and a couple can see that they pulled marks from the couple(s) ahead of them, that there were a number of judges who placed them ahead of the couple who ultimately beat them. In such situations, and the closer the marks, is becomes almost impossible *not* to imagine what “might have been.” Clearly this is a very

different situation than one where, for instance, George and Joanne do not pull a single mark—from any judge on any dance—from the couple ahead of them.

In this second scenario George and Joanne might expect to place second—say knowing that they are heads and shoulders above all but one other couple in the competition—yet not even imagining that they could win against that one other couple who, in turn, are equally heads and shoulders above them. In this later scenario (which can turn out to be the case more often than might be expected), a national finalist may attend a given competition and, depending on George and Joanne's level, may represent an unachievable mark for George and Joanne, and therefore not factor into George and Joanne's calculus of satisfaction. Here too the public nature of judges' marks can factor into evaluations of satisfaction. Again, if George and Joanne are not going to pull a single mark from the couple placing ahead of them, it is far less likely that George and Joanne's imagined outcomes would include coming in first.

Taken together, these two scenarios illustrate that imagined outcome and expected outcome are separate (even if often linked) variables, each of which provide an axis of evaluation for relative comparisons and counterfactual thinking. In both cases George and Joanne expect to come in second (so, as a variable, that remains constant). At the same time, however, the imagined outcomes for George and Joanne are drastically different, setting up different parameters of, and for, counterfactual thinking—and thereby providing totally different calculi of satisfaction.



An additional point of that needs to be taken into account is that, just as imagined and expected outcome are separate if overlapping variables, so too with assessments regarding relevant others. For George and Joanne, being second is not *automatically* coded as a loss to Fred and Jill. Where are these two couples relative to each other? Even if ranked as number one and number two in the world, there may be an almost insurmountable gap between the two on the one hand, or they may have been trading world titles back and forth on the other. After their closest rivals Dmitri Timokhin and Anna Bezikova turned professional in 2002, for instance, Franco Formica and Oksana Nikiforova went unchallenged as the best amateur Latin couple in the world—no couple even coming close to challenging their hold on any and every contest they entered—through 2004 when they retired from amateur competition. Clearly this type of almost unquestioned dominance provides for a very different experience of second place—which may be perceived as “the best place *possible*”—then in a closely contested back and forth; such as that of the Professional Standard Blackpool title won by John Wood and Anne Lewis in 1989, Marcus and Karen Hilton in 1990, Wood and Lewis again in 1991, the Hiltons in 1992, Wood and Lewis in 1993, and then the Hiltons again in 1994.

### **Counterfactual Longevity**

Also worthy of comment is the potential longevity of counterfactual thinking and of counterfactually based dissatisfaction that may therefore ensue. While some may, indeed, “just get over it,” this is not always the case and the enduring nature of

counterfactual dissatisfaction should not be underestimated. Husted, Gilovich, and Madey, for instance, provide the following account:

Consider the case of Abel Kiviat, the 1,500m silver medallist in the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. Kiviat had the race won until Britain's Arnold Jackson "came from nowhere" to beat him by one-tenth of a second. "I wake up sometimes and say, 'What the heck happened to me?' It's like a nightmare." Kiviat was 91 years old when he said this in an interview with the Los Angeles Times (cited in Tait and Silver 1989:351). It appears that thoughts about what might have been may plague us for a very long time. (1995:609)

When such events transpire in meaningful domains, especially those of self-definitional significance, the counterfactual alternative may remain looming in one's mind, life-long, as the case of Abel Kiviat's 1,500 meter Olympic race makes clear.

Unlike a 1,500 meter race, however, the unmistakably subjective nature of ballroom competition adds some wrinkles to this picture. The subjectivity of ballroom can impact the longevity of counterfactuality in either direction. Some dancers may feel like they danced the best and deserved to win. For many of these dancers the subjectivity of dancesport may provide for enduring experiences of counterfactually-based remorse and loss. For other dancers, however, the subjectivity of dancesport allows them to accept that because the *result* was beyond their control—i.e. there is not an objective measure of finishing 1,500 meters in the second fastest time—that second place actually does *not* mean that they danced second best.

### **Additional Comments on Counterfactual Thinking**

Matching Kahneman's (1995) continuum between "automatic" and "elaborative" counterfactuality, and contrary to much previous thinking, Husted, Gilovich, and Madey posit that, "many counterfactuals are imposed by the nature of

the events experienced” (1995:609). “Coming close to winning the gold, for example,” they go on to note, “appears to automatically activate frustrating images of having almost won it all” (1995:609).<sup>3</sup> As this suggests, and despite idiosyncratic variability, there can be strong structural pressures toward automatic counterfactual thinking while other situations may enable idiosyncratic variability, wherein “counterfactual processing is partly brought on through the exercise of choice, and its direction and intensity is influenced by the individual’s motives and intentions” (1995:609). Coming close<sup>4</sup> to the next couple, especially when a significant jump is concerned (such as from second to first, fourth to third,<sup>5</sup> semi-finalist to finalist, quarter-finalist to semi finalist, and so forth), seems to be an automatic trigger for counterfactual processing. Missing the next round by one mark, for example, begs the question “what *if*?” in a way that falling far short of the cut off mark—say only receiving four out of 28 recall votes instead of 27 out of 28—does not.

As a final point regarding counterfactual thinking, it is important to realize that the degree to which a given outcome may evoke various elements of satisfaction and dissatisfaction is, of course, highly variable and individual (Husted, Gilovich, and Madey 1995, based on Tversky and Griffin 1991). While some situations seem to serve as nearly automatic triggers to counterfactual processing (as just noted above), this is not deterministic of the levels of dis/satisfaction so engendered. While some situations, such as a close second placing, seem to demand thoughts of “what if” and being “that close,” the impact of such counterfactual thinking is not a given. What “what if” and being “that close” count as—for a given person, and in a given

situation—is a different from counterfactuality and is a dynamic implicated by issues of expectations and focus.

## **Expectations**

Different from the personal expectations implicated in counterfactual processing, almost all social systems have structural and processual expectations as well. It is not, after all, the reigning world champion who may be expecting to win against all comers; others “in the know” are also likely to share such expectations. Now certainly both the type of activity and the track record of other contenders factor into such expectations. In a 100-meter dash, for instance, where fractions of a second may separate multiple contenders, there is probably less turmoil and sense of “upset” than in other activities where the typical margins of victory may be larger. In cases such as the 100-meter dash the type of activity allows for—and indeed structurally suggests that—while the pre-contest front-runner may be favored, it is neither entirely unexpected nor shocking to announcers, interested press members, or spectators if he or she does not win.

Another related, and key, element pertinent to any understanding of structural expectations has to do with the very nature of the events in question. Are results self-evident—such as who crossed the line first, or scored more points—or are they more subjective, such as in diving or gymnastics? This dynamic may play a large role in competitors’ satisfaction with final results, where even if a runner felt like they were bumped, or a basketball player felt like they were fouled, they can still see that the other runner crossed the finish line first, or that the other team scored more points.

Activities such as these set up a very different dynamic—a different field of perception and experience—than a gymnastics or ice skating routine, where one may feel that they did, *in fact*, place second.

Often aligned with the expectations suggested by the structure of the event, are expectations related to the field of contenders. Is it, for instance, a “tight” field? Or are there clear and expected contests within contests where, perhaps, the top three contenders are considered to be in a different league from everyone else and, essentially, are considered separately from the rest of the field? In this later case a win by any of the three, even if technically an “upset,” is of a different order than if someone outside this bracket somehow breaks through for the victory.

What a given result may mean to a dancer than is not just a factor of personal expectations, but also one of systemic expectations. Even if, personally, a dancer really does expect to win, it is a very different thing, experientially, to win in front of an audience who shares this expectation versus an audience with no such expectation. It is also important to realize that to “win” does not only describe winning but can, in fact, be many things. While a personal best, for example, is unlikely to count as winning at the systemic level, advancing to an unexpected round, bracket, or heat may very well constitute—and count as—a “win,” for both audience members and contestants alike.

## **The Character of a “Champion”<sup>6</sup>**

Trying to write about what it takes to be a DanceSport champion quickly reveals one very big problem, that of defining what being a “champion” even means. Is a champion simply the person who wins? Or is there something more to it than just that? Even if winning alone suffices to constitute being considered a champion, winning at what level? Is the winner at their university a “champion” and, if so, is this in the same way as a city champion, a state champion, a national champion, or a world champion? What commonalities are shared by the best at each level and where are the differences? Most importantly, what does the gap between these two suggest about the nature and character of being a “champion?”

Many people—competitors, spectators, and judges alike—contend that dancing should be judged solely “on the night” for example. From a purely sporting or athletic viewpoint this makes sense, and even from an aesthetic frame of reference this can be justified. But is this all there is to it? Early in my research, and as many dancers still contend, I would have said that this was the only thing that was “fair” and so, of course, what should be done. Along the way, however, I have heard numerous comments all pointing to a larger and deeper consideration when major titles are on the line. Although never explicitly worded as such, the underlying question that emerges is “will they be good champions?” and the accounts of both winners and audience members alike suggest that winning and being a champion are not, in the system, synonymous. Whereas establishing a winner is a relatively straightforward

determination, being a champion also seems to involve more subjective assessments of who is the best—both in and of themselves and as a model for others.

“Champions” are more than just “those who won,” they are also both models for those who follow—in this case other dancers—and examples for those who pay attention and follow the activity in question. Someone may be a fantastic dancer, for instance, even the very best, but, in the extreme, if they are verbally abusive and belligerent to everyone they come in contact with, do they really fit the image and mental model of what constitutes a champion? Is such a person really the best person to represent the pinnacle of dancing achievement and success, to bear the banner of being the champion? Especially given the “lived in public” element intrinsic to so much of ballroom life, such personality and character variables can be quite visible indeed. How, for instance, does a couple react to their results? Do they pout, complain, cry “foul” (usually blaming their loss on biased politics<sup>7</sup>), or complain about unfavorable floor conditions? Or, alternatively, is a couple gracious in defeat? Such factors do, indeed, enter into the equation as several judges have, for instance, told me that it is exactly along such grounds that they never want to see certain dancers become the U.S. National or World Champions.

Especially given that the decision of which dancing is the best is a subjective one in any final analysis, judges’ assessments as to whether someone has—or lacks—the character of a champion can have important ramifications indeed. Some judges will not mark a couple to win a major title if they do not consider that couple—or either member of it—to be a good representative of ballroom dancing and role model

for future dancers and dancing. And, while this may not seem fair to the dancers in question, it may very well be done with only the best interest of ballroom dancing in mind.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that some competitors, even when on the “losing” end of such evaluations, may ultimately find this not only acceptable but also even reasonable and appropriate.

I interviewed David about four months after he was a runner-up at Blackpool. Almost everyone I had spoken with over the intervening months shared the opinion that David and his partner had clearly danced the best and should have won at Blackpool. When I asked David how he had felt about the Blackpool results he admitted to having been frustrated on the night and for a day or two afterward, but then said that since it had only been his first time “winning” it made sense that he did not actually win. I was somewhat confused by this comment and, by way of clarification, David evoked “the rule of three” whereby one has to “win” three times in order to actually win—the first time to get the judges’ recognition, a second time to show that the first time was not a fluke and that you had the consistency to be a champion, and a third time when you are finally given the win. While such “proving” of one’s self is not typical at every level of competition, the higher one goes, and the higher the level of competition, the more in effect David’s “rule of three” seems to be. The higher the stakes the more important it becomes to have an appropriate champion.

Whether the rule of three really holds true, and if so in what circumstances, is an issue unto itself, albeit one with important implications regarding the political and structural dynamics of DanceSport life. What is significant about David’s use of the



rule of three regarding “championshipism” is *how* he used it. David did not hide behind the rule of three, claiming that he had been robbed of a win he deserved. Even when I asked David if his Blackpool loss due to such a “rule” would bother him, he responded that the rule made sense because “it’s important for the champion to really *be* a champion.”

Unpacking David’s assertion that “it’s important for the champion to really be *a champion*,” reveals several layers of what it means to be a champion. In the first instance it affirms that even elite level competitors—even those who “lose” in comparison—may recognize that there is more to being a champion than winning alone; even more than dancing the best at any given time. Implicit in David’s comment—and all points to which I will shortly return—are understandings about the self-reliance, resilience, determination, demeanor, consistency, performance, and true quality that go into being a champion. As cliché as it may be, the path to the top is, indeed, a long and arduous one. As with any trying path in life the importance of psychological factors and characteristics cannot be overestimated in differentiating between those who make it all the way in the end and those who fall by the wayside somewhere along the way.

### **It’s a Mental Thing: The Psychology of Being a Champion**

Obviously some level of aptitude and ability are prerequisites for success but, as any coach or athlete well knows, ability alone is never enough. The most gifted athlete cannot long succeed on talent alone, whereas the less naturally gifted competitor may reach elite status through unrelenting effort, practice, and training.

Certainly there are but limited numbers of those who have the requisite physical aptitude to go on to become champions—to be counted as among the very best of the best at what they do—but more people have such aptitudes than ultimately surmount this summit. While timing, fortune, and opportunities are all inescapably important variables, they are also all factors that are external to persons so, ultimately, tell us nothing about those who do become champions or their character. Aside from twists of fate—including inborn aptitude and talent—it is predominantly an array of psychological qualities that set champions apart.

### **Self-Reliance**

While there are many psychological characteristics and dynamics that contribute to the eventual emergence of a champion, it is self-reliance that, in the end, undergirds all the others. Ultimately it is the dancers themselves who do—or do not—become champions, no matter the number of coaches, supporters, or friends who may support and be involved with a dancer's path, career, and success. Advice and suggestions from others may be good or bad, comments and critiques may be constructive or mean spirited, results and placements may be encouraging or discouraging. Any, and all, of these possibilities can interfere with a dancer's progress, even the most supportive of coaches may have other students or even their own ego involvements confounding their commitment to a given couple, even those with the best of intentions may give contradictory advice, and even good overall advice may not be ideally suited to any given dancer in any given situation.

No matter the input of feedback of others, it is ultimately the dancers who must decide what path they will take and who must then commit to and execute it. Undergirding everything else involved in being a champion then, is a foundation of self-reliance. Champions not only understand that the only thing they can control is themselves, they accept and even thrive on this as well. While champions may very well be aware of what other dancers are doing, who is on the judging panel and what their preferences are, and who else is on the floor with them, they do not let such things distract them in their dancing. Champions do not let trends in dancing shape what they do, nor do they let poor results make them question their approach to dancing. Along the way there are, of course, episodes of trial and error, development and change but, in the end, champions not only commit to the approach they choose but they believe in it and in themselves. They do not switch to new judges when they encounter setbacks, or train differently because the couple that beat them does. Those who will be champions evolve over time, growing into their role, but, throughout, they remain committed to their own course and believe in themselves.

Asked about the biggest mistake he sees competitors make, Frank, a multiple time national finalist, offered the following perspective:

It probably sounds corny, but I think that the worst thing a couple could do is to stop believing in themselves. As soon as you doubt yourself, or your partner – you're dead. There are a lot of things that can mess with your confidence: results (good and bad), people's comments, jealousy and negativity, but if you believe in yourself and what you do, you shouldn't let anything or anyone get in your way.

At first blush the notion that positive feedback can prove disruptive may seem to be counterintuitive. For the couple that is not self-reliant, however, this is indeed the case and positive feedback, as much as negative, can be disruptive as, even amongst the

ranks of the elite competitors, positive results can disturb dancers' self-reliance. If a couple is not 100% committed to what they are producing and not entirely comfortable and confident in their approach, almost anything can emerge as a stumbling block. A couple may be meeting with immense success, for instance, but, because they are "moving up," end up placing so much pressure on themselves to continue climbing and placing well their next time out that they actually melt down. At the largest premier DanceSport events, across five or more rounds, it can be quite noticeable when a top couple starts the earlier rounds dancing as beautifully as expected, only to tighten up (and thus under-perform) as they head into the semi final and final rounds.

## **Resilience**

Being crowned a champion only comes after a long road, one replete with setbacks as well as successes. Even the most successful of competitors do not always dance their best or win every time they take the floor. How does a couple react when they are expected to win yet fail to do so? How do they react to the unfulfilled expectations of those around them and with whom they come in contact? How does such a couple react to their own disappointments? One attribute of championship couples is their ability to bounce back from such disappointments, to use such setbacks as motivation to buckle down in order not leave any doubt of their superiority the next time they take the floor. Those dancers who let poor results<sup>9</sup> discourage them for long or disrupt their development are not destined to become champions. Rather

than getting caught up in the results themselves, champions get on with their dancing and continuing to develop themselves as dancers.

Asked what advice she would offer other dancers for overcoming adversity—such as training setbacks and poor results—Linda, a several time National champion, offered the following advice:

One should always remember that adversity in our business is just someone's personal opinion. And what for one person is bad, could mean complete the opposite for someone else. A true competitor should always learn from poor results as much or even more than from desired results. And a setback today is a step forward tomorrow.

Aside from being pragmatic advice, Linda's perspective provides important insight into the mentality of a champion. Where others may retreat in the face of adversities, the champion not only forges ahead despite such setbacks but, in fact, is also of a mental mindset not to even conceive of such hurdles as setbacks in the first place. Vanessa, a national champion, provides an example of exactly this dynamic.

A winner of several national championships, Vanessa and her partner missed being recalled to the final of a world championship by one vote. While many competitors would decry their misfortune in such circumstances, most elite couples react differently, renewing their efforts all the more so. What is telling here, however, and indicative of the championship mindset noted by Linda above, is the impromptu comment made to me by Vanessa, as we were sharing a shuttle ride from the airport several months later, that "that was the best thing for us." It was not clear to me in what way missing a world final, and especially by such a slim margin, could constitute "the best thing," so I asked Vanessa how this was the case. She responded that it was good and important to her to try her hardest and still have failed. While on the one

hand Vanessa construed her failure to reach the final *as* failure, it is also true that she saw this as both an important reality check and as a benchmark against which she could push herself in the future. For the champion, and as Linda's comments suggest, what others see as a setback is often seen as feedback, and hence a stepping-stone, to the champions' mentality. The barrier that serves as a roadblock to the masses is the very same surface from which the champion bounces back. This capacity to always bounce back is, of course, linked to another closely related variable: determination.

### **Determination**

Closely linked to resiliency is the issue of determination. Whereas resiliency provides the wherewithal to bounce back from disappointments or setbacks, it is determination that imparts the motivation to do so. The eventual champion is a self-driven (in this case dance) competitor. They may or may not be driven by competition itself, but the desire to continually improve one's dancing, to develop as a dancer and as a performer, burns fierce indeed in the eventual champion. Many such competitors are driven by a deep seeded, almost pathological, competitive drive. In what is perhaps the most extreme formulation of such determination, David, a past Blackpool champion, replied "kill, kill, kill!" when I asked him how he had felt about his competitors. When asked whether this had been his mindset towards his competitors when on the floor against them or all of the time he responded, "no, pretty much always."

In diametric contrast to David's competitive stance is the perspective provided by Danielle, herself a past world champion. Danielle says that she never really liked to

compete but that she loved to perform and, since the best opportunities to perform were reserved for the most successful competitors, that is what drove her to compete. Whether driven by David's competitive instinct or Danielle's love of performance and utilitarian view of competitive success, champions have a nearly insurmountable drive to continuously forge ahead in developing their dancing.

### **Demeanor**

Being judged a champion is, in the end, a subjective attribution. No matter the resilience or determination of any competitor, it still matters whether one comports themselves and is seen as a champion or not. Related to, but separate from issues of personal resilience and determination, is the public face exhibited by a dancer—in practice, in their daily interactions, on the competition floor, when triumphant, and when disappointed. It is, of course, relatively easy to put on a good face when one is successful and triumphant. But do competitors present the same front when things have not gone their way and, if not, what is the difference? The same competitor who may stress that, in the end, good dancing will always prevail may be the same competitor who turns around and decries the biased judging when their results are particularly disappointing.

I first interviewed Carl, for instance, when he was still on his way up the ranks—making bigger and bigger finals and, almost on an event by event basis, placing ahead of more and more couples. At the time, when I questioned him as to how he felt about his competitors, Carl expressed only respect and admiration for all of them, commenting on how he knew how much they all invested in their training

and dancing. Carl went on to compliment the dancing of several of his closest competitors, actually naming the couple just behind him in “the rankings” as a couple whose dancing he really admired. Going even further than this, Carl even volunteered that he liked this other couple’s approach and dancing so much that he would feel the same way about them even if they surpassed him in the rankings. On the surface Carl’s favorable review of his close competitors and their dancing might seem like a champion’s characteristic indeed. Yet at the time Carl first made these comments, however, there was still a fairly wide gap between Carl and the closest couple behind him.

The sentiments expressed by Carl were probably quite genuine, especially given that he made these comments in the context of a private and confidential interview. Yet, over time, the couple that had been trailing Carl slowly closed the gap and, eventually, surpassed him. While Carl does not say anything directly negative about this couple that now regularly place ahead of him, his reactions to placing below them sometimes almost border on the belligerent. When called out in a lower place, Carl’s bearing and deportment exude dissatisfaction and even disgust; even Carl’s partner can be heard telling him to “let it go” and not to worry about it as he stands out in the hallway scowling soon thereafter. I should point out, of course, that the change in Carl’s comportment does not suggest that his original sentiment was in any way disingenuous, but only that there was a shift in Carl’s perspective and demeanor when his position and situation were no longer as favorable. Carl, however, is far from being alone in either his displeasure or his behavior.



Similarly to Carl, Vin visibly and vocally expresses his dissatisfaction when he is unhappy with his results. In the face of a friend trying to tell him that he had done well just after placing second in his national championships, Vin could be heard loudly decrying that “no, second’s not good!” just outside the ballroom doors. Certainly the drive to be the best is part of what it takes to be a champion and, on this front, Vin’s dissatisfaction makes sense. At the same time, however, a champion is expected to carry themselves like a champion at all times; not only when things are going well, but equally so in the face of disappointments. While ambition, motivation, drive, and determination may all be highly laudable traits in a champion, they are far from being the only ones—which is not to say that disappointment and even outright dissatisfaction are not real or cannot be expressed. The same person who is as equally satisfied with losing as with winning is, after all, an unlikely heir to the champion’s mantel. What sets the champion apart, however, is the actual source of dissatisfaction and how such dissatisfaction is exhibited.

Take Nathan and Bret, two top tier Blackpool competitors and finalists. When announced in a lower placing than he clearly felt he deserved, Nathan took his time getting to the floor and, even then, doing so with clearly visible anger and disgust. In response to Nathan’s antics, Janice, a former dancer and dance studio manager sitting nearby, voiced the sentiment of many when she said “what a sore loser”—a comment that met with abundant head nods and murmurs of assent from almost all in our near vicinity. Bret, in contrast to Nathan, did not even make the finals on this particular occasion. Shortly after the close of the evening session I bumped into Nathan. When I

told him that I thought they (he and his partner) should have placed better and were unlucky not to make the final his response was a telling, if simple, “not really, we danced like shit.” Harkening back to the first, and, what I have argued is the most fundamental element of championship character—self-reliance—Nathan puts responsibility (if that is the right word) for his poor placement on his own shoulders in comparison to Bret who, while making all the finals, was clearly and visibly irate with his placements.

Being disappointed in one’s own dancing, and taking responsibility for one’s own placing, is a far different proposition from being dissatisfied with the results and feeling that the system has somehow done wrong by you. Where Nathan was disturbed by how *he* (and his partner) placed, Bret was disturbed by how he *was* placed (ostensibly by the judges). Although intricately wound up with the issue of self-reliance, this difference in perspective is an important one, typically manifesting in a competitor’s demeanor. Nathan’s anger at the judges and his placement is, after all, of a different nature than Bret’s frustration (or even anger) with himself and his placement. Everyone encounters setbacks, even the most lucky and the most privileged; and so too do champions. Champions, however, meet such disappointments with the resiliency already noted above yet, at the same time, also remain as steadfast in their comportment as much as in their resolve.

The importance of demeanor to really being a champion is not lost on other dancers, or even on other champions, either. When I asked Cory, himself a national champion, about whom his champions and role models had been along the way, and

why, one of the people he named was Ron Montez, the seven-time U.S. Professional Latin champion. This seemed like a strange response to me given that Cory danced in a different division than had Ron. Cory's clarification, however, was a telling one. "In seven years, I never heard him say anything negative about anyone," says Cory, "and believe me, he had the chance." While Cory's assertion alone does not establish whether Ron Montez did or did not actually ever say anything negative, the point is that the impression he gave, at least to Cory, was of never doing so—and thereby helped elevate himself (Ron) to championship status in Cory's estimation. This type of composure and demeanor that Cory was noting is, of course, in marked contrast to that exhibited by the examples already given of Carl, Vin, or Nathan. Is it any wonder then that judges have commented that none of these later three will ever be crowned champion? While the politics that can be involved in the eventual selection of a champion are a different topic, the very fact that some judges consider competitors' comportment and demeanor as significant elements in the emergence of a champion is, in its own right, quite telling. Being a champion, as mentioned at the outset, is about more than just winning; it is about being seen as a champion as well.

A final component of championship demeanor that needs to be mentioned—of appearing as like a champion—concerns attire. The enormously visual dynamic of the DanceSport scene should not be underestimated, off the floor as well as on it. One element of this is that significant personages are expected to embody and reflect an appropriate image of their position and stature within the community. Some judges are allowed certain eccentricities, but they are in a different category from those still

trying to establish themselves as *the* epitomotic exemplars of ballroom dancing. In this capacity it is also worth noting that there are some differences between what counts as appropriate and expected for Ballroom dancers versus for Latin dancers. The proper gentleman or lady of ballroom needs to appear distinguished; he in a suit or tuxedo as is appropriate and she in an elegant gown, dress, or outfit. Their Latin counterparts—while also acceptable in this more “proper” attire—can also dress with a hint more of the edge typically associated with the more overtly sexualized and animalistic connotations of their dance genre. Once one becomes the champion they can drift away from such expectations but, on the way up, these rules are very much in place even if not (normally) overtly spoken.

Whether it is one’s conduct on the floor or off, one’s comments when ahead or behind, or one’s attire at practice or in the ballroom, demeanor matters. And, although elements of demeanor are inextricably linked to other psychological and character variables associated with being a champion, how one presents one’s self is its own piece of the championship puzzle, and a significant one at that. Especially given the subjective and impression based nature of DanceSport competition there should be little wonder that it is all that much more important to carry one’s self like a champion in order—in David’s words—to truly “*be* a champion.”

## **Consistency**

Another implication of David’s rule of three is the concern with the consistency of performance expected from a true champion. Good day or bad day,

favorite competition or least favorite competition, good music or poor music, a champion is expected to perform like a champion at all times. Anyone can have the competition of their lifetime on a given night. Or, conversely, everyone else on the floor may be having a particularly poor showing or all choke on any given night. Being the best “on the night” is therefore seldom, if ever, enough to really establish one’s status as a true champion.<sup>10</sup> Darby is an international judge who takes the continuity issue quite seriously for instance, and will not mark certain reigning world titles holders to win—not because she does not think that their dancing in the final round is the best but because, in her mind, they hold back too much in earlier rounds. For Darby a true champion should be a role model at all times, not just in the final or perhaps semi-final rounds. Although Darby’s case is an extreme one, it well represents the more general concern with consistency; that to be a champion, and not just a winner, demands a pattern of such excellence—one must perform at the highest level consistently.

## **Performance**

Related to the issue of consistency is that of performance. Whereas consistency is about the pattern of excellence produced, performance is about what it is that is actually produced (in the case of DanceSport) on the floor. How well one dances in practice is not what is judged in DanceSport after all, no matter how impressive. One formulation that I have heard from several past and present competitors and judges is that the competitors who win are the ones who come closest to putting what they achieve in practice on the competition floor. The underlying recognition here is that it

is difficult to perform at one's peak under competitive conditions. The reasons for this discrepancy in performance are numerous, as well as a separate set of issues in their own right, but there are some interesting implications regarding championship character. One such issue important to recognize in the current context is that, by their very nature, competitions shift some of the focus away from dancing and onto winning. Competition also introduces any other number of variables including (but far from limited to) costuming, makeup, traveling, and unfamiliar locations and surroundings; each of these variables also coming tied up with their own bundles of associated (and compounding) stresses.

On the one hand than, a champion is someone who can be least effected by external conditions and circumstances, dancing *their* dances regardless of extrinsic stimuli. The champion's performance cannot, however, be solely attributed to an ability to tune out distracting elements while harnessing one's abilities. DanceSport is, by its very nature, a performance-based activity; and while superb technique may sometimes (even often) be enough to win, it never, alone, suffices to qualify someone as a champion. To be a champion is to be multi-axial, competing with superb skill and technique, but also drawing in and connecting with those spectating, audience members and judges alike. A champions performance than is one marked by both skill *and* charisma. Off the floor is a different question and issue but, on the competition floor, a champion exudes confidence, command, and calmness, but also a sense of connection with the observer; the champion's performance does not just impress the spectator, it also moves them. Although exceedingly difficult to quantify, the ability to

connect with and draw the audience into the performance is, indeed, one of the hallmarks of a champion

### **True Quality**

While only a very few ever manage to reach the pinnacle of DanceSport success represented by winning National, Blackpool, or World Championships, and while all those who do reach these apexes are, indeed, truly elite dancers, not all are considered or recognized as champions in the same way. Many dancers, for instance, hold their respective national championship titles but cannot break into the world championship semi-finals or even the round of 48 at Blackpool. While such dancers may thus hold the title of being national champions, they are not viewed as *champions* in either a broader or absolute scale. But even winning a World or Blackpool title is not enough to cement someone's status as a "true" champion and not just as the official champion. Here too, one cannot become a champion only by competing and winning against those who have succeeded but also against the best of the best to truly qualify as a champion.

When speaking to Brad about his first Blackpool title he indicated that it was not entirely satisfying for two reasons. In the first place Brad felt that he had not danced anywhere close to his optimal level. While Brad feels that he has only danced his best at two or three events in his life, he did not feel that the performance that he finally won a Blackpool title with was even close to his best. The second element of Brad's dissatisfaction with his Blackpool title, however, is the more telling one. In Brad's mind there were three men competing during the same general time frame as

him who he considered to be the best in the world, all three of whom had retired before Brad won his Blackpool title. Even though many, many people actually considered Brad's runner up at Blackpool to be the better dancer between the two of them, Brad's Blackpool title meant less to him since, in his mind, it did not come against those whom *he* considered the best.

While there is always some amount of discrepancy in evaluations of who is the very best, there is still a general understanding that really being the *champion* means that one has to be better than the best and not just better than all the rest. Some competitors are seen as winning titles by waiting "their turn," by sticking with it long enough for all those who are ahead of them to retire. Such titles, when credited to longevity alone, cannot establish champion status. Only a win against other worthy contenders—who are widely considered to be among the best dancers (of their generation)—seems to count as credit towards champion status. When the other couples in the elite field are not considered to be of the highest caliber, however, winning seems to count simply as winning. Being tested on the competition floor against the best and emerging triumphant provides a credibility (in this case as a champion) that is forever lacking when the same win comes at the expense of "non-contenders."

The need-to-best-the-best-to-be-the-best dynamic is, of course, far from unique to DanceSport. This same phenomenon is well evinced in the Olympics where the same winning decathlete may be acknowledged as the best athlete in the world yet forever lack the prestige or status of being the one who runs the very fastest or jumps



the very highest. Or, alternatively, in an artistic arena, an artist may be widely respected for their ability to produce truly exceptional art in a variety of media and, indeed they may be recognized as the best at watercolors *and* oils. Such a painter, however, is still not *the best* at either watercolors or oils and will never have the stature that goes with being the best at either one.

DanceSport, as a point of conjunction and activity between both athletic and artistic pursuits, provides its own epitomotic example of this dynamic via the case of 10-Dance. While no one underestimates the difficulty of achieving 10-Dance excellence, let alone superiority, 10-Dance “champions” are still not regarded with the same reverence as Latin or Ballroom champions.<sup>11</sup> Such perceptions are built into any competitive or comparative endeavor, as students—whether of specific teachers or of an activity or art in general—will be looking to the pinnacle for a model, for role models, for inspiration, and for instruction. In the same way that the aspiring decathlete will seek instruction for each event from event specialists, and in the same way that an aspiring artist will seek instruction from specialists in each media, so too does the aspiring 10-Dancer seek out the best Latin instruction *and* the best Ballroom instruction, not the best average instruction.

## **What Else? The “It” Factor, “The Feeling,” and Everything Else**

### **The “It” Factor**

Closely related to issues of performance and true quality is the “it” factor—that “special” or “unique” quality that sets the champion apart from all the rest of their peers. While closely related, the “it” factor is both more than and different from these

other factors, or even the sum of them together; the “it” factor cannot be reduced to performance true quality alone. Whereas the champion has to have both the underlying quality and the ability to produce, to put this quality on the competition floor (the performance factor), these two elements alone do not suffice to elevate a dancer to championship status. “Just” being the best, as suggested from the outset above, simply makes one a winner, and not a champion. More specifically, to be a champion takes more than just being better at the same things, and in the same ways, than everyone else.

One important, but often overlooked, ramification of the importance of the “it” factor is that it is possible for one to be a champion even without ever emerging as the overall winner among the very best. Certain dancers, for instance, may never win a World or a Blackpool title, but still become recognized, even as the very best of the best, regarding whatever it is that they do that is uniquely theirs. As past world champion Zack relates, what he remembers about the dancers and competitions he has watched is not “who placed where, and at which events” but, rather, the “specific performances” that moved him. Perhaps not everyone has as explicit an awareness of this dynamic as Zack does, but this same idea is implicit in the comments made by several spectators seated near me at Blackpool in 2003 when Massimo Giorgianni and Alessia Manfredini announced their retirement and danced a tango following the team match event.

Amidst the long and thunderous standing ovation for Massimo and Alessia’s retirement dance, several spectators in my immediate vicinity commented on what

great champions Massimo and Alessia had been. While it is true that Massimo and Alessia had won the IDSF World Amateur Championship twice over (in 1995 and 1996), as well as several World Classic Showdance Championships (in 1997, 2000, 2001, and 2002), most of those who have won amateur and showdance world titles are not revered as champions in the same manner as were (and are) Massimo and Alessia. This general impression of Massimo and Alessia was (and is) a widely expressed one, by those around me at the time, by any other number of people with whom I spoke at Blackpool that week, and with any other number of people with whom I have spoken since then. While this is only one particular example, the point is a generalizable one. Because Massimo and Alessia brought their own special, unique “something” to the floor, they retired as champions—a status accorded them above other dancers who, based on competition placements alone, had been more “successful.”

Following up on the issue of retirement, but also relating back to the issue of true quality, the champion is someone who can—and does—retire on his or her own terms. The competitor who steps into a vacated title but then immediately retires without defending their title against other competitors who are, themselves, considered worthy of winning, will never be accorded the same status as the competitor who wins the title in the face of fierce competition. The champion is almost always someone who retires while there is still felt and thought to be at least one more win “up their sleeve.” Conversely, retiring only when one is no longer expected to win undermines one’s status as a champion. Although one may still be going out as “a winner,” they are not perceived to be leaving on top of the game and on their own

terms. Those who retire after having continued to strive after a title for years on end and, in the end, overcoming the odds and succeeding in winning their title have certainly earned the accolades and respect that are their due. Yet there is a difference, perhaps even a categorical one, between these winners and those who have either taken the title from, or held onto that title against, the challenge of worthy competitors. The champion must earn their title *against* other contenders for the title and not simply because it was “their time” or “their turn” or they were “next in line” to get it.

### **It’s All About the Feeling**

Amidst all of the other variables being discussed so far, it is easy to overlook the love of dancing that also undergirds the champion’s path to the top. While a love of dance is certainly not unique to the champion, the champion’s love of dance should not be overlooked either. As part of his response as to what advice he would give to others for overcoming adversity (such as training setbacks and poor results) Fred, a multiple time national champion and World and Blackpool finalist asserts that “All the problems and setbacks that you meet in your dance career should be outweighed by your sheer desire to dance.” In a like vein Robert, himself a multiple time national champion and World and Blackpool finalist already familiar with my project, stopped me in the hallway at the Winter Gardens in Blackpool and expressed this same sentiment to me even more succinctly. “If nothing else,” said Robert, “make sure that people understand it’s all about the feeling.” For any but the most elite athletes, the amount of time, dedication, and effort invested in reaching the pinnacle of their activity is difficult to truly fathom. The actual number of hours can, of course, be

noted, but the effort and persistence required to reach that level resist such simple commodifications.

In speaking to all the champions that I have, it is clear that, at some significant level at least, they all truly love what they do in and of itself. Certainly most champions have a competitive drive, and often a very strong one at that, but their dedication to DanceSport and their ongoing efforts towards developing and ever-improving their dancing cannot be explained away by competitiveness alone. Indeed, if it were only a matter of competitive drives needing to be met, the same people would be far better served by investing their efforts in any of the myriad more richly rewarded athletic and artistic pursuits. DanceSport, after all, lacks both the financial and prestige awards accorded to most other athletic pursuits and, even within the dance genre, lacks the stature of ballet, modern, and jazz dance or the wide-spread social and commercial appeal of salsa. What all of this means is that in the context of DanceSport extrinsic rewards alone cannot account for the champion's drive.<sup>12</sup> The comments made by Fred and Robert alike, are strong testament to the genuine passion that the champion holds for their chosen activity. Indeed, the feeling that champions have for their activity (in this case DanceSport) facilitates the very self-reliance, resilience, determination, demeanor, consistency, performance, and true quality that go in to the making of a champion. And, in the same vein, the "it" factor of the championship couple cannot exist in the absence of a genuine feeling for their chosen activity.

A final point worth making in this regard concerns a discrepancy in the respective focuses between champions (and those who seem poised to become champions) and those who may well be finalists (even at the highest levels) but do not seem destined for championship status. While it is true that anyone might yet emerge as an unforeseen champion,<sup>13</sup> there is still a noticeable trend of difference in the comments made by both champions and those in genuine contention for the champion's mantle versus those who are not in genuine contention (despite claims made by some in this later group to the contrary, that they are in contention).<sup>14</sup> When comparing both the interviews and the informal dance related conversations of these two groups, it is clear that the comments of champions and serious contenders alike are more focused on dancing itself whereas the comments of those who are non-contenders (despite any amount of professing to the contrary) are more heavily focused on issues of placement and competition.

At first blush it might seem like the difference in focus on dance by contenders and placement by non-contenders can be explained away by suggesting that those who have made it to the top or quite near to the top have "made it" and are therefore less concerned with placement than those who are still hoping to make it. Yet research such as that done on counterfactual thinking in elite sports suggests otherwise. In the context of Olympic medal winners, for instance, counterfactual thinking research shows, as previously noted, that second place competitors tend, overall, to be less satisfied with their results than those finishing in third place (Medvec, Madey, and Gilovich 1995).

Applied to DanceSport, this finding would predict a greater concern with placement among those closer to the top (especially among the couples contending to become champions). Since this prediction is contradicted by the interview and informal ethnographic data mentioned above of the direction of the discrepancy in focuses—on dance for true contenders versus placement for others—these differences emerge as real and substantive markers regarding differences in focus and mentality between champions (and those poised to become champions) versus others (including those conferring contender status upon themselves). What sets the champion apart than, is that while the champion is, of course, conscientious of their ranking, and how they play “the game” to achieve their championship status, for the champion the dancing itself is, as Roberts says, ultimately “all about the feeling.”

### **Everything Else**

While all of the psychological and character variables heretofore mentioned are, indeed, part and parcel of what makes a champion—as are a genuine feeling for their activity as well as an “it” factor—these alone can never suffice to explain why one person emerges as a champion while another does not. While all of the factors mentioned so far are necessary variables to becoming a champion they also remain far from sufficient to explain why some become champions in the end whereas others do not. The importance of simple exigencies of fate should not be underestimated, for while the champion perseveres and overcomes even where most others would not, not all who persevere and overcome go on to become champions—far from it in fact. While many different dynamics may factor in as confounding variables, some of the

more prominent ones in the context of Dancesport concern partnering and competition.

A separate and important topic in its own right, at the most fundamental levels DanceSport is about dancing *with* a partner. As such, no dancer ever goes on to become a champion without an appropriate partner. Complicating this picture, however, is the reality that there is no such thing as an objectively perfect partner. It is not without cause that most DanceSport competitors analogize their partnerships to marriages. Just as the same person is not equally suitable as a spouse for everyone, the same is equally true for partnering and dance. The same partner who may make one dancer wince at the prospect of even another half hour of practice may empower a different partner to new heights of practice, excellence, and performance.

The pool of eligible partners—especially at the higher levels of DanceSport competition—is, however, smaller than the typical pool of potential life partners. In response to a question of if he and his partner were dating for instance, Eric, a runner up for his national title, says “no way! It’s *hard* to have a partner! Having a girlfriend is easy!” While this perspective is far from universal (there are many dance partners who are romantically involved with each other after all), the underlying sentiment is still worth noting. It is far from easy to find the right partner. When asked about the challenges of competitive ballroom dancing, the vast majority of people, from the lowest levels to the highest, do in fact mention the difficulty in finding a suitable partner. Given how much narrower the pool of eligibility gets the closer one gets to the top, this become all that much more of a limiting factor for the potential champion;



especially given the time it typically takes to develop as a couple.<sup>15</sup> As should be clear than, the champion caliber dancer will never become champion in the absence of a suitable partner—something that is anything but a given.

Finally, just as potential partners are a limiting factor, so too are the other contestants “in the field” at the same time. One couple, couple A, might reach the pinnacle of their career amidst a vacuum of dominant dancers and thus be relatively readily crowned with the titles of champions. A different, even better couple, couple B, however, might reach the summit of their careers amidst a logjam of superior couples. Thus, even though couple B might be better than couple A, hypothetically speaking, in a head to head comparison, because of the different playing fields they each encounter couple A may go on to become champions whereas couple B does not. Donnie Burns and Gaynor Fairweather, for instance, held both the Professional World and Blackpool titles in Latin from 1984-1988 and, similarly, Marcus and Karen Hilton held both the Professional World and Blackpool titles in Ballroom from 1994-1997.<sup>16</sup> In the American styles (which are not contested outside of North America) Bob Powers and Julia Gorchakova won the Professional Rhythm title consecutively from 1993-2004. During the rein of such champions, the same couple that might have risen to prominence, and even championship status, at any other time will likely fall under the shadow of such dominant couples.

While every champion must overcome numerous obstacles as they strive to reach the summit of their chosen activity, such obstacles are by no means constant across time and place. In the context of DanceSport for instance, there are particularly

significant compounding variables such as the partners available and the prominence of other competitors at the time that, ultimately, are beyond the potential champions control. As such the same dancers who might rise to championship status at one point in time may be forever be denied the champion's mantel at another point in time. This being said, however, there are clear and distinct characteristics that can be seen in those who go on to become champions.

Although circumstances may conspire against some, there *are* opportunities for champions to emerge and it is but a select few who go on to reach this summit. As discussed above the characteristics that set the champion apart from all other comers for that title include self-reliance, resilience, determination, demeanor, consistency, performance, true quality, the "it" factor, a genuine feeling for the activity. Although chance, fortune, and opportunity all play their often-important role, and although they may prevent some who would otherwise be champion from being so, no one becomes a champion by chance, fortune, and opportunity alone. There are psychological and character variables that set the champion apart, that let them make the most of what fate sends their way, and by which they surmount the same terrain whereas others do not.

### **Personal Meaning, Motivation, and Identity**

*More than half a century after Max Weber and Sigmund Freud, it is time to become aware of the necessity of incorporating the study of meaning into the social sciences and psychology.*

D'Andrade 1986:39

As social and cultural role models within dance, understanding the character of “a champion” serves an important role in understanding how sociocultural structures intersect and interact with personal practices and experiences. That being said, *all* ballroom and salsa dancers find personal meaning, motivation, and identity in dance; they would not dance if they did not. Simultaneously, then, dance is always about more than dance and persons are always themselves (even when dancing). Dancers are whole persons after all, responding to dance and dance situations based on their non-dance experiences as well as their dance experiences.

Yet how could it be otherwise? Persons, after all, both (and simultaneously) define and are defined by culture, and it is thus that dancers both define and are defined by dance. At the dance specific level Hawkins makes a like point in noting that:

*The student responds to the dance situation as a whole person...along with his feelings about dance, he has feelings about himself and about his life. His response to the particular learning situation in dance is affected by all of his feelings. When he enters the dance studio, he does so as a whole person. He does not bring any special parts of himself and leave other parts outside the studio. (1969:118; cited in Vermey 1994:72, emphasis added)*

Looked at in a wider context, however, what is at issue is the theoretically crucial realization that culture shapes human experience at the same time as human experience is experienced by humans and not by cultures.<sup>17</sup>

## **Agency**

Dancers are people. They are not simply repositories of personal and cultural data but, rather, agentic beings with their own motivations, agendas, thoughts, and feelings. Questions of agency and agenda, although at times difficult to unravel, are of

paramount importance. While it is easy to observe when someone does or says something, the *why* of such doing or saying is far less transparent. People's motivations, agendas, thoughts, and feelings are the very threads from which the tapestry of their agency is woven<sup>18</sup> and this agency rarely remained in the background of my research, particularly my interviews. "People," as Theresa Buckland points out, "make dance and it is this agency of production which has often been neglected in mainstream paradigms for the study of dance" (1999:3).

Many active competitors, for instance, used their interviews as an opportunity to also ask me questions, especially about information that they thought I might have become privy to that could be of utility to them. Some frequently mentioned the confidentiality of the interview as the context for their ensuing responses while others would ask me to reiterate my promise of confidentiality before providing a given response. Yet others declined to respond to particular prompts, or redirected the discussion onto something, or someone, else. These people had their own agendas, agendas that existed both prior to and beyond my research, questions, and involvement. "Subjects," as Ortner duly notes, are "real people, with complex lives and intentions of their own" (1999:24). So how, for instance, did I fit into their agendas? How did they try to make use of me? Which people chose to talk to me and why? Who chose to facilitate my research and why? Such questions are, of course, important for any deep understanding of individual's responses—but these questions are equally important elements regarding the contextualization of such comments.

Returning to Buckland's point, it is people who make dance and this "agency of production" has been overlooked far too often (1999:3). How a dancer chooses, conceptualizes, choreographs, learns, practices, performs, and executes their dancing are all agentic choices. Even in the most straight jacketed of circumstances, options exist. And which options are exercised—their how and their why—are no less than the very fabric of agentic action, arising from within the penumbra of individual's motivations, agendas, thoughts, and feelings.

Yet however individual agency may be, it is also always situated. While some agency will always flow along idiosyncratic lines, many other axis of agency will be in regards to existing social structures, norms, and patterns. Because interests and actions counter to accepted and practiced norms are more visible—to the very extent that they do run counter to such norms and practices—it is easy to overlook the remainder of the situation, that much agency flows along the lines of accepted norms and practices. Indeed, if the overwhelming mass of people's agency were united in a different direction than the prevailing standards it seems highly unlikely that such standards would long endure.

Agency, however, is no less real when in accord with accepted standards and norms. Volunteered information that corresponds with accepted norms, for instance, is no less significant than contrasting information that runs counter to the same norms. The dancer who speaks on behalf of the status quo is no less responding from their own motivations, agendas, thoughts, and feelings than is the dancer who speaks against the status quo. Two dance teachers, both former instructors for the same

franchise, provide very different commentaries on this franchise. One speaks against it, commenting on its “manipulative practices,” while the other fondly reminisces about receiving “excellent instruction.” These comments two comments, although brief, are representative of two widely divergent accounts of working for the franchise in question. More important than any particulars of these individual perspectives though, is realizing that neither can be considered more agentic than the other. Whether in accordance with the status quo or in opposition to it, agency is emergent from individual’s motivations, agendas, thoughts, and feelings.

### **Ego and Domain Relevance**

How a dancer dances matters to them because dancing matters to them. Those who are not interested in dance could hardly care less about the timing of a cha cha, a rumba, or a samba. For those who care about dance, however, such distinctions are important, with dancing “off time” representing a lack of command of even the basic dance practice of moving together—with a partner—in time with the music. The vast majority of people alive today are terrible ballroom dancers, never having taken even a single group class in a single ballroom dance. The overwhelming majority of these people would not feel the least bit insulted, hurt, or discouraged to be told that their dancing was just purely horrendous. For those very few who have *chosen* dance, however, it has far more domain relevance to/for them, coming closer to their own conceptualization and understanding of who they are; both as “self” and “in the world.” Lily, an experienced swing dancer but a salsa newcomer describes the thoughts and feeling she has along these same lines thus:

...It probably has a lot to do with the fact that I'm a complete beginner in Salsa so I already feel ill at ease. Plus, my ego is rather fragile as I Swing dance really well so it's hard to start all over again and not be one of the better dancers in the room...I guess that's why I don't appreciate the constant flow of advice when I'm dancing. I feel like telling my dance partners, "But I CAN dance. Just not Salsa..."

Part of what is at issue here, then, concern the identity politics embedded in practice for the practitioner. People do not like to be (or *appear* to be) incompetent in areas that are of *identificatory* importance after all.

As Ortner points out, “identity politics” are at play whenever intentional shaping or presentations of identity are involved or at issue (1999:259). The non-dancer does not mind being though an incompetent dancer, therefore, because they have no intention of either being or being seen as a dancer. For those who choose to dance, however, their very practice of dance attests to their intentions to be and/or be seen as a dancer. Critiques that conflict with such intention are thus also cast being in conflict with identity—establishing the field within which identity politics are contested. Sergey Ryupien demonstrates the blending of practice and identity, for instance, when he notes that “this is what we do and what we are made of” [np].

One factor that influences the field within which ballroom and salsa identities are forged (and contested) is that ballroom and salsa dancers—as previously noted—dance as themselves, and not as someone else (e.g. a character in a ballet). “The paradoxical result,” of this, as Vermey points out for ballroom, “is the *ballroom dancer’s inflated ego*” (Vermey 1994:20; emphasis added). Commenting on along these exact lines, a second generation professional competitor commented to me about how “no one in dancesport has the right to think they’re any better than anyone else. Think they’re a better *person* because they’re a better *dancer*,” going on to point out

that such “dancers get snooty for no reason – no one outside our little circle even knows who we are.”

### **Conditional Egoism**

For all that dancing as one’s self (versus in a role) may artificially inflate a ballroom or salsa dancer’s ego, for many of these dancers their egotism as a dancer is a conditional one. On the one hand those who choose to dance—and especially ballroom competitors and salsa performers—are people comfortable<sup>19</sup> being in the spotlight, often literally, at the center of attention. Yet at the same time, it is equally important to note that these dancers have also invested themselves in a dance form—via partnered dancing—that always involves sharing this same spotlight. Many practiced ballroom competitors and salsa performers are thus comfortable (and most enjoy) being the center of attention, but have chosen—via their practice of partnered dancing—not to be the center of attention by themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Another sense of the conditional egoism involved in ballroom and salsa dancing concerns the relationship of the dancer “on the floor” to “off the floor.” In many ways, of course, who someone is on the floor is integrally related to who they are off the floor, with who they are on the floor reflecting—at least in part—who they are off the floor. This dynamic is readily seen among developing dancer as, the more they dance and compete dance, the more of their off floor personality you can see emerging on the floor as they become more comfortable with dancing.

On the other side of this equation, however, who a dancer is on the floor can also be a “shadow” (as per Jung) of who they are off the floor. In this case the more



one dances, the more their on floor personality starts to bleed over into their off floor personality as they become more comfortable with the shadow aspects of their psyche that they get to embody on the dance floor. It is along just such lines, for example, that a UK salsa of oriental heritage can comment thus:

Another thing about salsa -- it seems to bring out a totally new personality I didn't know I had in me. When I'm dancing, I'm all smiles, full of energy, outgoing, playful, flirtatious and happy with my sexuality as a woman. I wouldn't dream of being like that in my "real life", yet I think I like my salsa alter ego rather a lot.

In either (or both) cases, then, regardless of direction, and with time, the dancer's on floor and off floor personality are likely to come into ever-closer alignment.

### **Concluding Remarks on Self**

If Chapter Ten touched on the physical pain that goes hand in hand—or, more aptly, foot in foot, as the case may be—with the dancer's life, there is emotional pain as well, especially for those for whom dance is a career. Dancing is not easy, taking struggle, perseverance, and effort. But the rewards transcend words. World and Blackpool Professional Latin vice-champion provides a compelling glimpse into the psychology of self, self-evaluation, and competition of an elite competitor:

The pain of loosing a title is an unexplainable tear in your heart. It is only now, two years after my retirement that I can look back at these such moments and acknowledge my achievements. To me I had failed, and there is know way of explaining this pain to you. When you have that competitive fight in you, being number one is all that counts, being placed second you may as well as not been in the final contention.

Pain also comes at moments when you are overseas and you miss your brother's birthday celebrations, or your best friend from schools wedding. Pain comes when you have been away for three weeks and you just want to come home for that cuddle from your boyfriend knowing that the flowers for Valentines day that arrived in your hotel in Japan cannot really explain how much we were missing each other. Pain also comes when you can hear how much your parents are worried about you and they feel helpless during your travels, feeling they are only a voice at the end of a phone when you have announced you lost a competition and need their support.

But even with all these pains you go through in your career, fighting to perfect movements that were created so many years ago by lovers of dance. It is all in your efforts of making a beat of music seemingly last forever and to see the faces of your admiring fans and family ecstatic and in disbelief that such a movement could be possible. (Hardy:np)

As the materials in this chapter make clear, then, ballroom and salsa contribute to and influence a range of meanings, motivations, and identities in individual dancer's lives. Dance is not, after all, simply a physical skill that one learns, or even a schema for movement that one internalizes; for the dancer it is a transformative process. Theoretically the meanings, motivations, and identities found in—and through—dance may come from within, without, or both. As experienced in lived lives, however, dance provides a field for both internal and external transformations; both of which intercontextualize the other. Just as Ortner says of mountaineering Sherpas, then, dance teachers, professional competitors, performers, and judges each represent “*a fused bundle of role, status, and identity*” (1999:88, emphasis added), a situation made all that much more complex as any individual can be more than one at a time, often transitioning between them. While the specific meanings, motivations, and identities a dancer finds in dancing may be crucial to them, individually, what is really at issue—at least in the larger sense—is that dance provides both a source and a surrounding for the negotiation of such meanings, motivations, and identities.

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## Endnotes: Chapter Twelve

<sup>1</sup> Robert Levy seems to be thinking along these same lines in talking about “symbol hunger” (1990).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Kahneman and Miller 1986; Kahneman and Tversky 1982b; Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, and McMullen 1993; Miller, Turnbull, and McFarland 1990; Roese 1994; Roese and Olson 1995

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note Husted, Gilovich, and Madey's formulation of "*coming close* to winning the gold" (1995:609, emphasis added), which is very different from simply winning the silver. The argument being made is that it is closeness to winning the gold—when this is the case—is implicated in generating "automatic" counterfactual thinking.

<sup>4</sup> Such as in the example of the back and forth trade off of the Professional Standard Blackpool title between John Wood and Anne Lewis and Marcus and Karen Hilton in the early 1990s noted above.

<sup>5</sup> As with Olympic medals, the jump from fourth to third is the difference between making the podium or not at most major IDSF and WD&DSC championship events and, as such, represents a quantum jump in a way that fifth to fourth (etcetera) does not.

<sup>6</sup> Since I first wrote this section I have shared a slightly revised and elaborated version of these materials with Caroline S. Picart for a chapter on "Creating DanceSport Champions" that I am co-authoring with her for her book *Inside Edge: Creating Dancesport Champions*.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that politics never play into ballroom judging but, rather, that decrying politics as the reasons for one's results does not seem to fit the model of "a champion's" character.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say whether such judging is in DanceSport's best interests or not but, rather, merely to point out that such evaluations may be made with only the best of intentions.

<sup>9</sup> In this case "poor" is relative to an anticipated win and not in relation to an objective standard (which would have to recognize the second place position of the runner up as a very good result in its own right).

<sup>10</sup> The one exception to this may be Blackpool. For many reasons winning at Blackpool is probably the only acceptable means of bypassing the consistency "requirement." Note, however, that this is a different proposition from suggesting that the consistency requirement is absent from Blackpool—far from it. As David's own case suggests, consistency is, as always, a typical prerequisite for winning the Blackpool title. Still, if there is any one event where the pattern of quality typically in effect can be bypassed it is at Blackpool. As the one major championship that is open to all and where all the top ranking dancers show up, Blackpool is where things can be shaken up, even if this rarely happens. (One example of such an unanticipated shake up, for instance, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> place placement of Eugene Katsevman and Maria Manusova in Amateur Latin at the 2003 Blackpool Dance Festival, never having placed higher than 5<sup>th</sup> prior to that time.)

<sup>11</sup> The built in exception to this is the couple that emerges as 10-Dance champions by winning both the Latin *and* the Ballroom divisions. In such a case their prestige as champions is all that much greater since they have proven themselves as the best of the best in *each* category. Note, however, that with the current degree of development and specialization involved no one has come close to such a feat at the highest levels in some time.

<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that, taken on their own, extrinsic rewards should be taken to account for the motivations of those in more widely and generously rewarded activities. Rather, the case of DanceSport well illustrates that extrinsic reward alone cannot account for the effort and investment of those who go on to become champions. Also, although separate from the issue of championshipism being herein considered, that fact that extrinsic award alone does fails to explain the champions participation speaks all that much more strongly to the intrinsic motivations of non-champions who receive far less, if any, of the extrinsic rewards accorded to the champions.

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<sup>13</sup> This eventuality is actually somewhat facilitated by the partnering aspect and dynamics involved in DanceSport. The same dancer who may have seemed like a non-contender, even for years on end, may emerge as a challenger for and even the eventual winner of championship status when paired with the right partner.

<sup>14</sup> While not a perfect science the division between genuine and spurious championship contenders is still a substantive one. While the exceptional case may, indeed, arise (as pointed out in endnote number eight above), most world-class coaches and adjudicators have spent years “in the trenches” as competitors themselves and, even more tellingly, their jobs (both as coaches and judges) involve ongoing evaluations of dancing and of dancers. And, as such, there is good reason to take the recognition by such coaches and judges of certain competitors as legitimate contenders and others merely as species ones as a real and significant—even if not impermeable—distinction.

<sup>15</sup> Two points that should be made here are that, 1) there are exceptions to the tendency to need time to develop (Bryan Watson and Carmen, the reigning Professional World and Blackpool Champions, are one such case, going on to win their first World title very shortly after starting their current partnership), and 2) that given the different mechanics and aesthetics involved it also typically takes more time for Ballroom couples to develop, *as a couple*, than it does for Latin couples.

<sup>16</sup> Donnie Burns and Gaynor Fairweather actually won the Professional Blackpool Latin title from 1984-1988 and again in 1990 but held the Professional World Latin title consecutively from 1984-1996. Marcus and Karen Hilton won the Professional Blackpool Ballroom title in 1990, in 1992, and then from 1994-1998 and held the Professional World Ballroom title consecutively from 1991-1997. The years noted in the main text, 1984-1988 for Donnie Burns and Gaynor Fairweather and 1994-1997 represent the five and four year periods, respectively, where each of these couples won both major titles.

<sup>17</sup> This important point is not, of course, a new one. Among earlier works in anthropology, for instance, this issue is woven through and explored throughout Tom Levy’s *Tahitians* and *Mesocosm*.

<sup>18</sup> Ideas about agency are, of course, implicit in all social interaction. Just as we credit our own thoughts and actions as being driven by more than random chance so too are other people’s actions and comments understood as being indicative of something deeper and more enduring than just itself. Implicit ideas about agency are part and parcel of a theory of mind, marking personal actions as representing something of greater profundity and durability than the action itself.

<sup>19</sup> Obviously the degree of such comfort may vary greatly from person to person or from and from situation to situation. In all such cases, however, the dancers in question are at least sufficiently “comfortable” to have trained to compete or perform and to have shown up to do so.

<sup>20</sup> In a related vein, one World and Blackpool champion—a World and Blackpool champion mentioned to me that they loved just even going out to a nightclub and letting their body move to the music for its own sake, but that they hated how almost everyone would soon stop dancing themselves in order to watch him.

## SECTION V: DANCE AS SELF, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

As noted at the outset, community, culture, and self are never discrete entities. Looking at each in turn—in Sections II, III, and IV—served an analytical purpose, allowing for more nuanced exploration, consideration, and understanding than possible with an “all at once” approach. At the same time, however, it is important to realize that not only are self, culture, and community never entirely distinct from one another, but that each can only truly be understood in relation to one another. Certainly persons’ lives are never only personal, cultural, or communal. Yet at the same time, persons’ personal lives cannot be separated from their cultural and communal lives. Self, culture, and community inextricably intercontextualize one another, and it is in this light that this final section reintegrates and focuses on dance as self, culture, *and* community.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: A General Theory of Dance as Self, Culture, and Community

As D'Andrade suggests, the need for a general theory is that “social, cultural, and psychological aspects of life interact in ways that create effects that one would not have anticipated looking at each aspect separately” (2000:4), and dance represents a rich and largely untapped nexus of lived life.<sup>1</sup> “Our assumption” D'Andrade goes on to note, “is that interaction effects are quite strong and need to be taken into account in the basic fabric of the conceptual framework one begins with” (2000:4). This is clearly the case with the salsa and ballroom dance communities. The structures and values of these communities, when taken in conjunction with the persons who fill and create them are neither easily read nor predictable. Rather, there is an ever-undulating mixture of persons, experiences, events, structures (both social and physical), and locations that constitute the communities in question. As such, to isolate, reify, or privilege any one of these variables—without first establishing empirical grounds for such a maneuver—serves to distort rather than clarify social actions and interactions.

Following in Durkheimian footsteps (Durkheim 1993:39), D'Andrade points out that collective consciousness—despite its realization via individuals—is something different from, and of a different order than, individual consciousness writ large. One does not need a concept of “collective mind,” D'Andrade points out, to believe or recognize that “society is something more than just the sum of individuals taken one by one” (2000:9). Ballroom and salsa dance communities are more than

mere amalgamations and conglomerations of dancers—the same people, for example, can cross over between these two communities without, simultaneously, blending them.

The salsa scene and the ballroom scene, more to the point, each have characteristics and qualities—experiential flavors and hues—that typify their respective societies’ regardless of the specific personnel involved. A salsa club *is not* and *does not feel like* a ballroom dance studio or a ballroom competition. Although differing in character from club to club, city to city, state to state, and country to country there is a salsa culture that transcends merely the particular individuals involved. Take, for example, the Second Annual West Coast Salsa Congress held in Los Angeles, CA. I personally met and danced with people from Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, and Switzerland (not to mention from throughout the United States). Despite little common language the roles, actions, and behaviors that were involved almost never needed to be negotiated. The elements in question were already in place—albeit not necessarily at a conscious level—due to shared cultural knowledge, in this case knowledge of and familiarity with the salsa “culture.”

Ballroom dancing also provides many examples of this same point. A prime case comes from a recent UCSD DanceSport Team Command Staff meeting. At this particular meeting a number of ballroom competitions came up in conversation, including one of the major national competitions as well as the collegiate competition that our team annually hosts. The other captain of the team, the coaches, and myself were in the midst of a discussion when a new member of the team (and of the

command staff) asked for, what amounted to, a translation. Although the words that we were using were comprehensible to her—it is not as if we switched into Swahili for this segment of the meeting—the essence of our communication depended on cultural knowledge that was specific to the ballroom community. Similarly, the instruction “line up across from the ‘on-deck’ area” made no sense to new ballroom competitors when members of our Summer Team competed in Universal City at the Pacific Dancesport Championships this past fall.

While an “on-deck” area, scrutineers, runners, etc., are all certainly parts of a ballroom competition, to say that the specific identity of these individuals, that the particular individuals enacting these roles, are constitutive of such a competition is simply not the case. As D’Andrade points out, “a *collective* is more than a plurality of actors” (2000:11-12). Simply stated, and as applied to the collectives with which I am currently dealing, neither a ballroom nor a salsa dance community can be described, explained, or understood merely by accounting for the persons involved.

Using a Star Trek analogy D’Andrade suggests that while Gilbert’s collective “we” approximate the Borg (a race of non-individually agentic beings), humans are, in fact, simultaneously both Borg and individual (2000:13n5). This point is an important one since individuals never exist outside the contextualizations of culture and society while culture and society do not exist without the instantiating (and contextualizing) constituency of individuals. Cultural, social, and psychological processes (as pointed out above in the “Goals” section) all serve to intercontextualize each other in an open ended and ongoing feedback system.



## Interaction Effects

Belonging to a collective is, as I have already noted, seldom an all or nothing proposition. “At any one moment,” D’Andrade points out, “every human is a complex mixture of collectivities, all at different strengths” (2000:21). I am a regular of the San Diego salsa scene, I am a UCSD graduate student in anthropology, I am an American, I am a past MMW and DOC teaching assistant, I am a past member and Co-captain of the UCSD DanceSport team, I am Jewish...all of which represent collectivities (among many others, to be sure) that play a role in who I am, what experiences I have, and what those experiences mean to me. And part of these interaction effects come about since, D’Andrade, “collectivities affect how one acts in the world because what happens to you is not just what happens to *you*” (200:21; original emphasis). Saying that Fred (a San Diegan) is not a good salsa dancer does not spin out, by extension, in the same way as saying that San Diegans are not good salsa dancers. A derogatory remark about San Diego’s salsa scene *means* something different to me because it involves other members of a community of which I am a part.

Part of this distinction depends on what Searle termed constitutive rules—the structure of what counts as what and in what circumstances. A woman wrapped in a man’s arms, bent backward over his leg is not just one thing. It counts as entirely different things if it is part of a dance, a physical altercation, or the culmination of a romantic evening. It is in assigning meaning to the values of what “X” counts as what “Y” in what context (“C”) that institutional facts inform lived lives. And it is the intersubjective awareness of and capitulation to such institutionally constituted rules

(irrespective of enthusiasm) that facilitates patterned and predictable (albeit rarely fully predictable) social interaction. *It is because Natalie knows that being wrapped in Ken's arms while being bent backwards over his leg (X) counts as a dip (Y) when executed to music on the dance floor (C) that she does not consider it either an assault or a romantic overture.*

Yet even this understanding of institutional facts is incomplete. “There is,” after all, “more to institutions than just agreeing to give some meaning to something” (D’Andrade 2000:21). The “X” that counts as “Y” in context “C” can be of profound significance in people’s lives. Such meanings can be integrated at a number of levels of personal salience (Spiro 1994[1987]) and at a number of different cascading hierarchical levels (D’Andrade 1992; Marion 2000; Shore 1991).

## **Action Systems**

An adequate description and understanding of action systems is of the utmost importance since it is “relations among action systems [that] constitute society” (D’Andrade 2000:25). At first blush this description may seem a little too austere to account for lived life but, upon any further reassessment, any such perceived sterility is illusory—action systems are not after all, mechanistically operating systems in which human cogs merely function as interchangeable automatons. Collectivities [including their constitutive action systems] are concomitantly cognitive and behavioral; they not only allow for but, in fact, require *interaction* between individuals (D’Andrade 2000:26). As the materials I have presented so far serve to demonstrate—indeed as the very activity of partner dancing intrinsically makes explicit—the

“collectivitieness” of collectivities requires intersubjectivity, identification, and interaction, all of which are necessary prerequisite elements to collectivity (ibid).

Action systems can be seen as the institutionalizations of “social action” (Weber via Parsons) as such institutionalized patterns are, and become, “manifest in observable activities and interactions between people” (D’Andrade 2000:26). And, as I have previously pointed out (Marion 2000:10;n1) such actions are “always part of some *role*” (D’Andrade 2000:32). So what, precisely, is the relation of action systems to collectivities? D’Andrade provides the following insight:

In any society an enormous body of interactions occur *repeatedly*, consisting of *similar behaviors* occurring between the *same persons*, carried out in the *same settings*, and having the *same effects*. The occurrence of these repeated interactions is an indication that the participants form a *collectivity* (26, emphasis in the original).

What emerges is that those who participate in the same action systems are, to at least some degree, also functioning under the umbrella of membership to a common collective. Now the degree of membership, as felt by the individuals themselves and by other members towards them, represents a fluctuating boundary. Club owners, DJs, dancers, bartenders, and bouncers seem unlikely to identify with—or be identified by others—as members of the salsa community in the same way. At the same time, however, all of these people interact in institutionalized patterns, or maybe better yet, *within* institutionalized patterns, which, themselves, constitute the salsa dancing community.

D’Andrade posits that at least 10 elements must be involved in any fully fleshed out action system: multiple agents; communication between agents; collective cognitions; institutions; norms; values; resources; motives; activities and exchange;

and environment/conditions (2000:27-28). Let me look to the San Diego salsa community and see how it holds up as regards these criteria. First, multiple agents are called for—so far so good. Second, communication between these agents is called for. There are some interesting questions in this setting as regards what counts as communication but there can be no doubt that communication takes place.<sup>2</sup> Third, D'Andrade calls for collective cognitions—shared understandings—of how things are done, what are normal and legitimate expectations. Here the picture is not as clear cut (since collective cognitions in no way preclude the coexistence of non-collective cognitions) but there is definitely a way things are done and, corresponding to this, a way that people expect things to be done. Being asked to dance, for example, involves numerous expectations including (1) that the dance to be danced will correspond to the music being played (i.e. no cha cha if a mambo is what is being played), (2) that the normal “rules” of lead and follow will be adhered to, and (3) that, barring serious accident and/or injury, or some relatively egregious social *faux pas*, both parties will dance through to the completion of the song. I do not mean to suggest that this is (in any way shape or form) an exhaustive list of such expectations but, instead, merely to exemplify the reality, presence, and oftentimes interlinked connections of such collective cognitions in asking a partner to dance.

The fourth element D'Andrade stipulates as requisite to an action system is the presence of institutions that, themselves, set statuses and norms for the agents involved. A salsa club requires, at a minimum, a club owner, a DJ, dancers, a bartender, and a bouncer. In most cases there is also a club manager, more than one

DJ, possibly a band (including its own manager, musicians, and support staff), one or more dance instructors, additional bartenders and service staff, as well as additional security members. A salsa club fits this required stipulation for an institution then, involving status positions that set norms (including power distributions). The idea that the structure of society is, itself, constituted by actions systems that resist change (D'Andrade 2000:30) then flows forth as a logical extension. Durable action systems are the materials of which society is hewn, formed, and molded.

Norms—the shoulds for actions to be performed and goals to be pursued—are the next element required of action systems (D'Andrade 2000:27). The cases of dancing to the music and leading/following again serve as clear-cut examples of such norms for partner dancing. Closely related to such norms are values concerning actions, goals, and accomplishments. Such values are concerned with the “what counts as what” issue. The connection and communication between leader and follower, the style of movement, non-dance related interpersonal implications of dancing, etc., are just a few of the myriad values that are integral components of the social dance scene.

Next come resources—control of things that people want or do not want to have/happen. Dancing ability is certainly one such (in this case relatively self-evident) resource. Dancing ability *counts*. What such ability counts as is not always abundantly clear, but the fact that it counts as something—and often times something quite important at that—is clearly the case. Some dancers seek out this person as a partner—some only for the duration of a song or two, some as a regular dance partner, some even as a romantic partner. Others may choose just to watch an able dancer—some for

inspiration, some out of intimidation, some purely as an enjoyable spectacle. Dancing ability is thus a resource—and probably one of (if not) the most significant resource within the culture of dance—but it is, by no means, the only such resource. Physical appearance also functions as another such resource. Being considered attractive is a resource that *can* achieve many of the same things as dancing ability, albeit most likely for different reasons.<sup>3</sup>

The next element required in an action system is that of motives—interests that are either rewarded or punished via engagement with the action system. It seems to me that such motives are intricately bound up with the *resources* involved in an action system. Resources such as dancing ability and/or physical appearance, for example, *count as* resources specifically *because* they play a role in fulfilling or hindering the interests of others within the action system. It is because a dearth of potentially willing dance partners clearly is at odds with any given dancer's interest in dancing that dancing ability is, intrinsically, elevated to the status of resource within dance related action systems. The same dancing ability has no bearing on work (at least in any overtly significant way) in a biological research lab—and thus does not count as a resource within that action system. It thus becomes clear that there are intricate interactions between what count as resources, norms, values, and motives within a given action system.

The second to last of D'Andrade's criteria are activities and exchange. "Without exchange," contends D'Andrade, "nothing motivationally salient happens" (2000:28). This is but one more layer to the resource/motivation pie. The resources of

dancing ability and/or physical attractiveness would not function motivationally—indeed could not—without the interpersonal activity and exchange entailed in the action system in question. The “act behaviors” (ibid) associated with dancing ability *count as* a resource precisely through the interpersonal flow and exchanges—be it between partners, role models, or spectators—involved. Finally, action systems require environments/conditions—material and non-material contexts within which such interactions transpire (D’Andrade 2000:28). Nightclubs and dance studios certainly constitute material environments. Knowledge of club locations, music, and other members of the dance community are all some of the non-material conditions of these same action systems.

Now society is, of course, larger than any given action system. Likewise, most roles are implicated in more than one action system. The degree of overlap between these (multiple) roles and action systems requires ethnographic investigation (D’Andrade 2000:33). Let us take Nathan, the owner of a local dance studio, as an example. Dance instruction, advertising, public relations, capital investments, and finance management are just some of the social structures—the durable action systems—with which his role as studio owner is implicated. But Nathan is not only, or just, a studio owner. He is also a social dancer, a homeowner, a web page designer, etc. “Persons,” it must always be remembered, “hold many statuses” (ibid:32) and this is significant for more than just understanding persons. Just looking at one slice of the pie, take who Nathan is as a social dancer, *makes a difference* in who he is as a studio owner—and thus in *all* of the action systems therewith involved as well. The types of

lessons, moves, and workshops he offers his students; the prices he charges; the guest instructors he brings in; the promotions he offers—all of which are functions of his status as a studio owner—are (and cannot help but be) informed by his status as a social dancer.

Identification and classification of action systems are *standard folk knowledge*, the assessments of which require ethnographic investigation (D'Andrade 2000:33). What counts, as an action system (or any other social phenomena), is something that can only be determined on the ground, from the people involved with it. One interesting avenue this opens up for future research in dance communities is the congruence and overlap of action systems between dance forms (i.e., salsa versus ballroom versus swing versus Argentine tango) and locals (i.e., San Diego versus Los Angeles versus Phoenix versus New York versus Boston; America versus Sweden versus Israel).

The investigation of such action systems is not, necessarily, an easily accomplished task. Action systems need not be behaviorally obvious (D'Andrade, 2000:33) and, in point of fact, are never *directly* observable (2000:34). So how is it that action systems can be examined and assessed? One point of ingress is that of norms—the shoulds of an action system (D'Andrade, 2000:34). People can say what one is supposed to do in a given situation and one can also see—especially via exposure across time—what behaviors are normative. How should one ask for a dance? How should one dance? These are questions that can be asked of people but they are also questions that lend themselves to observational investigation, assessment,



and verification. An intriguing line of investigation that arises here is the degree of overlap between norms as reported and norms as observed. Are these two things congruent? If not, why not? Is this incongruity (if there is one) evenly or differentially distributed across the action system? Why this distribution? Does regional context (be it city or country) serve as a variable? What about other intersectional variables such as age, race,<sup>4</sup> class, and gender?

Parson's pattern variables, the "dimensions of choice, specified by the norms of the role, that constantly pattern the actions of the agent" (D'Andrade 2000:35) serve as another point of entry for examination of action systems and their associated norms. These pattern variables are: (1) ascribed versus achieved roles (quality versus performance roles); (2) universalistic versus particularistic roles; (3) specific versus diffuse roles; (4) affectively neutral versus affectively expressive roles: and (5) self-interest versus other-interest roles (D'Andrade 2000:34-35). Here, for example, are some of the roles involved in dance related social systems as broken down according to these Parsonian pattern variables:

**Table 13.1: Parsonian pattern variable distributions for several dance related action systems**

	<b>Dancer</b>	<b>Instructor</b>	<b>DJ</b>	<b>Bouncer</b>	<b>Bartender</b>
<b>Ascription— Achievement</b>	Achieved	Both/Either	Ascribed	Ascribed	Ascribed
<b>Universalism— Particularistic</b>	Particularistic	Universalistic	Universalistic	Universalistic	Universalistic
<b>Specificity— Diffusiveness</b>	Both/Either	Specific	Specific	Specific	Specific
<b>Neutrality— Affectivity</b>	Affective	Affective	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
<b>Self-interest— Other-interest</b>	Self-interest	Other-interest	Other-interest	Self-interest	Self-interest

In looking at this table of role pattern variables it is important to keep in mind that these roles, like most, are rarely implicated by only one action system. The roles of instructors, DJs, bouncers, and bartenders are all, for instance, also implicated by the social action system of running a business (in this particular case a nightclub) where the distribution of the pattern variables might be assessed quite differently. So too may dancers also (simultaneously) be involved in other social action systems—say that of dating. And all five of the roles noted and assessed above are likely—at least to some extent at least—to also overlap with the action system(s) of friendship and social acquaintance.

Another element of action systems, closely related to norms and the Parsonian pattern variables, is that of values. The assessment of such elements is a difficult one since “values” is a highly polysemous term, including numerical scales, preference scales, degrees of goodness, and scales of moral goodness<sup>5</sup> (D’Andrade 2000:35). As values become institutionalized, “assessments of goodness” concomitantly become “consciously experienced” (D’Andrade 2000:36). Uninstitutionalized values are thus more likely to exert their influence without conscious awareness but, as they become imbedded in social forms, become accessed with greater consciousness. Values, like meanings, are *not* things or even characteristics of things. They have no reality outside of selves or as part of the external world—rather “valuing is something we *do*” (ibid, emphasis in the original). A resource such as dancing ability, as previously noted, gains motivational significance only in so far as persons value it. Dancing ability is not, itself, a value nor does it have, intrinsically, a given value. The value of dancing

ability is, simply and only, the value given to it by persons within (often overlapping) action systems.

Values are, of course, highly intertwined with “shoulds” and “oughts” (D’Andrade 2000:37). “*Shouldness*” as well as goodness, notes D’Andrade, “appears to be a *semantic prime*” (ibid, emphasis in the original)—they cannot be broken down into or explained by other concepts. Since shoulds are tightly linked to values, which are (as previously noted) highly polysemous, shoulds are not unitary or bounded “things.” There are shoulds relating to goodness, conventionality, lawfulness (both scientifically and legally speaking), and functionality. Shoulds, beyond assessments of goodness, also serve as “major sources of *motivation to conform*...because one believes people think one should do something because this something is *said* to be good” (D’Andrade 2000:39, emphasis added). One should tango in a certain way, for instance, because that is the way one is told (and understands) it is good to dance tango. There is not, intrinsically, anything more “tango like” about certain dance steps and more “waltz like” about others.

I would like to propose that the concepts of goodness and shouldness are good candidates for what I have defined as deep-meanings—personally salient points of congruence between cognitions and emotions (Marion 2000). “Phenomenologically,” D’Andrade points out, “*goodness* and *shouldness* both appear in consciousness with some of the properties of a *thought* and some of the properties of a *feeling*” (2000:37; original emphasis). Cognitions rarely, in and of themselves, provide strong instigation

to action. It is emotional charge, when linked to cognitions, which provide the impetuses to action (e.g., Marion 2000; esp. Chapters Three and Four).

D'Andrade provides a like assessment in noting that, “thoughts are mostly either conscious or absent, and *unless connected to feelings* or desires, do not, by themselves, normally push one to act” (2000:37; emphasis added). It is as conceptions (of goodness or shouldness) become linked with strong emotions that internalization transpires (D'Andrade 2000:37-38; citing Spiro 1994)—it is via this process of salientiation that “a *value* not only has *cognitive* properties, it also has *affective* and *motivational* properties” (original:38, original emphasis). Certainly dancing does not come to be held as such a deep meaning for most (or even many) people but, for those it does, it can become incredibly powerful. The investment of time and money that dancers dedicate to their dancing is impressive—especially when viewed in the context of a society that often falls back on these two very items as catchall excuses. The members of the UCSD DanceSport Competition Team, for example, pay \$125/quarter in coaching fees. They pay close to \$90 for ballroom shoes, and costume allowance fees for the competition team are in the vicinity of \$140.

All of these expenses accrue even before all of the expenses associated with competing into consideration. Airline tickets to Florida and/or San Francisco, round trip van rentals from San Diego to Las Vegas, hotel accommodations, entrance fees, and myriad other expenses quickly add up, especially on a student's often-tight budget. Time commitments are similarly vast. The 1999-2000 Competition and Show teams had choreography practice from 9:00-11:00 every Monday and Thursday night;

weekly team information sessions every Tuesday from 8:30-9:00 immediately followed by Technique practice from 9:00-11:00. Spring quarter, in particular, also saw weekends being quickly consumed by various competitions and performances. All of these time commitments are not made without a concomitant impact on the academic and social lives of the team members.

Beth, for example, was almost never free to get over to her boyfriend's place until after 11:30 PM three nights a week, as well as being away one to two days each weekend for the entire month of April. Such sacrifices would have quickly become—also read as “counted as”—unacceptable if dancing on the team had not been deeply meaningful to her. Yet even this situation only hints at the depth of meaning that can be found in dance. What of Justin, the guy who opened a second credit card (his first was already charged to its limit) just so he could attend the Second Annual Bacardi West Coast Salsa Congress in Los Angeles? What of Gabby, the newcomer salsaera who moved, a mere one-month after starting to dance salsa, so as alleviate the one-hour commute between her old residence and her regular salsa club of choice? What of Francine, who after being thrown from a thoroughbred horse spent two months bedridden and the remainder of a year in a wheelchair; who, after a night of salsa dancing, would find herself sitting in her car, tears streaming down her face just in anticipation of the sheer agony that moving and walking to the front door would entail? What was it that pushed me to perform and compete in my first ballroom event despite having x-rays from four days prior show seven vertebrae and three rib heads

out of place? As all of this data emphasizes dancing can, and clearly does, come to mean something—and something quite profound at that—in dancers' lives.

Based on an extensive cross-linguistic analysis (Osgood, May, and Miron 1975) it appears that the three most frequent and salient assessments that people make are: first, evaluation (goodness vs. badness); second, strength; and third, activity (D'Andrade 2000:38). "The first thing one probably wants to know about how somebody thinks of something is – do they think of it as *good* or *bad*?" notes D'Andrade (2000:39, emphasis in the original). This question has to do with how things are evaluated, and thus what meaning(s) they have. Is someone a good dancer, or instructor, or DJ, or judge? The answers that people give to these questions—as well as the reasons for their assessments—represent a crucial step in understanding people and their action systems. Who, for example, are considered to be good dancers in the San Diego salsa scene? On what grounds are such assessments made, and by whom?

### **Culture and Its Deconstruction**

One important point made in the previous section is that motivation and exchange are, just as much as norms and values, necessary elements of action systems. This is because norms and values are not, on their own, (usually) strong enough to maintain action systems. Motivational satisfaction and the exchange of resource are also needed (D'Andrade 2000:40). Cognitive schemas (such as pertain to norms and values) can often be readily generalized across circumstances (and, when so generalized, can be termed cultural). Indeed, it is the learning, sharing, and

transmission of such models that constitutes the culturizing process (D'Andrade 2000:41). The enculturative *process* is what is important to look at—how it is that schemata and propositions are actually transmitted. Resources and motivations, however, can often be quite difficult to transmit because these elements are often contingent on individual idiosyncrasies (D'Andrade 2000:40). This is why the sharing of cultural meanings cannot be assumed to be, and indeed probably seldom are, completely shared—a long standing understanding of many anthropologists (e.g. D'Andrade 1992:41; Mead 1963; Ortner 1989:128; Sapir 1985; Schneider 1995:6; Shore 1991:12, 1996; Spiro 1994; Swartz and Jordan 1976:47-48; Swartz 1991).

D'Andrade, following Parsons lead, contends that the term “cultural” is most aptly applied to “ideas and values that are causally powerful within action systems” (2000:41). Culture thus emerges as an axiomatic orientation and not merely as proscriptive content. It is thus that one can speak of “American” culture, despite the often rancorous divides therein contained. Education, taxes, and abortion are all, as even casual observation will quickly reveal, commonly regarded as key and pivotal political issues—even by those who hold diametrically opposed positions on these topics.<sup>6</sup> The role that various action systems play in instantiating such issues is of tantamount importance since, as D'Andrade explicates, “discourses and ideologies have effects if they become embedded in action systems but are just talk otherwise” (2000:41-42).<sup>7</sup>

Let me provide some examples of this axiomatic orientation at work. Spectators and judges at a dance competition, for instance, share the understanding

that, in a competition, the best dancers should win. What it is that counts as best, however, can vary. This variation can (of course) be merely an issue of differential expertise (Dreyfus 1983, 1984). But it can also be a preference for expressiveness, musical interpretation, or technique. Similarly, it is the emphasizing of one of these (or many other) elements that help set the style of any given dancer. Yet these personal preferences, inclinations, and proclivities in no way mitigate the belief that the best dancers should win a competition but, rather, only serve to inform individuals' assessments of what counts as best. This example may seem somewhat of stretch. What is important to keep in mind, however, is the notion that "institutions vary in the degree to which the rules are explicitly formulated" (D'Andrade 2000:42). This is why what counts—in this case as the best dancing—achieves more readily accepted concurrence in the more formal ballroom community when compared to the more informal salsa scene.<sup>8</sup>

One interesting fact is that people often continue to participate in institutions long after doing so is clearly advantageous, and participation in such institutions—those perpetuated by force of habit—can quickly unravel and collapse (Searle:92; cited in D'Andrade 2000:43). This situation is well evidenced by the ongoing and fluctuating openings and closings of different salsa clubs as well as the patronage patterns of these clubs by local dancers. Take the example of The Trap Door. Practically everyone who has ever taken a salsa lesson or gone out salsa dancing in San Diego knows of and has been to The Trap Door. Part of its popularity stems both from longevity and exclusivity. When there have been alternative venues available,



however, many of the more accomplished dancers in town have rapidly and eagerly opted for these other locals. Yet The Trap Door has still maintained a thriving business. What it is that this point demonstrates is that many dancers who really do not like The Trap Door (myself included) continued to frequent it out of habit—it is/*was* where one went on “X” night. The other side of this coin is that, since such patronage was merely habit driven, it was prone to both rapid and uncomplicated shifting whenever alternatives were readily available.

Another important step in understanding culture(s) is recognizing the (often multiplexed) relationship between institutions; the interlocking of which are too big/complex to be (fully) known for modern society (D’Andrade 2000:43). This is the reason that things outside of individual minds come—symbolically—to embody meanings (D’Andrade 2000:43). Just because the entire tapestry of institutional interweaving can not be known does not, however, mean that the relationships between particular threads, as it were, cannot be examined. Just as being a salsa club DJ is a role implicated in a variety of action systems, so too are multiple institutions implicated in this same role. There are, to point out but a few, institutions of DJing, of clubbing and partying, of business, of music, of patron-client interaction (both as regards employer and audience), etc., which are all involved in being a salsa DJ. Language—as many anthropologists and others have long noted (e.g. Basso 1972, 1996; Chaika 1994; Holland and Valsiner 1988; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Sapir 1985; Whorf 1935)—is also a crucial element in institutional construction. A large role played by language in this context is that status—what counts as what—is

not intrinsic but, rather, assigned (D'Andrade 2000:43), and language provides the largest repertoire of symbols for such statuses and assignments.

## **The Power of Institutions**

A profound and significant manner in which institutions have power in people's lives is via meaning. Institutions, notes D'Andrade, can be looked at as:

Collective cognitive complexes that define, for a given situation, what people should do and what people shouldn't do. And because people often do what they should do, and don't do what they shouldn't do, institutions have power. If the proper values are internalized, one doesn't feel pushed around by institutions, since one is just doing what one feels one should (2000:44).<sup>9</sup>

What things mean—what they count as, for concrete persons in concrete situations—is not constrained by brute facts. Meanings, in point of fact, both shape and reflect (as well as epitomize) observer dependent reality. D'Andrade illustrates this point with the case of gender, noting that the “*status* of being a woman...is different then the physical fact” (2000:44; original emphasis). It is exactly this notion—that physical facts (and other brute facts) *do not have meaning(s), but are imbued with meaning(s)*—that undergirds both my concept of deep-meaning and much feminist theorizing (e.g. de Beauvoir 1988[1952]; Lorber 1992[1991]; Marion 2000: especially pages 96-116 in regards to gender; Mohanty 1991; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Quinn 1992; Rhode 1997; Yanagisako and Collier 1987).

Let me return to the case of leading and following in partner dancing to provide an example. The status of being a leader or a follower is not based on the “physical fact” of being male or female.<sup>10</sup> Most dance instructors, for instance, know both the leader's and the follower's part of any given pattern and can (and do) teach

both male and female students how to lead and follow respectively. Yet the idea that men are supposed to lead and that women are supposed to follow—that in the context of partner dancing men *count as* the leader and women *count as* the follower—is no less real for all of its ascription. *A man who does not lead or a woman who does not follow is not a good (partner) dancer!* Being a man or a woman does not, intrinsically, mean being a leader or follower but, in the context of social (partner) dancing, that is what each sex counts as—it is what each sex (contextually) *means*. A dancer is evaluated as being good or bad—is granted status—based on this non-innate correspondence. And such meanings function to both color and shape experiences.

The continuation of Eddie Lewis' personal account of her introduction to salsa, as started in Chapter Eleven, is illustrative of these concepts at work on the ground—or the dance floor as the case has it:

I started going to that club every week. Unfortunately, the trio never showed up again. I was hoping they would, and was kicking myself for being too terrified to ask them their names and befriending them. I finally got the courage to dance a song later on that evening, but I couldn't figure out how my feet were supposed to go. I was basically a "Disaster on the dance floor". A "Catastrophe" waiting to happen - I just knew it. I had no confidence, no rythm, no style, no nothing - just a love for the music, and a passion to learn. I didn't know what the difference was between Cumbia, Merengue, Cha, Cha, or Salsa. I thought it was all the same - it all sounded alike to me. I was just thrilled to be in someone's arms, actually coordinating and trying to negotiate steps!

I didn't know the guy was supposed to lead. I thought we traded-off or something. It wasn't until a kind gentelman in his 50's told me to close my eyes, and just "feel" the music through his body and motions. He held me close, and started to slowly guide me through the steps, like my father used to do when I was about 4 years old. I used to stand on top of my father's big feet, pretending to dance with him. He could lead me anywhere!

That night, the older gentleman and I only danced one song, but I'll never forget that kind man. And I will always thank him for being so patient with me, and showing me the basics of "following the man." I hope he reads this some day. If you do, "Thank you."

I was starting to go out 2-3 nights a week. Then this jumped to about 4-5 nights per week. I knew I needed some sort of instruction, but was too shy, and thought I was "basically good enough". I was a real tight-wad at the time and I didn't want to spend the money on lessons. I soon began to notice one thing however. VERY FEW of the guys were asking me to dance anymore. In fact, I had to start ASKING THEM! When I started getting turned down right and left, and started spending the entire evening in my chair, I knew there was a problem. I still didn't get it. I HATED IT WHEN THEY TURNED ME DOWN AND SAID "Uh, maybe next time..." or "Uh, I'm really tired..." or "Well, I don't really like this song..." and then a couple seconds later, I'd see them dancing with someone else! **This really pissed me off.** But I knew I still didn't understand the rhythm, nor the basic step. Guys HATED dancing with me. I'll never forget one guy telling me "Uh, you dance very.....uh....interesting." (thank you JOE - you **know** who you are!)

Edie, The Salsa FREAK (<http://www.salsaweb.com/stories/edie.htm>) [all emphasis from the original]

"I didn't know the guy was supposed to lead" says Edie. Yet leading and following—and the sexed ascription of that distinction—is a fundamental component of partner dancing. Sex based leading and following is, as will hopefully be clear by now, part of something bigger; it is but one element of the larger institution of salsa dancing which is, in turn, part of the larger institution of partner dancing, etcetera.

It is via their institutionalization that ideas such as the (en)gendering of leading and following become so pervasive—and persuasive. As already noted above, institutions have (much) causal power. The fact that institutions are the most complex level of cultural "things" (D'Andrade 2000:45), however, is also of great significance since, as such complex "things," institutions are not easily dismantled—either literally or conceptually. Any given cultural element that is institutionalized (be it value, norm, resource, schema, etc.) is not easily detached and severed from all of the other components comprising that institution.<sup>11</sup> It is not possible, for example, to hear someone say "oh, he's a great salsa dancer but he can't lead." They might recognize

“his” dancing ability, and even comment accordingly, but leading is too tightly ingrained an element of the institution to be able to disconnect it from (institutionally) informed conceptualizations of what counts as good dancing. Some cultural elements are ingrained in particularly powerful ways, and form *cognitive backgrounding*—the “things people learn which they cannot state and are not aware of, but which they need to know to be conscious of things that they are conscious of” (D’Andrade 2000:46).

As Parsons has pointed out, *culture*, *society*, and *personality* are all made up of smaller things and, as D’Andrade goes on to explicate, “these [smaller] elements overlap considerably in that many of the elements are shared between culture, personality, and society/social system” (2000:48). The idea here is that difference(s) in culture, personality, and social systems are *not* content based but, rather, that the differences between culture, society, and personality stem from different systematic formulations of overlapping elements (2000:48-49). D’Andrade depicts this model thus (2000:48):

Personality	←	motives	ideas	values			
Culture	←		ideas	values	norms		
Social system	←		ideas	values	norms	roles	action systems

Yet even this division does not provide a fully discrete set of demarcations. Motives, for instance, obviously come to fruition for individual persons yet such motives do not spontaneously erupt in persons. Cultures clearly do not have motives (nor do social systems) but both clearly provide a repertoire of meanings from which—in addition to idiosyncratic experiences—individual motives are constituted. Similarly, and in

accordance with the axiomatic model of culture presented above, certain arenas of/for meaning are culturally privileged but it remains only within personalities that such meanings come to roost as motives. In a like vein, social systems cannot be said to have motives. Yet the components of a social system (roles, action systems, etc.), provide, just as does culture, many of the constitutive elements as well as contextual referents from which motives gain personal salience.

None of this, of course, is to suggest that there are not individually significant elements of motivation or that motivation is merely an assembly of cultural and social components. Individual experiences, predispositions, idiosyncrasies, happenstance, and temperament (e.g. Akiskal 1993, 1996; Cassano, Akiskal, Perugi, Musetti, et al. 1992) all enter into the picture. The notion, none the less, that it is the arrangement of elements, and not their content, that differentiates between personality, culture, and social systems is an apt one. What counts as good ballroom dancing, for instance, is (relatively) consistent across the domains of personality, culture, and social system. It is how this evaluation articulates with other elements of each category (personality, culture, and social system) that distinguishes them from each other. What counts as good ballroom dancing might, for instance, be aptly understood as a multiplexed and cascading appraisal that provides a motivationally significant achievement role for a person, a standard frame of reference and evaluation within the dancing culture, and an institutionalized set of roles and evaluative standards for the social system all at the same time.

The values of cultures and social systems do not, it should be clear, directly translate or transform into motivational elements of personality. As Spiro has pointed out cultural propositions can be integrated at varying levels of personal salience (1994). D'Andrade takes note of this, and provides the following insight:

For values to function as *felt evaluations*, not just thoughts about what is good, and for norms to function as *felt shoulds*, there must be *internalization*, or the connection of cognitive learnings to the correct emotional and motivational states, and that is why values and norms fail to generalize as easily as pure cognitive templates (2000:49, italicized emphasis in the original, underlined emphasis added).

This melding of cognition and emotion is precisely what I had in mind in formulating my model of deep-meanings, and it is precisely in so far as such notions acquire personal salience that they emerge at the nexus of lived lives (Marion 2000). This is why the same content—whether culturally or socially available—can have very different personal manifestations and why not all such content is equally transferable to personality.

Since content alone cannot be used to describe them, it becomes important to define, or at least operationalize, social systems and culture. It is in looking at social systems that action systems emerge as essential elements of social science. Action systems are basic units, whereas more complex units (i.e. social systems) are conglomerations of multiple action systems (D'Andrade 2000:50). The salsa social system, for instance, is composed of multiple action systems—all functioning in complex feedback relations with each other. Paying a cover charge, asking for a dance, flirting, ordering drinks or food, and dancing each have their own action systems, all of which are entailed in and contribute to the larger salsa social system. Myriad series of action systems are also implicated and coalesce in the roles played by

DJs, bartenders, service staff, security staff, management, etc., all of which are also, when viewed in the larger picture, components of the salsa social system.

Culture, as shifting definitions and long standing debates within anthropology well attest, is more resistant to such straightforward conceptualizations. Part of the problem, of course, is that “culture is not some kind of stuff, but a *collection* of different kinds of things” (D’Andrade 2000:51, original emphasis). Uni Wikan makes a closely related point in noting that:

Meanings do not inhere in “culture,” for culture is not a thing. Nor does “it” have any power; only people can have that power. Cultural templates work by deriving their force or power, as well as their *meaning* from their ability to mobilize human energy (1990:15, emphasis added; also see Paul 1990).

The idea that culture is not a “thing” has several important implications. For one, as a collection culture does not exist either as an entity or as an entirety. The implications of this formulation is important since “a collection lacks the causal properties of integrity” (D’Andrade 2000:51). Complementing the axiomatic view of culture already presented, this helps account for the non-monolithicism of cultural content. A concrete example of this fluctuating variability can be seen in the very term, the music, and the dance practices of salsa.

### **Drawing the Line**

Given the position taken above that culture is not a thing—that it is, in fact, a shifting collection—the question of what makes different cultures and societies different from each other inevitably arises. What is it then that is, in fact, different in different societies? (D’Andrade 2000:53). Clearly there are differences, very real



ones, ones that can be of great significance, and ones that people feel, often quite strongly. D'Andrade makes the important observation that “the sense of being in a totally different universe when one encounters small cultural differences can be very powerful” (2000:53). Different dance scenes seem to well represent this notion. Social and competitive ballroom communities have vast amounts of overlap, yet the few differences provide for profound distinctions. In a like vein, the similarities between salsa and ballroom communities far outnumber and outweigh the differences but the differences that do exist are real and, often, of profound, powerful, and expansive significance.

The similarities between salsa and ballroom communities include musical interpretation (e.g. what music counts as a mambo versus what music counts as a cha cha, etc.), the standardized partnering of a male and female as a dancing couple, as well as rules and principles of lead and follow to name but a few. Yet salsa and ballroom societies—and their associated cultures—are distinctly different. The evening of 3–September–2000 provided me with a particularly telling look into both the similarities and differences between the salsa and competitive ballroom societies. The Embassy Ball (where the UCSD DanceSport summer team had performed earlier that evening) came to a close with several prestigious competitions as well as a showcase of champions—command performances by (most of) the winners of the more prestigious divisions/events from throughout the weekend’s competitions. Following the showcase my friend Stacy and I (Stacy is another member of the UCSD DanceSport team who is also an avid salsa dancer) went to Dance Town where

members of Los Rumberos<sup>12</sup> were celebrating one of their member's birthdays. After watching some of the incredible dancers at Dance Town Stacy commented "...and the people we were just watching [back at the Embassy Ball] thought they were doing Latin dancing?"

Certainly there is a tendency, as D'Andrade notes, to underplay similarities between different societies (2000:56; also see Fujita and Sano). The similarities introduced above—musical interpretation, partnering, and leading/following—do, after all, make the salsa and ballroom dance communities more similar to each other than either one is to almost any non-dance communities. D'Andrade makes the following observations regarding by what, and how, different societies are differentiated from each other:

- Values can be the same but *what* is evaluated can be quite different (2000:57, emphasis in the original).
- In other cases the difference just seems to involve *when* and *where* a value is applied (ibid: emphasis in the original).
- What is different tends to be *norms* and *specific beliefs* about how things work (ibid: emphasis in the original).

Do these assessments account for the perceived differences between different salsa and ballroom dance communities? Let me take D'Andrade's first proposition, that "values can be the same but *what* is evaluated can be quite different" (2000:57, emphasis in the original). Good partnering and musical interpretation, for instance, are values deemed important in both salsa and ballroom dance communities and, to a large degree, what is evaluated for each of these variables is the same. What counts as good partnering in these two communities, however, also includes some differences.

In competitive ballroom dancing routines are pre-choreographed and partnering tends to involve a balanced presentation of both partners. The lead and follow of such routines also involves each partner executing their own part while matching their partner and providing the other partner someone to work off of. Social ballroom and salsa dancing typically involve more improvisation wherein it is the man's job to lead, essentially choreographing on the fly. His lead, ideally, serves to display the woman. A frequently heard analogy in partner dancing circles is that the woman is the picture and that the man is her frame. Leading is thus a clearly held (and important) value in both dance communities but what it is that is evaluated in assessments of leading is not the same. Improvisation and technical execution are, in a similar vein and respectively, key elements to good partnering in salsa and competitive ballroom dancing. To the outsider these differences may seem minimal but, from the inside, they are quite distinct. Following the idea that “what is different tends to be *norms* and *specific beliefs* about how things work (D’Andrade 2000:57, emphasis in the original) we can see that part of what differentiates salsa from ballroom dance communities are the *norms* of improvisation (versus choreographed execution) and the *specific beliefs* of what the man's role (as leader) is within a dancing partnership.

A point with interesting and potentially profound significance is that “most values are abstract and a number of actions can be framed as fulfilling or not fulfilling the value” (D’Andrade 2000:58).<sup>13</sup> This can be seen, for example, in the value placed on being a good dancer. It should come as no surprise that dancing ability is, at least for the vast majority of dancers, an important value—and one of sufficient salience to

provide strong and enduring motivational impetus. At the same time, however, this value is sufficiently abstract to give rise to a variety of instantiating behaviors. Display, for instance, can be one common manifestation of the value placed on dancing prowess. Flashy and showy patterns and tricks are aspired to with compliments from appreciative spectators being viewed as a measure of accomplishment and success. For some, sociability seems to serve as a measure of dancing ability—a line of willing dance partners counts as fulfilling the value placed on dancing ability—while, for others, expert evaluation serves as the litmus test of ability—if an acknowledged expert (say a world recognized judge) approves of one’s dancing then one has ability. In yet other cases the self driven perfectionist primarily relies upon their own evaluations—usually based on somatic perception as well as visual cues from mirrors and videotapes. In yet other cases self-perception of ability comes only (or at least primarily) from the comments of one’s actual dance partners. As all of these cases should make clear, any given value can serve to instigate a wide variety of manifestations.

Taken from a wider vantage point, the values institutionalized within dance communities exhibit a fair amount of systematicity for, as D’Andrade points out, “a society, in institutionalizing values into action systems, specifies when and where to apply the value. Outsiders, however, do not know which value is being applied to what actions” (2000:58). The second part of this formulation helps account for the differences between the etic and emic perspectives involving any given social system. This helps explain how and why the novice dancer and the interested spectator can be

wowed by the same couple that irritates and disgusts more experienced dancers. So what is going on here? What looks like advanced tricks to the beginner is dismissed as mere showing off by more practiced dancers. What looks like a floor clearing performance to the beginner is recognized as a lack of floorcraft and control by the accomplished dancer. The well executed patterns that impress the beginner become the stale patterns, lacking in improvisation and style that bore the more experienced dancer.

The crucial point to all of this is that meanings are never a given (e.g. Marion 2000). D'Andrade, for example, quotes Tomasello in noting that a dog can connote an animal, a pet, or a pest (Tomasello 1999:9; cited in D'Andrade 2000:58). This is, of course, only the beginning of the picture since dog can also be a hunting companion or tool, a beast of burden, or a food source to give only a few examples (e.g. Marion 2000: especially pages 7-10; Sahlins 1990). Such meanings, however, are not spontaneously generated—they do not coalesce by chance alone. Past experiences, one's culturally available "box of tools," and other available models all come to bare as "individuals choose to construe things out of a number of other ways they have construed them..." (Tomasello 1999:9; cited in D'Andrade 2000:58). What dancing means to a given dancer, while never a given, is also not independent of the particular cultural and social surround in which these meanings coalesce. The significance of all of this comes from realizing that the "big differences are not in values or general goals or general beliefs, but in *what counts as what*" (D'Andrade 2000:59). The values, general goals, and general beliefs of a society, community, or culture probably to not

exhibit all that much interpersonal variance, what separates individuals—even within the same community—is what things come to *mean* for individual persons.

## **The Psyche**

Cultures manifest through individuals and individuals function as the organs of social systems. Who, however, are these individuals? While they are biological organisms this is not the level at which they interact with culture and social systems. Humans, unlike other animals, exhibit a complex set of feedback prone mental processes that is usually referenced as the psyche in the social sciences. So, what then, is the psyche? “The *psyche*” suggests D’Andrade, “is made up of *perceptual, cognitive, affective, and motivational* processes and capacities” (2000:60, emphasis in the original). While clearly based in a common evolutionary past (a point long championed by Spiro) the human psyche is far more complex than biology writes. Society and culture are also powerfully shaping forces for individual’s psyches. “The values, cognitive models of the situation, norms, and motivation in each action system,” D’Andrade points out, “are part of the psyche of individuals” (2000:60). The values of dance ability and leading prowess, the concept of what constitutes a dance competition, the sexed ascription of leading and following, as well as the differentiation of different dances (i.e., waltz versus tango), and the drive to succeed in this arena of activity do not, as per D’Andrade’s formulation, exist independently of the persons—and thus psyches—involved in these action systems.

Durable action systems, by dint of their very stability (relatively speaking), provide—via institutionalization—a bounded set of norms. If, for example, one could

do any steps one wanted, to any music, there would not be—and, indeed, could not be—an action system for salsa dancing. One cannot for example—despite any amount of accumulated knowledge, experience, and expertise—dance salsa with someone who has no idea about what salsa is. Certainly a person could teach the novice some rudimentary basics of salsa dancing but *norms* are precisely what it is that would be being transmitted in such a scenario. Without such norms the action system could not be sustained.

The motives involved with action systems are more flexible, however, than are its associated norms (D’Andrade 2000:60). Two dancers, for instance, can readily dance with each other—based on a commonality of associated norms—despite a total lack of match in motivation. A given dancer’s instigations to dance could be for exercise, to fulfill narcissistic display motives, for physical contact or intimacy, as artistic expression, for social interaction, or a plethora of other possibilities.<sup>14</sup> Yet due to the institutionalization of norms for the action system(s) in question different people can successfully dance with each other, and successfully at that, irrespective of fit between their respective motivations.

As in most (if not all) cases where humans are involved, the situation is often quite complex since motives cannot accurately be described as residing solely within individual psyches. “People,” as D’Andrade is well aware, “will [often] show motives and values in specific *situations* that one would never have predicted from the way they act in other settings” (2000:60, emphasis in the original). The same person who goes to the gym almost religiously, for example, may not even consider the exercise

involved with dancing as an impetus to their participation in this action system. Or take the case of the guy who shyly lurks the periphery of other social settings, especially as pertains to attractive women but, in a salsa club may boldly stride up to a striking woman and extend his hand toward her—all the while making solid eye contact—in a silent but confident request for a dance. These scenarios, as they are enacted over and over across the variables of situations and persons, demonstrate that, when looked at in the big picture, “motives and values belong as much to action systems as they do to persons” (D’Andrade 2000:60).

“There is a problem in trying to ground values and motives entirely in the individual,” D’Andrade notes, “because knowing an individual does not always predict motivations and values in *particular* standing patterns of action” (2000:61, emphasis added). Undergirding this variability is the fact that a person’s values and motivations are based on the *meaning of that situation for that person at that time*. “Frankl’s meaning,” which served as the jumping off point for my own conception of deep-meaning, as Tengan takes note, “changes in the *concrete situations* of an individual” (1999:144; emphasis added). It is since the situation is a significant variable (just as are the person and historic confluences involved) that motives and values must be attributed both to individuals and action systems. While the value placed on dancing ability may be far more significant for person “A” than it is for person “B” it does not follow, in any way, that dancing ability is equally significant to person “A” across different life settings. Dancing ability is unlikely, for example, to be as valued by “A” in their work or home environment as it is in their recreational



environment. This is, of course, a generalization since “A” might be a professional dancer, or instructor, or choreographer. Yet it is precisely in so far as dancing permeates more and more facets of “A’s” life that dancing can be said, and seen, to take on deeper and deeper meanings for “A.” Despite any such depth of meaning (or lack of depth as the case may be), “any person will neither be perfectly consistent nor entirely without consistency and...the degree of consistency will vary by trait and by person” (D’Andrade 2000:61). This is why person *and* situation must both be (empirically) assessed.

If a “repository of values and motivations” does not account for the psyche—since values and motivations are equally features of time and place (both physical and conceptual)—what is it that we are speaking of when referencing the psyche? One answer to this is that systems of appraisal—“primary generators of affect and motivation” (D’Andrade 2000:61)—are constitutive of the psyche. The multiplicity of appraisal systems so proposed is in accord with Marvin Minsky’s (1986) formulation that “the mind consists of a variety of *agents* which operate with considerable autonomy” (D’Andrade 2000:62; original emphasis). While perhaps a bit opaque at first glance, this formulation fits plenty of anecdotal data. How often, for instance, are people overheard to say “part of me felt ‘this’ way and part of me felt ‘that’ way”?<sup>15</sup> Charles Nuckolls takes account of this same phenomenon in pointing out that “we can all think of instances in which we have held different beliefs about the same issue, or felt torn between two emotions or choices” (1996:12). What then, specifically, are appraisals and what systems of appraisals is it that compose the psyche?

From the cognitive psychological perspective Lazarus<sup>16</sup> breaks appraisals down into primary appraisals—assessments of personal relevance—and secondary appraisals—assessments of pertinent coping (Lazarus, Averill, and Opton 1970; Lazarus 1991; Smith and Lazarus 1993). In operation this distinction plays out as follows:

A primary appraisal, for instance, might involve rounding the corner of a city block only to be confronted with a snarling dog. The recognition that this is of direct and personal significance is a primary appraisal. The decision of what to do in this situation, whether to freeze, run, or throw the groceries in one's hands at the slobbering canine, are all secondary appraisals—appraisals as to how to best cope with the situation (Marion 2000:56-57).

Lazarus' model of appraisals is centered on what he terms "relational meanings" (Smith and Lazarus 1993:236). Whether someone can (or cannot) dance might, therefore, qualify as a primary appraisal while ideas about what one should do as a result (i.e. ask the person to dance, sit back and watch, etcetera) would qualify as secondary appraisals. As Shore has pointed out in this regard, "there is an important but underappreciated distinction between information processing [primary appraisals] and meaning making [secondary appraisals]" (1996:339).

Lazarus' model is somewhat different from that presented by D'Andrade who suggests that appraisals "are signals of the degree of match or mismatch of perceived events to networks which represent how the world should be" (2000:63).<sup>17</sup> This leads to the commonsensical idea that appraisals of someone's ability to execute a given dance, let us say the waltz, cannot be made in the absence of a cognitive model of how this dance [the waltz] *should* be danced. And shoulds, as has been pointed out, are directive. Shoulds do not hold a monopoly, however, when it comes to directiveness—

affects too are (often) highly directive (D'Andrade 2000:64). Dancers have preferred dances, preferred styles of dancing, preferred partners, etc., that cannot be predicted from cognitive models alone. Deep-meanings are precisely those nexuses of lived lives where cognitions and emotions converge (Marion 2000: especially chapter 3).<sup>18</sup>

Appraisals do not, of course, all occur with equal self awareness and can, in fact, transpire either automatically or consciously. Conscious appraisals, as D'Andrade points out, recruit the central executive (2000:64). It is thus that most learning involves deliberate realignments of cognitive structures, although the deliberateness of such realignments does not always coalesce in an intended manner. Subliminal learning, while not as commonplace, can be far more pervasive as it often involves *emotional conditioning* (D'Andrade 2000:6; based on LeDoux, 1996). One of the reasons that such implicit learning is often so pervasive is that, since one need not know *what* is learned in order to learn, one does not therefore know that some mental realignment has transpired. Such unconscious realignments therefore become background to future assessments, experiences, cognitions, and affects. So what, in particular, distinguishes and differentiates between conscious and unconscious informational processing?

Consciousness, D'Andrade suggests, is most aptly cast as the arena of upper level trouble shooting (2000:66, based on Minsky 1986; also see 68). Most daily operations, therefore, are typically organized and operated outside of awareness. One outcome for this is that it can—and often does—lead to “activated goals and procedures also without awareness” (D'Andrade 2000:67, based on Mandler 1984).

Emphasizing the importance of dynamism (both situational and systemic) D'Andrade points out that “the operation of a system is constrained by the organization of a system” (2000:67). As such, any assessment of pattern variables is never—in and of itself—sufficient to explain the processes involved and entailed in an action system. The organization and interrelations of these pattern variables is also of impact in how action systems are actually implemented in real life situations, and often immensely so. An interesting issue that this situation brings up is that of match between cognitive models and action systems—to what extent and in what ways do action systems follow cognitive models and, in counterpart, to what extent and in what ways do cognitive models parallel action systems. Since action systems and cognitive models (as has already been pointed out) are never entirely independent of other action systems and cognitive models no singular, definitive answers are likely to emerge. None the less, the direction and strength of influence between action systems and cognitive models is of significant interest, reflecting the processes by which mentation and action serve to intercontextualize each other in lived life.

The often transparent feedback between psychological and behavioral systems does not, however, mean that the impacts so engendered are equally transparent. It is quite possible, after all, for a person to be aware of steering without awareness of how that steering is effected and takes place (D'Andrade 2000:67, based on Minsky 1986:56). At the physical level, for instance, one can be aware of executing a basic cha cha lock step, a salsa rock step, or a waltz box step without consciously processing the details of how this particular action was enacted.

Breathing is, naturally, one of the many “inbuilt automatic operations” with which humans are born (D’Andrade 2000:67). But inbuilt operations are only a fraction of the human actions that can, and do, come to function automatically. “Through learning,” D’Andrade points out, “another large number of complex operations come to be automated” (2000:67), and it is precisely this process which dancers are struggling to invoke in their ongoing hours of practice. Indeed, the very purpose of practice is precisely this (in the language of most physical athletes)—to train their muscle memory, to teach their body what to do automatically. The effort to encode muscle memory is, much like the clichéd axiom of practice makes perfect, consciously directed, and this should come as little surprise given that “at most all times the human adaptive system is goal directed” (D’Andrade 2000:68). But, as D’Andrade proceeds to note, “goals are selected by the executive form the contents of consciousness, *or goals can be activated without conscious intent*” (2000:68; emphasis added). The grueling practice of the professional dancer is, at least in large part, engaged in so as to automate such “lesser” goals as, say, foot placement or arm extension.

It is not just nestled goals, however, that can be activated without conscious intent. Unconscious motivation can also be the impetus to larger, more over-arching goals. The very goal of dancing can be influenced by many such unconscious motives. Physical contact and intersexual social interaction might very well serve as unconscious motives to dance—although they could also, potentially, serve as conscious motives. Similarly, attention cravings might very well motivate the

performative nature of dance.<sup>19</sup> Such affects—emotions, feelings, and felt body states—are part and parcel of consciousness, crucial to the appraisal process (D’Andrade 2000:68), and effect the operation of the executive system (ibid:69). It is crucial to recognize the role that affects have in goal formulation—both conscious and unconscious—since “affects have special properties that thoughts do not” (ibid). What I think about a certain dance or dancer is of a different order than the affects that those same dances or dancers engender. Here a more explicit assessment of motives and motive formation will help illuminate the processes by which affect and thought—and their interactions—inform lived lives.

“A motive is formed,” D’Andrade posits, “when the schema [cognition] for a goal becomes connected to the anticipation of a felt appraisal [emotion]” (2000:69), a formulation that closely parallels my own understanding of deep-meanings as conjunctions of cognitions and emotions and, as I argue, such meanings can, in turn, both filter and inform other experiences and actions (Marion 2000). This understanding of deep-meanings parallels the model D’Andrade presents since, as he goes on to point out, “felt appraisals then become potential sources of motives” (70). As the reluctant participant in a first time dance lesson is appreciative of or put out by the physical exertion, as s/he is intimidated or inspired by the more experienced dancer, as s/he is intrigued or self-conscious about the physicality—and myriad other such possibilities—his or her perceptions, interests, expectations, of dance begin to coalesce. These “things” are in no way a given nor (once formed) permanently established, yet such appraisals—especially as informed by affect—emerge as strong

influences in motivating future participation. Having fun or being miserable certainly contribute to the receptivity with which one hears an invitation to a future dance lesson.

Urit, for example, loves to perform and, when still in her early teens, was part of her national swim team. She really *enjoys* the spectacle of partner dancing (be it ballroom or salsa) and this enjoyment provides motive force—both consciously and unconsciously—for her dance related activities. Karl, on the other hand, had never excelled at any physical activity and grew up being often self-conscious of his bodily appearance and relative lack of physical prowess. Why then did he ever show up to a dance class? In Karl's case it was to impress someone he was interested in (a story that closely parallels my own initial foray into the world of dancing). His inability to execute beginning dance steps, while frustrating, was mitigated and overshadowed by more (for him) profound feelings. Yet the very mastery of a physical skill provided an unanticipated fulfillment which, in turn, colored Karl's future interests and involvement with dance. And, as these brief sketches help illustrate, "*once a motive is formed it too becomes a source of appraisals*" (D'Andrade 2000:70; emphasis added). Urit, for whatever reasons, is motivated to perform and, as such, this motivation serves as an input to her appraisal of dance. For her, a ritual dance performed alone would not be assessed the same way as, say, a salsa performance piece. So too can Karl's motive to impress a romantic interest be seen at work in his appraisal of what dances to learn.

Not all motives, appraisals, emotions, and cognitions, however, come into play in the same ways. D'Andrade accounts for this (based on the work of Freud, Bowlby, Fairborn, Kohut, and others) by identifying five major affective/ motivational systems of the psyche: the superego system, the identity system, the attachment system, the cognitive system, and the executive system (2000:71-75). As regards the attachment system D'Andrade postulates that “while people have feelings about many things, there are in-built neural systems which make certain *kinds* of objects naturally arousing, engaging, and the source of characteristic feelings” (2000:71; original emphasis).<sup>20</sup> As D'Andrade goes on to point out, other human beings represent the dominant class of objects to which we people have an inbuilt attunement. While it is something that I have not yet pursued in depth it seems to me that the interpersonal interaction intrinsic to partner dancing is telling in this regard.

In a related vein Pipsa Nieminen found, based on a factor analysis of data collected on four dance subcultures in Finland, that social contact was one of four significant motivational factors (1998).<sup>21</sup> Love, closeness, intimacy, relatedness, etc., all pertain to the attachment system and are, as Karl and Edie's examples well illustrate powerful forces involved with partner dancing. The attachment system, however, can also give rise to more negative manifestations such as hate and jealousy “when interference with attachment goals is experienced” (D'Andrade 2000:71). Jealousy, after all, does not just arise as regards dancing ability—dance partners, social affiliations, and social positioning are all variables around which jealousy can, and often does, coalesce.



The attachment system must, however, be understood in all of its pervasiveness. Two issues need to be taken into account here. First, “this goal is *instinctive* – it is inborn, shaped by evolution, and a human universal” (D’Andrade 2000:72; original emphasis). As such, the attachment system is potentially implicated in a large range of situations and is not something that can be dismissed as a socialized value. As D’Andrade goes on to explicate, “the human attachment system is instinctively organized to adapt cognitively, emotionally, and motivationally to other humans” (2000:78).

What actually counts as meeting attachment needs and what count as acceptable means of meeting these needs are, of course, culturally bounded but the underlying drive is inherent to human life. This is an important point for a number of reasons. For one, it opens a window into examining variation in cross-cultural manifestations of universal human characteristics. As this links up to my particular project partner dancing, and all of its interconnected variables, can be contrasted cross-culturally as regards attachment motives. On another front, inter-individual variation can be explored without having to make too much of an allowance for variation in attachment as a motivating factor. While individual temperament has been shown to be a real and significant variable in human psychology and behavior (e.g. Akiskal 1993, 1996; Cassano et al. 1992) attachment needs can still be viewed as an intrinsic human motivation and variations in cognitive models, experienced affect, and meanings can be assessed as the outcome of specific conjunctions of cultural and idiosyncratic variables. “Among the motivational producing systems of the psyche,”

notes D'Andrade, "the attachment system appears to be the most pervasive and, if not the most peremptory, the most general organizer of the psyche" (2000:72). It is in this light that the intrinsic sociality of partner dancing emerges as particularly telling and salient.

An important distinction regarding the attachment/relatedness system, is that while it is always integrated (to some degree) with the physiological sex system, it is a different/separate system (D'Andrade 2000:72; based on Bowlby 1980:281). Certainly these two systems can merge, as in the case of romantic love (D'Andrade 2000:72), but should not be conflated. This is important as attachment motivation and sexual motivation need not (and often do not) show up either in the same ways or at the same times. Sexual interest is, as numerous examples in my data make clear, certainly motivating for many as regards the reasons to, understandings of, and experiences in dance. Far more examples, however, point to the attachment needs addressed by dancing. Understanding why these needs are met by dancing (as opposed to some other equally social outlet for instance), for this person, is, of course, part of the conceptual excavation of deep-meanings. Additionally, distinguishing between sexual system and attachment system motivation also allows for more discreet arenas of address and analysis—both variables need not be seen in order to signal significance—thus opening up the range of situations and interactions recognized as meritorious of closer inquiry and assessment.

Yet one more reason that the attachment system is of such significance in understanding the psyche and its associated motivational systems is that "the

attachment system is the basic system from which the superego and identity system differentiate” (D’Andrade 2000:75). While attachment systems are, as has already been pointed out, universal features of persons the idiosyncratic configurations of this (attachment) system serves as the point of departure for variances in other appraisal/motivational systems of the psyche. It is only with this background and understanding in mind that it makes sense to turn to some of the other motivational systems.

The next system that D’Andrade looks at is the ego/executive system of which he says, “the top-level goal...is to accomplish goals” (2000:73). Feelings that emerge in relation to this system are those of anxiety, effectiveness, mastery, and accomplishment (D’Andrade 2000:73). Dance expertise emerges as an excellent venue in which to examine this dynamic of the psyche. Where other systems may seem more likely instigators to involvement with dance—such as, say, the attachment system—it is the ego/executive system which is likely to parse out particular goals within dance. As Karl’s case (presented above) demonstrates, romantic interest can serve as the instigating motive to dance. Accounting for this initial impetus, however, is only the jumping off point for understanding Karl’s experiences with and involvement in dancing. While intending to impress his romantic interest other goals are recruited by this objective. In Karl’s case expertise in dancing represents a nestled motivation, which, unanticipatedly, gave rise to independent accomplishment motives.<sup>22</sup> These emergent accomplishment motives are not, of course, independent in the sense of being spontaneously generated but, rather, in the sense that they began to function

autonomously from his romantic motivations and, in turn, began to recruit other “lesser” goals.

The third motivational system presented in D’Andrade’s model is the identity system. “To be conscious,” states D’Andrade, “is to be aware that one’s self is there, observing,” and the observational referent here is personal identity (2000:73)—it is the “I” that identifies as a dancer, a graduate student, and a teaching assistant. The affects associated with this motivational system are the likes of pride, mastery, control, embarrassment, and shame. This can be the hurdle, for instance, over which the dancer’s identity becomes differentiated from those who “merely” dance. In this case to be “a dancer” is an identification—it is both a self-assertion and a self-recognition of a realm of confidence and belonging. It is, put in other terms, an ascendance of self (and other) valued qualities and competencies. The characteristic goals of this system, relates D’Andrade, are “affirmation and enhancement of the self, as well as goals of obtaining responses of acceptance and admiration from others” (ibid)—a point with several important implications.

For one, the identity system is situated as “the part of the psyche that gives us a *need* to have a good self” (D’Andrade 2000:73, emphasis in the original). The self, after all, cannot be affirmed or enhanced if it is, via self-reflexive critique, failing. But failing at what? Here is where different models of self (cultural and otherwise) enter the picture as do personal and cultural values as well as evaluatory mechanisms and standards. What counts as good and what counts as a good self may vary—both

interpersonally and interculturally—but the *need* for such goodness inheres in the identity system.

Another implication is that there is probably a strong interaction effect between the identity system and the attachment system. To the extent that the identity system engages goals of instigating responses and acceptance from others it seems probable that the attachment system will, concomitantly, become recruited in motivation formation. Take Sally, a new member of the UCSD Dancesport Team. While new to ballroom dancing she has years of ballet, jazz, and tap training. Her self-identification as a dancer clearly contributes motivational equity to her involvement on the team—spurred by drives for senses of pride, mastery, and control of the craft. At the same time, however, these self-affirming goals also tend to involve, as has been pointed out above, other-self affirmations and not just self-self affirmations. Here, other team members' affirmations of Sally's self are (situationally) salient factors for her identification system. Yet, as salient human factors, these same team members also serve to instigate attachment system related impetuses to motivation. Other team members' affirmations matter to Sally's dance related identity system but her teammates also enter into the picture as regards closeness, intimacy, relatedness, support, and responsiveness; all instrumental components of the attachment system.

In further explicating “the *cognitive core*” of the identity system D'Andrade presents it as “a linked network of self-representations and ideal self representations with varying degrees of fit and conflict among them” (2000:74). Sally, having grown up with years of dance training, has a strong self-representation as a dancer. Ballroom

dancing, however, is a different type of dancing from the forms in which she has experience and Sally finds it very frustrating that ballroom dancing “does not just come naturally” as she had expected it would (based on her previous experiences with other dance forms). Sally’s frustration is such that, even though she made a spot on the “varsity” at her first try out, she is thinking of not returning to the team next year. Here then we see the lack of fit and the conflict between Sally’s self-representations and ideal self-representations—her ability as a ballroom dancer, while impressive, does not match her model self-perception of being able to dance it “naturally.”

Another element of the identity system is that “self-representations are typically gendered” (D’Andrade 2000:74). Identifying as ballroom or salsa dancer is, after all, an incomplete identification—there is no such thing as “just” a ballroom dancer or salsa dancer. As numerous linguistic scholars have long pointed out (e.g. Chaika 1994, Lakoff 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 1980), language is often reflective of conceptualization. This is important because it helps highlight that referring to a given salsa dancer as a *salsero* or a *salsera* is *not* just a linguistic designation; that it also invokes conceptual capital as well. A *salsero* is conceptualized, evaluated, and valued differently than is a *salsera* and according to different models. Clearly there cannot be a complete (or even major) bifurcation between such models—both are, after all, (and to return to a terminology from earlier in this work) members of the same (in this case salsa) collective. At the same time, however, a member of the salsa collective is a *salsero* or a *salsera*...and not just a salsa dancer. A gendered self-representation then is

involved in the self-representations—and ideal self-representations—that one holds of ones' self as a salsa dancer.

Ballroom dancing also exemplifies the “gendering” of such self-representations. My identification as a ballroom dancer is conceptually intertwined with the action systems, cognitions, and affects involved in being a *male* ballroom dancer. Similarly, the discrepancies between Sally's self-representations and ideal self-representations as a dancer (both ballroom and otherwise) cannot be discretely conceptualized separately from the gender models that inhere in the action systems implicated in (and by) ballroom dance. The “characteristic discriminations” of the identity system, and its cognitive core in particular, as D'Andrade points out, “involve judgments concerning what is acceptable, respected, prestigious, honored, etc., along with judgments about social rank” (2000:74) and, as I have been pointing out, what is accepted, respected, prestigious, honored, etc., in ballroom and salsa dancing does entail gender discriminating differentiation.

The penultimate appraisal/motivational system presented by D'Andrade is the autonomous cognitive system. As described by D'Andrade this system primarily functions as a resource of the executive system, but also has some motivational autonomy (2000:74); and “the voice of reason,” as he relates, “can come to us without being called” (2000:74). What is “reasonable” in a given situation is not just a variable that is or can be toggled by conscious attention but also represents a more intrinsic element of human appraisals.<sup>23</sup> The last of the major appraisal/motivational systems of the psyche dealt with by D'Andrade is the superego system, “a system of moral

prohibitions and prescriptions” (2000:75). This system, probably more so than any of the others, exhibits cross-cultural variability—in content if not in performance—as different models of morality are available for internalization.

While all of the appraisal/motivational systems function as coherent, integral mechanisms—and hence operate with some degree of independence—they are not entirely autonomous of one another. A number of significant implications follow from this consideration. “The attachment system,” for instance posits D’Andrade, “is the basic system from which the superego and identity system differentiate” (2000:75). Changes in the attachment system—both in orientation and fulfillment (or lack thereof)—are thus likely to cascade down to the superego and identity systems as well. This makes sense as the development of superego and identity systems represent continuous (life long) processes (D’Andrade 2000:75).

Self-representations of being a dancer, for example, inform both Karl and Edie’s self-identifications...despite the fact that neither was a dancer for the majority of their (adult) lives. “The autonomous cognitive system,” in contrast, “is a late maturational development and always fragile” (D’Andrade 2000:75), while some humans may not even develop a superego (D’Andrade 2000:75). The pertinence for all of this in looking at human communities, and their constituting agents, (in this case ballroom and salsa dance communities and dancers) is that the appraisals and motivations at work—as well as the systems by which such appraisals and motivations are informed and enacted—cannot, in any way, be taken as a given. Instead, the five systems identified by D’Andrade all represent potentially compelling variables in



understanding persons' thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The significance of any system, however, are always—at least to some extent—personally and situationally variable, and thus mandate empirical data and analysis if the undergirding structures of both conceptual and action systems are to be accurately understood.

Another important consideration that needs to be taken into account is that the total system of the human psyche is something greater—both quantitatively and qualitatively—than the five systems noted above. Quantitatively, there are certainly far more than five constituent systems to the human psyche, a point of which D'Andrade is well aware (e.g. 2000:75). Qualitatively, the total system must be understood as a synergistic phenomenon, a totality whose nature and function cannot be understood solely by the functioning of its constituent elements. It is the total system, taken as a gestalt, which, according to D'Andrade, gives rise to most general emotions such as fear, rage, and joy (2000:76). Such appraisals are felt for the total system, for *oneself*, as a person (D'Andrade 2000:76). It is Urit, or Sally, or Karl, or Edie—as a person—who derives and feels joy from dancing; not just a particular system of their respective psyche's since, as D'Andrade explicitly states, the core appraisals of the total system pertain to “preservation and fulfillment of oneself as a *person*” (ibid, emphasis in the original).

As a synergistic functioning of all of its nestled comprising systems, impacts on any of the (sub-)systems may impact the total system (D'Andrade 2000:76). D'Andrade provides that losing someone important as an example of a problem for the attachment/relatedness system that is also quite likely to have a (potentially) profound

impact on the total system (D'Andrade 2000:76). Depression, as D'Andrade contends, is as a total system response and this is precisely the reaction that is likely to ensue given the loss scenario suggested above (2000:76). Indeed, such dynamics have been much in evidence as of late in the San Diego salsa community, primarily stemming from the tragic death of a long time member and pillar of the local salsa scene. The impacts of the death in question—while clearly centered on felt frustrations to the attachment/relatedness system—were felt by persons, by their total systems, and had ramifications in individuals' and the community's life broader than attachment/relatedness concerns alone.<sup>24</sup>

One important caveat that must be taken into consideration here is that the total system is *not* synonymous with the identity system (D'Andrade 2000:76). A self's reactions (manifestations of the total system) and one's self-reflexive appraisals (manifestations of the identity system)—although likely to involve varying elements and vectors of feedback—are different (and, at least conceptually, separable) phenomena. Again, the recent death in the San Diego salsa community provides myriad examples of the differentiation of these systems and their respective instantiations. In the immediate aftermath of the accident, during funeral arrangements, on the communities on-line bulletin board (and its constituent mailing lists), as well as at the memorial and burial, numerous people—as a function of their total system—alternatively lashed out at and comforted others within the community who—as a function of their identity system—were not logical recipients of such actions and reactions.

A final point about the total system is that it has both a dark and a light side (D'Andrade 2000:76). The same systems, be it any of the sub-systems or the total system, has the potential for manifestation in either direction. Just as self preservation is the positive side of the same dynamics that can give rise to greed, envy, avarice, and selfishness, the same cajoling that can talk the reluctant dance student out of absurd sums of money can also be utilized to encourage another student to step past their self-consciousness and lack of confidence on the dance floor.<sup>25</sup>

As abundant psychoanalytic data indicates internal objects, as a natural consequence of the primacy and centrality of the attachment system in persons' psyches, "have strong causal powers" (D'Andrade 2000:77). Understanding what internal objects are involved as well as the manner of their engagement lies close to the heart of any inquiry or assessment with which deep-meanings are concerned. What objects are being recruited in a given situation and its constituting appraisal processes? Are the objects so recruited being activated in their entirety or have they been split—and if so, how, why, and with what ramifications? What feelings, thoughts, and meanings have these internal objects themselves produced? What new internal objects are being formed and how do these objects articulate with those already existing within a given psyche? Where, how, and to what extent do they fit (or not, as the case may be) into the landscape of the individual psyche?

Part of the complexity involved in the acquisition and operation of internal objects stems from the fact that "cultural cognitions can be internalized to a greater or lesser degree" (D'Andrade 2000:78; following Spiro 1994). This differential

salientiation (Marion 2000) is a multiplexed phenomenon since it is not only internalization that is variable but also the psychic bed in which any given cultural cognition goes to seed. “Parts of any cultural idea complex,” as D’Andrade points out, “can be internalized differently in each of the [personality] systems” (2000:78). The gender roles involved in partner dancing, for instance, are neither accepted or rejected—be it consciously or unconsciously—in their entirety, nor are they evenly distributed across the attachment, ego, identity, autonomous cognitive, and superego (as well as other, lesser) systems. Gender roles are neither equally applicable to all of these systems nor is the manner in which they are applicable identical across the systems either.

Further complicating the picture is that “the same person can [and often does!] have different parts of the same cultural idea complex internalized into a number of different levels of internalization” (D’Andrade 2000:79). And, I would like to suggest, this web of differentially internalized salience is precisely what my concept of deep-meanings addresses. As I have repeatedly stressed *deep-meanings are meanings as they come into play in lives as lived by individual persons*. It is exactly this phenomena that D’Andrade takes into account in noting that, “*experienced meanings are found inside people’s psyche’s, generated by different systems*” (2000:79; original emphasis). Ideas about ballroom and salsa dancing neither exist nor function as total, uniform, or monolithic conceptual systems. Dance and ideas about dance are permeate different lives to different extents and, more importantly, are differentially integrated with individual psyches. Research questions in need of empirical research thus involve

issues of what dynamics and ideas about dance are linked to which systems, for who, and why?

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### **Endnotes: Chapter Thirteen**

<sup>1</sup> I want to make it explicit from the outset that the theoretical model from which I am working, while largely based on the general theory provided by Roy D'Andrade (2000) is also an attempt to integrate some of my own theories (Marion 2000).

<sup>2</sup> The content and the communicative dynamics involved are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this project. Such issues, however, lay close to the core of my future research into deep meanings within salsa and ballroom dance communities.

<sup>3</sup> What each resource counts as, why, in what circumstances, and for whom, are all questions that require specific (most likely person centered) ethnographic inquiry.

<sup>4</sup> I do not, of course, mean to insinuate that race is, in any way real at the level of brute fact but it is certainly—as all too much social research has long shown—a widely recognized, distributed, and significant social fact.

<sup>5</sup> The level of moral goodness would, in this case, represent a core or deep meaning which informs all lower levels of meaning (J. Marion, 2000). Also see Parish 1993 for a fully worked up ethnography of the role that such moral values play socially, culturally, and psychologically—both directly and as they cascade down through other values.

<sup>6</sup> I must thank Gordon Lloyd (personal communication), now of the New School for Social Research, for bringing this idea to my attention early in my collegiate career.

<sup>7</sup> This is the same issue that Spiro is addressing in differentiating the levels at which persons internalize various cultural propositions (1994[1987]) and that I am grappling with in exploring the different idiosyncratic meanings that common cultural elements have for different persons.

<sup>8</sup> An important and intriguing point, given the variance in institutionalization of rules—albeit one which I cannot explore here—is that an oscillation between social versus institutional fact is possible (D'Andrade 2000:42-43).

<sup>9</sup> This is, of course, the demarcative distinction between hegemony and force.

<sup>10</sup> For various takes on the fallacy of entirely discreet and binary male/female classifications see Devor 1998; Fausto-Sterling 1998[1993]; Hubbard 1998; Kaschak 1992; Lorber and Farrell 1991; Macdonald 1993; and Vines 1993.

<sup>11</sup> The dis-integration of any element from an institution actually faces a larger problem since the interactive and feedback systems within the institution must also be overcome. Institutions, as the most complex level of cultural things are epitomotic examples of synergistic social phenomenon—the parts alone do not account for the totality of the institution.

<sup>12</sup> One of the premier salsa performance groups based in Los Angeles and regulars on the Bacardi Salsa congress circuit.

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<sup>13</sup> It is this same notion that undergirds my proposition that the same deep-meaning(s) can give rise to highly divergent social forms (Marion 2000).

<sup>14</sup> It is also important to realize that such motives are unlikely to function in a vacuum and that, in fact, a complex intertwining of numerous motives can be at work in any one circumstance.

<sup>15</sup> The salience of such conflicting can, at times, be quite profound—and it can also be somewhat disconcerting in a society which, on the whole, conceives of the self as a (relatively) consistent and unified system.

<sup>16</sup> Cornelius (1996:125) points out that Arnold made a similar distinction (Arnold 1960:180-181).

<sup>17</sup> This understanding seems relatively analogous to Lazarus' secondary appraisals, the affective sensations which, in turn, emerge as and are perceived as felt appraisals (D'Andrade 2000:64).

<sup>18</sup> Several tracks of recent evidence seem to provide a biological substrate for the construction of deep-meanings. Antonio Damasio, for instance, has pointed out that—contrary to earlier models—emotions play an integral role in decision making process (e.g. 1994, 1999). In a similar vein “recent evidence also suggests the cerebellum also *integrates and synthesizes cognitive and emotional circuits*” (D'Andrade 2000:63, emphasis added, based on Schmahmann 1997).

<sup>19</sup> What dancing means to given persons—both consciously and unconsciously—and how such meanings arise out of particular nexuses of idiosyncratic and cultural factors is one of the large scale questions that I have begun to look at and will continue to explore in my research.

<sup>20</sup> This formulation closely parallels Spiro's argument for certain fundamental human universals based on common biological “wiring.”

<sup>21</sup> The four “subcultures” (so categorized by the author) looked at in this study were those of folk dance, competitive ballroom dance, ballet, and modern dance. The other three motivational factors revealed by Nieminen's study were self-expression, fitness, and achievement/performance.

<sup>22</sup> See Karl Popper (1966) regarding the importance of unanticipated consequences to intentional actions for social science.

<sup>23</sup> This understanding follows well in line with D'Andrade's postulation that “the pressure to be rational seems distinctively human” (2000:74). Also significant in this formulation is the notion of pressure—force exerted on appraisal and motivation which arises, autonomously from other motivational systems, within the human psyche.

<sup>24</sup> Given the primacy (and intrinsic nature) of the attachment/relatedness system it seems likely that any impact on this system may trigger both pervasive and far reaching ramifications for the total system.

<sup>25</sup> It strikes me that the Jungian concepts of the shadow self—and the energy, which can be tapped into via this psychic structure—represents a complimentary model and one which might help provide further insight into the functioning, both elementary and combinatorially, of the psyche.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Worth studying based on its almost universal cultural manifestation, this dissertation has used dance as a particularly concentrated microcosm of myriad social, cultural, and psychological dynamics—issues with significance far wider than dance itself. Starting from my own experiences and perspectives, this dissertation has explored how salsa and competitive ballroom dance mobilize cultural meanings within modern society, and how these meanings articulate with and inform both personal and collective identities. Based in the wider social field of leisure, ballroom and salsa are chosen activities through which dancers find meaning, identity, and community. As a voluntary participation ballroom and salsa are not socioculturally compelled activities, but practices that have personal significance both expressive and generative of personal and collective meanings and identities. While focused on competitive ballroom and salsa, this project offers insights into how people in contemporary industrial societies attempt to integrate meaning, identity, and community by way of a leisure activity that is voluntary, participatory, and ritualized.

Taken as a whole, the materials I have presented on ballroom and salsa help show how public and personal meanings intercontextualize each other, and how these dances mobilize meaningful personal and cultural symbols and associations that, in turn, articulate with and inform both personal and social identities. This research is thus significant for three main reasons. First, it focusses on dance as a performative activity that generates meaning but, unlike religious ritual and similar practices, typically does so unintentionally; operating as an “unintended” meaning system.

Second, dance provides an example of the manner and process by which chosen systems of commitment and participation can be constitutive of both identity and community within the circumstances of modern, industrial society. Third, contemporary partner dancing is examined as a means of re-embodiment that allows people to experience their bodies and gives meaningfulness to those bodies in a manner unavailable in, and to, much of modern life.

Far from being dance specific, then, the data and findings of this project contribute to a number of fields. Perhaps most obviously, this dissertation contributes to theories of performance as well as the role of performance in constructing meaning and identity. More specifically, these materials address forms of chosen identity and community in contemporary industrial society, providing insight into the manner in which the body and the self are mutually constitutive of one another (and thus contributing to a theory of the body that explores the overdetermined meanings of the body).

Section I provided the reader with an introduction to the background, issues, and settings for my research, while Section II on “Community” focused on the people involved and the social structures of competitive ballroom and salsa. Based on the social structures and dynamics laid out in Section II, Section III was focused on “Culture,” looking at the values and norms associated with dancing and the dance community. In Section IV I looked at the dancers who live the social and cultural lives described in Sections II and III and, finally, in Section V I concluded by reintegrating the dynamics of self, culture, and community; artificial groupings that served as useful



conceptual distinctions to provide both landmarks and means of understanding the “hows” and “whys” of human actions, beliefs, and behaviors. In reuniting self, culture, and community, then, Section V presents a synthetic assessment that highlights how issues of self, culture, and community are mutually constitutive and intercontextualizing elements of being human.

As a whole, the order of materials I presented in this dissertation started at their widest—at the level of community parameters and membership—and continued to narrow through the following sections and chapters. This structure served two complimentary and interrelated purposes. First, each chapter provided contextualizing background for the chapters that follow as successive chapters narrowed in focus, looking at ever more personal facets of dancers’ lived lives. Second, this structure paralleled the perspectives and transitions faced by an outsider as they become a dancer, starting with a seemingly overwhelming array of styles, dances, names, and organization that gradually get reinterpreted as known quantities, personally held values, and even as self-understandings.

Taken in conjunction with the persons who fill and create them, the structures and values of the dance communities explored are neither easily read nor predictable. There is an ever-undulating mixture of persons, experiences, events, structures (both social and physical), and locations that constitute the communities in question. As such, to isolate, reify, or privilege any one of these variables—without first establishing empirical grounds for such a maneuver—serves to distort rather than clarify social actions and interactions. This is precisely the reason why a general

model is both appropriate and necessary to social scientific inquiry, and why the last chapter of this dissertation suggested a general theory of dance as self, culture, *and* community.

Overall, then, this dissertation used competitive ballroom and salsa dancing as case studies to look at people's lives as they are actually lived—on the ground, by persons, and entailing myriad complex and overlapping personal, social, and cultural dynamics and processes—looking at the depth and meaning with which lives are both replete and constructed on an ongoing basis. While not subject to a specific “conclusion” as such, this dissertation illuminates many of the ways in which chosen activities and participations inform personal and collective meanings and identities, More importantly, I have explored how chosen participations concomitantly involve self, culture, and community.

Beyond these general contributions, however, this dissertation has foregrounded the utility and productivity of focusing on dance *as dance*. While never separate or explicable save in relation to its sociocultural context, neither can dance be reduced to nothing more than its sociocultural context. Whether as part of a ritual or as a ritualized activity in its own right, dance is more than what it partakes of; it is a specific means of being in the world and, given its cross-cultural scope, deserves careful anthropological attention.

# APPENDIX 1:

## Glossary of Key Terms, Roles, and Concepts

<b>ABC</b>	Acronym for American Ballroom Company, Inc., the <b>ABC</b> is a privately owned corporation sanctioned by the NDCA to run and award the United States national titles. Organize the United States DanceSport Championships (USDSC).
<b>Amateur</b>	Historically a designation for dancers receiving no compensation (monetary or some equivalent) in exchange for their dancing skills. Now known as a “DanceSport Athlete” by <i>USA Dance</i> .
<b>American style</b>	The umbrella term for the <i>Smooth</i> and <i>Rhythm</i> divisions. Slowly gaining exposure outside the U.S.
<b>AMI</b>	Acronym for Arthur Murray International. The largest dance franchise organization in the world, one of the two primary dance franchise organizations in the U.S., and a Full Member Organization of the National Dance Council of America ( <i>NDCA</i> ) with six votes.
<b>ÅS</b>	Acronym for Århus Sportsdanserforening and located at the Olympic training facilities in Århus, Denmark, <b>ÅS</b> is Denmark’s premier dancesport club and widely recognized as the most successful dancesport club in the world based on the number of World and Blackpool finalists and champions it has produced.
<b>Ballroom</b>	Derived from the Latin word "balare," meaning "to dance," and originally a social grace of the upper classes in Europe where it was formalized, <b>Ballroom</b> is now an umbrella term for the style of partner dancing that is danced both competitively (under the name dancesport) and socially. Sometimes used as an umbrella term including both the traditional <i>International Style Ballroom</i> dances, also known as <i>Standard</i> and <i>Modern</i> ,

(Waltz, Tango, Viennese Waltz, Foxtrot, and Quickstep), and the *Latin* dances (Cha Cha, Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, and Jive), and the *American Style* dances in the *Smooth* (Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, and Viennese Waltz) and *Rhythm* (Cha Cha, Rumba, Swing, Bolero, and Mambo) categories. Sometimes also used in reference to nightclub dances taught at ballroom studios such as Nightclub Two Step, West Coast Swing, Hustle, Merengue, and Salsa.

- Ballroom Competition** An organized event including dancers, officials, and spectators.
- Blackpool** The location of the **Blackpool** Dance Festival/British Open Championship in **Blackpool**, England, “**Blackpool**” serves as the nickname for the *British Open* Championships, the most prestigious (and longest continuously running) ballroom competition in the world.
- Break** Step on which the body weight changes direction, i.e. from moving forward to moving backward.
- Bremen Agreement** The agreement signed in Bremen, Germany on October 3, 1965 between the International Council of Amateur Dancers (ICAD, then under the leadership of Detlef Hegemann) and the International Council of Ballroom Dancing (ICBD, then under the leadership of Alex Moore) that established a Joint Committee with balanced amateur and professional representation (three members of each organization at the time of the signing, later expanded to four members from each) in order to facilitate differences between amateur and professional interests.
- British Open** Most prestigious and longest continuously running ballroom competition in the world. Typically referenced as “*Blackpool*,” for its setting in Blackpool, England.
- BYU** Acronym for Brigham Young University, home of the Brigham Young University Dance Company, an Affiliate Member of the National Dance Council of America with one vote.

<b>Cabaret</b>	A professional version of a <i>solo</i> routine, each couple dances a routine choreographed to their own music and is marked on a point system. Unlike <i>Showdance</i> events, however, there are no restrictions on lifts.
<b>Casino</b>	Refers to the Cuban style of salsa.
<b>CDDSC</b>	Acronym for the Canadian Dance and Dance Sport Council, the official governing body for professional ballroom dancing in Canada and Canada's member organization of the World Dance and Dance Sport Council. Previously known as the Canadian Dance Teachers Association ( <i>CDTA</i> ).
<b>CDTA</b>	Acronym for the Canadian Dance Teachers Association, now known as the Canadian Dance and Dance Sport Council ( <i>CDDSC</i> ).
<b>Chairman of Judges</b>	Judge in charge of overseeing the other officials and the overall conduct of a ballroom competition. Must also be qualified as a scrutineer.
<b>Champ</b>	Shortened form for the amateur <i>Championship</i> division or for Champion.
<b>Championship</b>	Name for open (i.e. non-syllabus) full multi-dance events (i.e. all 5 <i>Rhythm</i> dances, all four <i>Smooth</i> dances, etc.); also a term used for larger competitions with more couples/entries and requiring more judges.
<b>Cheam</b>	The location of the Dance Options dancesport studio in <b>Cheam</b> , England, " <b>Cheam</b> " serves as the nickname for the studio; widely recognized as one of the four elite studios in South London, along with <i>Semley</i> , <i>Starlight</i> , and <i>Stopford's</i> .

<b>Chrisanne</b>	Largest and most widely known ballroom dress company in the world; based in South London, England.
<b>Clave</b>	The term refers both to the basic structural rhythm for Afro-Cuban music as well as the two short wooden rods that are struck together, as a simple percussive instrument, in order to create this rhythm.
<b>Closed Dance Position</b>	Full ballroom frame with body contact between partners, the leader's right hand holding the follower's left shoulder blade and the follower's right hand held in the leader's left hand.
<b>Closed Event</b>	1) An event restricted to syllabus material (also see <i>Closed Routine</i> ), or 2) an event with participant restrictions (usually by nationality or within franchise), e.g. the Closed British Championships may only be contested by British couples.
<b>Closed Frame</b>	See <i>closed dance position</i> .
<b>Closed Routine</b>	An event restricted to syllabus material as per definition 1 of "closed event," e.g. "Closed Silver" meaning only bronze and silver syllabus materials may be danced.
<b>Closed Syllabus Event</b>	An event restricted to syllabus material (also see <i>Closed Event</i> and <i>Closed Routine</i> ).
<b>Coach</b>	Typically used to designate a very accomplished instructor who teaches a partnership (whether <i>amateur</i> , <i>pro-am</i> , or <i>professional</i> )
<b>Competition Organizer</b>	The person responsible for organizing a given ballroom competition. Often, but not always, the competition owner as well.
<b>Competition Owner</b>	The person holding financial stake of a ballroom competition.
<b>Continental (Style)</b>	Old term used in the USA for <i>International Style</i> ballroom dancing.

<b>Core-meanings</b>	The particular deep-meanings which, for a given person, are the most fundamental, which lie at and constitute the core of their evaluative being.
<b><i>Dance Beat</i></b>	A monthly, U.S.-based ballroom newspaper, <b><i>Dance Beat</i></b> is the pre-eminent ballroom publication in the United States. Gave rise to <i>Dance Beat International</i> and, later, other printed versions such as <i>Dance Beat Italia</i> .
<b>Dance Beat International</b>	The online, internationally focused pay for access spin-off of <i>Dance Beat</i> (at <a href="http://www.dancebeatinternational.com">www.dancebeatinternational.com</a> ).
<b>Dance Forums</b>	Largest online English language bulletin board for partner dancing in the world, with dance specific forums dedicated to “ballroom,” “salsa,” “swing,” “Argentine tango,” “country western,” and “general,” at <a href="http://www.dance-forums.com">www.dance-forums.com</a> , and with a much smaller sister site for non-partnered dance forms at <a href="http://www.danceforums.net">www.danceforums.net</a> . Co-administrators for both sites are David Duval and Jonathan Marion.
<b>Dance Naturals</b>	Italian ballroom shoe company, represented in the US by Dance Naturals America.
<b><i>Dance News</i></b>	A weekly, England-based ballroom newspaper, <b><i>Dance News</i></b> is the pre-eminent international ballroom publication.
<b><i>Dance Notes</i></b>	A bi-monthly, US-based ballroom newsletter featuring interviews with dancers, officials, and vendors.
<b>DanceSport</b>	Officially recognized as a sport by the <i>IOC</i> since 1997, <b>dancesport</b> designates competitive (vs. social) ballroom dancing.
<b>Dancing with the Stars</b>	Widely popular ABC adaptation in the US (as well as Australia and New Zealand, etc.), of England’s hit series <i>Strictly Come Dancing</i> .
<b>DBI</b>	Acronym for <i>Dance Beat International</i> .
<b>Deep-meanings</b>	Conjunctions of cognition and emotion which, functioning as a gestalt, both represent and serve as loci

for the pertinence, purpose, salience, and substantiveness by which life is experienced.

<b>Deck Captain</b>	Person(s) responsible for lining up competitors in order to take the floor. Also known as the <i>On-deck Captain</i> .
<b>Designs to Shine</b>	Popular US ballroom dress company; responsible for the women's costuming for the first season of <i>DWTS</i> in the US.
<b>DF</b>	Acronym for the <i>Dance Forums</i> website at <a href="http://www.dance-forums.com">www.dance-forums.com</a> .
<b>Doré Designs</b>	Founded in 1970 and based in Florida, <b>Doré Designs, Inc.</b> is one of the largest and currently the most widely traveled dance dress company in the US, now carrying dresses for several US and international vendors.
<b>Doré Photography</b>	One of the major ballroom photography companies in the US; contracted photographer for <i>AMI</i> and the <i>USDSC</i> ; owned and operated by Gay Erlanger Davis, based in Florida.
<b>DWTS</b>	Acronym for <i>Dancing with the Stars</i> .
<b>ECS</b>	Acronym for East Coast Swing, the ballroom derivation of Jitterbug, and one of the dances contested in the American Rhythm division.
<b>ET2</b>	Acronym for "Eddie Torres 2." Developed in New York by Eddie Torres, <b>ET2</b> is a style of <i>mambo/salsa</i> that takes steps on the 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , and 7 <sup>th</sup> beats (of an eight beat measure) that <i>breaks</i> on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> beats. Also known as "New York 2" or <i>NY2</i> .
<b>Event</b>	Term used for multiple purposes including 1) a specific competition entry, such as "Silver (Syllabus) Waltz," "Amateur Pre-Champ," or "Professional Rising-Star Rhythm," or 2) a specific competition such as <i>Blackpool</i> , the <i>GOC</i> , or the <i>USDSC</i> .
<b>FADS</b>	Acronym for the Fred Astaire Dance Studios of North America. One of the two primary dance franchise organizations in the U.S. and a Full Member



Organization of the National Dance Council of America (*NDCA*) with six votes.

<b>FIDA</b>	Acronym for the Federation Internationale de Dance pour Amateurs (International Amateur Dancers Federation), the first international amateur ballroom dancers association, lasting from 1935-1964, and the earliest precursor to today's International DanceSport Federation ( <i>IDSF</i> ).
<b>Floats</b>	Cloth attachments on the back and arms of <i>Standard</i> dresses intended to embellish the sense of movement.
<b>Floorcraft</b>	Refers to the skill of avoiding other dancers and obstacles while maneuvering around the dance floor.
<b>Formation Team</b>	A group of up to eight ballroom couples dancing to their own music while transitioning their overall formations on the floor between various geometric shapes and patterns (think ballroom meets synchronized swimming, albeit without water).
<b>Frame</b>	Refers to the dance hold, including body and arm tone, utilized to facilitate partnered movement.
<b>GOC</b>	Acronym for the German Open Championships (also known as the German Open) the largest dancesport competition in the western world as far as the number of total dancers involved.
<b>Grand Slam</b>	An elite series competitions initiated by the <i>IDSF</i> in 2003, the <b>Grand Slam</b> series attract the very top <i>IDSF</i> competitors via the most lucrative prize purses and expense reimbursements.
<b>Heel Lead</b>	Weight distribution pattern whereby the heel of the foot (vs. the toe and ball of a <i>toe lead</i> ) make first contact with the floor when taking a step; the convention for all <i>Standard</i> and <i>Smooth</i> dances.
<b>Heat</b>	1) A specific event, such as "Silver (Syllabus) Waltz," "Amateur Pre-Champ," or "Professional Rising-Star Rhythm," or 2) a grouping of competitors dancing

together within an event when there are too many couples to be dancing on the floor all at the same time.

**ICAD** Acronym for the International Council of Amateur Dancers, the second instantiation of an international amateur ballroom dancers association, founded on May 12, 1957, and a forerunner to today's International DanceSport Federation (*IDSF*).

**ICBD** Acronym for the International Council of Ballroom Dancing, the first international professionals dance organization, founded on September 21, 1950, in Edinburgh, Scotland, and the forerunner of today's World Dance and Dance Sport Council (*WD&DSC*).

**IDO** Acronym for the International Dance Organization, the IDO currently represents over 50 member countries and provides both amateur and professional competition in various dance forms not under the purview of the World Dance and Dance Sport Council (*WD&DSC*, of which it is an affiliate member) or The World Rock 'n Roll Association.

**IDSF** Acronym for the International DanceSport Federation, the official governing body for worldwide amateur ballroom competition. The **IDSF** is composed of 82 member organizations (56 recognized by their National Olympic Committees) representing over four million athletes.

**IDSF Age Classifications** Based upon age at birthday of the calendar year:

Pre-Teen I	9
Pre-Teen II	10-11
Junior I	12-13
Junior II	14-15
Youth	16-18
Adult	19+
Senior I	35+
Senior II	50+

**IOC** Acronym for the International Olympic Committee.

<b>Instructor</b>	Typically refers to someone who teaches individual group classes, but sometimes used interchangeably with <i>Teacher</i> .
<b>International Style</b>	The umbrella term for the Standard/Ballroom/Modern and Latin/Latin American divisions. The dominant style contested worldwide and the style contested in both the <i>WD&amp;DSC</i> and <i>IDSF</i> World Championships.
<b>International</b>	Widely popular English brand of ballroom dance shoes; not to be confused with the <i>International Style</i> or with <i>The International</i> .
<b>International (The)</b>	Short for the Elsa Wells International Championships, held every October in London; widely recognized as one of the three “premiere” events along with the <i>UK</i> and <i>Blackpool</i> .
<b>Invigilator</b>	A person certified as a judge responsible for reporting any
<b>ISTD</b>	Acronym for the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance.
<b>Jazz</b>	Music style originating in the US in African American communities in the early 1900s and gaining international popularity up through the 1920s; based on based on Western African music but using European instrumentation. <b>Jazz</b> music gave rise to swing dancing, but is also now a term for a western theatre-based dance style balancing elements of both ballet and modern dance technique.
<b>Latin</b>	Also known as <i>Latin American</i> , the umbrella label for the five dances of: Cha Cha, Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, and Jive. Contested worldwide.
<b>Latin American</b>	Also known as <i>Latin</i> , the umbrella label for the five <i>International Style</i> dances of: Cha Cha, Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, and Jive. Contested worldwide.
<b>Latin Fusion</b>	Broadway style Latin-based ballroom production premiered at the City Center facility in New York; designed and directed by Louis van Amstel.

<b>LeNique</b>	Popular US ballroom dress and menswear company founded and owned by two-time US Professional Smooth Champions Nick and Lena Kosovitch. Responsible for the men's costuming for <i>DWTS</i> in the US (where Nick was also one of the professional dancers on the second season).
<b>Lindy Hop</b>	The original <i>Swing</i> dance, <b>Lindy Hop</b> originated in Harlem, New York, in the 1920s and early 1930s as a form of street jazz pairing European partnering and African improvisation. Most typically danced to <i>jazz</i> and blues music.
<b>LOD</b>	Acronym for <i>line of dance</i> .
<b>Line of Dance</b>	<b>Line of dance</b> refers to the ballroom convention of progressing counterclockwise around the dance floor in all of the traveling dances.
<b>Mambo</b>	Originally a club/street dance originating in New Yorico, <b>Mambo</b> is now one of the five dances contested in the <i>Rhythm</i> division of <i>American Style</i> ballroom. Also refers to <i>Salsa</i> danced <i>on2</i> .
<b>MC</b>	Short for Master of Ceremonies, the <b>MC</b> is responsible the flow of a ballroom competition, calling judges and competitors to the floor, informing judges of the number of couples to recall to the next round, and announcing competition results.
<b>Meaning aspects</b>	A "piece" of the meaning-making picture, be it meaning-pieces, meaning-sets, or meaning-maps.
<b>Meaning-making</b>	The dynamic interplay between social form and lived experience.
<b>Meaning-maps</b>	The pathways or connections by which various meaning-pieces or meaning sets are linked together.
<b>Meaning-piece(s)</b>	Particular elements, or dynamics, of life experiences which have pertinence for a given person.

<b>Meaning-sets</b>	A collection of meaning pieces which are linked together for a given person and tend to function as a unit of meaning.
<b>Meaning-structure</b>	Actually somewhat of a misnomer, at least in so far as “structure” implies some kind of fixity or rigidity. This is the total system of meanings—pieces, sets, and maps—by which a person encounters the world. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Modern</b>	Also known as <i>Standard</i> or <i>Ballroom</i> , the umbrella label for the five <i>International Style</i> dances of: Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, and Quickstep. Contested worldwide.
<b>Multi-dance event</b>	An event where the results are based on the dancing of two or more dances combined, e.g. Waltz and Tango, or Cha Cha and Rumba, etcetera. Note: all higher-level <i>Amateur</i> and <i>Professional</i> competitions are contested in this manner; with the overall result being based on the results a couple receives on each dance in their category.
<b>Muscle Memory</b>	Refers to physical practices that are so well trained that the body can execute them without conscious thought effort.
<b>NADSA</b>	Acronym for the North American Dance Sport Alliance (signed on November 19, 2004, in Columbus Ohio) between the National Dance Council of America ( <i>NDCA</i> ) and the Canadian Dance and Dance Sport Council ( <i>CDDSC</i> ). An expansion of the 1981 North American Treaty between the National Dance Council of America and the Canadian Dance Teachers Association, the NADSA provides for greater unification and cooperation for ballroom dancing in North America.
<b>NCDTO</b>	Acronym for the National Council of Dance Teachers Organization, now known as the National Dance Council of America ( <i>NDCA</i> ).
<b>NDCA</b>	Acronym for the National Dance Council of America, the official governing body for professional ballroom dancing in the United States and the U.S. member organization of the World Dance and Dance Sport

Council (*WD&DSC*). Previously known as the National Council of Dance Teachers Organization (*NCDTO*).

<b>New Vogue</b>	Australian dance style that appears much like American Smooth but with predetermined choreography for each dance, i.e. all dancers learn the same choreography for each <b>New Vogue</b> dance.
<b>NOC</b>	Acronym for National Olympic Committee.
<b>Novice</b>	The lowest of the <i>syllabus</i> -free (i.e. free choreography allowed) amateur dance levels in the US.
<b>NY2</b>	Acronym for “New York 2”, a style of <i>mambo/salsa</i> developed by Eddie Torres, in New York, taking steps on the 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , and 7 <sup>th</sup> beats (of an eight beat measure) that <i>breaks</i> on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> beats. Also known as “Eddie Torres 2” or <i>ET2</i> .
<b>On Deck Area</b>	Area bordering the floor where competitors line up prior to taking the floor to compete.
<b>On Deck Captain</b>	Person(s) responsible for lining up competitors in order to take the floor. Also known as the <i>Deck Captain</i> .
<b>On1</b>	Designation for <i>salsa/mambo</i> breaking (see <i>break</i> ) on the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> beats (of each eight beat measure).
<b>On2</b>	Designation for <i>salsa/mambo</i> breaking (see <i>break</i> ) on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> beats (of each eight beat measure). Includes <i>NY2/ET2</i> and <i>Power 2/Palladium 2</i> .

<b>Open Dance Position</b>	Partners are allowed to separate from each other; anything different from <i>closed dance position</i> .
<b>Open Event</b>	1) An event without restrictions on the steps that can be danced, or 2) an event without restrictions on participant nationalities, e.g. the German Open Championships ( <i>GOC</i> ) are not restricted to only German couples.
<b>Open Frame</b>	See <i>Open Dance Position</i> .
<b>Open Routine</b>	An event not restricted to syllabus material, as per definition 1 of “open event,” e.g. non-syllabus choreography is allowed.
<b>OSB</b>	Acronym for the <i>Ohio Star Ball</i> Championships
<b>Ohio Star Ball</b>	The Ohio Star Ball Championships, held in Columbus every November, is the single largest ballroom competition in North America; taping location of the long-running “Championship Ballroom Dancing” TV series on PBS, and for “America’s Ballroom Challenge” on PBS in 2006.
<b>Palladium 2</b>	Named after the original Palladium club in New York, Palladium 2 is the original <i>mambo</i> timing and refers to a style of <i>mambo/salsa</i> that takes steps on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , and 8 <sup>th</sup> beats (of an eight beat measure) that <i>breaks</i> on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> beats. Also now known as <i>Power 2</i> .
<b>Park West/ Park West Photography</b>	Most widely traveled ballroom photography business in the US; owned and operated by Albert and Patricia Parker, based in Arizona.
<b>PDF</b>	Acronym for the Professional Dancers Federation, an Affiliate Member Organization of the National Dance Council of America ( <i>NDCA</i> ) with six votes.
<b>Power 2</b>	Named after the original Palladium club in New York, Palladium 2 is the original <i>mambo</i> timing and refers to a style of <i>mambo/salsa</i> that takes steps on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , and 8 <sup>th</sup> beats (of an eight beat measure) that <i>breaks</i> on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> beats. Also known as

*Palladium 2* after the legendary Palladium club in New York.

<b>Practice Rounds</b>	Competitive ballroom practice wherein dancers all dance their competition routines, simultaneously, to competition tempo and length music. Intended to simulate competition floor conditions and thereby help with <i>floorcraft</i> , endurance, and improvisation.
<b>Pro-Am</b>	Designation for partnerships between a professional and a non-professional dancer.
<b>Pro-Am Solo</b>	Typically referenced simply as a <i>solo</i> entry, a <b>pro-am solo</b> consists of a professional teacher and amateur students dancing a routine choreographed to their own music, marked on a point system, and with no one else on the floor at the same time.
<b>Professional</b>	Any dancer declaring themselves a <b>professional</b> , registering as a <b>professional</b> , or making a living from their dancing skills beyond what is allowed for non-professionals in their country. Now known as a “Regulated DanceSport Athlete” by <i>USA Dance</i> .
<b>Ray Rose</b>	English ballroom shoe company, named for founder, designer, and owner Ray Rose, represented in the US by <i>LeNique</i> .
<b>Registrar</b>	The person responsible for the registration of competitors at a ballroom competition.
<b>Rhythm</b>	The umbrella label for the five dance <i>American Style</i> counterpart to International <i>Latin</i> , the <b>Rhythm</b> dances are: American Cha Cha, American Rumba, East Coast Swing, Bolero, and Mambo. Only contested within North America or in some American based franchise studios internationally. Slowly gaining exposure outside the United States.
<b>Rising Star</b>	Classification for contested events that are closed to the very best dancers. In the U.S. <b>Rising Star</b> ( <i>RS</i> ) events are professional events closed to national finalists and previous winners of that specific <i>RS</i> title. Overseas there



are often both *professional* and *amateur* **Rising Star** events contested.

<b>Rounds</b>	Verbal shorthand for <i>practice rounds</i> .
<b>RPG</b>	Acronym for the Reichsverband zur Pflege des Gessellschatstanzes (Empire Association for the Promotion of Social Dancing), the original name of the German amateur ballroom organization. The RPG played an important role in founding <i>FIDA</i> (the first international amateur ballroom dancers association), with whom it organized the first official World Championship in Bad Nauheim, Germany, in 1936.
<b>RS</b>	Acronym for <i>Rising Star</i> , a competition category closed to top level competitors.
<b>Salienation</b>	The process by which a given item, action, thought, feeling, or experience becomes more substantive for a person.
<b>Salsa</b>	Name used to refer to “street/club” version of <i>mambo</i> , also the name given within the ballroom world to <i>mambo danced on1</i> .
<b>Salsera</b>	From Spanish, a female <i>salsa</i> dancer.
<b>Salsero</b>	From Spanish, a male <i>salsa</i> dancer.
<b>Salser@</b>	Online term used to refer to a <i>salsa</i> dancer of either sex.
<b>SCD</b>	Acronym for <i>Strictly Come Dancing</i> .
<b>Scrutineer</b>	The person responsible for tabulating judges’ marks and reporting competition results.
<b>Scrutineering Marks/ Scrutineering Sheets</b>	Sheets (typically computer print outs) documenting the recall and final placement marks assigned by each judge to each couple.
<b>Semley</b>	Short for The Semley Studio, located in Norbury, England, “ <b>Semley</b> ” serves as the nickname for the

studio; widely recognized as one of the four elite studios in South London, along with *Cheam*, *Starlight*, and *Stopford's*.

<b>Showdance</b>	A professional version of a <i>solo</i> routine, each couple dances a routine choreographed to their own music and is marked on a point system. Unlike <i>pro-am solo</i> and <i>cabaret</i> events, however, there are restrictions on lifts and how much of each Showdance routine must be recognizable ballroom dancing.
<b>Single Dance Event</b>	An event where the results are based on the dancing of one single dance, e.g. Waltz or Rumba or Tango, etcetera.
<b>Smooth</b>	The umbrella label for the four-dance <i>American Style</i> counterpart to <i>International Style Ballroom/Modern</i> but, unlike in <i>International Style</i> , allows partners to break frame and separate from each other. Composed of: Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, and Viennese Waltz. Only contested within North America or in some American-based franchise studios internationally. Slowly gaining exposure outside the United States.
<b>So You Think You Can Dance?</b>	US television show where competitors from different styles competed in randomly drawn dance styles with randomly drawn partners, with one of the judges, two of the competitors, and several of the dances coming from ballroom
<b>Social form</b>	Any object, action, performance, or role as it is manifested in the social arena.
<b>Solo</b>	Typically danced as <i>pro-am solo</i> routines in the US, a <b>solo</b> is a dance entry where only one couple takes the floor at a time, dances a routine choreographed to their own music, and is marked on a point system.
<b>Standard</b>	Also known as <i>Modern</i> or <i>Ballroom</i> , the umbrella label for the five <i>International Style</i> dances of: Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, and Quickstep. Contested worldwide.

<b>Starlight</b>	Short for The Starlight Dance School, located in Streatham, England, “ <b>Starlight</b> ” serves as the nickname for the studio; widely recognized as one of the four elite studios in South London, along with <i>Cheam</i> , <i>Semley</i> , and <i>Stopford’s</i> .
<b>Stopford’s</b>	Short for Stopford’s Dance and Fitness Center, located in Mitcham, England, “ <b>Stopford’s</b> ” serves as the nickname for the studio; widely recognized as one of the four elite studios in South London, along with <i>Cheam</i> , <i>Semley</i> , and <i>Starlight</i> .
<b>Street Latin</b>	Australian ballroom dance category (just like <i>Rhythm</i> and <i>Smooth</i> are <i>American Style</i> categories) that includes <i>salsa</i> .
<b>Strictly Come Dancing</b>	Widely popular British television show that gave rise to several international versions including <i>Dancing with the Stars</i> in the US.
<b>Studio Manager</b>	The person responsible for the day-to-day operations and management of a ballroom studio.
<b>Studio Owner</b>	The owner of a ballroom studio. May or may not be a dancer and may or may not serve as studio manager as well.
<b>Supadance</b>	Widely popular English brand of ballroom dance shoes; possibly the most popular brand in use by competitive dancers today.
<b>Swing</b>	Generic term for the family of partnered dances that started with <i>Lindy Hop</i> in the 1920s and 1930s; most often references major divisions such as <i>Lindy</i> , <i>WCS</i> , and <i>ECS/Jitterbug</i> but also includes other variations as well. The basis for the <i>ECS</i> danced in <i>American Rhythm</i> , and, even further removed, the <i>Jive</i> danced in <i>International Latin</i> . In the American ballroom world “ <b>Swing</b> ” is an often used nickname for <i>ECS</i> .
<b>Syllabus</b>	Groupings of dance patterns typically classified into Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels prescribed by ballroom teaching organizations such as <i>AMI</i> , <i>FADS</i> , <i>NDTA</i> , and the <i>IDSF</i> .

<b>SYTYCD</b>	Acronym for <i>So You Think You Can Dance?</i>
<b>Teacher</b>	Typically refers to someone who teaches group dance classes, but sometimes used interchangeably with <i>Instructor</i> .
<b>Toe Lead</b>	Weight distribution pattern whereby the toe and ball of the foot (vs. the heel) make first contact with the floor when taking a step. The convention for <i>Latin</i> (except Paso Doble), <i>Rhythm</i> , and <i>Salsa</i> dancing.
<b>UK (The)</b>	Short for the UK Open Dance Championships, held every January near London in Bournemouth; widely recognized as one of the three “premiere” events along with the <i>International</i> and <i>Blackpool</i> .
<b>USABDA</b>	Acronym for the United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association, the official governing body for amateur ballroom dancing and competition in the United States and the U.S. member organization of the International DanceSport Federation ( <i>IDSF</i> ). Now known as <i>USA Dance</i> .
<b>USA Dance</b>	Formerly functioning as <i>USABDA</i> , <b>USA Dance</b> is the official governing body for amateur ballroom dancing and competition in the United States and the U.S. member organization of the International DanceSport Federation ( <i>IDSF</i> ).
<b>USA DanceSport</b>	The division of <i>USA Dance</i> that regulates <i>dancesport</i> competitors and competitions.
<b>USBC</b>	Acronym for the United States Ballroom Championships. Now known as the <i>USDSC</i> .
<b>USDSC</b>	Acronym for the Acronym for the United States DanceSport Championships, previously known and still commonly referenced as the <i>USBC</i> .
<b>USISTD</b>	Acronym for the United States Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, an autonomous entity for the <i>ISTD</i> , and a Full Member Organization of the National Dance Council ( <i>NDCA</i> ) of America with six votes.

<b>Vendor</b>	General designation for material support personnel. Includes producers and distributors of: dance costumes (e.g. dresses, tail suits); dance shoes; tanning products; photography; videography; dance music; and costume jewelry just to name some of the most common.
<b>WCS</b>	Acronym for West Coast Swing. (Also the state dance of California.)
<b>WD&amp;DSC</b>	Acronym for the World Dance and Dance Sport Council, the official governing body for worldwide professional ballroom competition. The <b>WD&amp;DSC</b> is composed of 51 Full Members, one Probationary Member, four Introductory Members, and three Affiliate Members.
<b>World Class Athlete</b>	Designation by <i>USA Dance</i> for those eligible to compete in <i>World Class Events</i> .
<b>World Class Events</b>	Designation by <i>USA Dance</i> for those events that are part of qualifying and competing to represent the United States at the <i>IDSF</i> World Championships.
<b>World Competitor</b>	Essentially a “grey zone” classification for non-professional U.S. dancesport competitors who compete in <i>International Ballroom/Latin</i> and are allowed to teach for pay. (The criteria for <b>World Competitor</b> status also differs between the NDCA and USA Dance.)

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the problem with this term noted above I have elected to retain the term meaning-structure, in the face of alternatives (i.e., meaning-system) for several reasons. By referencing meaning-structures conceptual room is left for different genesis and internal processes that reference to a “system” might disallow.

## APPENDIX 2: Major Dance Organizations, Publications, and Websites

The various dance organizations, publications, and websites I present in this section are by no means the only ones or even the only important ones in the ballroom world. What they are, however, are organizations, publications, and websites that I have encountered in the course of my research, be it through my own involvements in dance or in light of the various observations and interviews that inform this project. As such, the overlapping memberships, structure, regulations, and influences of these various entities serve as part of the landscape, both for my research and for the ballroom community in general, as much the physical places I visited in the course of conducting my fieldwork.

### **Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)<sup>1</sup>**

Originally formed at Hotel Cecil in Covent Garden as The Imperial Society of Dance Teachers on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1904, this organization took on its current structure in 1924, changed its name to the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) in 1925, and was finally incorporated in 1945. Now an educational charity, the ISTD's website states that, "the ISTD's chief objective is 'to educate the public in the art of dancing in all of its forms'."<sup>2</sup> Producing its own books, tapes, videos, bi-monthly magazine, and extensive website, the ISTD is divided into 12 divisions (which it refers to as faculties): Classical Ballet (both Cecchetti and Imperial), Classical Greek Dance,

National Dance, Modern Theatre, Tap Dance, and South Asian Dance comprise the Imperial Dance and Theatre Faculties; Modern Ballroom, Latin American, Sequence, Disco/Freestyle/Rock 'n' Roll, and Club Dance comprise the Imperial Dance and Dance Sport Faculties; as well as instruction in Historical Dance provided by the Dance Research Committee.

While the ISTD examines over a quarter of a million people per year between all 12 of its divisions overall, it is only the two DanceSport divisions—those of Modern Ballroom and Latin American Dance—that factor into discussions of ballroom dancing. These two divisions, however, play both a central historical role in the development of contemporary ballroom dancing in addition to a critical contemporary one as well. Perhaps of the greatest significance, it was a committee of the ISTD's Modern Ballroom division, headed by Alex Moore, which produced the *Technique of Ballroom Dancing*. Later updated editions of the *Technique of Ballroom Dancing* are widely considered to be the definitive norm for Standard (or Ballroom) dancing and remains the most widely distributed standard.

Latin dance was a later addition to both the English dance scene and to the ISTD, being introduced into the English dance scene during the 1930's by the accomplished French dancer and teacher, Monsieur Pierre who, in 1946, was then part of forming the initial Latin American Faculty of the ISTD.<sup>3</sup> Finally, while the ISTD is now only one of many international dance organizations offering examinations and instructor certification in ballroom dancing worldwide, ISTD certification is still often viewed as the golden standard and still seems to carry the most weight. For those

instructors wanting to be taken the most seriously then, and especially as pertains to international style ballroom and the international scene, ISTD certification seems to remain the most widely acclaimed and respected certification available.

#### **U.S. Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (USISTD)<sup>4</sup>**

An Autonomous entity for the ISTD, the United States Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (USISTD) was incorporated in New Jersey on October 5th, 1967. As an affiliate of the ISTD the USISTD originally only concerned itself with International Style ballroom dancing (Modern Ballroom and Latin American) but has more recently expanded to include the American (Smooth and Rhythm) and Theatrical Styles of ballroom dancing as well. A member of the NDCA (National Dance Council of America), the USISTD, (like the ISTD) aims to “make it possible for the general public to find quality instruction in the art of Ballroom and Latin American dancing” and, to this end, is highly involved in medals testing, professional certification/licensing, NDCA and WD&DSC recognized adjudication credentials, and the production of a wide array of instructional books, manuals, and videos. Recognized as member of the NDCA since 1961, the USISTD is Full Member Organization with six votes in all NDCA matters.

#### **World Dance and DanceSport Council (WD & DSC)<sup>5</sup>**

Originally known as the International Council of Ballroom Dancing (ICBD), The World Dance and Dance Sport Council Limited (WD&DSC) was initially created by representatives from 12 countries in Edinburgh, Scotland on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1950.



The world governing body for professional Dance Sport, the WD&DSC aims “to encourage and promote dancing through its membership.” The WD&DSC is currently comprised of 51 Full Members, one Probationary Member, four Introductory Members, and three Affiliate Members, and split into two sections dedicated to 1) professional Dance Sport, and 2) dance schools and teachers. Perhaps the most notable role played by the WD&DSC in the ballroom world today is the awarding of the Professional European and World Titles in Ballroom, Latin American, 10 Dance, Classic Showdance, and South American Showdance. Indeed the “awarding” of these championships is actually twofold since the WD&DSC decides which competitions will get to host the various Professional European and World titles in a given year, long before these titles are eventually won by and then awarded to the competitors.

### **International DanceSport Federation (IDSF)<sup>6</sup>**

The first international amateur dancers association—Federation Internationale de Dance pour Amateurs,<sup>7</sup> or FIDA—was formed between amateur associations from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia in Prague on December 10, 1935.<sup>8</sup> This early organization was “very active” and, in conjunction with Germany’s RPG<sup>9</sup>, organized the first official World Championship in 1936—between 15 countries—in Bad Nauheim, Germany. FIDA continued to conduct “all international competitions” until the start of WWII in 1939 when all such international activities ceased. FIDA was re-instituted between Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, and Yugoslavia in Velden, Austria, in July 1953.<sup>10</sup> 1964 saw the final dissolution of the IDSF due to both internal conflicts and divergent

agendas from the professionals in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland that had first manifested in January 1956.

May 12, 1957, however, also saw the instantiation of a second international amateur association, the International Council of Amateur Dancers (ICAD). Initial ICAD members included Austria, Denmark, England, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands with Belgium, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia following close behind. Unfortunately many of the rifts and difficulties that led to the eventual demise of FIDA also plagued the newly formed ICAD until 1965 when Detlef Hegemann became president. Hegemann initiated efforts to form a joint committee between ICAD and the ICBD to provide a forum for resolving the ongoing tensions between amateurs and professionals alike and exactly such a committee was formed with the October 3, 1965 signing of the “Bremen Agreement” (named for the German city in which it was signed). On November 11, 1990, ICAD changed its name to the International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) in order to further the recognition of competitive ballroom dancing as a sport, especially as efforts were underway to gain recognition from the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Many amateur national organizations from throughout Eastern Europe and Asia started joining the ISDF in 1991 and this large influx helped add momentum to the ongoing ISDF efforts to achieve IOC recognition. In 1992 the ISDF formally applied for recognition by the IOC, received provisional recognition on April 6, 1995, and achieved full IOC recognition on September 4, 1997. Now the largest ballroom organization in the world with 82 National Member Federations (56 recognized by

their respective National Olympic Committees) and representing more than 4 million dancers, the IDSF is the undisputed governing body all international amateur dancesport competition.

### **National Dance Council of America (NDCA)<sup>11</sup>**

Originally the National Council of Dance Teachers Organization (NCDTO), the National Dance Council of America was formed as a non-profit educational organization in 1948. The NDCA was responsible for overseeing professional dancing throughout the United States, became a member of World Dance and Dance Sport Council in 1962, started certifying scrutineers in 1973, signed an agreement of cooperation (the North American Treaty) with the Canadian Dance Teachers Association in 1981<sup>12</sup>, and became a member of the Asian-Pacific Council<sup>13</sup> in 1986. Composed of full, affiliate, and associate member organizations, the NDCA serves as the coordinating and oversight committee for professional dancing and dance instruction that sanctions and sets standards for professional competitions in America. Additionally, as the WD&DSC recognized body for governing professional ballroom activity in the United States the NDCA sets the procedures and is responsible for selecting the dancers and adjudicators who will be representing the U.S. at the various WD&DSC sanctioned Professional World Championships.

The organizations with full membership to the NDCA, limited to “professional dance teacher organizations,” are: Arthur Murray International; Dance Educators of America; Dance Teachers Club of Boston; Fred Astaire Dance of North America; National Dance Teachers Association; New York Society of Teachers Association;

North American Dance Teachers Association; Pan American Teachers of Dancing; U.S. Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing; and U.S. Terpsichore Association. Each of these full member organizations has six votes in all NDCA matters except for the National Dance Teachers Association, the New York Society of Teachers Association, and the Pan American Teachers of Dancing each of which have four votes. The NDCA affiliate membership, restricted to other dance related organizations (i.e. non-“professional dance teacher organizations”), consists of: American Ballroom Company; American Ballroom Theatre Company; American Dancesport Theatre, Inc.; American Star Productions; Brigham Young University; Dancesport America; Heritage Dance Foundation; North American Dance Organizers Alliance; Professional Dancers Federation; U.S. Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association; and World Federation of Ballroom Dancers. Each of these affiliate member organizations has one vote in all NDCA matters except for the Professional Dancers Federation, which has six votes. Finally, associate member organizations of the NDCA are “professional dance teacher organizations with a minimum of 100 members” and have two votes in all NDCA matters. Currently Dance Vision International Dance Association is the sole associate member organization of the NDCA. Meetings of representative delegates from each member organizations happen twice each year in order “to discuss affairs, programs and problems related to the dance industry.”

In addition to the member organizations the NDCA has an executive committee consisting of a President, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer each of who have one vote in all NDCA matters and who run NDCA

business and affairs between meetings. With the approval of the Executive Committee, the NDCA President appoints the Ballroom Department Director, the Performing Arts Director, the National Registrar, the Public Relations Director, and the Publications Director. Finally, the NDCA president appoints the members of the NDCA committees: the Credentials Committee, the Constitution Committee, the Ballroom Department Committee, the Championship and Competition Committee, the NDCA Scrutineering Exam Committee, the Ethics Committee, the Finance Committee, the and Joint Committee.

***USA Dance/United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association (USABDA)<sup>14</sup>***

Originally a New York based group formed in 1965 to facilitate the inclusion of ballroom in the Olympics, the United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association, Inc.—recently renamed USA Dance—strives to promote and develop both social and competitive ballroom dancing. 1979 heralded USABDA’s first national elections with local chapters—the backbone of USABDA’s current structure—being initiated in several regions over the following years as “efforts were made to bring all other amateur ballroom dance organizations into USABDA.” In 1985 USABDA was granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service and, in 1987, USABDA’s unification efforts culminated in a unification election that placed all American amateurs under the USABDA umbrella and USABDA was recognized by the IDSF as the official governing body for amateur ballroom dancing in America.

Following the 1997 recognition of the IDSF by the IOC, USABDA was recognized (as an Affiliate member) of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC)

in 1999 and including being recognized “as the National Governing Body of DanceSport in the United States” and, on the competitive front, USABDA runs competitions at the local, regional, and national levels including the National Amateur DanceSport Champions whereat the United State’s representatives to the IDSF World DanceSport Championships and the World Games<sup>15</sup> are chosen. Aside from recognition from the USOC, 1999 also saw the rise of a new division within USABDA devoted to facilitating the expansion of social ballroom dancing “as a healthful lifetime recreational activity, with progression to competitions encouraged for those who are so inclined,” as well as a restructuring and expansion of the Youth College Network geared towards the USABDA goal of introducing “social ballroom dancing and DanceSport into every college and secondary school in [the U.S.A.]” As the most “grass roots level” ballroom organization in the United States USABDA’s greatest success has come in providing affordable access to both social and competitive dancing.

As the cornerstone of a stated aim of generating “a pool of world class DanceSport Athletes that will dominate the international world of dance in the years ahead,” USABDA’s ambitious outreach endeavors (especially to younger dancers) has also sometimes seemed to be at logger heads with USABDA’s goal “for everyone to ballroom dance.” The same resources, after all, cannot go to both competitive training and subsidies and to social outreach and expansion and, especially as a volunteer driven not for profit organization, USABDA has been faced with a difficult challenge in trying balance both its interest and commitment to the often more visible and active

competitive dancers and the far more numerous social dancers. Overall, however, USABDA's ongoing efforts and objectives include: promoting its network of state chapters featuring competitive, educational, and social dance opportunities; promoting competitive dancing in colleges and high schools through its Youth and College Network; publicizing "the physical, mental and social benefits of dancing,"—both socially and competitively—for all ages and skill levels; and continuing to groom future DanceSport competitors for success in the U.S., Internationally, and, ideally, for the Olympics.

### **Arthur Murray International (AMI)<sup>16</sup>**

In 1912 the innovative Arthur Murray started marketing and selling dance steps by mail, one at a time. Arthur Murray dance teachers played a large part of introducing many new dances to the public, both on land and on cruise ships, and, in the first Arthur Murray franchised dance school was opened in 1938 (in Minneapolis, Minnesota). The 1942 song "Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing In A Hurry"<sup>17</sup> was just one sign of the popularity that gave rise to 72 Arthur Murray studios throughout the U.S. by 1946. Arthur Murray was also a pioneer in bringing partnered dancing to the airwaves with the "Arthur Murray Dance Party" on ABC that was ultimately televised, nation-wide, for 12 years.<sup>18</sup> A group of franchisees purchased the company from Arthur and Kathryn Murray upon their retirement in 1964 and, a recognized as member of the NDCA since 1971, Arthur Murray International is Full Member Organization with six votes in all NDCA matters. Today Arthur Murray International

is the largest dance franchise in the world with over 180 franchised studios throughout the U.S. and overseas.

**American Ballroom Company (ABC)<sup>19</sup>**

Founded by Mary Molaghan and John Monte in 1971, the American Ballroom Company is chartered by the NDCA to organize the United States Dance Sport Championships (USDSC) with the top couples from the ABC's Latin and Ballroom national championships serve as the U.S. representatives to their respective world championships. Originally conducted in New York, the USDSC moved to Miami in 1984 and then to Hollywood Beach in 2003, and the NDCA Standard and Junior divisions have been held in Provo, Utah since 1996. Aside from administering the various U.S. titles in question, including the U.S. National Professional Rhythm and Smooth titles, the USDSC has also served as the site of the United States Open Championship—one of the WD & DSC's World Series events—since 1983. A member of the NDCA since 1984, the ABC is an Affiliate Member Organization and, as such, has one vote in all NDCA matters.

**Fred Astaire Dance of North America (Fred Astaire Dance Studios, FADS)<sup>20</sup>**

Fred Astaire first conceptualized his franchised dance studios with film executive Charles L. Casanave in 1946, and the first Fred Astaire Dance Studio opened On March 7, 1947 (at 487 Park Ave., NY). The company was run by Casanave family until 1990 (when it was purchased by a NY investment group) and, in 1993, was re-purchased by 10 FADS franchisors one of whom, Michael E. Schultz, served



as President and CEO until Jack Rothweiler took the helm. Recognized as member of the NDCA since 1971, Fred Astaire Dance of North America is Full Member Organization with six votes in all NDCA matters.

**Professional Dancers Federation (PDF)<sup>21</sup>**

Originally established in 1980 by Brian McDonald (currently the President of the NDCA), the PDF was incorporated (in California) on May 1, 1984, the same year that it was officially recognized as member of the NDCA (on August 8). The Professional Dancers Federation was admitted to the NDCA as an Affiliate Member Organization and is the only such affiliate member with six votes in all NDCA matters (all other affiliate member organizations only have one such vote). With the stated mission of protecting “the interests of professionals involved in competitive dancesport,” the Professional Dancers Federation is the only organization officially recognized by the NDCA that represents DanceSport competitors. Indeed, many of the rules effecting professional and amateur competition conditions at NDCA sanctioned competitions—expectations widely taken for granted such as no smoking in the ballroom, the presence of drinking water in the ballroom, and 20 minutes between competition rounds—were initially introduced for consideration to the NDCA, and advocated for, by the PDF on behalf of its constituency. Similarly, the PDF provides an avenue for competitors to voice anonymous complaints about competition adjudicators and organizers thereby avoiding concerns about potential political retributions. Also worth noting is that, unlike almost any other NDCA member

organization, the PDF officers are directly elected by the entirety of their organizational membership.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Dance Beat (DB)/Dance Beat International (DBI)***

*Dance Beat* is a monthly ballroom newspaper and by far the most widely circulated and read ballroom publication in the United States. Coverage includes competition results including placements, photos, and extensive write ups and critiques from various coaches and judges. Other regular features include interviews with various dancers and vendors, as well as a variety of dance related advice columns, a professional directory, and numerous ads from a wide range of ballroom competitions, services, and products. The announcements and letters inside the front cover page are also source of information regarding major partner switches, injuries, birth announcements, obituaries, and other major community news items. While subscriptions are available, most dancers reading *Dance Beat* do so by pick up the complimentary copies that are available at most major ballroom competitions throughout the United States.

In 2004 Dance Beat also started producing Dance Beat International (DBI), an online version of its coverage, but with a more expansive geographical focus including most of the major events contested outside worldwide. Because it only exists online, in addition to articles, interviews, and ads DBI also includes video clips and interviews from various competitions and competitors and has even provided live webcasts at a few major U.S. competitions. Also worth noting is that DB/DBI are owned and run by

Didio Barrera and Keith Todd, who both also regularly work as ballroom DJs and adjudicators at numerous U.S. events.

### **Dance Vision/ Dance Vision International Dance Association (DVIDA)**

Dance Vision is the largest ballroom related retailer in the U.S., specializing in dance videos, music, and manuals. Beyond this, however, Dance Vision also runs some of the most popular ballroom camps in North America, and gave rise to both the DanzSupport network—a support network offering some of the franchise-like support services for independent, non-franchise dance studios—and DVIDA, the Dance Vision International Dance Association, a professional teacher organization which provides teacher training and certification, was an Associate Member Organization of the NDCA holding two votes through 2005, and attained Full Member Status with six votes as of 2006. Also worth noting is that Wayne Eng, the founder and owner of Dance Vision is also the owner and organizer of the Emerald Ball, Executive Vice President of the Board of Directors of the American Ballroom Company, event organizer for the national United States DanceSport Championships (USDSC) as of 2005, and co-owner of several other competitions.

### **Dancescape**

Dancescape is a Canadian company whose website provides information about dance news and events, various online learning opportunities, general information, classified ads, a dance “singles” service, interactive features including a forum, and shopping. Until 2004 the Dancescape forum was the largest and most active English

language ballroom-based discussion board in the world and, as such, was a dominant source of ballroom related information and interaction for many.

### **DancePlaza**

DancePlaza.com is a Dutch-based website dedicated, in their own words to “providing actual international news, competition results, knowledge forums and exciting photo material about the Olympic recognised DanceSport.” Aside from providing extensive press materials, photo albums, and dancesport information, DancePlaza has long provided the most widely used partner search and discussion forums for international dancers and competitors. Also worth noting is that the same team behind DancePlaza also run the Blackpool and IDSF websites.

### **DanceSport Info<sup>23</sup>**

As of January 2006 DanceSportInfo.net, is accessible in 13 languages, contains a ballroom competition results database of 1,842 competitions from 73 countries (8,974 events and 215,821 individual results), has 55,760 photos—from 127 competitions—taken by 12 regularly contributing photographers, has an active discussion forum of over 1,500 registered users, and hosts a “partner wanted” database of currently over 3,760 registered dancers. In addition to Current news, short articles, and interviews with top dancers and coaches, as the leading competition results service, dancers from around the world<sup>24</sup> regularly use this DanceSport Info site to keep track of various couples and competitions worldwide.

## **Dance Forums (DF)**

Founded by David Duval (who, at that time, was also the webmaster for Showtime Dance shoes) the Dance Forums website ([www.dance-forums.com](http://www.dance-forums.com)) was originally launched in September 2002 as a non-commercial source for discussion and information about partner dancing. Attracted to its non-commercial nature, I joined the DF on March 28, 2003 as the thirty-eighth registered member. Still in its infancy, David invited me to help out as a moderator for the Ballroom and then the Salsa forums, and, later that year, became “Site Moderator” for the DF. Over the past two years—with David and I as administrators and with a staff of volunteer forum moderators helping run the site—the DF has emerged as the largest and most active English language partner-dance website in the world, now averaging over two thousand posts per week and well over one million page views per month. Primarily a discussion board—although also featuring a dance directory, music archive, and photo album—the DF remains a non-commercial site<sup>25</sup> intended to serve as a clearinghouse for “quality information about partner dancing of all kinds.”

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<sup>1</sup> This historical background regarding the ISTD is adapted from information at the ISTD website at [www.istd.org](http://www.istd.org) and the USISTD website at [www.usistd.org](http://www.usistd.org). For a slightly more in depth history, especially some of the people involved, of the IDSF please see: [http://www.usistd.org/society\\_objectives/istd\\_uk/](http://www.usistd.org/society_objectives/istd_uk/).

<sup>2</sup> According to its website (<http://www.istd.org/about.html>) this aim is achieved through the ISTD’s four-fold efforts:

- to promote knowledge of the dance
- to maintain and improve teaching standards
- to qualify, by examination, teachers of dancing in the ISTD’s specialist techniques taught by our 10,000 members in schools of dancing throughout the world.
- to provide, through its syllabi, techniques upon which to train dancers for the profession.

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<sup>3</sup> The Latin American division of the ISTD was actually first started by Monsieur Pierre, Doris Lavelle (Monsieur's partner), and Doris Nichols and, later, were also joined by Gwenethe Walshe and Dimitri Petrides.

<sup>4</sup> This information is condensed from the history of the USISTD provided on the NDCA website at [www.ndca.org](http://www.ndca.org).

<sup>5</sup> This information about the WD & DSC was compiled from their website at [www.wddsc.com](http://www.wddsc.com).

<sup>6</sup> This information is condensed from the "History of International Organized DanceSport" as first published onto the IDSF website, [www.idsf.net](http://www.idsf.net), on August 25, 1995 and reproduced at the permission of the IDSF.

<sup>7</sup> International Amateur Dancers Federation.

<sup>8</sup> The amateur associations from the Baltic States, Belgium, Canada, Italy, and Norway all joined soon thereafter.

<sup>9</sup> Reichsverband zur Pflege des Gesselschatstanzes (Empire Association for the Promotion of Social Dancing).

<sup>10</sup> Other national organizations that soon joined were Finland (on December 6, 1953), Switzerland (on August 15, 1954), and the Netherlands (on March 1, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> This information is condensed from documents available at and information provided on the NDCA website at [www.ndca.org](http://www.ndca.org).

<sup>12</sup> The North American Treaty of 1981 between the NDCA and the Canadian Dance Teachers Association was later reinforced and expanded with the November 19, 2004, signing of the North American Dance Sport Alliance (NADSA) between the NDCA and the Canadian Dance and Dance Sport Council (previously the Canadian Dance Teachers Association).

<sup>13</sup> The membership of the Asian-Pacific Council is Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, and the United States.

<sup>14</sup> This information is condensed from the USABDA website at [www.usabda.org](http://www.usabda.org).

<sup>15</sup> The World Games include sports that are not in the Olympic Program but that are recognized by the International Olympic Committee.

<sup>16</sup> This information is condensed from the Arthur Murray International website at [www.arthurmurray.com](http://www.arthurmurray.com).

<sup>17</sup> Sung by Betty Hutton with the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, "Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing In A Hurry" was recorded for the Paramount's black and white musical romance film "The Fleet's In" (directed by Victor Schertzinger, starring Eddie Bracken, Leif Erickson, William Holden, Betty Hutton, and Dorothy Lamour).

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Murray's television success actually started with 15-minute television slots that he convinced his wife Kathryn to teach and which he had purchased from CBS in July of 1950. Three of five episodes in Arthur Murray signed for the summer series of half-hour episodes of what ended up being immensely popular and successful "Arthur Murray Dance Party."

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<sup>19</sup> This information is condensed from the history of the ABC provided on the NDCA website at [www.ndca.org](http://www.ndca.org).

<sup>20</sup> This information is condensed from the history of FADS provided on the NDCA website at [www.ndca.org](http://www.ndca.org).

<sup>21</sup> This information is condensed from the PDF website at [www.pdfusa.org](http://www.pdfusa.org).

<sup>22</sup> Elections for every PDF office are held every other year.

<sup>23</sup> This information is taken from the DanceSport Info website at [dancesportinfo.net](http://dancesportinfo.net).

<sup>24</sup> According to the statistics provided on the DanceSport Info site in January 2006 the site was accessed from 128 countries from July through December of 2005.

<sup>25</sup> All operating costs are derived from Google ads and periodically solicited member donations and fund raising efforts (such as an annual silent auction conducted on line).

## APPENDIX 3: Franchise Studio Locations, In and Outside the US

The following chart shows the locations, by country, of all Arthur Murray Franchise studios as recorded on the Arthur Murray International website as of January 25, 2005.

### International Arthur Murray Franchises

<b>Australia: 5</b>	Adelaide x1; Crows Nest x1; Knox x1; Melbourne x1; Sydney x1
<b>Canada: 17</b>	Calgary x1; Dollard Des Ormeaux x1; Edmonton x1; Etobicoke x1; Laval x1; Lemoyne x1; Mississauga x1; Montreal x2; Oakville x1; Ottawa x1; Richmond Hill x1; Stony Creek x1; Thornhill x1; Vancouver x1; White Rock x1; Woodbridge x1
<b>Egypt: 1</b>	Cairo x1
<b>Israel: 4</b>	Raanana x1; Tel Aviv x2; Zion x1
<b>Italy: 6</b>	Como x1; Florence x1; Milan x2; Treviso x1; Verona x1
<b>Japan: 6</b>	Date x1; Imaichi x1; Kamitsuga x1; Muroran x1; Oyama x1; Tsuruta x1
<b>Jordan: 1</b>	Amman x1
<b>Lebanon: 1</b>	Beirut x1
<b>South Africa: 7</b>	Acradia x1; Belville x1; Benoni x1; Durbanville x1; Florida Hills x1; Rivonia x1; Table View x1

The following chart shows the locations, state by state, of all Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire Franchise studios in the U.S.A. as recorded on their respective websites as of January 25, 2005.

### Franchise Studios in the U.S.A.

	Arthur Murray	Fred Astaire
Alabama		4: Birmingham x2; Daphne x1; Montgomery x1



### Franchise Studios

Alaska		2: Anchorage x2
Arizona	2: Phoenix x1; Scottsdale x1	7: Chandler x1; Mesa x1; Phoenix x2; Scottsdale x2; Sun City West x1
Arkansas		2: Ft. Smith x1; North Little Rock x1
California	22: Beverly Hills x1; Carmichael x1; Costa Mesa x1; Escondido x1; Glendale x1; Hayward x1; Lake Forest x1; Long Beach x1; Orange x1; Pasadena x1; Redlands x1; Redwood City x1; Riverside x1; San Diego x1; San Francisco x1; San Jose x1; Santa Barbara x1; Sherman Oaks x1; Thousand Oaks x1; Upland x1; Ventura x1; Woodland Hills x1	1: Santa Clara x1
Colorado	2: Denver x1; Lakewood x1	1: Denver x1
Connecticut	6: Danbury x1; Glastonbury x1; Hamden x1; New Britain x1; Niantic x1; Southport x1	5: Canton x1; Hamden x1; Norwalk x1; South Glastonbury x1; Trumbull x1; West Hartford x1
Florida:	8: Coral Gables x1; Jacksonville x1; Lakeland x1; Orlando x1; St. Petersburg x1; Sunrise x1; Tallahassee x1; Winter Park x1	15: Boca Raton x1; Crestview x1; Daytona Beach x1; Ft. Myers x1; Ft. Walton Beach x1; Jacksonville x1; Jupiter x1; Lake Park x1; Naples x1; Panama City x1; Pensacola x1; Sarasota x1; St. Petersburg x1; Tallahassee x1; Vero Beach x1
Georgia	1: Marietta x1	2: Atlanta x1; Duluth x1
Hawaii	1: Honolulu x1	
Idaho		1: Meridian x1
Illinois	3: Chicago x1; Morton Grove x1; Rockford x1	2: Chicago x1; Tinley Park x1
Indiana	8: Bloomington x1; Broad Ripple x1; Carmel x1; Fort Wayne x1; Indianapolis x2; Merrillville x1; Lafayette x1	3: Fort Wayne x1; Indianapolis x1; New Albany x1
Iowa:	1: Davenport x1	
Kansas	1: Lenexa x1	
Kentucky	3: Florence: x1; Lexington x1; Louisville x1	
Louisiana	1: Metairie x1	

### Franchise Studios

Massachusetts	8: Boston x1; Burlington x1; Danvers x1; Natick x1; Randolph x1; Springfield x1; Swansea x1; Worcester x1	6: Belmont x1; Boston x1; Hanover x1; Norwood x1; Springfield x1; Worcester x1
Maryland	5: Baltimore x1; Bethesda x1; Gaithersburg x1; Severna Park x1; Silver Spring x1	
Michigan	8: Ann Arbor x1; Bloomfield Hills x1; Grand Rapids x1; Kentwood x1; Northville x1; Portage x1; Royal Oak x1; Sterling Heights x1	
Minnesota	2: Minneapolis x1; St. Paul x1	2: Inver Grove Heights x1; Rochester x1
Nevada	2: Las Vegas x2	
New Hampshire	1: Manchester x1	
New Jersey		4: Englewood x1; Red Bank x1; Ridgewood x1; Upper Montclair x1
New Mexico	1: Albuquerque x1	1: Albuquerque x1
New York	16: Amherst x1; Bay Shore x1; Bayside x1; Huntington Station x1; Latham x1; Merrick x1; New York x1; Plainview x1; Port Jefferson Station x1; Rochester x2; Southampton x1; Syracuse x1; White Plains x1; Williston Park x1; Yonkers x1	13: Bardonia: 1; Bedford Hills x1; Hartsdale x1; Latham x1; Mamaroneck x1; New York x3; Rochester x1; Staten Island x1; Tarry Town x1; Wappingers Falls x1; Williamsville x1
North Carolina	2: Charlotte x1; Raleigh x1	6: Charlotte x1; Durham x1; Greensboro x1; Monroe x1; Raleigh x1; Winston-Salem x1
Ohio	7: Cincinnati x2; Columbus x1; Dayton x1; Huber Heights x1; Montgomery x1; Springfield x1	9: Boardman x1; Canton x1; Columbus 2; Lancaster x1; Seven Hills x1; Warren x1; Westchester x1; Westerville x1
Oregon	2: Beaverton x1; Portland x1	
Pennsylvania	11: East Norriton x1; Lancaster x1; Leymone x1; McMurray x1; Monroeville x1; Narberth x1; Paoli x1; Pittsburgh: 1; Scranton x1; Wexford x1; York x1	1: West Reading x1

### Franchise Studios

Puerto Rico	1: San Juan x1	
Rhode Island	1: Johnston x1	1: Providence x1
South Carolina	1: Charleston x1	3: Charleston x1; Greenville x1; Hilton Head Island x1
Tennessee	2: Brentwood x1; Goodlettsville x1	3: Chattanooga x1; Memphis x2
Texas	4: Austin x1; Dallas x1; Plano x1; San Antonio x1	1: Houston x1
Virginia	3: Alexandria x1; Roanoke x1; Vienna x1	1: Virginia Beach x1
Washington	5: Bellevue x1; Everett x1; Federal Way x1; Seattle x1; Vancouver x1	
Wisconsin	1: Eau Claire x1	4: Brookfield x1; Milwaukee x1; Mequon x1; Wales x1

## APPENDIX 4: VOKES v. ARTHUR MURRAY, INC

VOKES v. ARTHUR MURRAY, INC

Audrey E. VOKES, Appellant, v. ARTHUR MURRAY, INC., a corporation, J. P. Davenport, d/b/a Arthur Murray School of Dancing, Appellees

No. 67-476

Court of Appeals of Florida, Second District

212 So. 2d 906; 1968 Fla. App. LEXIS 5388; 28 A.L.R.3d 1405

July 31, 1968

COUNSEL: Wolfe, Bonner & Hogan, Clearwater, for Appellant.

Julian R. Howay, St. Petersburg, for Appellees.

JUDGES: Pierce, Judge. Liles, C.J., and Mann, J., concur.

OPINION BY: PIERCE

OPINION: [\*906] This is an appeal by Audrey E. Vokes, plaintiff below, from a final order dismissing with prejudice, for failure to state a cause of action, her fourth amended complaint, hereinafter referred to as plaintiff's complaint.

Defendant Arthur Murray, Inc., a corporation, authorizes the operation throughout [\*907] the nation of dancing schools under the name of "Arthur Murray School of Dancing" through local franchised operators, one of whom was defendant J. P. Davenport whose dancing establishment was in Clearwater.

Plaintiff Mrs. Audrey E. Vokes, a widow of 51 years and without family, had a yen to be "an accomplished dancer" with the hopes of finding "new interest in life". So, on February 10, 1961, a dubious fate, with the assist of a motivated acquaintance, procured her to attend a "dance party" at Davenport's "School of Dancing" where she

whiled away the pleasant hours, sometimes in a private room, absorbing his accomplished sales technique, during which her grace and poise [\*\*2] were elaborated upon and her rosy future as "an excellent dancer" was painted for her in vivid and glowing colors. As an incident to this interlude, he sold her eight 1/2-hour dance lessons to be utilized within one calendar month therefrom, for the sum of \$ 14.50 cash in hand paid, obviously a baited "come-on".

Thus she embarked upon an almost endless pursuit of the terpsichorean art during which, over a period of less than sixteen months, she was sold fourteen "dance courses" totalling in the aggregate 2302 hours of dancing lessons for a total cash outlay of \$ 31,090.45, all at Davenport's dance emporium. All of these fourteen courses were evidenced by execution of a written "Enrollment Agreement - Arthur Murray's School of Dancing" with the addendum in heavy black print, "No one will be informed that you are taking dancing lessons. Your relations with us are held in strict confidence", setting forth the number of "dancing lessons" and the "lessons in rhythm sessions" currently sold to her from time to time, and always of course accompanied by payment of cash of the realm.

These dance lesson contracts and the monetary consideration therefor of over \$ 31,000 were procured from [\*\*3] her by means and methods of Davenport and his associates which went beyond the unsavory, yet legally permissible, perimeter of "sales puffing" and intruded well into the forbidden area of undue influence, the suggestion of falsehood, the suppression of truth, and the free exercise of rational judgment, if what plaintiff alleged in her complaint was true. From the time of her first contact with the dancing school in February, 1961, she was influenced unwittingly by a constant and continuous barrage of flattery, false praise, excessive compliments, and panegyric encomiums, to such extent that it would be not only inequitable, but unconscionable, for a Court exercising inherent chancery power to allow such contracts to stand.

She was incessantly subjected to over-reaching blandishment and cajolery. She was assured she had "grace and poise"; that she was "rapidly improving and developing in her dancing skill"; that the additional lessons would "make her a beautiful dancer, capable of dancing with the most accomplished dancers"; that she was "rapidly progressing in the development of her dancing skill and gracefulness", etc., etc. She was given "dance aptitude tests" for the ostensible [\*\*4] purpose of "determining" the number of remaining hours instructions needed by her from time to time.

At one point she was sold 545 additional hours of dancing lessons to be entitled to award of the "Bronze Medal" signifying that she had reached "the Bronze Standard", a supposed designation of dance achievement by students of Arthur Murray, Inc.

Later she was sold an additional 926 hours in order to gain the "Silver Medal", indicating she had reached "the Silver Standard", at a cost of \$ 12,501.35.

At one point, while she still had to her credit about 900 unused hours of instructions, she was induced to purchase an additional 24 hours of lessons to participate in a trip to Miami at her own expense, where [\*908] she would be "given the opportunity to dance with members of the Miami Studio".

She was induced at another point to purchase an additional 126 hours of lessons in order to be not only eligible for the Miami trip but also to become "a life member of the Arthur Murray Studio", carrying with it certain dubious emoluments, at a further cost of \$ 1,752.30.

At another point, while she still had over 1,000 unused hours of instruction she was induced to buy 151 additional [\*\*5] hours at a cost of \$ 2,049.00 to be eligible for a "Student Trip to Trinidad", at her own expense as she later learned.

Also, when she still had 1100 unused hours to her credit, she was prevailed upon to purchase an additional 347 hours at a cost of \$ 4,235.74, to qualify her to receive a "Gold Medal" for achievement, indicating she had advanced to "the Gold Standard".

On another occasion, while she still had over 1200 unused hours, she was induced to buy an additional 175 hours of instruction at a cost of \$ 2,472.75 to be eligible "to take a trip to Mexico".

Finally, sandwiched in between other lesser sales promotions, she was influenced to buy an additional 481 hours of instruction at a cost of \$ 6,523.81 in order to "be classified as a Gold Bar Member, the ultimate achievement of the dancing studio".

All the foregoing sales promotions, illustrative of the entire fourteen separate contracts, were procured by defendant Davenport and Arthur Murray, Inc., by false representations to her that she was improving in her dancing ability, that she had excellent potential, that she was responding to instructions in dancing grace, and that they were developing her into a beautiful dancer, [\*\*6] whereas in truth and in fact she did not develop in her dancing ability, she had no "dance aptitude", and in fact had difficulty in "hearing the musical beat". The complaint alleged that such representations to her "were in fact false and known by the defendant to be false and contrary to the plaintiff's true ability, the truth of plaintiff's ability being fully known to the defendants, but withheld from the plaintiff for the sole and specific intent to deceive and defraud the plaintiff and to induce her in the purchasing of additional hours of dance lessons". It was averred that the lessons were sold to her "in total disregard to the true physical, rhythm, and mental ability of the plaintiff". In other words, while she first exulted that she was entering the "spring of her life", she finally was awakened to the fact there was "spring" neither in her life nor in her feet.

The complaint prayed that the Court decree the dance contracts to be null and void and to be cancelled, that an accounting be had, and judgment entered against the

defendants "for that portion of the \$ 31,090.45 not charged against specific hours of instruction given to the plaintiff". The Court held the complaint [\*\*7] not to state a cause of action and dismissed it with prejudice. We disagree and reverse.

The material allegations of the complaint must, of course, be accepted as true for the purpose of testing its legal sufficiency. Defendants contend that contracts can only be rescinded for fraud or misrepresentation when the alleged misrepresentation is as to a material fact, rather than an opinion, prediction or expectation, and that the statements and representations set forth at length in the complaint were in the category of "trade puffing", within its legal orbit.

HN1It is true that "generally a misrepresentation, to be actionable, must be one of fact rather than of opinion". *Tonkovich v. South Florida Citrus Industries, Inc.*, Fla.App.1966, 185 So.2d 710; *Kutner v. Kalish*, Fla.App.1965, 173 So.2d 763. But this rule has significant qualifications, applicable here. It does not apply where there is a fiduciary relationship between the parties, or where there has been some [\*909] artifice or trick employed by the representor, or where the parties do not in general deal at "arm's length" as we understand the phrase, or where the representee does not have equal opportunity to become apprised [\*\*8] of the truth or falsity of the fact represented. 14 Fla.Jur. Fraud and Deceit, § 28; *Kitchen v. Long*, 1914, 67 Fla. 72, 64 So. 429. As stated by Judge Allen of this Court in *Ramel v. Chasebrook Construction Company*, Fla.App.1961, 135 So.2d 876:

"\* \* \* HN2A statement of a party having \* \* \* superior knowledge may be regarded as a statement of fact although it would be considered as opinion if the parties were dealing on equal terms."

It could be reasonably supposed here that defendants had "superior knowledge" as to whether plaintiff had "dance potential" and as to whether she was noticeably improving in the art of *terpsichore*. And it would be a reasonable inference from the undenied averments of the complaint that the flowery eulogiums heaped upon her by defendants as a prelude to her contracting for 1944 additional hours of instruction in order to attain the rank of the Bronze Standard, thence to the bracket of the Silver Standard, thence to the class of the Gold Bar Standard, and finally to the crowning plateau of a Life Member of the Studio, proceeded as much or more from the urge to "ring the cash register" as from any honest or realistic appraisal of her dancing [\*\*9] prowess or a factual representation of her progress.

HN3Even in contractual situations where a party to a transaction owes no duty to disclose facts within his knowledge or to answer inquiries respecting such facts, the law is if he undertakes to do so he must disclose the whole truth. *Ramel v. Chasebrook Construction Company*, *supra*; *Beagle v. Bagwell*, Fla.App.1964, 169 So.2d 43. From

the face of the complaint, it should have been reasonably apparent to defendants that her vast outlay of cash for the many hundreds of additional hours of instruction was not justified by her slow and awkward progress, which she would have been made well aware of if they had spoken the "whole truth".

In *Hirschman v. Hodges, etc.*, 1910, 59 Fla. 517, 51 So. 550, it was said that -

"\* \* \* HN4what is plainly injurious to good faith ought to be considered as a fraud sufficient to impeach a contract",

and that an improvident agreement may be avoided -

"\* \* \* because of surprise, or mistake, want of freedom, undue influence, the suggestion of falsehood, or the suppression of truth".

We repeat that where parties are dealing on a contractual basis at arm's length [\*\*10] with no inequities or inherently unfair practices employed, the Courts will in general "leave the parties where they find themselves". But in the case sub judice, from the allegations of the unanswered complaint, we cannot say that enough of the accompanying ingredients, as mentioned in the foregoing authorities, were not present which otherwise would have barred the equitable arm of the Court to her. In our view, from the showing made in her complaint, plaintiff is entitled to her day in Court.

It accordingly follows that the order dismissing plaintiff's last amended complaint with prejudice should be and is reversed.

Reversed.

LILES, C.J., and MANN, J., concur.



# APPENDIX 5

## Judging Criteria: How a Dance Competition is Judged

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*By Dan Radler, L.I.S.T.D. Ballroom and Latin, Registered World Class Adjudicator, and co-owner of the Dan Radler and Suzanne Hamby Ballroom Dance Studios.*

Since many ballroom dancers attend dance competitions, it might be useful to look at a subject of interest to both spectators and competitors: *What factors does a judge weigh in assessing a couple's performance?*

The criteria that a judge might choose to consider are actually too numerous to examine individually in the brief time allotted, since at least six couples are being judged simultaneously. Therefore, the judge must rely on the impression each couple makes relative to the others. The experienced judge, having seen and studied dancing at all levels, can quickly assess these factors collectively:

**POSTURE** - one of the most important aspects. Good posture makes you look elegant and exude confidence. It improves balance and control, and allows your partner to connect well to your body in the smooth dances. One's competition result is often directly proportional to one's postural correctness. Hence the old adage, "Persistent practice of postural principles promises perfection."

**TIMING** - if a couple is not dancing on time with the music, no amount of proficiency in any other aspect can overcome this. The music is boss.

**LINE** - by this we mean the length and stretch of the body from head to toe. Attractive and well- executed lines, either curved or straight, enhance the shapes of the figures.

**HOLD** - the correct and unaffected positioning of the body parts when in closed dancing position. For instance, the line of the man's arms should be unbroken from elbow to elbow. Also, there should be symmetry of the man's and woman's arms coming together to form a circle, which, although changing in size, should remain constant in shape so that the dancers remain in correct body position relative to each other. The silhouette of the couple should always be pleasing.

**POISE** - in smooth dancing, the stretch of the woman's body upwards and outwards and leftwards into the man's right arm to achieve balance and connection with his frame, as well as to project outwards to the audience.

**TOGETHERNESS** - the melding of two people's body weights into one, so that leading and following appear effortless, and the dancers are totally in synchronization with each other.

**MUSICALITY AND EXPRESSION** - the basic characterization of the dance to the particular music being played and the choreographic adherence to musical phrasings and accents; also the use of light and shade to create interest value in response to these accents and phrases. For instance, in foxtrot, the stealing of time from one step to allow another to hover; or a quick speed of turn in an otherwise slow rumba; or the snap of a head to suddenly freeze and then melt into slowness in tango.

**PRESENTATION** - Does the couple sell their dancing to the audience? Do they dance outwardly, with enthusiasm, exuding their joy of dancing and confidence in their performance? Or do they show strain or introversion?

**POWER** - Energy is exciting to watch. I've noticed that, in a jive, it always seems to be the most energetic couple that wins this dance. But the energy must be controlled, not wild. For instance, powerful movement is an asset in waltz or foxtrot, but only if it is channeled into the correct swing of the body, and not just by taking big steps. The lilt of the music must be matched by the action of the body. In a waltz for instance, the dancers' body action must clearly show the influence of the one down beat and two up beats. So the release of power into the beginning of a figure must be controlled and sustained during the rise at the end of the figure.

**FOOT AND LEG ACTION** - the stroking of feet across the floor in foxtrot to achieve smoothness and softness; the deliberate lifting and placing of the feet in tango to achieve a staccato action; the correct bending and straightening of the knees in rumba to create hip motion; the extension of the ankles and the pointing of the toes of the non-supporting foot to enhance the line of a figure; the sequential use of the four joints (hip, knee, ankle, and toes) to achieve fullness of action and optimal power; the bending and straightening of knees and ankles in waltz to create rise and fall; the use of inside and outside edges of feet to create style and line all fall under this most important of categories.

**SHAPE** - Shape is the combination of turn and sway to create a look or a position. For instance, in Paso Doble does the man create the visual appearance of maneuvering his cape? Does the lady simulate the billowing flow of the cape through space? In foxtrot, does the man use the appropriate shape on outside partner steps to enable body contact to be maintained?

**LEAD AND FOLLOW** - Does the man lead with his whole body instead of just his arms? Does the lady follow effortlessly or does the man have to assist her?

**FLOOR CRAFT** - This refers not only to avoiding bumping into other couples, but the ability to continue dancing without pause when boxed in. It shows the command of the couple over their choreography and the ability of the man to choose and lead figures extrinsic to their usual work when the necessity presents itself.

**INTANGIBLES** - such as how a couple "look" together, whether they "fit" emotionally, their neatness of appearance, costuming, the flow of their choreography, and basically whether they look like "dancers"; all have an affect on a judge's perception and therefore on his markings.

Different judges have different predilections in what they want to see, and weight these factors differently. One judge, for instance, might be especially interested in technique, while another wants to be moved by musicality and expression. While both factors are obviously important and need to be considered, it can result in couples getting widely disparate markings. Couples wondering what a judge saw to give them a particularly high or low mark should know that any one of the many factors listed in this article could be responsible. The use of a heel when a toe is warranted can just as easily hurt you in a judge's eyes as a meticulous closing of feet can help. Because the judge sees each couple for only a few seconds, anything that draws the attention, either positively or negatively, could very well be the deciding factor on how you are marked.

Competitors, please be assured that virtually no qualified adjudicator will mark you for any reason other than his or her honest evaluation of your performance. Most judges hold their own opinions highly, and try to do a conscientious job. Anyway, no one judge can make or break you. The use of a panel of these experts usually insures that the end result is the correct and equitable one.

*Dan Radler is a former North American, United States, and Eastern U.S. Champion, as well as United States Ten-Dance Champion. He has twice won the Feather Award for "best Professional Smooth Dancer in the United States." From 1983 to 1995 he was featured on the "Championship Ballroom Dancing" television show.*

**Watertown Studio**

111 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown MA 02172 508-620-7138

**Southborough Studio and Offices**

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## APPENDIX 6: Interview Participants

This list of my interviewees is presented in the order I first interviewed them. A few I have not seen since that time, some I have conducted follow up interviews with at later times, and a few are long-standing friends.

[NOTE: names connected by <&> are people interviewed together at the same time.]

Sam Sodano, Jim Gray & Sunnie Page, Brent Allen, Shawn Hawkins, Lee Wakefield, Anne Lannenga, Curt Holman, Corky Ballas, Juliet McMains, Tom Hicks, Melissa Dexter, Dan Kitsis & Giselle Peacock, F.J. Abaya & Natasha Thayer, Adrianna Chessa, Alain Doucet & Anik Jolicour, Jean Marc Generoux, France Mousseau, Kimberly Mitchell, Tony Meredith, John Abrahams, Marianne Nicole, Jonathan Roberts & Anna Trebunskaya, John Kimmins, Jim Maranto, Howard Guess Jr., Genny Sexton, Pierre Alaire & Mirrei Velliou, Pat Traymore, Vince & Alicia Duhon, Ray Rivers, Jennifer Thomas, Michael Mead & Toni Redpath & James Kunitz, Edward Simon, Nicole Caroll, Timothy & Michelle Mason, Marcus Johnson, Bill Sparks, Enrique Ramon, Nadia Eftidal, Milos Poprocky, Paul Beeton, Timothy Howson & Joanne Bolton, Dima & Olga Sukachov, Didio Barrera, Erica Ridgeway & Anton Domansky, Diane Jarmolow, Ruud Vermeij, Forest Vance, Richard Booth, Louis van Amstel, Jonathan Wilkins & Katusha Demidova, Ilona Mayzenburg & Dimitry Chaplin, Briggette Meyer, Karl Breur, Franco Formica & Oksana Nikiforova, Klaus Kongsdal & Viktoria Franova, Julia Bovik, Mark Lunn & Louise Lidbury, Anne Heiermann & Keri Hyytinen, Wolfgang Opitz, Mark & Viola Weiss, Victor Fung, Matt Becker & Lisa Richards, Philip Gott, Jim Drysdale, Thomas Keller & Evelyn Lafferty, Glen & Grisselle Vasquez, Jeannie Penatello, Tatiyana Makarov, Gary McDonald, Rufus Dustin, Sammy Stopford, Hans-Reinhard Galke, Greg De Wet, Bill Irvine MBE (& Bobbie Irvine MBE), Marcus Hilton MBE, Lydia Ungaretti, Graham Oswick, Arunas Bizokas & Edita Daniute, Kenny Welsh, Evgenii Smagin & Rachel Heron, Pamella McGill, Jukka Haapaleinen & Sirpa Sutari, Midori Itoh, Ray Rose, Peter Stokkebroe & Kristina Juul, Christopher Hawkins & Hazel Newberry, Andrew Phillips & Katarzina Kozak, Brendon Midson, Michael Burton & Martina Wuttig, Michael Wentink & Beata Onefater, Donald Johnson, Maurizio Vescovo & Melinda Törökgyorgy, Glenn Weiss, Turtle Brennan, Ikaika Dowsett & Ann Solovyeva, Laura La Gassa, Stephen & Johanna Cullip, Espen Salberg, Viktor Kanevsky, Sandro Virag & Viktoria Janosi, Felipe Telona Jr. & Carolina Orlovsky, Ben Ermis & Shalene Archer-Ermis, Alec Mazo & Edyta Slewinska, David Weiss & Valentina, Andrej Skufca & Katarina Venturini, Stefano Corapi & Margaret Ottaviani, Brian Jolly & Kristina, Charlotte Jorgensen, Ryan Hammond & Arianna Garcia, Hazel Fletcher, Mikko Kaasalainen & Hanna Haarala, Ken & Blanche Bateman (& Leslie Dodd), Bryan Watson & Carmen, Goran Nordin, Kevin Clifton & Anna Melinkova, Warren & Kristi Boyce, Lene James, Renè Loft & Laura Hair, Henrik Larsen, Martino Zanibellato & Michelle Abildstrup, Brian Ericksen & Marianne Eihilt, Ricky Bentzen & Kamilla Seeger, Mikael Lauridsen & Maria Odgaard, Frank Radich & Henriette Lindbjerg, Kristjan Kuusk & Anri Kokkonen, Lidiya Vyshnyakova, Louis Svane, Barbara McColl, Przemek Lowicki & Yana Pokrovskaya, Carolyn Smith, Augusto Schiavo, William Pino, Mark Perkovich & Veronica Cirignano, Eugene Katszevman & Maria Manusova, Vibeke Toft, Nick Kosovich & Lena Bahcheva, Slavi Kryklyvyy, Karina Smirnoff, Maxim Kojenikov & Eulia Zagorovitchenko, Bob Powers, Massimo Giorgianni & Alessia Manfredini, Stephen Hevenor & Larinda McRaven, Malene van Hauen.

## Interviewed Professional (NDCA) and Amateur (USABDA) U.S. Title Holders, by Year

The following chart lists, by last name (which can then be cross referenced with the interviewee list), the dancers that I have interviewed who have won professional or amateur Blackpool or World Titles. This arrangement shows some of the movement between categories but also, and more importantly, helps highlight some of the longitudinal perspectives represented in my research collection and data.

Year	<u>NDCA</u>	<u>NDCA</u>	<u>NDCA</u>	<u>NDCA</u>	<u>USABDA/USA Dance</u>	
	Latin	Ballroom	Smooth	Rhythm	Latin	Ballroom
2005		Wilkins & Demidova	Kosovitch & Bacheva		Katsevman & Mausova	
2004		Wilkins & Demidova	Kosovitch & Bacheva	Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	
2003	Kryklvyy & Smirnoff	Wilkins & Demidova	Ermis & Archer-Ermis	Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	Fung
2002	Kryklvyy & Smirnoff	Wilkins & Demidova	Mead & Redpath	Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	Fung
2001	Kryklvyy & Smirnoff	Wilkins & Demidova	Mead & Redpath	Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	Fung
2000	van Amstel & Smirnoff	Wilkins & Demidova	Mead & Redpath	Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	
1999	Sparks & Mitchell	Wilkins & Demidova	Mead & Redpath	Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	
1998	Sparks & Mitchell	Wilkins & Demidova		Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	Fung
1997	McDonald			Powers & Gorchakova	Katsevman & Mausova	Fung
1996	Dexter		Simon	Powers & Gorchakova		Fung
1995	Meredith			Powers & Gorchakova	Sukachov (Lazebnaya)	Fung
1994	Sparks		Maranto	Powers & Gorchakova		Fung
1993	Sparks		Maranto	Powers & Gorchakova		
1992	Dexter			Vance		
1991	Dexter	Culip		Vance	Hicks	
1990	Ballas			Vance		
1989	Ballas			Vance		
1988	Ballas			Vance		
1987	Ballas					
1986	Ballas					
1985						
1984			Panatello	Panatello		

## Professional and Amateur Blackpool Title Holders Interviewed, by Year

The following charts list, by last name (which can then be cross referenced with the interviewee list), the dancers I have interviewed who have won professional or amateur Blackpool Titles. This arrangement shows some of the movement between categories but also, and more importantly, helps highlight some of the longitudinal perspectives represented in my research collection and data.

### BLACKPOOL

Year	Professional		Amateur	
	Ballroom	Latin	Ballroom	Latin
2005	Howson Bolton	Watson Carmen		
2004	Hawkins Newberry	Watson Carmen		Formica Nikiforova
2003	Hawkins Newberry	Watson Carmen		Formica Nikiforova
2002	Schiavo	Watson Carmen		Formica Nikiforova
2001		Haapalainen Suutari		Skufca Venturini
2000		Watson Carmen		Kryklvyy
1999		Haapalainen Suutari	Pino	
1998	Hilton	Haapalainen Suutari		Wentink Beata
1997	Hilton	Haapalainen Suutari	Hawkins Newberry	
1996	Hilton	Ballas	Hawkins Newberry	
1995	Hilton	Ballas	Howson Bolton	van Amstel
1994	Hilton	Stopford McColl	Howson Bolton	
1993		Eftedal	Howson Bolton	
1992	Hilton	Stopford McColl	Schiavo	Watson
1991		Stopford McColl	Schiavo	Watson
1990	Hilton			Galke
1989		Stopford McColl		

**Blackpool Title Holders (continued)**

**BLACKPOOL**

**Professional                  Amateur**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Ballroom</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>Ballroom</b>	<b>Latin</b>
1988				Nyhagen
1987				
1986				
1985			Weiss	
1984				Mikkelsen
1983		Stopford		Hilton
1982		Salberg		Hilton
1981		Salberg	Welsh	
1980		Fletcher		
1979		Fletcher		
1978				
1977		Fletcher		
1976			Kimmins	Salberg
1975				
1974				
1973				Fletcher
1972				Fletcher
1971				
1970				
1969				
1968				
1967				
1966	Irvine Irvine	Irvine Irvine		
1965				
1964	Irvine Irvine			
1963	Irvine Irvine			
1962	Irvine Irvine			
1961				
1960				

## Professional and Amateur World Title Holders Interviewed, by Year

The following charts list, by last name (which can then be cross referenced with the interviewee list), the dancers I have interviewed who have won professional or amateur World Titles. This arrangement shows some of the movement between categories but also, and more importantly, helps highlight some of the longitudinal perspectives represented in my research collection and data.

### WORLD

Year	Professional		Amateur	
	Ballroom	Latin	Ballroom	Latin
2005		Watson Carmen		
2004	Hawkins Newberry	Watson Carmen		Formica Nikiforova
2003	Hawkins Newberry	Watson Carmen		Formica Nikiforova
2002	Hawkins Newberry	Watson Carmen		Formica Nikiforova
2001		Watson Carmen		Skufca Venturini
2000	Schiavo	Watson Carmen		Kryklvy
1999		Watson Carmen	Pino	
1998			Pino	Wentink Onefate
1997	Hilton	Galke	Hawkins Newberry	
1996	Hilton		Giorgianni Manfredini	
1995	Hilton		Giorgianni Manfredini	van Amstel
1994	Hilton		Jørgensen	van Amstel
1993	Hilton		Schiavo	
1992	Hilton			Toft
1991	Hilton			Watson
1990				Galke
1989				Galke
1988				Nyhagen
1987				Nyhagen
1985			Weiss	
1984			Weiss	Mikkelsen



## World Title Holders (continued)

## WORLD

## Professional Amateur

Year	Ballroom	Latin	Ballroom	Latin
1983		Salberg		Hilton
1982		Salberg		Hilton
1981		Fletcher	Welsh	
1980		Fletcher		
1979		Fletcher		
1978		Fletcher		
1977		Fletcher		
1976				Salberg
1975				
1974				
1973				Fletcher
1972		Opitz		Fletcher
1971				
1970				
1969				
1968	Irvine Irvine	Irvine Irvine		
1967	Irvine Irvine			
1966		Irvine Irvine		
1965	Irvine Irvine			
1964	Irvine Irvine			
1963	Irvine Irvine			
1962	Irvine Irvine			
1961		Irvine Irvine		
1960	Irvine Irvine	Irvine Irvine		

## **APPENDIX 7:**

# **Facts for Consumers from the Federal Trade Commission Dance Studios – November 1992**

Although dance lessons may offer opportunities for fun, entertainment, and companionship, they also may be more expensive than planned, especially if you do not know how to protect yourself against some dance studio sales practices. For example, beware of:

- Signing long-term contracts and prepaying thousands of dollars for dance lessons or clubs that you may be unable to complete or cancel;
- Signing additional contracts before the current one expires;
- Making large prepayments to studios that may be unable to give refunds should they suddenly close or go bankrupt.

In an effort to make consumers aware of certain sales practices used by some dance studios, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has prepared this brochure. It also suggests ways in which you can protect yourself.

### **Sales Techniques:**

If you are thinking about or are already taking dance lessons, you should understand the sales techniques that some dance studios may use to persuade you to take lessons, or to take additional lessons.

#### *Relay Salesmanship:*

Some studio instructors use the technique of relay salesmanship (consecutive sales talks by more than one representative in a single day) to try to persuade students to buy lessons or buy more lessons. This tactic may put you under heavy pressure to sign a contract, encouraging you to buy lessons you may later realize you do not want or cannot afford.

#### *Overlapping Contracts:*

Some studio instructors try to convince their students during lesson time to sign additional contracts before completing the current lessons. In some instances, you may unwittingly be buying additional lessons that extend beyond your interest, your physical fitness, or even your life expectancy.

#### *High-pressure Sales:*

Some studio instructors, using high-pressure sales tactics, exploit student emotions or personal vulnerabilities to oversell lessons. Sometimes, when students refuse to buy additional prepaid lessons, instructors will neglect them in classes, embarrass them in public, or transfer them to a less skilled instructor.

**Precautions:**

Awareness about the possible use of these sales techniques can help you avoid potential problems. In addition, you may avoid some potential problems if you comparison shop for dance lessons.

Finally, before signing or renewing a contract for dance lessons, consider taking the following measures.

Pay in advance for only a certain number of lessons to see if you like them. You may get a discount if you make a large prepayment on a long-term contract, but it will have little value if later you are unable to take the classes, you want to cancel them, or the studio closes before your lessons are completed. At this time, only a few states require studios to post bonds to protect consumers' prepayments.

Insist that the following items are clearly stated in writing:

- any oral promises;
- the cost per hour of private and group lessons;
- your cancellation and refund rights; (These are important in case you change your mind about lessons, move, or become ill.)
- any prepayment protections, if required by state law.

You can ask about these important items when you comparison shop.

Do not sign a contract immediately, especially if you have concerns about the stability of the studio or are asked to prepay a large amount of money for a lifetime membership, an exclusive club membership, or dance cruise offer. Take time to think about the matter and talk it over with a friend, a family member, or an attorney. Even if your contract offers you a refund or cancellation option, you may be unable to get your money back if the studio closes or its refund check bounces. Prepay only as much as you can afford to lose if the studio closes.

As an additional precaution, you might wish to contact your local or state consumer protection office to learn what rights you may have under local or state law with regard to maximum costs for contracts, cancellation and refund rights, studio bonding requirements, and a "cooling off" period, which may give you a few days to reconsider your decision after you sign your contract. Also, by contacting your local Better Business Bureau office, you may be able to learn if there are any current complaints registered against the dance studio you are considering.

**Complaints:**

If you have a problem with a dance studio and cannot resolve it, send a letter describing your complaint to your local or state consumer protection agency and your local Better Business Bureau. (Check your phone directory for addresses.) Also, send a copy of your letter to: Correspondence Branch, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, D.C. 20580. Although the FTC generally cannot intervene in individual disputes, the information you provide may indicate a pattern of possible law violations requiring action by the Commission.

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