# Critical Approaches to Arts-based Research

Volume 5
Issue 1
2015

UNESCO
Observatory
Multi-disciplinary
Journal in
the Arts

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2015



ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by
The UNESCO Observatory Melbourne
http://unescomelb.org

In conjunction with
The University of Melbourne,
Parkville, Victoria 3010.

UNESCO Observatory
Multi-Disciplinary
Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2015

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

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# Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

**Guest Editors** Anne Harris
Mary Ann Hunter
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THEME

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its 'validity', and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This 'coming of age' is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific 'versus' arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based 'outputs' or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a 'reduction' back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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# Dance as Intervention: Disrupting Gendered Norms of Embodiment

AUTHOR **Jack Migdalek**

ABSTRACT

This article describes, and comments on, the process of using dance as an effective research tool through which to self-reflexively research one's embodied habitus. It refers to research that I conducted into notions of masculine and feminine norms of embodiment commonly prescribed as fitting for one's biological sex. This research extends to an investigation into modes of thinking and doing into which I was inducted as a male dancer and as a person in the everyday. The process of creating what was to become a danced physical theater performance piece proved to be both emotionally confronting and enlightening. It also served as a form of intervention. Not only has critical interrogation of my own practices and aesthetic sensibilities as a male dancer, choreographer, and dance educator shifted and enhanced my perspectives and understandings of gender and embodiment, but it has also disrupted embedded and habituated ways in which I operated in dance and other contexts. In addition, the performance piece, *Gender Icons* [i], has generated profound responses in a number of my fieldwork participants, indicating that dance research also has the capacity for raising social consciousness in others.

## BIOGRAPHY

Jack Migdalek has worked as a performance artist, director, choreographer, and educator in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Currently Jack is a Drama lecturer at Trinity College (University of Melbourne). Jack's PhD on Embodied Choreography and Performance of Gender was undertaken in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University under the supervision of Dr. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli.

This paper describes, and comments on, the process of using dance as an effective research tool through which to self-reflexively research one's embodied habitus. It refers to a practical and personal journey in dance that I conducted into notions of masculine and feminine norms of embodiment, which are commonly prescribed as fitting for one's biological sex. It refers to an investigation into modes of thinking and doing into which I was inducted as a male dancer and as a person in the everyday. Using my body as an autoethnographic research tool proved to be both emotionally confronting and enlightening. Not only has critical interrogation of my own practices and aesthetic sensibilities as a male dancer, choreographer, and dance educator shifted and enhanced my perspectives and understandings of gender and embodiment, but it has also disrupted my habituated corporeality in dance and other contexts. A dance performance piece that emerged through self-reflexive embodied exploration also played a key role in my ethnographic fieldwork, in that it has generated profound responses in others. In this article I will give some background to why problems of gender and embodiment are often overlooked. I will explain where mindful self-reflexive investigation of these issues took me, and then outline and analyse my use of dance as an embodied research method through which I argue that social consciousness and action may be advanced.

This paper engages with concepts of embodiment—meaning the manner of physical deportment in which a physical practice is performed—and with concepts of gender as social constructions of femininity and masculinity. My interest in these concepts resulted from the impacts that social constructions of masculinity have had on me, both as a person in the everyday and as a performance arts practitioner/educator (Migdalek 2012). I wanted to investigate ways in which, as a subject of particular cultures, I was positioned toward the embodiment of gender, and how this positioning affected ways in which I came to operate. It disturbed me that embodied norms commonly

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Gender Icons, the performance piece referred to in this article, can be accessed via Deakin Research Online at: http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30047367/stream_migdalek_performance_2012.flv

prescribed and valorised for those who present as male differ from those prescribed for those who present as female. This relates to issues of social and emotional well-being and the impact and consequences that dominant gender norms have for male and female bodies and on those whose embodied inclinations do not fit (or do not fit comfortably) with such norms. The limited set of options given and taken up as representative of heteronormative and homonormative embodiment for males and females can adversely affect the self-image and self-esteem of those who do not feel comfortable taking up embodied subject positions prescribed for them by societies/cultures/institutions to which they aspire or belong (see Butler 1993; Gard 2001; Drummond 2005; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005).

I acknowledge that there are those for whom the dichotomous binary categories of male and female, around which this article is based, do not fit. Indeed issues of embodiment of gender and the opening and diversifying of possibilities of gender performance are also of relevance to transgender persons. I choose, however, to restrict the parameters of this discussion to the dominant binarily-constructed and gendernormative categories of male and female, as they are categories, within the contemporary vernacular, by which so many individuals are defined and/or define themselves.

## GENDER ICONS

## DELIMITATIONS OF HABITUS

A problem with the notion of exploring, disrupting, or deconstructing gendered norms of embodiment, or any other practice, is that habitual ways in which we perceive and operate tend to become so normalised that the machinations and ideologies behind them are rendered invisible. Bourdieu theorises about 'habitus' as non-consciously performed practices that are "internalised as second nature and so forgotten" (1990, p. 56). Habitus manifests in "schemes of perception, thought and action" (1990, p. 54). The first two forms, perception and thought, concern internal response and reaction. The third form, habitus in the form of action, manifests itself in and through the body. Theories on habitus in the form of action are consistent with Butler's theories on gender performativity, wherein gender is not a singular or deliberate act, but rather the repeated stylisation of the body (Butler 1990, 1993). Like habitus, gender performativity is largely hidden from obvious view and beyond our control. This relates to the ways in which one may come to dance and choreograph, both one's own body, as well as the bodies of others. The autoethnographic component of my research used dance experimentation as a practical means toward interrogating habitual and embedded gender inequities in my own practices.

Even where we consider ourselves to have agency, ways in which we come to operate are largely regulated (and restricted) by cultural boundaries, influences and parameters prevalent in cultures that envelop us (McRobbie 2009). While it can be argued that I had agency over my actions (Goffman 1959), the influence of my enculturation and ways in which I had been inducted into social worlds in which I operated, as a subject categorised by biological sex, can not be discounted (Turner 1984; Butler 1990; Connell 1999; Shilling 2003). Through recollections of externally imposed delimitations placed on my embodiment, and my own panopticonic self-regulation across an array of social and cultural contexts, I became aware of a delicate relationship between social and personal control of my embodiment of gender. I found that I would not sit, stand, gesticulate, or dance in ways that could be deemed as being feminine, for reasons that males who did so in my worlds were marked as 'other'.

Norms and ideals serve as signifiers that cast light over that which is 'other'. Slavoj Zizek's (1999) master-signifier theory (after Lacan) makes the point that when a signifier or that which carries meaning becomes stable in what it symbolises, it can cause that which is different and the most removed from it to stand out as marked, other, and abnormal (see also Pickering 2001; Rex Butler 2005). For example, where the signification of a male dancing in a strong or arguably masculine manner becomes symbolic of good male dancing then it may have a degrading effect on the signification of a male dancing in a soft or arguably feminine manner (see Migdalek 2013).


Taste, as a manifestation of habitus (Bourdieu 1990; Turner 1992; Shilling 2003) is something that we tend not to question. Individuals overlook the proposition that their sense of taste is culturally framed or imposed (McRobbie 2009). What we come to understand to be tasteful/distasteful for male or female bodies can delimit not only how we perceive and appreciate embodied performances of gender, but also ways in which we come to express gender through our own bodies. These delimitations are very much influenced by the signalling of what has come to be considered normal, and also aesthetic, embodiment for male and female bodies that figure so persistently in mass media, sports, and the arts. Definitive embodied representations of normative heterosexual and homosexual males and females within such mainstream arenas of performance serve to demarcate the discursive space in which individuals in the everyday are able or willing to embody. The machinations of these prevalent representations that have become increasingly and globally common are fundamentally invisible.

## EMBODIED SELF–REFLEXIVE EXPLORATION

The work of aforementioned theorists led me to ask questions about how pervasive discourses of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and gendernormativity influenced the ways in which I came to operate and embody as a male dancer, choreographer, and as a person in the everyday. However, I felt that academic theorising on these issues did not adequately address my own inclinations and aesthetic sensibilities concerning my personal embodiment of masculinity and femininity. The work of arts informed researchers and theorists, Bagley and Cancienne (2002), Snowber (2002), Blumenfeld-Jones (1995, 2008), and Leavy (2009), which acknowledge the body as research tool and promote the artistic presentation of data (see also Richardson 1996; O'Toole 2006), led me to pursue deeper practical and embodied critical interrogation of my own practices. In short, I used dance as a device, through which to research–and also to represent my research–into my own comforts and discomforts with embodied masculinity and femininity.

In my endeavours to explore and question ways in which I habitually view and do the embodiment of gender, I employed a self-reflexive approach and delved, through physical improvisation and dance, into my own sense of embodied consciousness and self-consciousness as a gay male who had grown up in urban Australia. This methodology can be understood to be a form of autobiographical identity work (see Ellis 2004; Leavy 2009) where the body figures as a research tool. A danced form of inquiry can be understood as a methodology wherein one's questions are danced into wonder (Snowber 2002). In what follows I describe my embodied exploratory work and what developed into a danced physical theatre performance piece, which I subsequently performed before others. On commenting on how the process impacted on me personally, as well as the responses the piece generated in others, I state the

case for dance as intervention, both for the researcher and for research participants.

My interest in aspects of embodied masculinity and femininity led me to collate a sound collage of several music excerpts, each of which was evocative of 'feminine' or 'masculine' embodiment to me. Masculine or feminine aspects which I recognised in each excerpt pertained to images in envisioned storylines or simply movement qualities suggested by instrumentation and melody. The extent to which individuals read and/or physically respond to each track similarly to the way I do, is likely to depend on commonalities in our enculturation. As musicologist Susan McClary (1998) claims, music may be read and perceived differently according to meanings and associations related to human life assigned it by our cultures (see also Leavy 2009). On becoming lost in music and dancing, creative writer Enza Gandolfo questions the extent to which we own our responses: "Am I really free to dance or is the music forcing me to move in particular ways I am not even aware of?" (2006, p. 63).

I used the sound collage in a professional development session that I ran with twenty-nine fellow performance arts educators/practitioners, which was conducted under the auspices of a major Victorian art centre. This group of participants, with specialist skills in areas of dance, drama, design, and/or music, were asked to physically improvise to the sound collage. Throughout the eleven-minute improvisation, participants appeared to *naturally* fall into common gendered repertoires of motion. For the most part, music that had a strong and powerful beat and was arguably 'masculine', evoking strides, thrusts, and gestures from participants that were also strong and powerful. Music that was delicate, lilting, and arguably 'feminine' evoked footwork and gestures from participants that were dainty, light, and graceful, such as work on tip-toes and wafting arms. At the same time, several male participants punctuated their feminine balletic moves with parodic grins that bespoke their amusement, embarrassment, or sense of awkwardness with

performing in such ways. This output is what inspired me to workshop and explore via my own body what it was to comply with and resist norms of masculine and feminine embodied action. In my initial improvisations, I too found myself *naturally* falling into similar movement styles in moving to various excerpts of the sound collage. I began to mindfully also work against my usual repertoires of embodied gender expression, exploring and acknowledging repertoires of embodiment that had become natural for me, as well as those that were corporeally uncomfortable to me. All the while, I deliberately resisted parodying any motion that the music inspired me to perform.

I decided to develop this exploratory dance work into a performance piece, which I planned to present at my Confirmation of PhD Candidature session as an articulation of my research concerns. In working on the piece, which I titled *Gender Icons,* I was exploring elements of my own lived experiences, as well as unchartered areas of consciousness and confusion, pertaining to the embodiment of gender. In preparing the piece I took my investigation beyond the dance studio and scrutinised how and why I felt uncomfortable standing with hips cocked to the side or sitting with legs neatly crossed at the ankles in everyday public settings such as bus stops. This brought to light the degree to which my comforts/discomforts with masculine/feminine embodiment as a dancer/choreographer were informed by and embedded in ways in which I operated as a person in the everyday.

Carl Bagley and Mary Beth Cancienne (2002) endorse the representation of collected data via artistic means such as dance performance (see also Ellis 2004). Where Leavy (2009) refers to ethnotheatre as theatre that depicts the researcher's interpretation of ethnographic data, *Gender Icons* can be regarded as a piece of auto-ethnotheatre, the data of which emanated from my personal experiences and consciousness of gender and embodiment. *Gender Icons* can be seen as a stylised dance

performance of a selection or distillation of my autoethnographic data. As Richardson (1990) claims, the choices we make concerning what and how we present our data inscribes our own subjectivity into our research texts. In short, *Gender Icons* is a personal expression of my frustrations, angers, dilemmas, and desires, and thus draws upon my own lived experiences and consciousness as data. A brief description of the piece follows.

In *Gender Icons* (see video) I dance to a series of Western music excerpts in the styles of classical, pop, and jazz, that are arguably masculine or feminine in feeling. Through counterpointing music that could be considered to be masculine with imagery and action performed in a feminine demeanour, and music that could be considered to be feminine with imagery and action performed in a masculine demeanour, I challenge audiences to consider how and why it is that we do and view certain embodied practices differently according to the biological sex of the performer. As if in a *straight* jacket, I embody the idea that biologically sexed bodies are restricted by firmly embedded iconic semiotics of femininity and masculinity.

As my project progressed, it became apparent to me that *Gender Icons* would be a useful resource in subsequent ethnographic fieldwork sessions with educators and high school students. I hoped that the piece would trigger personal reflections on issues of embodiment and gender in fieldwork participants, which I might also draw on as data. In addition to performances of *Gender Icons*, I also incorporated movement and choreographic workshops into my fieldwork sessions. One of these workshops involved participants in choreographing and then performing non-parodic feminine sequences of movement for male bodies and masculine sequences of movement for female bodies. Another involved analysing gendered aspects of improvised, danced representations of creatures such as bulldogs and butterflies,

the former consistently interpreted as being masculine and male and the latter as being feminine and female, regardless of the biological sex of performer participants.

## CONFRONTING EMBODIED HABITUAL NORMS

The process of creating what was to become a danced physical theater performance piece proved to be both emotionally confronting and enlightening. Preparing sections of *Gender Icons* in which my body danced in feminine ways involved deliberately embodying against what had become my 'male dance habitus'. Although I was confident that I was physically and technically capable of performing sequences of movement that I had choreographed, moving my body in the feminine manner required by particular sections of my choreography felt unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It was not my habit to move in such ways, unless choreographing for females, and I found it difficult to let myself go in ways I could when performing actions that were not feminine. Consciously moving in a feminine manner challenged my habitual perceptions, positioning, and modes of practice. As a choreographer, my interest was to challenge audience perceptions of what is fitting embodiment for male and female bodies. At the same time, as a performer, I was anxious that I would feel embarrassed or confronted when moving, as an object of gaze, in a feminine manner in front of others. This was contingent on my sense of audience reaction to me—the male performing the piece—during the moments of performance itself.

Initial performances of *Gender Icons* were executed for peers and academics. These were held and contextualised as academic events in lecture theatres and conference centres, and as such, performing feminine sections of the piece was not too disconcerting. My sense of confidence was contingent on the audience knowing something of the context of the piece prior

to viewing it. Even in cases where audience members laughed at particular segments, I felt that their responses were grounded in the knowledge that the piece had an academic purpose. This was in sharp contrast to the prospect of performing the piece before high school students.

Self-reflexive autoethnographic analysis of the process of bringing the performance of *Gender Icons* before high school students centred on apprehensions that hinged on what I understood to be at stake for the male who transgressed embodied norms of gender when not doing so in parody. I was aware through my enculturation and extensive first hand experience as a performance artist who had performed before school audiences at all levels in both private and public institutions, that a male moving in a feminine manner elicited sniggers, laughter, and/or hostility and derision from audiences that connected to established homonegative suppositions which will be discussed further along. Fellow male performance arts practitioners whom I had spoken to of my anxieties verified that they too would feel similarly about performing feminine motions such as those featured in *Gender Icons* for high school students. Being constantly on guard and anticipating hostile or derisive reactions is hardly an appealing situation in which to place oneself, particularly when the performance requires deep immersion into a persona or emotion.

The apprehensions that I experienced attest to the power of forces that might inhibit or discourage live performers or performance artists/educators (like myself), who want to present work that challenges embodied norms of gender, from placing themselves in a position of having to endure or deal with reactions of live audiences that might be mocking, aversive, or offensive. In my case, the hope that the piece might challenge and promote critical inquiry into the gendered inequitable ways the students perceived masculine/feminine embodiment according to the biological sex of the performer, inspired me and gave me the

courage to 'put myself out there' and integrate the performance into ethnographic fieldwork with high school students.

As it happened, the performance made a powerful impact on many of the high school students who saw it. Despite my anxieties, most student groups before whom I performed were sufficiently respectful to me as a performer, not to be disruptive in ways I had feared. Perhaps my earnestness when introducing myself and the fact that the sessions occurred in sites of learning set a tone which communicated that the piece was not intended to be comic. Even so I was aware of several students sniggering during my performances, and, as expected, these moments were difficult for me to work against.

My anxieties of how high school students might respond to me embodying in a feminine manner in a staged performance are so deeply embedded that they surfaced, and continue to resurface, on every occasion that I perform before high school students. I acknowledge that perhaps not contextualising the piece prior to performing it would allow for audiences' unguarded reactions to the performance and subsequently make post-performance reflection a more provocative learning experience for audiences. However, I continue to be unwilling to take the risk that the piece be misinterpreted and received in a way that might reinforce already existing discriminatory and potentially aversive attitudes in those who might not be attuned to the intended tone of the piece. I am mindful that art expression, and particularly non-verbal dance expression, can be interpreted in ways that differ from an artist's intention (Blumenfeld-Jones 2002; Knowles & Cole 2008). Specifically, I would hate to reinforce for high school student audience members what they already find weird, bizarre, gay, or 'other' about males embodying in an effeminate manner.

## DANCE RESEARCH AS INTERVENTION

The process of research can affect and change us as people and as researchers (Szarycz 2010). It can lead not only researchers but also fieldwork participants to new understandings around particular issues (Lincoln 1995; Gunzenhauser 2006). Representing data via artistic means such as performance, allows it to be seen and touched in different ways (Bagley & Cancienne 2002). This applies for researchers in working with their data, as well as for those who encounter the resulting artistic representation. In such cases, the research itself can be understood as an act of intervention. Arts based research advocate Patricia Leavy (2009) attests that arts based forms of presentation can be used as a means of creating critical awareness in audiences. She argues that performance work can evoke emotional responses, raise consciousness, educate, and empower. A performance may pull audience members not only into the experiences of the performer/researcher but also into their own experiences (Snowber 2002; Ellis 2004): "As I, the performer share my own story through dance and voice, I open up a place for the audience to share more intimately their own stories" (Snowber 2002, p. 31). Stacy Holman Jones (2005) refers to the potential of autobiographical performances to make participants and audiences not only glimpse who and what they are and desire, but to also serve as avenues through which they might come into contact with different identities, positions, and desires. This kind of theatre ultimately demands response and has the potential to generate action.

Self-reflexive dance-based interrogation of my own practices disrupted, shifted, and enhanced my habituated perspectives, understandings, and practices of gender and embodiment. In addition, dance performances of *Gender Icons* as well as movement and choreographic workshops that I conducted served to generate attitudinal changes in a number of high school students and adults, as evidenced in reactions and

embodied responses of participants. Fieldwork participants across different workshop sessions commented that the sessions they took part in provoked their consciousness and disrupted their perspectives regarding the embodiment of gender in ways that they had not previously considered:

> *"[The session] made me realise things I see everyday but never think about" (high school student);*
>
> *"[The performance] was an enlightenment to watch and I can't see the world the same again" (high school student);*
>
> *"Even though I think I am open minded and not judgmental, the performance made me realise in terms of gender that I really was [gendered]" (educator).*

That the dance performance and/or taking part in practical movement workshops provoked some participants' consideration of issues in ways that they may not necessarily have considered before, is testimony to the power of performance works and performance arts activities as mediums that can lead people to see themselves in new ways (see Saxton & Miller 2009; Sinclair et al. 2009). What this form or research revealed to me was how powerfully a direct experience can highlight issues of concern as compared to less concrete means such as discussion alone. In the latter, notions are merely articulated as cognitive perspectives. In the former they are experienced if not actually embodied. Through embodied interrogation, participants are in a position to see/experience, and not just imagine what aspects of their own practices might be gender inequitable.

Whilst it is my contention that dance performance and workshop activities can bring issues of embodied gender inequity to the fore, I acknowledge that the work that I did also had its limitations. Students' publicly shared responses to *Gender Icons* and ensuing workshop activities were that people should be free and uninhibited to embody gender in any way at all.

Nevertheless, comments made both in discussion and in anonymous response sheets, from amongst both student and adult audiences revealed common, fixed, and inequitable preconceptions and expectations concerning the embodiment of the homosexual, and particularly the presupposition that the effeminate moving male is queer (see O'Connell 2012). Assumptions about how queer males embody can be related to Zizek's (1999) master-signifier theory in that they are determined in counterpoint to notions of how straight males embody. This is in line with DePalma and Atkinson's (2008) concerns about the conflation of sex, gender, and sexuality, which ignores "that these are in reality separate aspects of human identity and experience" (p. 127). Clearly, the work that I did needs further development in order to challenge such conflations.

In the same light, comments were made in anonymous response sheets by several student and adult viewers that made assumptions about my sexual orientation because of the way in which I danced:

> *"The feminine dance made me think that he was a homosexual" (high school student);*
>
> *"You seem as if, by your actions that you are gay" (high school student);*
>
> *"When performing a 'feminine' move I found it hard not to stereotype you as gay" (trainee educator);*
>
> *"Through the gestures and poses I assumed that the performer was gay" (trainee educator).*

Despite cognitive shifts in mindset that have destabilised traditional codings and categories of what it is for a male to be gay within wider society and a broadening of attitudes toward males who display feminine qualities ('sensitive new age guys' for instance), feminine embodiment on a male body

continues—within wider society—to be perceived as 'gay' (see Gere 2001; Gard 2001; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005). Feminine embodiment continues to be promoted and perceived as unfitting embodiment for a straight male, positioning both 'gay' and 'feminine' as subordinate (Migdalek 2012). As mentioned, dominant culturally promoted norms of what is seemly gender embodiment for male and female bodies can impact detrimentally on the social and emotional well-being of those whose embodied inclinations do not fit comfortably with such norms (see Butler 1993; Gard 2001; Drummond 2005; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005).

Following the conclusion of my fieldwork sessions with students, many of them complimented and thanked me for my performance of *Gender Icons*. My sense was that they thought me brave and courageous as a male to have performed before them in a feminine manner as evidenced in the following response sheet comments:

> *"I think you are very creative and adventurous, not scared of how others will think of you";*
>
> *"I think it was very daring for the performer to perform feminine actions and dance steps";*
>
> *"I think that it took a real man to do what was showed at the performance today. Many people would not dare to portray that kind of performance in today's society. Kudos to you".*

As complimentary as the last comment is, the male student who made it, displays clear discriminatory ideas on qualities, such as daring, that make a 'real' man. The implication here is that other men with other qualities are not real men and as such subordinate. These comments verify that for these students, transgressing norms of gender embodiment takes courage and the overcoming of fear, and if done with confidence, earns respect. I find it interesting that students did not think that

I cared about how I projected. I wonder with what esteem students would have regarded or admired me had I shared my apprehensions with them. I wonder if in exposing my fears, or what some might regard as weaknesses, I would still have been regarded as a 'real man'. I cannot explain why it was that I did not express these fears, but wonder if having the nerve to do so would have made me even more of a man in their eyes. Somehow I do not think so. Perhaps that is the next step for me to take in dance-based fieldwork.

In appraising the outcomes of my ethnographic dance-based fieldwork, my feeling is that a single professional development session or school visit is unlikely to be adequate interruption or intervention into established and inequitable positioning and presuppositions of some fieldwork participants. I also acknowledge that steeping concepts in binary notions of male/female and masculine/feminine, as I did, undermines and delimits other possibilities of gender expression. I would endeavour, in future dance-based fieldwork, to promote these concepts as merely being broad points on a continuum that also accommodates shifting and varying positions.

## SOCIAL CHANGE

My autoethnographic research has made it possible for me to reflect back on my distinctively different positioning toward bodies of those who presented as males and females respectively. This was deeply embedded in gender normative, heteronormative, and patriarchal ideologies, as informed by life inscription and induction to a cultural heritage that prescribes differing norms for male bodies and female bodies. The gendered machinations of my practices were so embedded and invisible that they not only appeared, but also felt, perfectly 'natural'. I was so used to perceiving and operating in particular ways that I was unable to recognise connections between the ways in which I operated

and ways in which I had been conditioned. It is precisely because the machinations of habitus and taste (Bourdieu 1990) remain largely invisible to us, that essentialist modes of thinking, where a sense of what is 'natural' embodiment for particular bodies is understood to be something fundamental to who we are (see McRobbie 2009; Butler 2004), have been overlooked and under-problematised in regard to embodied performance of gender. Dance as a practical research tool made it possible for me, and a number of my fieldwork participants, to see and understand the embodiment of gender in different ways.

I concur with arguments that practical and embodied activities, such as those experienced in the performance arts workshop, may lead to not only an understanding and appreciation of the experiences of others (Sinclair et al. 2009), but also to the disruption of one's own habituated practices (Threadgold 2005). To this end I advocate the use of dance and other arts-based practices as methods through which to advance critical enquiry and investigation into embodied gender inequity. More broadly these methods can be an effective means toward the challenging of cultural boundaries, influences, parameters, and protocols that regulate how we habitually operate.

If generating and stimulating social change toward gender equity in and through processes of education is an aim, then those in positions of influence, such as educators, need to become mindful of existing and hidden inequities in their own habituated practices. To this end, I advocate self-reflexive professional development work with educators (see Ollis 2008) that challenge them to engage with notions of habitus (Bourdieu 1990) and turn a mirror onto themselves in order to think about the impact that their own routine assumptions, positions, values, and attitudes, such as those concerning the embodiment of gender, have on their own practices. To avoid being oppressive to some of those under their charge, there is a need for educators to be open to recognising, interrogating, and deconstructing aspects of their own positioning, particularly

those pertaining to the embodiment of gender, because the gendered operations of one's habitus are so deeply embedded that they are rendered invisible.

It is not easy to break with corporeal trajectories assigned to us via our social location, habitus, and sense of taste (Shilling 2003). Delving into and reconstructing ways in which I operate/operated as a performance arts practitioner, and as a person in the everyday, has been both confronting and inspiring. As suggested by Ellis (2004), the process of scrutinising oneself and revealing one's findings can, while insightful, be simultaneously emotionally challenging. Discomforts triggered through the research process and bringing myself to dance *Gender Icons*, shifted and enhanced my own perspectives and understandings of gender and embodiment, as well as those of a number of fieldwork participants. Looking back on broader and more equitable attitudes toward the embodiment of gender that some of my performances, fieldwork, and discussions have triggered in others, has made me see that doing this project has had a positive effect on my bearing as well as my resolve to undertake further initiatives in the field.

The process of undertaking research can be recognised as a means toward fostering, stimulating, and enabling social action (Lincoln 1995). Dance-based research can serve as a conduit toward new understanding surrounding possibilities of gender and embodiment. Whilst the focus of my arts-based self-reflexive and ethnographic research was on gender and embodiment, it holds implications to intervention pertaining to other positions we occupy (not just gender), and other ways in which we habitually come to perceive and act.

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