

Invisible Barriers, Visible Change:

Addressing Gender Bias in Ballet Training to Create Equitable

Artistic Leadership Pathways

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Short reflection

During this module I have learned how to conceptualise, plan, execute and evaluate a research project. Through writing a dissertation of this length, I have learned the importance of consistency, ensuring I have used language and concepts in the same way throughout. I am proud of the UK-specific quantitative data I have gathered and the qualitative exploration of dancer experience to contextualise findings. I have needed to discipline myself to maintain neutrality especially during face-to-face interactions (focus group), and continuously reflect on my potential biases which may influence the way that I gather or interpret data. I have grown in confidence over the course of this module and now feel ready to disseminate this research more widely as I move beyond the MA process.

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ABSTRACT

Ballet is an activity with participation predominantly by girls and women, yet the majority of artistic leadership roles in ballet are held by men. UK leadership data gathered in this research project reflect international patterns identified in existing reports. In recent years initiatives have been introduced to build more equitable gender representation in choreography, but this does not tackle the root of the problem. It is suggested that long before a dancer reaches professional level, their leadership and creative potential is being nurtured or constrained by gendered treatment and expectations in training.

This research project investigated the impact of gender bias in ballet training through a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data illustrated a stark contrast between gender ratios in ballet participation and those in artistic leadership. Although cis boys made up just 7% of the students under the age of 18 in UK ballet classes, in the five largest UK ballet companies men had choreographed 83% of the work shown in the past four seasons and held all the artistic director positions. Qualitative data, gathered through surveys and a focus group, contextualised these trends by centring the lived experience of participants from a wide variety of gender identities. The key themes that were revealed by a review of the existing literature were reinforced by those which emerged from the qualitative data: disproportionate praise and unequal expectations, binary gender norms, and the need for pedagogical and curricular reform.

Solutions were proposed to include targeted Continuing Professional Development (CPD), free resources for ballet teachers, the adoption of a gender non-specific training approach grounded in feminist pedagogy, and the inclusion of intentional leadership training and

opportunities within ballet curricula. Outputs aimed to be relevant to ballet teachers across all levels and training contexts, bridging the gap between research and real-world application.

Building on existing work in this area, this project provides new UK-specific evidence on gender inequity in professional ballet, offering a focus on how this is impacted by gender bias at training level, and provides strategies to support more equitable pathways to artistic leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016 I attended English National Ballet's production of *She Said*, a triple bill featuring works from three women choreographers. Tamara Rojo, then Artistic Director and Principal dancer, had commissioned this production, explaining that since embarking on her professional career at the age of 16 she had never danced a piece created by a woman (English National Ballet, 2016). Now aged 41, she was reaching the end of an illustrious professional career dancing for world-leading ballet companies (Rojo, no date). With my own ballet teachers having been predominantly women, I was accustomed to their presence in positions of authority, and it had never occurred to me that a gender disparity might exist within ballet's artistic leadership. This defining moment piqued my interest and eventually led me to focus my MA research on investigating why this imbalance exists, and what improvements can be made. Nearly a decade later some progress is evident, but it is still the case that 70% of Artistic Directors globally are men (Dance Data Project, 2025), while 72.4% of works programmed in English-speaking countries in the 2023-2024 season were choreographed by men (Dance Data Project, 2024).

I suggest it is important to challenge this inequity. As an art-form with significant cultural influence and attention, I believe that ballet has a duty to function in a progressive and responsible manner. As explained by Liza Yntema, President and Founder of the Dance Data Project, 'Female audiences, donors, and students continue to support an art form that routinely marginalizes women in all respects' (Yntema, quoted in Women's Media Center, 2019, para. 15).

I currently enjoy a portfolio career which includes teaching ballet in recognised FE/HE institutions in the UK, delivering teacher-training, adjudicating, choreography, public

speaking, advocacy work and journalism, with an overall focus on championing equity and progressive culture within ballet. Working across a wide range of environments, I engage with many different groups within the sector, from recreational students to professional dancers, teachers at all levels, choreographers and academics. In my own interactions, I have observed significant variation in awareness and perception surrounding the topic of gender equity in ballet, inevitably shaped by each individual's lived experience. I have personally noticed that those in positions of influence often emphasise meritocracy as the only valid route to leadership, thereby overlooking the nuances which disproportionately empower and equip some individuals to achieve leadership roles over others.

As a White, cis woman, I acknowledge that many of the structures which exclude certain individuals and groups from ballet have benefited and supported me. However, throughout my career the ethical considerations of ballet have become increasingly important to me. Across my professional contexts, I am committed to amplifying the voices of under-represented groups, and feel great sensitivity to issues surrounding power dynamics and privilege in ballet training and in the professional industry.

In recent years, a range of initiatives have been implemented that aim to address gender imbalance in ballet choreography (Wirth, 2022). However, I question their sustainability and effectiveness if the pathway through ballet training into the professional industry is not investigated as well, alongside the reform of the embedded norms present in ballet pedagogy and curricula.

This project aimed to investigate how gender biases within ballet training might limit future leadership potential of cis women, trans people and non-binary people. Quantitative data was gathered to validate the scope of this issue. Specifically, a teacher survey and desk-based

research established gender ratios of students under the age of 18 in UK ballet classes, and of artistic director and choreographer roles in the UK's five largest ballet companies. Through surveys and a focus group, qualitative data was analysed to contextualise the quantitative trends by identifying consistent themes reported by current and former ballet students about gendered experiences in training. A key aim for this project was for the data and subsequent analysis to be accessible to a wide audience and to extend dialogue outside of academic circles to reach teachers, dancers and leaders. As such, the outcomes were distributed in multiple formats: a free digital resource for ballet teachers at all levels, a CPD course for ballet teachers at FE/HE level, podcasts and social media content.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms *women* and *men* to encompass both cisgender and transgender individuals who identify as such. Where distinctions are necessary for context, I have specified using the terms *cis* or *trans*. I have adopted this approach rather than using the terms *female-identifying* or *male-identifying*, as these modifiers can be perceived to undermine the legitimacy of trans people as women or men (Language, Please, no date; Seed&Spark, no date; Seattle Riot, 2019; University of Oxford, no date).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief history of gender in ballet

An exploration of the historical relationship between ballet and gender suggests that the current leadership norms need not be accepted as fixed or inevitable. Instead, they reflect cyclical shifts in the progression of power and belonging within ballet. Investigating how gender roles and attitudes have evolved over time allows critical awareness of the sexism and patriarchal standards which still underpin ballet culture today, highlighting that these dynamics can shift once again with conscious effort and strategic interventions.

The binary standard often perceived as ‘traditional’ ballet is just one phase in its historical cycle. France’s King Louis XIV, credited as one of the earliest pioneers of ballet, established the link between ballet and nobility. In contrast to today’s perception of ballet as a feminised activity (Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson; 2017; Risner, 2014; Souza et al., 2022), in the 17th century ballet was an inherently male pursuit: ‘At its zenith, *la belle danse* was unequivocally masculine, regal and weighted with gravitas: it was, quite literally, the dance of kings’ (Homans, 2011, p.20). Where women characters were required in the plot, they would be danced by men *en travesti* (Homans, 2011). It wasn’t until the 19th century that women came to the forefront of ballet, at which time ‘the ballerina would eventually displace the *danseur* at the summit of the art’ (Homans, 2011, p.63). In both time periods dancers performed *en travesti*, but a role reversal was evident whereby in the latter period the *women* now performed the men’s roles, both as the male *corps de ballet* and even as the male romantic leads (Garafola, 1985, p.35).

While the woman ballerina was celebrated at the centre of the art form in the 19th century, deliberate efforts were made in the early 20th century to redefine the role of the male dancer. Dancers such as Vaslav Nijinsky, alongside other men in Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, displayed a wide range of masculine presentations. They 'traced a spectrum of male roles that transcended conventions of gender while presenting the male body in a way that was frankly erotic' (Garafola, 1999, p.246).

Meanwhile in the United States, George Balanchine established the School of American Ballet and the New York City Ballet, institutions described as 'unabashedly hierarchical... in which authority went unchallenged' (Homans, 2011, p.507). Balanchine crafted a new feminine ideal whilst maintaining strict dominance over his dancers, exerting total control over the women he professed to idolise. By today's standards, his approach would likely be viewed as misogynistic and unacceptable: 'As much as Balanchine revered women as the stars of his ballets, his treatment of them was deeply tinged with objectification and oversexualization' (Wirth, 2022, p.129).

The rigid aesthetic ideals which Balanchine insisted upon for women dancers reportedly drove many ballerinas to starvation tactics, (Kirkland and Lawrence, 1986; Pazcoguin, 2021). This body-shaming culture has persisted well beyond the Balanchine era, with women ballet dancers continuing to be at disproportionately high risk of developing eating disorders (Arcelus, Witcomb and Mitchell, 2014; Pickard 2013). Beyond its damaging effects to physical and mental health, holding women dancers to these extreme physical standards further disempowers them from achieving leadership roles. Dancers who are chronically under-fuelled and under-nourished may lack the physical resilience and mental capacity to challenge the structures which constrain them.

In contrast to Balanchine's feminine ideal, Soviet ballet of the Cold War period projected a hyper-masculine vision of the male dancer: heroic, virile and deeply patriotic. In the USSR, male dancers were propagandic symbols of national superiority rather than simply artistic muses (Ezrahi, 2012). This period offers a compelling example of how ballet, and its gendered portrayals, have never been ideologically neutral. Instead, they have been continually shaped by the cultural and political ideals of their time.

In Western society in the mid-to-late 20th century, male dancers were increasingly associated with effeminacy and homosexuality, drawing public scrutiny and distrust. As Burt (2007, p.9) notes 'Up until the nineteenth century in Europe, prejudices against the male dancer did not exist', but this began to change during the 20th century. Rudolf Nureyev delighted audiences with his passionate on-stage partnership with Margot Fonteyn, prompting public speculation as to whether their relationship extended beyond ballet. On stage, he portrayed the hypermasculine, heteronormative ideals which contemporary Western society tended to find palatable when enacted by prominent male figures, despite these not being reflected in his personal life (Kavanagh, 2007). While the gay rights movement had begun to gain traction, Western public anxieties around homosexuality were deeply entrenched, and further exacerbated by the 1980s AIDS crisis, which fuelled widespread homophobic attitudes (Anderson and The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, no date).

At the turn of the millennium, ballet fought against these stereotypes, adopting what Jennifer Fisher calls the 'make it macho' approach (Fisher, 2009). This involves eager attempts to spare boys from withstanding the negative perceptions associated with the 'gay male dancer' stereotype (Polasek and Roper, 2011; Risner, 2014). By positioning ballet for boys or men to be as similarly athletic and highly masculine as contact sports, with the bonus of being

continuously surrounded by beautiful and scantily-clad women, the art form created a wider chasm between the masculine and feminine. This insistence on palatable presentations of masculinity may have inadvertently perpetuated rather than challenged stereotypes, reinforcing masculine coding as exclusively associated with strength, athleticism and heterosexual prowess.

In recent decades, ballet's approach to gender has continued to shift. Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995) which 'shattered convention' by replacing a traditionally female *corps de ballet* with a 'menacing male ensemble,' went on to become the 'longest running full-length dance classic in the West End and on Broadway' (Swan Lake, New Adventures, no date). Since then, world-leading companies have increasingly experimented with gendered casting and narrative. For example, in 2017 Justin Peck, New York City ballet's resident choreographer, introduced the company's first gender-neutral principal roles in *The Times are Racing* (Mainwaring, 2019), American Ballet Theater's *Touché* (2020), the company's first all-male pas de deux 'explores the themes of male love' (Touché, American Ballet Theatre, 2020), and in 2024 the Australian Ballet presented Christopher Wheeldon's *Oscar*, which depicts the life of Oscar Wilde, encompassing queer identity as a key theme (Winship, 2024).

In 2025, broader cultural biases and power structures in Western society are reflected in the gendered norms in ballet training. Evidently, ballet's relationship with gender has consistently shifted throughout history, with gendered portrayals often influenced and reinforced by ballet critics of the time (Croft, 2014). This highlights that further evolution is both possible and necessary to create a more inclusive and equitable future.

Recurring themes

A review of existing literature related to gender inequity in ballet leadership revealed five consistently recurring themes: hierarchy and obedience, binary gender norms, gender ratios and replaceability, mismatch of leadership qualities, and institutional favouritism towards men. These interconnected themes provided context on how and why the gender disparity in ballet's artistic leadership exists.

Hierarchy and obedience

As cited by DeFrank-Cole and Nicholson (2016), Basco describes ballet culture as being hierarchical and obedient. Similarly, the conformity inherent in *corps de ballet* work, an essential rite of passage for women dancers (Farnsley, 2022), discourages independence and creativity. It acts as a method of institutional control which expects compliance from women dancers thereby disempowering them and limiting their leadership potential (DeFrank-Cole and Nicholson, 2016; Grundstrom, 2020; Kelly, 2017).

This gendered disempowerment begins in training. Stinson (2005) explains how young girls are taught to be silent and obedient through ballet's 'hidden curriculum', aiming to be 'good girls who will do what they are told' (Stinson, 2005, p.53). She describes how broader cultural gender expectations are upheld and reinforced within ballet classes, through subtle messaging which is embedded yet never explicitly discussed or included within schemes of work.

Ballet training functions beyond technical skill-building, instead shaping young dancers' beliefs, skills and habits of thinking and behaving which become deeply ingrained in a person. Pickard (2013, p.3) explains that 'the purpose of ballet schooling or training is to make the

unnatural natural'. Ballet training does not simply instil technique and discipline, it constructs a dancer's perception of what it means to *be* a ballet dancer. This identity becomes embodied, extending beyond conscious thought, whereby young dancers learn to accept and even welcome the pain and suffering inherent in their training (Pickard, 2012). The obedience and conformity expected in ballet classes therefore become embodied within a dancer.

Green (2000) highlights the ...'destructive and oppressive' pedagogical approach to which girls are exposed at a far younger and more vulnerable age than boys, who generally start their training much later (Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson 2017; Feltham and Ryan, 2022). When boys do enter ballet training, they are given more opportunity to explore their creativity (Angyal, 2021; Boudier, cited in Angyal, 2017; Souza et al., 2022) and are 'encouraged to be challenging, energetic and daring' in comparison to girls who are 'expected to be passive, by unquestioningly accepting the instructions of the dance teacher' (Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2017, p.128).

If women who become professional ballet dancers have been conditioned to be submissive and compliant from a young age, it will be difficult for them to display the initiative, risk-taking and bold decision-making required for effective leadership.

Binary gender norms

Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson (2017) argue that the binary approach to gender in ballet training is restrictive to a dancer's vocabulary, quality and identity. While there is limited study regarding experience of trans and non-binary students in ballet training, a 2023 study of 30 trans and non-binary students in Physical Education classes in UK secondary schools explained how participants 'were reluctant to, yet forced to, comply with the idealized ways of 'doing'

gender, with limited opportunities to express their true identities’ and that this affected their overall engagement and attendance (Kettley-Linsell, Sandford & Coates, 2024, p.460). These findings are likely reflected in ballet contexts, where ‘Opportunity and inclusion of non-binary dancers in classical ballet are nearly non-existent, and the stark gender divide may be difficult to overcome for non-binary dancers’ (Lund, 2022, p.1).

Leroy Mokgatle, a trans woman and demi-soloist with Staatsballet Berlin, explained how being encouraged to explore the female-coded roles and dance *en pointe* allowed her to thrive in ballet: ‘I couldn’t really express my artistry at its fullest in classical ballet, since it’s very gendered’ (Mokgatle, quoted in Bauer, 2024). Such a comment emphasises that when dancers are restricted in this way, it is unfeasible that they will feel empowered to explore their full scope of creativity, highlighting how a binary approach can impact artistic leadership outcomes.

Alongside Mokgatle, global visibility of trans and non-binary dancers is increasing. Representation of these groups is essential; ‘the more people become aware of the talents and stories of non-binary and transgender dancers, the more likely those in ballet leadership positions will engage in dialogue on how we might support an inclusive ballet environment’ (Mandradjieff and Alterowitz, 2023, p.4020). However, when these dancers are featured in UK and US mainstream media, the narrative is shaped to be palatable to an audience who is assumed to be cisgender. The benefits of exposure for these dancers are moderated by the media reinforcing gender stereotypes ‘that mark the artform as feminine and designate particular body types and movements to specific binarized genders’ (Mandradjieff and Alterowitz, 2023, p.4011).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) artistic leaders in the United States typically first have careers as professional dancers, a trend that is reflected internationally as the normative pipeline into ballet leadership due to the ‘near-universal adoption of traditional hierarchical structures’ (Farnsley, 2022). If trans and non-binary dancers do not feel ballet training is an inclusive and welcoming space for them, they may struggle to progress to professional level making leadership positions unattainable.

Gender ratios and replaceability:

Gender bias in ballet training is reinforced and magnified by high participation of girls compared to boys. Boys are scarce and therefore treated as a precious commodity, whereby they are granted preferential treatment and opportunity. Meanwhile, girls are abundant and therefore commonly feel dispensable: ‘The boys are coddled, but the girls... know that if they speak up or show individual personality, they’ll be replaced’ (Basco, cited in Wirth, 2022, p.7). Due to their lesser numbers, male professional dancers also have more opportunities to interact with leaders; ‘You don’t really get that when there’s forty-two swans in the room’ (Kelly, 2017, p.32). These kinds of interactions are significant in an industry where professional opportunities are often born out of networking and relationships (Kelly, 2017).

Mismatch of leadership qualities

The conformity, subtlety, grace and elegance traditionally encouraged and expected from women dancers are qualities which contrast with traditional leadership traits: ‘Women have difficulty being seen as competent leaders while also being perceived as appropriately nurturing or feminine’ (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016, p.86). As Helen Pickett, one of the world’s most prolific ballet choreographers, explains, ‘We are still training women to be pretty and nice instead of being exceptional and beautiful leaders’ (Pickett, cited in Kelly, 2017, p.36).

When women face the ‘double bind’ (DeFrank-Cole & Nicholson, 2016, p.86) of trying to display culturally valued leadership qualities whilst simultaneously displaying culturally valued qualities of femininity, it is little wonder they face challenges in becoming leaders.

In addition, broader studies such as ‘The Gender Gap in Self-Promotion’ (Exley and Kessler, 2019) identify that when men and women are given equal, accurate information about their performance, men rate themselves higher and are more likely to be willing to apply for a role than women. Tamara Rojo believes this trend appears in ballet as well, she describes:

I was offered a directorship before and I said no because I thought I needed to know more. I think women want to be absolutely certain they know they will be capable of fulfilling a role before committing to it. Maybe men are more willing to take on challenges that they have no skills for (Norman, 2015, para. 16).

Importantly, there are several women who like Rojo, have achieved top tier leadership roles. Wirth (2022) reports women such as Lourdes Lopez (then artistic director of Miami City Ballet), Julie Kent (then artistic director of Washington Ballet) and Victoria Morgan (then artistic director of Cincinnati Ballet) as notable examples of those who have achieved powerful roles despite systemic barriers. Ironically, all three women have since been replaced by male artistic directors in these roles. This mirrors Dance Data Project’s assertion that when women leave artistic director positions they are most likely to be replaced by a male successor (Dance Data Project, 2024), thereby reinforcing the potential fragility of women’s progress into leadership. Farnsley (2022) notes the important historical and current contributions of women leaders but asserts that these have been achieved *in spite* of systemic structures. She explains that seeing these successful women as proof of ballet’s equitable leadership opportunities is akin to seeing the election of President Barack Obama as proof that racism was eradicated in America: ‘Exceptional victories do not eradicate systemic issues, and if vigilance is not

maintained, the celebration of success can actually take the wind out of the sails of progress’ (Farnsley, 2022, p.28).

A significant barrier to leadership is therefore the combination of women dancers not seeing themselves represented in artistic leadership roles, whilst also being culturally conditioned to undervalue their own abilities and be less forthcoming to self-promote.

Institutional favouritism towards men

Farnsley (2022) describes professional ballet as a ‘boy’s club’ and Kelly (2017) asserts that male dancers often benefit from established pathways to leadership which are not afforded to dancers of other gender identities. When describing the career journeys of high-profile male choreographers like Justin Peck and Benjamin Millepied, Kelly explains ‘For these men, the path to choreographic success had a logic; it was clear, well-lit, and supported by those in charge (such as Peter Martins)’ (Kelly, 2017, p.21). Without equitable and transparent policies surrounding mentorship and leadership recruitment, opportunities will likely continue to be passed down to protégés without fair process.

Existing initiatives

Wirth (2022) notes examples of initiatives created by companies and programmes to champion underrepresented gender groups in choreography, for example, Boston Ballet’s ChoreographHER and ABT’s Women’s Movement. Additionally, high profile women such as former New York City Ballet principal dancer Ashley Bouder and renowned choreographer Helen Pickett have created their own initiatives to connect and empower women choreographers (Burke, 2018; Pickett, no date). There is limited evidence of initiatives designed to target artistic director roles in the same way. Regardless, interventions at

professional level cannot truly tackle root causes and therefore may risk offering repeated compensations rather than genuine solutions for consistent progress.

Organisations like the Dance Data Project raise awareness by gathering and publishing metrics on gender equity in the dance industry. However, existing data tends to focus more heavily on a global or USA-specific picture, leaving a lack of UK-specific evidence. Current literature addresses underlying causes which may contribute to unequal outcomes and proposes potential solutions. Yet there appears to be further need for consistent, real-world interventions to raise awareness and equip dancers, teachers and leaders with practical tools to enact change.

FRAMEWORKS

Despite the high participation of girls and women at all levels of ballet, and the pioneering contributions of women to founding companies, it appears that ‘once the power and prestige of the established institutions come into play, men are perceived as the likely heirs’ (Meglin and Brooks, 2012, p.2). In 2025, women make up just 30% of Artistic Directors of ballet companies worldwide. Non-binary, trans and other gender diverse individuals remain entirely unrepresented in these roles, with no artistic directors worldwide openly belonging to these groups (Dance Data Project, 2025). This project aimed to investigate how gender biases within ballet training might explain some of these trends by centring the lived experience of a diverse range of dancers. Subsequently, it aimed to suggest solutions for pedagogical and curricular reform, and to offer practical interventions which may positively influence equity in leadership outcomes. Thus, my work was underpinned by a framework of feminist pedagogy, which both supported and informed these aims.

Ballet education has long operated with hierarchical power structures which enable knowledge and traditions to be passively transferred from teacher to student. Clements and Nordin-Bates (2020, p.2) criticise this approach for being ‘autonomy-suppressive, with an all-knowing teacher instructing passive, unquestioning students in a culture of black and white views on right and wrong’. This contrasts with feminist pedagogy, which Shrewsbury (1987, p.6) defined as ‘engaged teaching/learning’ that is:

Engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change.

When conducting a multidisciplinary review of feminist pedagogy, Webb, Allen and Walker (2002) identified six principles consistent across the existing literature. My research aligned with each of these principles, which are quoted verbatim below followed by reflections of how each was applied during this project:

1. 'Reformation of the relationship between professor and student' - This project sought to re-examine the traditionally accepted hierarchies and power structures within ballet training. The CPD session and PDF resource encouraged teachers to reflect on their roles and embrace shared power dynamics with their students.
2. 'Empowerment' - This project examined ways in which dancers of all gender identities may be disempowered by traditional ballet pedagogy, which can undermine their critical thinking skills and sense of autonomy. The CPD session and digital outputs advocated for pedagogical practices which uplift all dancers and embolden their sense of identity and agency.
3. 'Building community' - Design of the CPD session established a safe space for dialogue and questioning. Social media output aimed to engage a digital community in this work.
4. 'Privileging the individual voice as a way of knowing' – The qualitative data analysis sought to contextualise the quantitative trends with individual, anecdotal insights, aiming to illustrate both the depth and breadth of participant experience.
5. 'Respect for diversity of personal experience' - The data collection design valued centring the personal lived experience of people of varied gender identities, backgrounds and roles.

6. 'Challenging traditional views' – Questioning ballet's traditional practices was at the heart of this project. Personal reflection opportunities were incorporated through the CPD output and PDF resource, aiming to encourage an ethos of continuous reflexivity.

In this project, feminist pedagogical principles informed both the data collection and output design. For example, the focus group uplifted the voices of all participants by enabling them to speak freely about their own lived experiences. The output design aimed not only to share the data collected, but to model resistance of problematic norms, particularly those related to hierarchy and unequal power dynamics. As such, the digital outputs, i.e. social media content, digital resource for teachers and podcast appearances, were designed to enable the data to be accessible and empowering to all. These outputs aimed to reach both specialist and non-specialist audiences, to avoid assuming knowledge, to use conversational language to frame the research, and to be applicable across teaching contexts.

The CPD session followed a feminist pedagogical delivery style, aligning with Bell (1987) who criticises lectures which follow the 'tyranny of traditional formats' (p. 107) and suggests that 'the barrier of silence must be broken early on' (p. 109). As such, the design actively resisted a one-way depositing of information and avoided language and actions which reinforced hierarchies. Instead, it was designed to be an interactive experience for collaborative engagement and reflection, through use of Mentimeter, group discussion points and Q&A. These methods offered a choice of engagement strategies to suit each participant and enabled opportunities for anonymous sharing and equal participation.

METHODOLOGIES

This chapter outlines the research design, ethics procedures, strategies for participant recruitment, data collection tools and methods of analysis. A feminist pedagogical philosophy informed the mixed-methods approach, which centred the lived experience of a diverse range of participants. Quantitative data was gathered to illustrate the current picture of gender ratios in UK ballet classes compared to UK ballet leadership, and qualitative data was collected to identify common experiences related to gendered treatment, opportunities and overall culture within ballet training.

Traditionally, triangulation in a mixed-methods approach seeks to validate data accuracy when multiple data sources align. However, Hesse-Biber (2012) argues that through a feminist lens, triangulation should instead be used to investigate complexity and nuance and uncover subjugated knowledge – the perspectives of those ordinarily excluded from dominant narratives. For this reason, multiple data sources were utilised in this project not only to increase robustness, but also to enable depth and breadth of analysis and to ensure marginalised perspectives were included.

Ethics overview

The project received ethics approval from the Rambert School ethics committee in February 2025 (see Appendix A). Further approval was granted in May 2025 following proposed revisions to increase clarity for focus group participants on how their data would be used. Potential risks included participants becoming identifiable, power imbalances between researcher and participants, and emotional safeguarding of participants when discussing potentially triggering topics. These risks were mitigated through clear consent processes, the right to bypass questions or withdraw at any time and prompt anonymisation of all data. In

the Participant Information Sheet for the focus group (see Appendix B), LGBTQIA+ wellbeing resources were signposted (Mind, 2024), recognising that discussion of homophobic or transphobic treatment may be particularly difficult for these groups.

Participation across all data strands was entirely voluntary. This was particularly emphasised for focus group participants to reassure them their choice to participate would not affect academic standing or opportunities. Using a mixed-methods approach reduced the risk of over-relying on any one data strand or participant perspective that may be influenced by power dynamics.

Data was stored securely in password-protected files, and any identifiable data such as video recordings were permanently deleted following transcription and anonymisation. Further details of these processes are included later in this chapter.

Data Sources

This project utilised four data sources:

1. Desk-based analysis of publicly available data on gender representation in UK ballet companies
2. An anonymous online survey for ballet teachers
3. An anonymous online survey for current and former ballet dancers
4. A recorded focus group

Desk-based research

Data was analysed from the UK's largest five ballet companies. Company size was determined by number of dancers, as listed on official company websites on 23 May 2025. This measure

was selected due to its comparability: other options such as financial measures enabled less equivalence due to varying company structures, for example, touring versus home theatre companies. Rationale for including five companies was twofold: firstly, feasibility of time constraints for a solo researcher. Secondly, a clear distinction in scale was evident between the largest five companies and the next five. The largest five listed 36-101 dancers, the next five listed 11-15. This indicates that the largest five companies have significantly bigger budgets and higher audience reach, which in turn gives them more cultural visibility and suggests they are most relevant for a project aiming to illustrate power and representation.

The following data was collected from each of the five companies:

- Gender of the Artistic Director
- Gender of all choreographers credited in the past four seasons (2021-22 to 2024-25)
- Gender of all choreographers credited per act presented in the past four seasons (2021-22 to 2024-25)

The third data point was collected to illustrate the extent of choreographer contribution, noting any disparity between the gender ratios of choreographers credited overall versus the gender ratios of those credited per act presented, i.e. to distinguish between choreographers commissioned to create full-length works and those contributing shorter works to mixed bills.

Inclusion criteria and attribution decisions

Choreographic credits were determined using the following criteria:

- Only mainstage productions were included. Educational and outreach performances, or collaborations with student and youth companies were excluded.

- Original choreographers were credited for re-staged works unless new choreography was formally credited.
- If an individual choreographed multiple works within a season, multiple credits were attributed to them.
- Where a work had multiple historical choreographers, credit was attributed to the lead choreographer. For example, Liam Scarlett was credited with all Royal Ballet Company performances of *Swan Lake*, even when choreography from Petipa and Ivanov remained.
- Once choreographer gender was recorded, credits were disaggregated per act to illustrate the extent of choreographer contribution.
- In the case of Scottish Ballet's *The Nutcracker*, multiple choreographers were credited for 'additional choreography'. Credits were attributed proportionately to choreographer contribution, attributing one act to Christopher Hampson and one act to the other six choreographers.
- In the case of mixed bills, credits were attributed based on the number of acts rather than the number of works. Where a work was formally presented as a full act, it was credited as one act. Where an act featured multiple works continuously, they were credited as a proportion of that act. For example, Birmingham Royal Ballet's *Luna* featured works from five choreographers presented in two acts, therefore was attributed as five choreographic credits shared across two acts.
- Seasons were determined as running from 1 August to 31 July of the following year.
- Choreographer gender was determined using the precedent set by AWA Dance in their gender equity research (AWA DANCE, 2025), using the pronouns noted in company biographies, programmes and other publicly available sources.

Verification process

- Data was gathered and cross-checked against a range of publicly available sources, including company websites, repertoire archives, season announcements, and official press releases.
- Final data was compiled in a spreadsheet and then converted into plain-text summaries.
- Each company was sent the plain-text summary of the data collected on their programming on 23 May 2025 and invited to propose amendments within a two-week period (Birmingham Royal Ballet et al., 2025).
- The Royal Ballet Company, Birmingham Royal Ballet and Northern Ballet did not respond.
- Julia Jurkowlaniec, marketing and communications assistant for English National Ballet, and Christopher Hampson, Artistic Director of Scottish Ballet both responded proposing a few small amendments. Except in the cases where these did not align with the above criteria the data was adjusted accordingly.

Surveys

Two surveys were created via Google Forms:

Dancer survey (see Appendix D) - open to individuals who

- are aged 18 or over
- have participated in ballet classes at any level, regardless of current involvement, age or gender identity

Teacher survey (see Appendix E) - open to individuals who

- currently teach ballet in the UK to students under the age of 18

The purpose of the dancer survey was to identify common gendered experiences in relation to bias, feedback or training culture. The purpose of the teacher survey was to determine the gender ratio of UK ballet students under the age of 18, allowing comparison with the gender ratios discovered in the desk-based analysis of company artistic directors and choreographers.

Both surveys included a combination of quantitative questions (e.g. Likert scales) and qualitative questions (e.g. open-ended questions regarding personal experience or opinions).

Both surveys were anonymous to encourage honest and open engagement from participants, and to ensure no identifiable details were collected. Invitations to complete the surveys were distributed via social media posts and professional networks. The dancer and teacher surveys were closed for analysis once response rates plateaued, with 207 and 102 responses respectively.

Focus group

The focus group was a 90-minute in-person session involving ten participants and was filmed with their consent. Invitations to participate were sent to the full student body of a UK dance and musical theatre conservatoire. The invitation included an overview of the project and aims of the focus group. Students who expressed interest to participate were sent a detailed Participant Information Sheet and link to an online consent form (see Appendix C). The role of the researcher was to pose questions and moderate discussion, ensuring all voices were valued and power was shared between all participants, in line with the project's overarching feminist pedagogical framework. Participants were encouraged to share their own lived experience and perspectives rather than comment on behalf of other individuals or groups.

Together, these four data strands provided a multi-layered understanding of gender representation at both training and artistic leadership levels, and the cultural and pedagogical conditions which might support or hinder access to leadership roles.

Data analysis

Ballet company data

Data for each ballet company was compiled using Google Sheets. Visual charts (such as bar and pie charts) were used to illustrate relevant findings.

Surveys: quantitative data

Data for each survey was exported to a Google Sheets spreadsheet. Pivot tables were used to calculate the frequency of certain experiences across participant characteristics, e.g. gender identity or training level. In the teacher survey, occasionally the total number of students reported by a teacher was not equal to the number of students they reported when broken down by gender. Therefore, when reporting the total number of students per teacher, this was consistently calculated by adding the number of students each teacher reported from each gender group, rather than from the total number of students reported by the teacher.

Regarding gender identity, participants selected from the following categories: *Cisgender man, cisgender woman, trans man, trans woman, non-binary, prefer not to say* and *other*. Three participants wrote 'female' rather than selecting 'cisgender woman' as their gender identity. As there was no indication that these participants identified as transgender or another gender category, their responses have been included within the 'cis woman' group. This decision was made to ensure consistency, however it is acknowledged that this terminology may not be reflective of their preferred language.

Of the 207 participants, there were 170 cis women, 18 cis men, 5 trans people, 12 non-binary people, one person who wrote 'genderqueer' and one person who selected 'prefer not to say'. For ease of presentation, the latter four groups have been collated together into a single category presented as 'gender diverse'.

Surveys and focus groups: qualitative data

Upon completing the focus group, the recording was transcribed using the transcription software Otter.ai. Wording was then manually checked and edited for accuracy against the recording, before all original files were permanently deleted.

Thematic analysis of the open-ended survey and focus group responses was conducted in line with the six-phase model of reflexive thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This began with familiarisation of the data, i.e. reading and re-reading the survey responses and focus group transcript. Following this, initial codes were created and colour coded. These were then arranged into themes, with example quotes and keywords provided for each initial code within the theme (see Appendix F).

The teacher survey included one open-ended question:

'Is there anything else you would like to share about gender representation in your ballet classes?'

The dancer survey included four open-ended questions:

'Can you share an example of how gender influenced your ballet training experience?'

'Do you believe your ballet training prepared you for leadership roles (e.g., choreographer, artistic director)? Why or why not?'

‘What aspects of ballet training do you think could better support leadership aspirations, especially for cisgender women, trans, and non-binary individuals?’

‘Is there anything else you would like to share about gender and leadership in ballet?’

It became apparent from the responses to these five questions that only the third question in the dancer survey yielded answers which were sufficiently targeted and relevant to warrant thematic analysis. It was clear that the other four questions lacked specificity and yielded answers which were highly individual or unrelated to the research aims, and were therefore excluded from analysis.

Ethics

Building on the earlier overview of ethical considerations, this section outlines the participant information, consent procedures and data handling methods for each data strand.

Survey ethics

The research aims and consent information were included at the top of each survey. Participants expressed consent by continuing past the following statement: ‘By completing this survey, you are consenting to me using your anonymous answers to inform my research’. No names or identifying information were collected as part of these surveys. The raw survey responses were password-protected, as was the spreadsheet to which they were exported for analysis. In their ethics approval, the Rambert School ethics committee approved this data being stored for ten years.

Focus group ethics

A Participant Information Sheet was sent to all interested students, with a revised version sent in May 2025 to ensure greater clarity over the intended research outputs in which anonymised quotes would be used. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasised in the Participant Information Sheet, with a clear statement that academic standing or opportunities within their conservatoire would not be impacted by their decision of whether to participate. Their right to pause, stop, or leave at any point in the focus group was explained, as was their right to withdraw their consent at any time up until 1 July 2025, when the data could start to be shared publicly. Consent was collected using a Google Form, including consent to participate, to be audio and video recorded, for anonymised quotes to be used in published resources, and for data to be held and used for future research.

The focus group was filmed and then transcribed within one week. During the transcription process, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure that no identifiable information was linked to their words. The anonymised data was then stored in password-protected documents to be held for ten years and accessible only to the researcher. The original recording and back-up recording were permanently deleted.

Researcher positionality

Ethical considerations also extended to my own positionality as a researcher due to my dual role as both teacher and researcher within the focus group context. Since I was conducting the focus group within a setting in which I teach, it was important to consider the potential for power imbalances. While participation was entirely voluntary, some participants were known to me as former or current students in my classes. During the session, my intention was to create an open and respectful environment, in which all voices were equally heard and

valued. Terms of engagement were established at the start of the focus group, including a joint commitment to confidentiality, respect, and the freedom to decline to answer any questions. Aligning with the project's feminist pedagogical framework which values shared power, I intentionally adopted an approach of facilitation rather than direction within the session. This included resisting affirming any one participant's contribution more enthusiastically than another, which may have encouraged participants to provide answers they thought I was looking for.

In reality, I found the most difficult part of my dual role as a teacher and researcher was hearing participants recount their experiences and having to temper my responses in this way. As a teacher, I would ordinarily affirm student experiences and where appropriate, offer guidance and support. In the research context, I had to remain more neutral and aim instead to empathetically reflect the words of participants to ensure they all felt equally heard. I did this by using phrases such as 'I can hear that was a difficult experience for you, thank you for sharing it'.

Limitations

The dancer and teacher surveys were answered by 207 and 102 participants respectively. While this was a reasonable sample size, a greater number of participants would have increased robustness. As survey participation was voluntary, there was a risk of self-selection bias, potentially attracting a disproportionate number of participants who feel personally invested in or have strong views on gender equity in ballet. Additionally, @annamorgandance Instagram was used as a key tool to recruit survey participants, a platform used to advocate for greater gender equity in ballet (annamorgandance, no date), thus social media followers may carry bias due to already supporting this work. However, the Instagram algorithm

amplifies posts to tens of thousands of users beyond the account's direct following, enabling a broader reach and increasing the diversity of participants.

Whilst the invitation to participate in the surveys was sent widely, it is likely that many of the dancer survey participants were recruited from one conservatoire, due to their awareness of this research by a current staff member and therefore perhaps their feeling more invested to participate. In addition, data regarding ethnicity, class, disability, or any other identity markers was not collected. As such, the findings cannot account for the nuance of intersectional experiences of, for example, those of a Black woman compared to a white woman in ballet. This project does not claim that the samples are representative of all dancers or teachers, but rather that they offer relevant insight into trends.

The aim of the teacher survey was to garner an overall picture of gender ratios in under 18 ballet classes in the UK. Participants' responses relied on teachers counting the number of students under the age of 18 to whom they teach ballet and breaking this number down by gender. Firstly, there is a chance that teachers may have been inaccurate in their counting of students, and secondly, that the gender with which the child identifies may not match the gender the teacher perceives them to be. In addition, teachers were asked to include all children that they personally teach across any number of organisations, which risks the chance that two or more teachers from the same organisation may have completed the survey referring to the same children. Such duplication of data as may have occurred was unavoidable due to the anonymous nature of the survey; other options to gather this data were considered, but ultimately the present method was chosen as it prioritised participant recruitment and simplicity while still offering a broad insight into student gender ratios.

As regards the focus group, a limitation was that all students were recruited from the same conservatoire, and therefore, their experiences of a wide range of teachers within full-time training was inherently restricted. However, these students represented a diverse range of gender identities and therefore carried different experiences even within the same training setting, and could also comment on their various prior experiences and settings.

Additionally, due to the broad nature of the conservatoire's training in dance and musical theatre, ballet formed only part of their curriculum meaning most were unlikely to pursue professional careers in ballet. However, it was not the aim of the focus group to evaluate their career readiness, professional aspirations or individual understanding of leadership outcomes in professional ballet, but rather to capture their personal gendered experiences in a range of ballet training settings. Furthermore, since the research outputs aimed to be accessible to ballet teachers who teach across all levels and contexts, recruiting students in specialist ballet training was not necessary.

Researcher reflections

It is important to acknowledge that as a cis woman, a ballet teacher, and an advocate for several areas of inclusivity within the ballet industry, I have a personal interest in this research. My advocacy for more equitable leadership outcomes in ballet, and my support of a gender non-specific pedagogical model is clear and public, not least through my social media channels. Additionally, my feminist pedagogical stance might influence my interpretation of the data. Therefore, I have had to continuously reflect on my personal bias throughout the project in attempting to gather accurate data and to minimise researcher influence.

I addressed this by ensuring neutral wording in focus group and survey questions and avoiding leading questions or giving responses which may have influenced participants into providing answers they thought I wanted to hear. I sought feedback from tutors and peers throughout the project to challenge my interpretations and discuss best practice approaches. Finally, I revisited the focus group transcript and survey responses multiple times to ensure thematic analysis was truly reflective of participant voices rather than my own expectations.

FINDINGS:

A mixed-methods approach combining four strands of data collection was used for this project. This design aimed to capture the current gender ratios in UK ballet classes and the pedagogical norms which shape ballet training, and to compare these with the statistical evidence of gender equity in artistic leadership over the past four years. The intention was to explore links between training experience and leadership outcomes.

The four data strands were as follows:

1. Focus group (qualitative insights).
2. Dancer survey (qualitative and quantitative insights).
3. Teacher survey (quantitative insights).
4. Ballet company data (quantitative insights).

Data which appeared highly individual, lacked consensus from other participants or was not relevant to the research questions was excluded from analysis.

Data strand 1: focus group

The focus group gathered qualitative insights from ten participants, aged 20 and 21, who were currently in full-time training in the UK with a curriculum that included ballet. These participants represented a range of gender identities, including cis men and women, non-binary, trans, and gender-questioning individuals.

The focus group lasted 1.5 hours and allowed participants to discuss their gendered experiences and observations in ballet training.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym during transcription. Table 1 lists their self-identified pronouns and gender-identity to provide context for their quotes:

Table 1 – Focus group pseudonyms, pronouns and gender identities:

Pseudonym:	Self-identified gender identity/pronouns:
Billie	Gender-questioning - he/they
Craig	Cis man - he/him
Dylan	Cis man - he/him
Jamie	Cis man - he/him
John	Cis man - he/him
Olivia	Non-binary - they/them
Rebecca	Cis woman - she/her
Ruby	Cis woman - she/her
Seren	Trans feminine - she/they
Tess	Cis woman - she/her

Four consistent themes were identified as follows:

1 - Disproportionate attention, praise and opportunities for boys and men

Across gender identities, participants reported perceiving that more praise, attention and opportunities were given to boys and men regardless of their ability. Rebecca explained:

Particular teachers would praise the male-identifying students more often... I would then come out of the class and think, well, that was a bit of a waste of my time... I was doing just as well as, if not better than [them], and... we wouldn't get seen.

Several participants also noted disproportionate time and attention spent on the boys or men within class. Olivia explained, 'a lot of the time you're stood at the side of the class, just watching people getting all this extra attention, and you just feel a bit useless.' Craig corroborated these perceptions and expressed his discomfort: 'it's hard to be the only one getting praised because then everyone else comes out like "that was a waste of my time"'. Billie described how, as a child, he had craved genuine rather than inflated praise; 'I obviously wanted to be told I was doing well, but only for my actual technical ability, you know, not just because I was the only boy'. John speculated that this approach may be a consequence of the rarity of boys in ballet; 'there are less of us so it's seen as more unusual or rare'. He believed the disproportionate treatment was 'a lot to do with encouragement purposes'. One might imagine that the men were revelling in this treatment, but instead they reported seeing it as unwelcome and unhelpful. Craig explained 'I don't need the ego boost, I want the teachers to go "fix this fix this fix this", and it'll push me more and I'll get more out of a class, rather than going "Craig you're great"'.

2 - Stricter expectations for girls and women

Participants consistently reported higher expectations in ballet for girls and women, specifically in performance standards, behaviour, and uniform requirements. Due to experiencing her transition within her full-time training, Seren had a unique perspective on

this, reporting that she had experienced more casual expectations when working alongside the men in her first year, in contrast to the less tolerant expectations placed upon the women dancers in her second year. She explained:

This year I did the female track for the assessment, and the treatment was completely different to first year. First year, it was like, 'you guys need to do this... oh you can only do one tour? That's so fine. Just do one tour there. Great job. You've got there in the end.' And then this year, was like, 'why aren't you doing 16 fouettés?

Participants reported perceiving stricter behavioural expectations for girls and women. Again, the men in the group acknowledged this dynamic. John described:

I'm able to get away with so much more than a female in my class... it would be 'ahh it's just John he's being cheeky'. I feel like I can get away with a lot of things just because I'm smiling at the teacher where I've seen other people have gotten told off for the same things I've done.

Ruby asserted that the same behaviour can be perceived differently depending on the gender of the person exhibiting it. She explained, 'if a boy does something slightly funny it's like, "oh he's the class clown"... whereas if it's a girl it's like "ugh she's so annoying" or "she's having a moment."' Rebecca agreed, explaining:

I would say overall a female having a bit of personality and having the same fun as a male-identifying [student] would be classed as disrespectful... I've rarely seen someone be called disrespectful as a male-identifying person.

Craig shared an anecdote to reinforce these assertions, describing a rehearsal where the men were on one side of the studio and the women on the other. He described:

The teacher was at the front, and on the side of the boys we were all just messing around, laughing and stuff, and if the girls spoke, it was like [makes slapping gesture to indicate punishment].

Rebecca explained she too had been in this rehearsal, describing how ‘from the other side of the room, it was jabber jabber jabber, actually like play fighting in the room’ in contrast to her side of the studio where ‘we wouldn’t dare move, because we would be shouted at.’

Participants also explained the contrast in uniform requirements for men and women dancers. Olivia explained, ‘for some reason the female-identifying have to be streamlined and slicked back and everything, and that’s just an expectation, and they have to be able to see every single part of your body, but for some reason, with the male-identifying, it’s totally OK to not be held to that standard’. Again, the men in the group reported being aware of this, with John admitting, ‘I feel like I’ve worn all sorts for ballet, like I’ve just worn a tight top and tights. Sometimes I’ll come in a leotard and tights but it doesn’t really matter, because it never gets brought up.’

3 - Discomfort with gendered expectations

Several participants reported feeling discomfort with the gendered assumptions embedded in their ballet training. Billie explained how the disproportionate praise given to dancers assumed to be male was difficult for him. They described: ‘I was getting more praise as a boy but at the same time I didn’t really want to be recognised as one’. Seren explained how dance has exacerbated tensions between cultural gender expectations and her authentic identity. In ballet, she reported uniform as contributing to this: ‘Having to wear tight clothing, especially for me is very dysphoric’, explaining that it becomes a conscious choice as to whether she can manage the emotional load of wearing ‘the pink tights and just a leotard because it’s so much more revealing. You’re literally there with your arse out, and it’s like “OK let’s see if I can do that today”’.

Olivia described how the gendered expectations within ballet make them feel unable to present themselves authentically, explaining:

I suddenly have to be someone I don't feel like, it does war with my gender expression... it's really tricky to feel like a whole person in ballet... You're this separate version of me right now, and sometimes I do feel a bit weird coming out of class, I feel like I've kind of just been acting.

Several participants discussed the binary nature of ballet vocabulary as being restrictive. Olivia described how 'when I don't get the opportunity to go on the big, slow music, I'm kind of fuming, because jumps are my thing.' Ruby worried that attempting the traditionally male vocabulary could be interpreted as a statement rather than simply a neutral choice, 'I knew what I wanted to do but there were steps there that were deemed more masculine... I'll just do the female one this time... I don't want people watching me and thinking I'm trying to prove something.' She explained that if vocabulary was approached in a less gendered way she wouldn't feel this pressure: 'I would love to just get the chance and get encouraged a little bit more during training in class, to try maybe something a bit more masculine'. Rebecca explained that she enjoys proving that she can perform vocabulary not traditionally deemed applicable to her as a woman:

I do it to prove a point! In my pride, 'ok you can do four pirouettes, so can I!' Seeing [*names a male student*] flicking his head around doing two tours, I can do that much neater, much tidier, much better than you. And that was a pride thing for me, like I can do that.

Craig raised a point about receiving sexualised feedback with reference to industry power dynamics. Describing an individual feedback session with a teacher, Craig recalled: 'I sat down and got told to sexualise my ballet dancing more to play up to the gay men who run the industry'. Jamie and Dylan both said they too had received similar advice. Tess also recollected that she 'got told to sexualise the way I look, as that's going to be an asset to me'.

Seren described how teachers can be reluctant to offer her critique in case they are perceived as transphobic. She described how ‘teachers don't want to get things wrong, but then I don't get any feedback’.

Participants discussed the topic of partnering at length. It appeared that participants across gender identities felt pressures to conform to the binary physicality required in ballet partnering. Women participants or those assigned female at birth discussed the pressure to be thin and light. The men described the pressure to be strong and muscular. Rebecca described how she always felt nervous entering *pas de deux* classes, concerned that ‘they’re going to think I’m fat, they’re going to think I’m so fat if they lift me’. Olivia explained, ‘I feel like I'm too heavy because of my muscles... like oh yeah they’re taller than me but have you seen my legs?’ John worried about his role in perpetuating these concerns: ‘I think there's quite a bit of pressure on boys in *pas de deux* as well, because you really don't want to make the girl feel heavy.’ Craig agreed, explaining:

Sometimes we have five partners at a time, just constantly going... if I get the third person not as high as the first person, they’re going to think I'm weak as hell... There's so much pressure about like, shit, they’ve all got to be the same height, my arms were shaking, and I was like, what if they go out and laugh at me because I'm weak?

Rebecca noted the confidence she found when reversing partner roles in a recent production, saying that when she acted as the ‘lifter’ she ‘felt so much more confident knowing that I had the control rather than I'm too heavy for this man to lift me’.

4 - External perceptions of gender in ballet

Finally, participants explored their experiences as ballet students *outside* of the studio environment. They discussed cultural stereotypes and who society deems to belong in ballet.

There was consensus amongst the group that girls and women were perceived more positively for participating in ballet than boys, men or non-binary dancers.

Several of the men reported bullying from peers or family members on account of them doing ballet. Craig explained, 'in secondary school I was really, really badly bullied for about Year Seven to Year Nine... like people pushing me around the corridors and stuff for doing ballet.' John reinforced this, describing secondary school as 'some of the worst years of my life' due to the bullying he endured. He believed that this bullying was steeped in homophobic stereotypes: 'because I danced I was therefore gay, and therefore that's not a good thing.' Dylan agreed that negative stereotypes exacerbated his bullying; 'I don't think the bullying comes from the fact that you were a boy in dance, it stems from the fact that people see it as something feminine.' Olivia reported the opposite experience, where they were able to use the perception of ballet as a feminised activity as a means to reduce bullying: 'I was always getting called a lesbian... I actually started telling everyone I did ballet so that they would be like, "oh, a girl!"'.

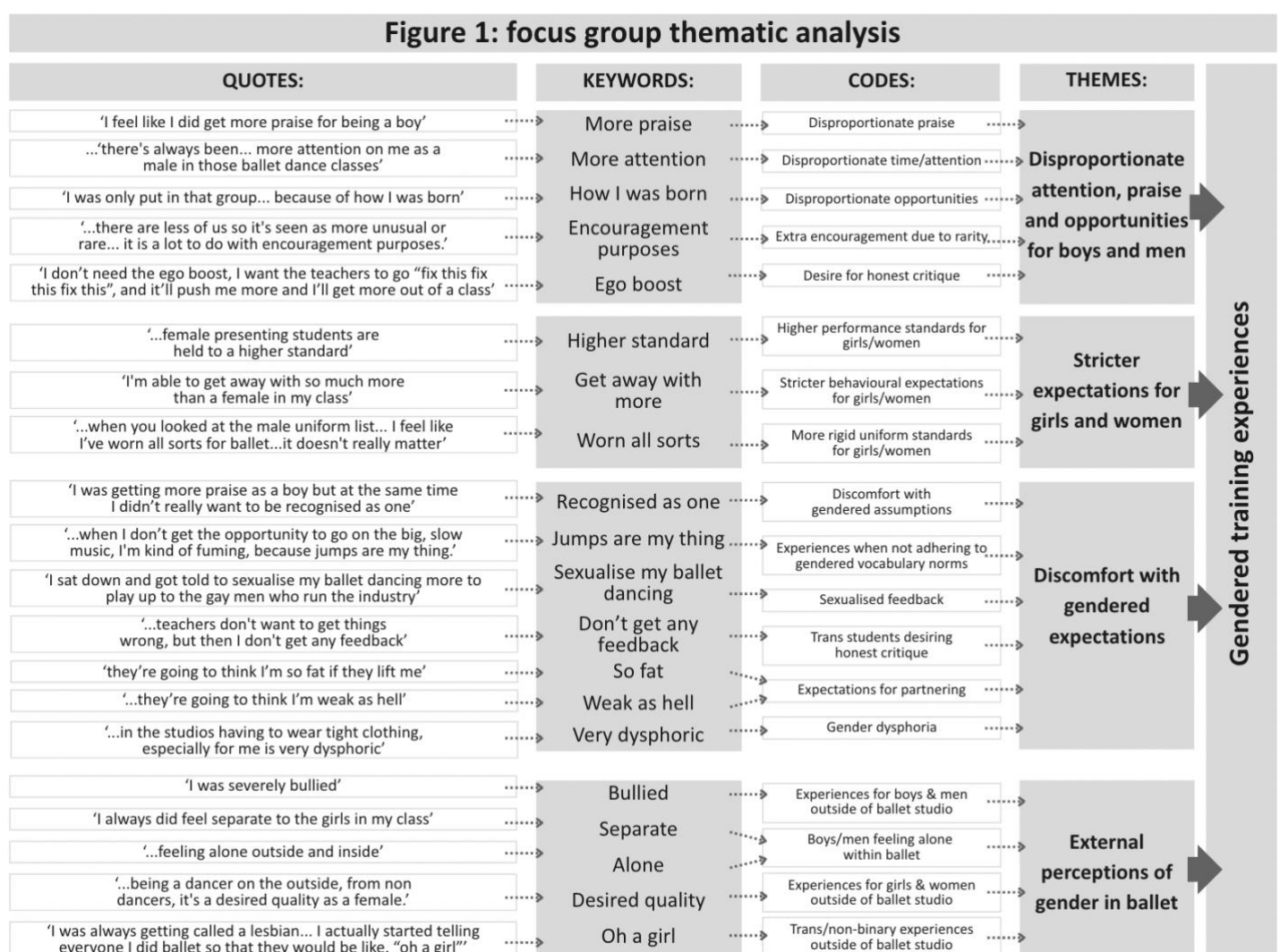
In contrast, the women generally reported feeling a positive cultural perception of their participation in ballet, with Rebecca describing being a dancer as 'a desired quality as a female'. She continued to say it was often so well received by heterosexual men that she questioned their interest in her beyond her identity as a dancer. She described men's common response to her being a dancer as 'oh so you're flexible then'. The other women joined in with the word 'flexible' with exasperated laughter and rolled eyes, indicating their recognition of this familiar question.

John explained how the negative input outside the ballet studio was not helped by being separated from the other students within it. He suggested that 'there's other ways to

encourage boys in dance, rather than just almost segregating them in class.’ He highlighted the emotional weight of managing the external judgement and internal isolation, concluding that ‘feeling alone outside and inside [the studio] wasn’t always the best.’

Thematic analysis of the focus group identified four consistent themes. These are summarised in Figure 1, which illustrates the progression from quotes to keywords, codes and final themes.

Figure 1: focus group thematic analysis



Data strand 2: dancer survey

Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered from 207 participants via a Google Form survey. The survey was open to individuals aged 18 and over who had participated in ballet classes at any level, regardless of current involvement, age or gender identity.

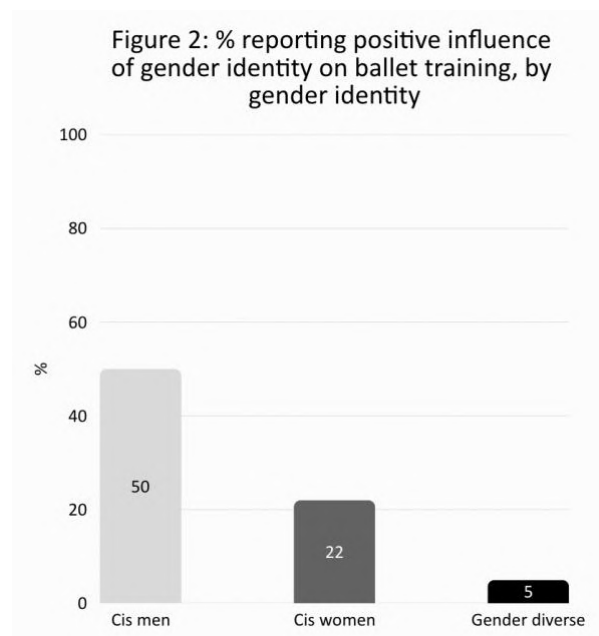
Quantitative data

Quantitative data from the dancer survey produced three core themes:

1 - Perceptions of gendered treatment in training

Cis men were more than twice as likely as cis women to feel their gender identity positively influenced their ballet training (50% compared to 22%). This figure dropped further for the gender diverse participants, where only 5% reported a positive impact (see Figure 2).

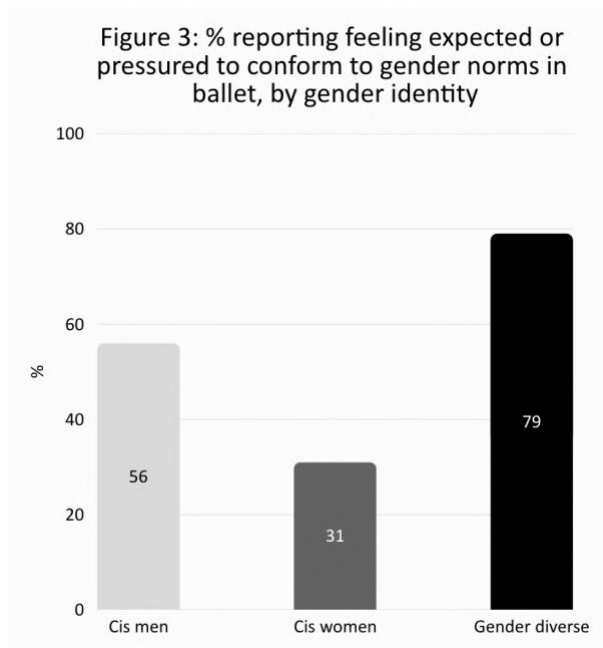
Figure 2: positive influence of gender identity on Ballet training, by gender identity



Gender diverse participants reported most commonly (79%) that they felt expected or pressured to conform to gender norms in ballet. Cis men were almost twice as likely to report

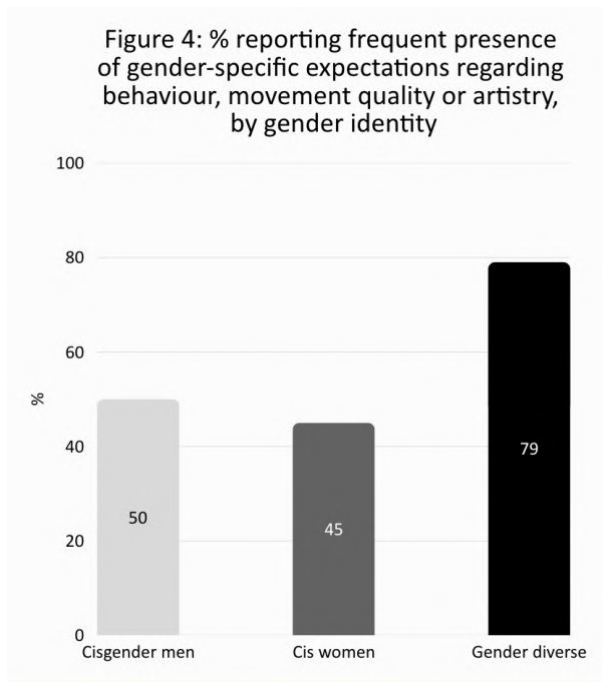
feeling this than cis women (56% compared to 31%). This presents an interesting duality whereby cis men report feeling positively impacted by their gender *and* a pressure to conform to gender norms (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: feeling pressured to conform to gender norms in ballet, by gender identity



Gender diverse dancers were most likely to report the frequent presence of gender-specific expectations regarding behaviour, movement quality or artistry (79%). A similar proportion of cis men and cis women reported this (50% compared with 45%; see Figure 4).

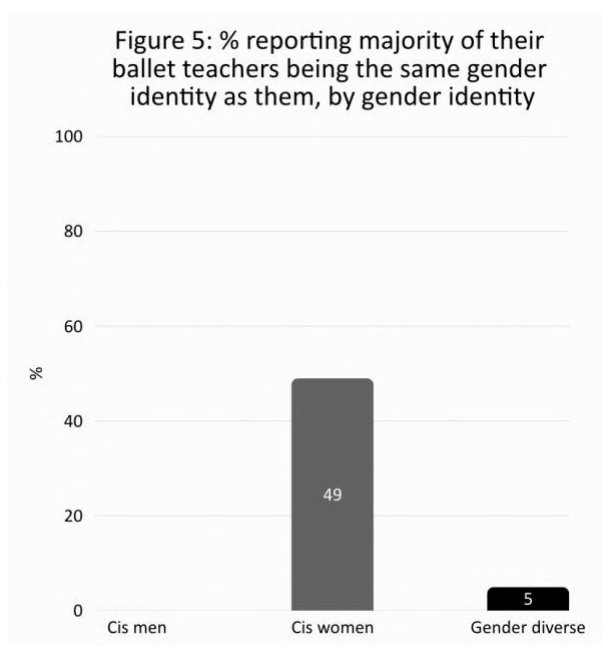
Figure 4: frequent presence of gender-specific expectations, by gender identity



2 - Representation and role models

No cis men reported that the majority of their ballet teachers had been the same gender identity as them (0%). A small number of gender diverse participants reported that this was the case (5%), compared to almost half of the cis women (49%).

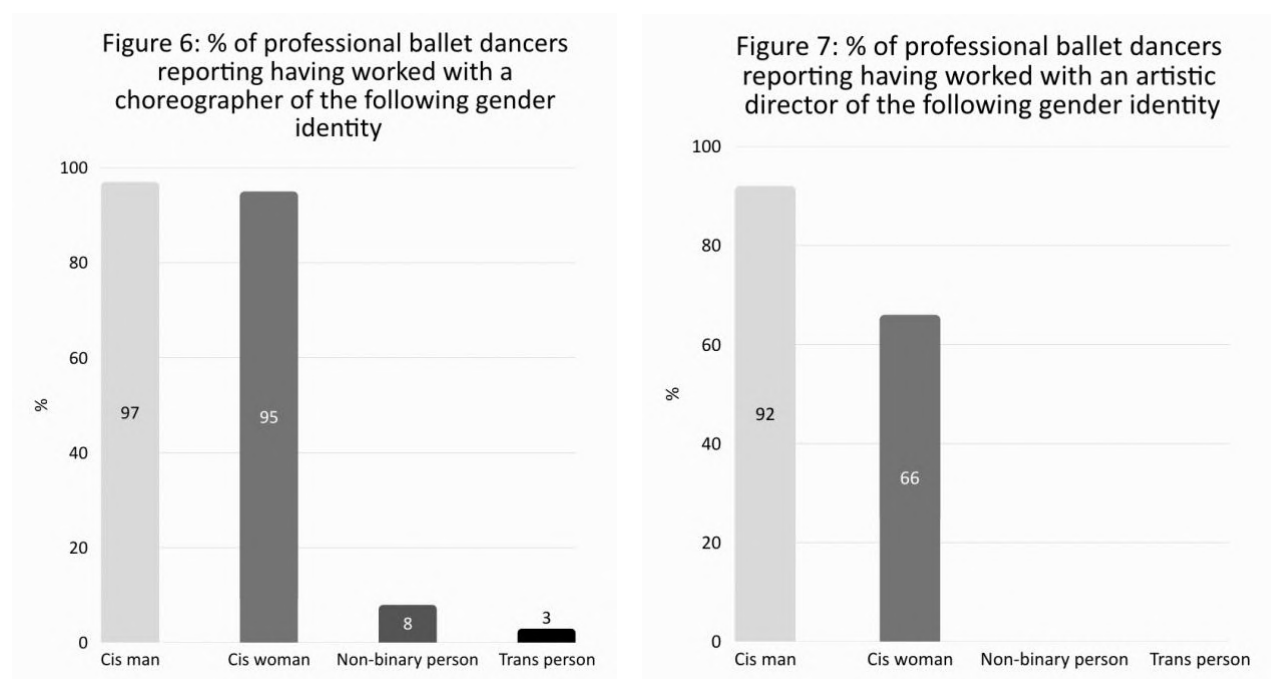
Figure 5: majority of ballet teachers being the same gender, by gender identity



Of the 38 professional ballet dancers who completed the survey, the majority said they had worked with a choreographer who was a cis woman (95%) or a cis man (97%). A small number said they had worked with a non-binary choreographer (8%) or trans choreographer (3%; see Figure 6). A starker contrast was shown when asking about the artistic directors they had worked with. No professional dancers said they had worked with a trans or non-binary artistic director (0%). Two thirds said they had worked with a cis woman artistic director (66%) and nearly all said they had worked with a cis man artistic director (92%; see Figure 7).

Figure 6: choreographers' gender identity reported by professional dancers

Figure 7: artistic directors' gender identity reported by professional dancers

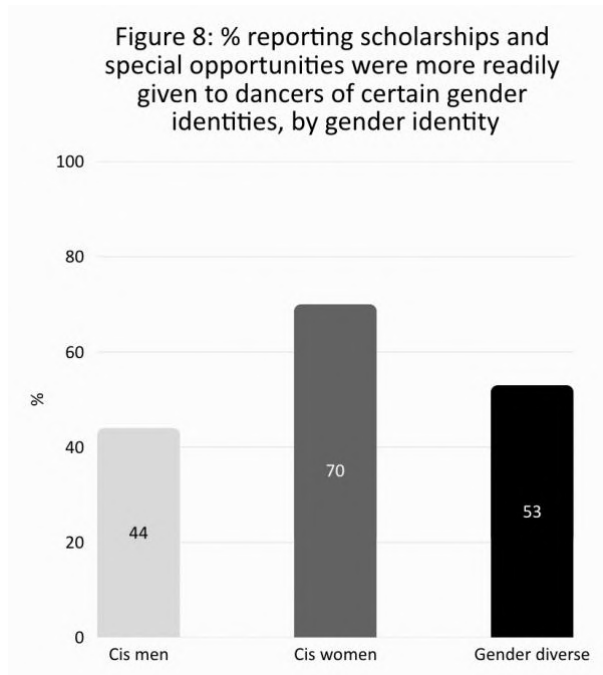


3 - Pathways to leadership

Two thirds of participants (66%) reported noticing that the awarding of scholarships and special opportunities was influenced by gender identity. Cis women were more likely to report

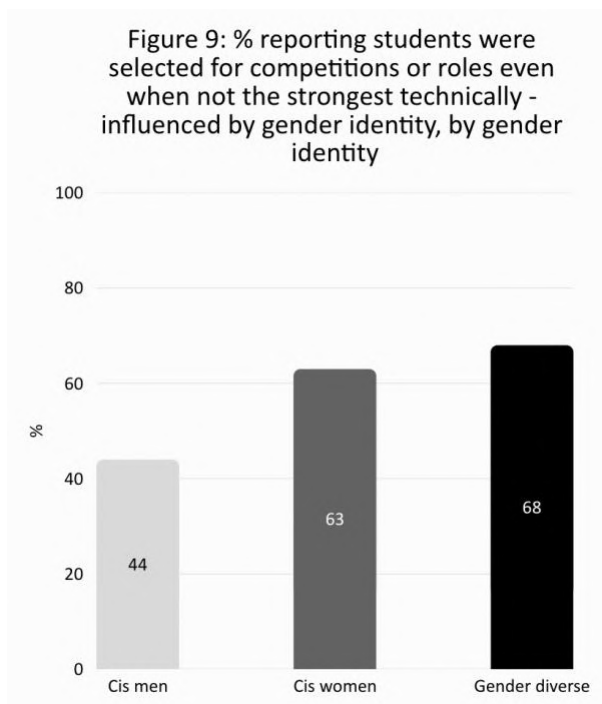
this (70%) than gender diverse participants (53%). Cis men were least likely to report this (44%; see Figure 8).

Figure 8: scholarships or opportunities awarded by gender identity



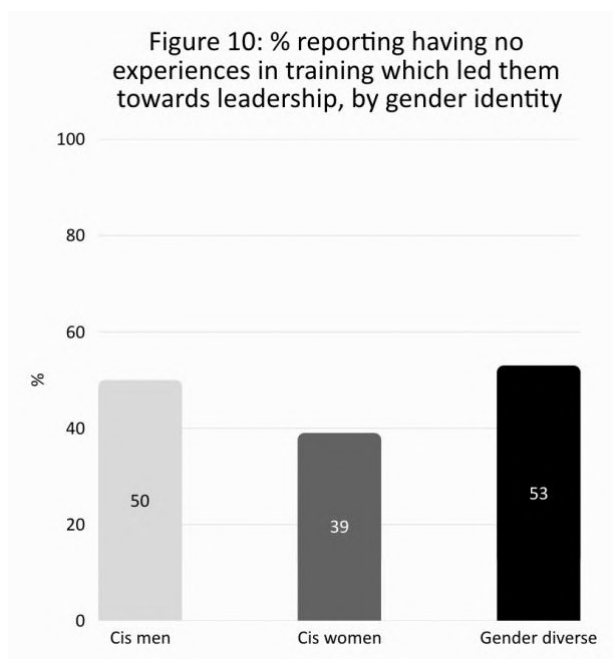
Similarly, nearly two thirds (62%) of participants reported noticing that students were selected for competitions or roles even when not the strongest technically, influenced by gender identity. Cis women (63%) and gender diverse participants (68%) were more likely to report this than cis men (44%; see Figure 9).

Figure 9: competition or role selection influenced by gender identity



When investigating experiences in training which led participants towards leadership roles, 42% reported no such experiences. Gender diverse participants were most likely to say they had no experiences which encouraged them towards leadership roles (53%). Cis men were more likely than cis women to say they had no experiences (50% compared to 39%; see Figure 10). This poses an interesting question about perception; cis men are clearly favoured in artistic leadership roles, and yet half of the cis men surveyed felt they had no experiences in training which led them towards leadership.

Figure 9: no experiences which led towards leadership, by gender identity



Qualitative data

Qualitative data from the dancer survey was gathered via four open-ended questions. Of these, only one is explored in depth within this section. The remaining three questions were excluded from analysis because they either yielded data which reflected similar themes to the focus group (but with less contextual depth) or produced responses which were too individual or isolated to form themes that were sufficiently meaningful or relevant to the core research questions. Of the 207 survey participants, 111 answered the question ‘What aspects of ballet training do you think could better support leadership aspirations, especially for cisgender women, trans, and non-binary individuals?’ Their answers produced four key themes:

1 - Embedding leadership into ballet training

Several participants suggested that leadership skills could be embedded into everyday classes. One described how ‘opportunities to learn from teaching or leading...’ could be part of a normal ballet class. Two participants highlighted mentorship as a potential solution. Several participants emphasised the importance of encouraging dancers to use their voices in class to

support leadership development, with one stating that it is important to ‘encourage asking questions; a quiet student isn’t a good student. Being obedient won’t make you a good leader’. Numerous participants commented on the importance of nurturing creative skills within the class setting, with one highlighting the value of ‘Allowing opportunity for creative tasks with feedback’. Several participants stressed the benefits of exposing students to career options in ballet beyond performing, with one suggesting it would be advantageous to have ‘better guidance on potential career paths and support for fully-rounded careers’ and another proposing the inclusion of ‘business education - all aspects of dance that is not the performing of the ballet itself.’

2 - Reforming studio culture

Several participants proposed that leadership cannot become more inclusive without first reforming the culture of ballet by eliminating outdated practices, toxicity, unequal power dynamics and abuse. One participant described the ideal environment as ‘Non-hierarchy. Equality. Communication. Asking questions. Wanting to learn’. Another simply summarised that ‘treating people with basic human dignity would be a start.’ A common topic raised by participants was body image, with several condemning the toxic pressure on girls and women to be thin and light. Several participants also raised the topic of uniform, with one explaining that ‘more inclusive and less prescriptive uniform’ would be beneficial.

3 - Gender equity and representation

Several participants echoed themes from the focus group that related to the benefits of gender non-specific training, and a more equal distribution of praise, attention and opportunities for dancers across all gender identities. One participant explained an important step in supporting leadership aspirations is to ‘allow dancers to train in all aspects of ballet’.

Another asserted that it is necessary to have ‘access to scholarships and funding based on merit not gender’.

Several participants reflected on the significance of representation, with one describing the importance of having ‘more representation and education about leaders of all genders.’ Others focused on the special treatment of boys being rooted in their scarcity, explaining the need to first address this in order to create a more level playing field in training, and therefore in leadership outcomes. One participant explained that ‘the more boys/men we can get into ballet, the less “rare” they will be, and therefore will receive less special treatment, favouritism and fast tracking over girls who are equally as good.’

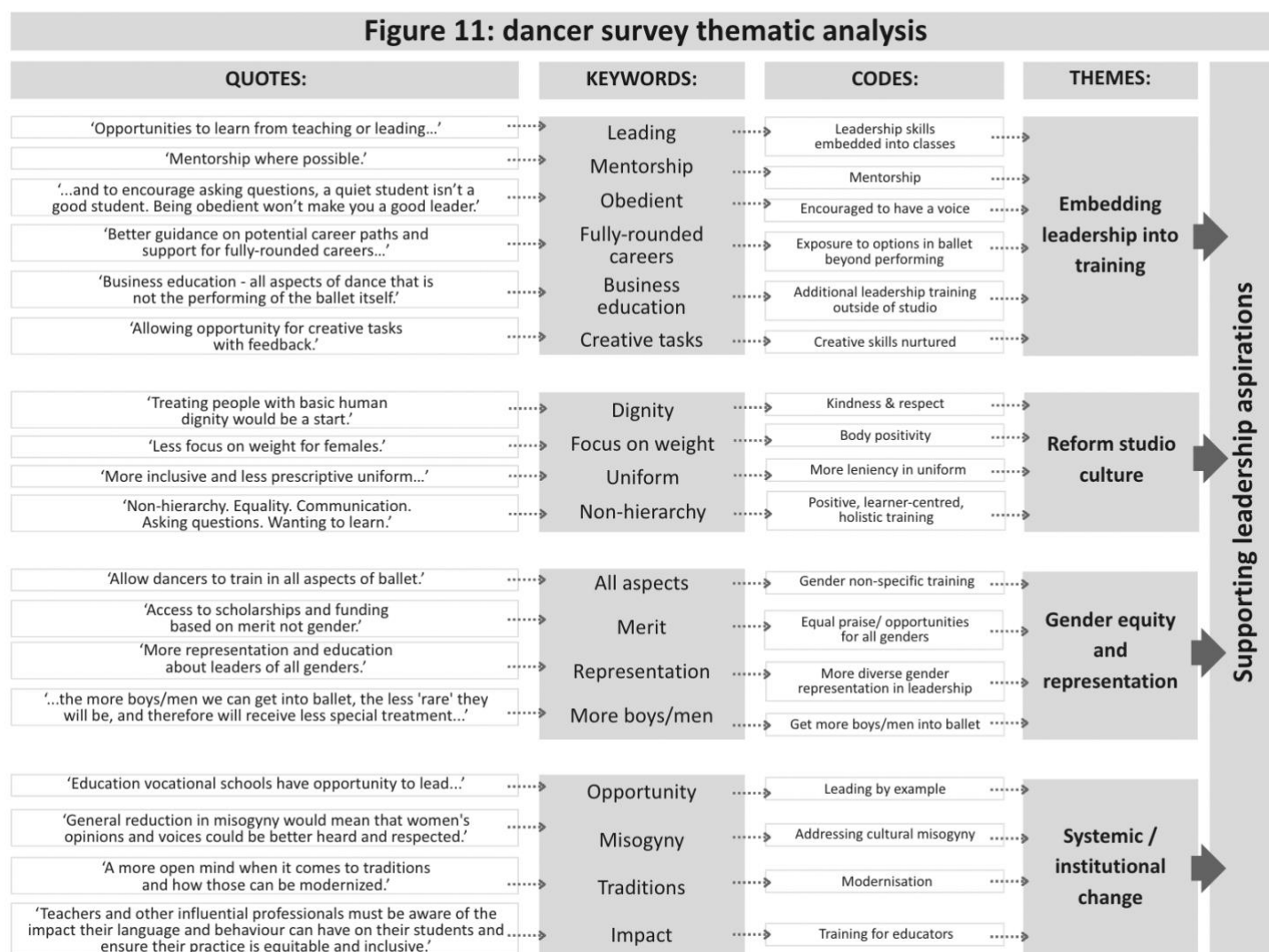
4 - Systemic and institutional change

Several participants described changes necessary at a systemic and institutional level, both inside and outside ballet. One participant considered the influence of broader cultural issues, explaining that a ‘general reduction in misogyny would mean that women's opinions and voices could be better heard and respected.’ Several participants focused on the responsibility held by leading training institutions, with one saying that ‘vocational schools have [the] opportunity to lead’ and another explaining that it is necessary to have ‘a more open mind when it comes to traditions and how those can be modernized.’ Other participants considered the need to educate and build awareness of bias in ballet teachers, with one explaining that ‘teachers and other influential professionals must be aware of the impact their language and behaviour can have on their students and ensure their practice is equitable and inclusive.’

Thematic analysis of answers to this survey question identified four consistent themes (see Appendix G). These are summarised in Figure 11, which illustrates the progression from quotes to keywords, codes and final themes. When considered together, these themes

suggest that supporting leadership aspirations for dancers of all gender identities first requires reform of the cultural, systemic and pedagogical norms embedded in ballet training.

Figure 10: dancer survey thematic analysis

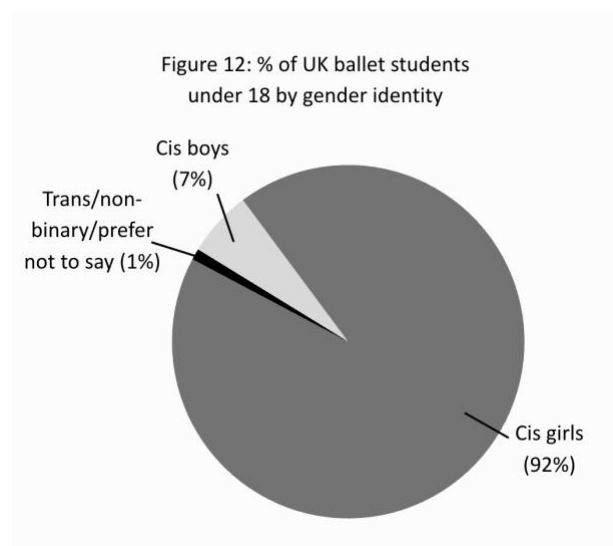


Data strand 3: teacher survey

Quantitative data was gathered from 102 participants through a Google Form survey. These participants were ballet teachers working within the UK. Collectively, the participants reported teaching ballet to 7555 students under the age of 18. To the best of each participant's knowledge, 92% were cis girls and 7% were cis boys. In the remaining 1% of cases the student

was trans, non-binary or preferred not to disclose their gender identity; or else the teacher was unsure (see Figure 12). This extreme gender imbalance demonstrates a stark negative correlation with the gender disparity in artistic leadership roles, as shown in the next data strand. While the majority of ballet students are cis girls, the leadership in ballet continues to be dominated by men.

Figure 11: gender ratios of under 18 students in UK ballet classes



Data strand 4: ballet company data

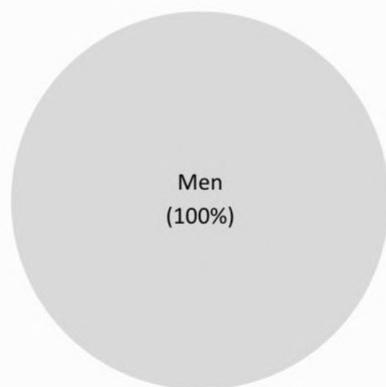
The final data strand involved analysing the gender balance of artistic directors and choreographers for the UK's five largest ballet companies: The Royal Ballet, English National Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Scottish Ballet and Northern Ballet (see Appendix H)

No openly trans, non-binary or other gender diverse individuals were identified in the data.

In all five companies (100%), artistic directors were men.

Figure 12: gender ratios of artistic directors in the five largest UK ballet companies

Figure 13: % of artistic directors
of largest five UK ballet
companies by gender identity



Of 184 choreographers whose work was performed by these companies over the past four years, 143 were men (78%) and 41 were women (22%; see Figure 14). When analysing the data, another trend appeared: when the 41 women choreographers were featured, they were more likely to have presented shorter contributions in mixed bills rather than full length works. This distinction is important as it reflects not only how many women were credited as choreographers, but also the extent of their contribution, visibility and artistic influence. When analysing the gender of these choreographers in relation to the number of acts they produced, an even starker imbalance was evident. Of the 282 acts performed over the past four seasons, 234 (83%) were choreographed by men, and only 48 (17%) were choreographed by women (see Figure 15).

Figure 13: choreographer gender, 5 largest UK ballet companies (past 4 seasons)

Figure 14: choreographer gender per act, 5 largest UK ballet companies (past 4 seasons)

Figure 14: % of choreographers whose work featured in the largest five UK ballet companies' past four seasons, by gender identity

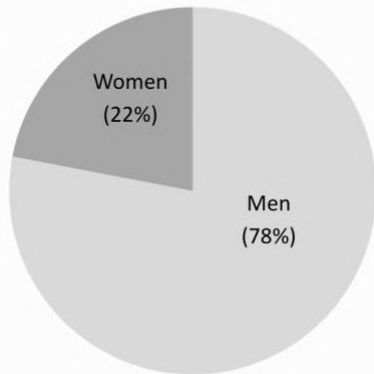
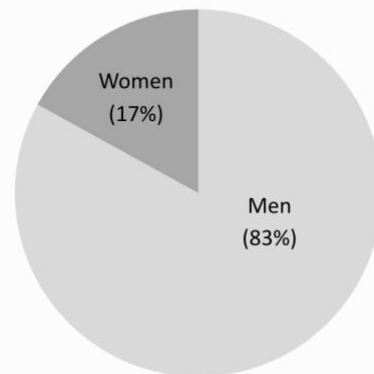


Figure 15: % of choreographers of each act featured in the largest five UK ballet companies' past four seasons, by gender identity



These figures demonstrate a clear contrast between the small proportion of cis boys in UK ballet classes (7%) and the disproportionately high representation of men in artistic leadership roles.

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the key themes identified across four data strands and analyses their relevance in relation to the research aims. These aims included capturing current statistical trends on gender ratios in UK ballet training and artistic leadership, exploring how gendered experiences in ballet training may impact leadership outcomes for cis women, trans people and non-binary people and considering how pedagogy and curricula might be reformed to create more equitable leadership pathways. Additionally, research outputs were designed in multiple formats to share findings with a broad audience, prioritising accessibility and engagement. Data from the four strands was analysed from which three consistent themes emerged:

1 – Disproportionate praise and unequal expectations

The quantitative and qualitative data consistently revealed patterns of disproportionate praise and attention for boys and men in ballet. The scarcity of boys and men leads to them receiving more encouragement and visibility than dancers of other gender identities. These patterns continue into the professional industry, whereby men are more readily noticed, recognised as individuals, and given opportunities to interact with leaders (Clements and Nordin-Bates, 2020; Kelly, 2017; Wirth, 2022). This was reflected by the quantitative data, which identified that just 7% of UK ballet students were cis boys, yet in the UK's five largest ballet companies, 83% of work was choreographed by men and all artistic director roles were held by men.

The focus group participants, across all the gender identities they represented, explained the significantly different behaviour, uniform standards and personality traits expected and accepted of girls and women compared to boys and men. This compounds pressure on girls and women to exhibit obedience and conformity to avoid being replaced, whereas

expectations are diluted for boys and men to maintain their enthusiasm and attendance (Angyal, 2021; Boudier, cited in Angyal, 2017; Wirth 2022).

If ballet teachers treat boys and men as a precious commodity to be indulged, over-praised and given disproportionate attention, while girls and women are held to far stricter and more punitive standards, it is unsurprising that boys and men are more likely to progress into leadership, while dancers of other gender identities feel disempowered, under-appreciated and ill-equipped to lead.

Awareness is the first critical step when addressing bias. The feminist pedagogical framework underpinning this project emphasises reflexivity and challenging traditional norms (Webb, Allen and Walker, 2002). Therefore, ballet teachers must consistently reflect on their practice including their distribution of praise, attention and opportunities. This framework also values shared power and respect for diverse experiences, therefore teachers must resist positioning boys as special, and instead affirm each student as equally valuable and encourage their voice to be heard.

I propose solutions such as CPD and digital resources for ballet teachers to build awareness and reflexivity. These methods can encourage ballet teachers to recognise gender biases embedded in ballet training and consider the impact their feedback, encouragement and treatment of students may have on future leadership pathways.

2 – Binary gender norms

A widely accepted career pipeline exists within ballet whereby artistic director and choreographer roles are generally achieved by those who have first experienced professional performing careers (US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023; Farnsley, 2022). Therefore, dancers

whose identities or body types are not traditionally accepted in ballet are excluded from professional companies and therefore unable to attain leadership roles.

The prevailing binary ideals of course discourage and exclude trans and non-binary dancers from ballet at both training and professional level, but the specificity of the associated binary body standards also means that many cis dancers are excluded. A tall, muscular, cis woman or a short, slight cis man, regardless of their choreographic talent or artistic vision, is unlikely to reach leadership roles due to being excluded from building experience as a professional ballet dancer in the first place.

Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson (2017) argue that the binary approach to gender in ballet training is restrictive, not only regarding vocabulary and skills covered but also in expression of quality and identity. This was reflected in the focus group, where the non-binary and trans dancers described their difficulty aligning their authentic gender identity with the binary expectations of ballet classes. Cis men and cis women in the focus group and dancer survey consistently reported wanting to try vocabulary not traditionally assigned to their gender identity. They also commonly described the pressures they felt to fit the ideals of their gender identity physically and artistically.

I propose that ballet training institutions from recreational to pre-professional level can adopt a gender non-specific, skills-based, pedagogical approach. This method would involve teaching all vocabulary, qualities and skills to all students. In vocational settings, students could trial specialisms where safe and appropriate, for example, pointe/pre-pointe, modern partnering, traditional partnering, virtuoso, repertoire, choreography etc., and then alongside experienced mentors could major or minor in different areas. This could be likened to medical students first training as generalists before participating in rotations and selecting their

specialisms. Redesigning the current binary norms in ballet training aligns with the key feminist pedagogical principle of questioning tradition and challenging existing models (Webb, Allen and Walker 2002). It emphasises critically examining *why* practices are maintained and considering alternatives.

The benefits of this system are that all students could explore the vocabulary, skills, qualities and expression which best suit their physicality and identity. Ballet companies would benefit from employing a diverse range of dancers who are versatile technicians and nuanced artists representative of a range of identities who are more relatable to a modern audience. Dancers who choose to pursue careers in ballet beyond performing will have a broad overview of skills, which will be particularly important for those who become teachers. Future leaders trained in this way would be more equipped to lead and create due to their holistic perspective of ballet skills. After all, there is a particular irony that the hallmark of a ballerina's technique - *pointe* work - is showcased in repertoire predominantly choreographed by men who have never trained *en pointe*. In line with feminist pedagogy, this approach would ensure future professionals in all areas of ballet do not simply inherit ballet's structures, but actively question them.

3 – The need for pedagogical and curricular reform

In the dancer survey, a pattern consistent across gender identities was the feeling of having had very little leadership preparation during training. I suggest that equitable leadership pathways cannot be developed without first reforming the way dancers are trained. This can be done by transforming the pedagogical approach, embedding leadership skill-building within daily class, and including leadership training as a separate, formal part of a vocational curriculum.

A lack of intentional leadership skill-building will likely affect girls and women the most, because the current embedded patterns encourage them to be quiet, submissive and compliant. Young girls enter ballet training earlier than boys (Clegg, Owton and Allen-Collinson 2017; Feltham and Ryan, 2022) and experience more pressure to accept and embody oppressive norms which encourage conformity and deference (Green, 2020; Pickard, 2012; Stinson, 2005).

I propose that reforming ballet education both inside and outside of daily ballet class is an essential step to effect change. Adopting a feminist pedagogical style in ballet training centres all learners and encourages their voices to be heard. With this approach, everyday class can move away from the traditional model where knowledge is passed from teacher to student without critical engagement with the content. Instead, it can move instead towards a person-centred model where students are engaged in their own learning. This will result in a natural immersion of leadership skill-building: Students will take charge of their own learning, focus on collaboration, engage critically with material and concepts, offer their opinions, lead tasks, explore their creativity, and more (Shrewsbury, 1987). Outside of class, more targeted leadership training can be included into the curriculum through talks, workshops and diverse mentorship.

It is wonderful that there are initiatives within education and professional institutions to try to nurture women's choreographic voices (Wirth, 2022). However, it is evident that the conditioning which will shape young dancers' futures has already been embedded long before they reach the later stages of their training or the profession itself (Angyal, 2021; Stinson, 2005). This led me to ground this project in the field of ballet education: Not only because it

is the area I am most immersed in professionally, but also because leadership pipelines (or their absence) are already present by the time children take their first ballet class.

Application of findings and output design

An important aim of this project has been to disseminate findings beyond academic circles and bridge the gap to real-world impact. 'Challenging traditional views' and 'building community' are key principles of feminist pedagogy (Webb, Allen and Walker 2002) and to achieve these findings must reach beyond the often-gatekept environments of ballet institutions. To ensure interventions would be impactful, it was important to reach audiences both within and outside of institutional structures. Consequently, multiple outputs were designed to maximise reach and accessibility.

CPD Presentation

The CPD presentation was delivered to teaching and non-teaching staff at a UK dance and musical theatre conservatoire (see Appendix I). This allowed findings to be shared with a range of professionals, both ballet specialists and non-specialists, working in higher and further education. The presentation was designed with empowerment and community building in mind, aiming to be collaborative and non-judgemental, in line with the feminist pedagogical approach (Bell, 1987). Mentimeter, a web-based platform enabling real-time digital interaction, was used to engage participants throughout (see Appendix J). For example, before presenting the gender ratios in UK ballet classes compared to artistic leadership, participants first guessed from a range of answers via a poll to gauge their initial perceptions. Each of the three consistent themes which had emerged from the data strands was presented as a puzzle piece to explore. Participants were encouraged to verbally reflect on each puzzle piece and discuss as a whole group. At the end of the session, participants were asked three reflective

questions including ‘What is one action you could take, or one area where you might think differently about your role, in relation to building gender equity in leadership?’ Some participants offered their ideas via Mentimeter and others verbally, indicating their comfort with selecting their own engagement preferences. These questions aimed to encourage reflexivity and build awareness of individual impact as teachers. These are both important elements of feminist pedagogy which encourages students and teachers to continuously re-examine their roles and relationships (Webb, Allen and Walker, 2002). The final Q&A produced insightful questions and vibrant discussion from participants. An interactive session such as this aligns with feminist pedagogy’s emphasis on democratic and participatory experiences (Bell, 1987).

Digital resource for teachers

This project sought to make findings and recommendations accessible and relevant for ballet teachers across all levels and settings. Therefore, a free PDF resource was created (see Appendix K). This resource offered summaries of the data, recommendations for best practice, and reflection prompts. Consequently, in addition to offering information, it encouraged active engagement and reflexivity from readers to help inform and develop their future teaching. This aligned with feminist pedagogical approaches which recommend critical reflection and connecting theory to practice (Bell, 1987).

Social media content, other digital content and podcasts

Throughout the year in which this project was undertaken, progress and findings were documented and shared through @annamorgandance Instagram and TikTok. This reflected the project’s aim to ensure findings were widely accessible, to reach a broad and diverse audience, and to foster community building. Rather than teachers and institutions operating

in isolation, feminist pedagogy recommends connection and collaboration (Bell, 1987; Webb, Allen and Walker, 2002). In today's busy world, and with the pressures faced by teachers and education systems, social media can be a powerful tool to facilitate these connections.

Social posts yielded varied results, with some producing high levels of engagement, for example, the Instagram post titled 'How would gender non-specific ballet training actually work?' (annamorgandance, 2025) reached 68,000 people.

In addition, research has been shared through collaboration with organisations such as the ISTD for their blog post on gender inclusivity in dance training (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, 2022) and through appearances on podcasts such as The Brainy Ballerina Podcast (Sloan, 2025) and Conversations with the Ballet Educator (Crumley, 2025). Each of these platforms aim to engage and inform teachers, spark conversations, and positively influence practice. The ISTD is a global organisation and the two podcasts mentioned are hosted in the USA, therefore each matches the research aims to engage broader audiences and the feminist pedagogical principle of connection and community building.

Together, these output formats served to communicate the research findings and proposed solutions to a wide audience, sparking conversations and creating further opportunities for dissemination which will continue beyond the scope of the MA.

CONCLUSION

This project aimed to gather UK-specific data regarding gender ratios in ballet classes in comparison to gender ratios in ballet's artistic leadership, contextualise these by centring the lived experience of a diverse range of participants, and identify common themes related to gender bias in ballet training and their potential impact on leadership outcomes. Following data analysis, the project aimed to propose potential solutions and disseminate findings and suggestions for best practice to a wide audience using multiple formats.

Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered which illustrated a stark contrast between gender ratios in participation and those in artistic leadership. Cis boys made up just 7% of the students under the age of 18 in UK ballet classes, yet in the five largest UK ballet companies, men had choreographed 83% of the work shown in the past four seasons and held all the artistic director positions. A review of existing literature identified five common themes which could explain these trends: hierarchy and obedience, binary gender norms, gender ratios and replaceability, mismatch of leadership qualities, and institutional favouritism towards men. These were reinforced by the three themes which emerged from the qualitative data on ballet training: disproportionate praise and unequal expectations, binary gender norms, and the need for pedagogical and curricular reform.

These statistics and themes were shared in the multiple research outputs to align with the project's aim to disseminate findings beyond academic circles and bridge the gap to real-world impact. These included a CPD presentation, a free digital resource for ballet teachers, social media content and podcast appearances. These outputs allowed for findings and potential solutions to be shared to tens of thousands of people in accessible and digestible formats.

The project does not claim to offer a complete picture; the quantitative data was limited by sample size and scope, and the qualitative data cannot guarantee total impartiality due to self-selection bias and potential unreliability of individual perceptions. However, the project scope was broad enough that compelling trends and themes have been identified that are relevant to the research aims, and the limitations offer opportunities for future research.

On analysing both the qualitative and quantitative data, solutions for challenging consistent biases embedded in ballet education and reforming pedagogical practices were considered. Targeted CPD and digital resources for ballet teachers can contribute to addressing the disproportionate praise and unequal expectations in ballet. The negative effects of binary gender expectations can be addressed with the widespread adoption of a gender non-specific, skills-based pedagogical approach. The need for pedagogical and curricular reform can be addressed by ballet training moving away from an authoritative and dictatorial model to one rooted in feminist pedagogical principles, and the inclusion of targeted leadership training and opportunities within ballet curricula. If implemented, these interventions can create essential changes to individual experiences, leadership outcomes and the future sustainability of the art form.

While existing literature identified the scope and contributing factors of gender inequity in ballet's artistic leadership, a gap was identified showing a necessity for further awareness-raising and tools for dancers, teachers and leaders. Existing quantitative data was generally focused globally or specifically on the USA. This project provides new UK-specific data, offers an exploration of how gendered experiences at a training level can impact leadership outcomes, and delivers practical solutions for ballet teachers across levels and contexts.

Moving beyond the MA dissertation, my intention is to share this research with further audiences and to work collaboratively with individuals and organisations in implementing proposed solutions. I will continue to disseminate my research in a range of formats to effect both individual and institutional change. The project has identified a stark negative correlation between gender ratios in ballet training compared to artistic leadership in ballet companies. It has provided evidence and contextualised this disparity with real-world experiences and proposed solutions. Therefore, I believe that with further sharing, dialogue and advocacy, it can contribute to tangible change in our industry and the individual dancers within it.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix A: ethics approval

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17.03.25

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to confirm that Anna Morgan has had her research ethics application approved by Rambert School Research knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee, to conduct surveys, interviews and focus-groups as part of her MA in Dance Research Dissertation due September 2025.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Best regards,

Phaedra Petsilas

Head of Studies (and chair of Research Knowledge Exchange and Ethics Committee)

Phaedra.petsilas@rambertschool.org.uk

Appendix B: focus group Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Participants

INVISIBLE BARRIERS. VISIBLE CHANGE: CONFRONTING GENDER BIAS IN BALLET'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY
Information Sheet for <i>Focus Group Participants</i>
Who is conducting the research?
My name is Anna Morgan and I am inviting you to take part in my research project: <i>'Invisible Barriers. Visible Change: Confronting Gender Bias in Ballet's leadership journey'</i> I am a Ballet teacher here at Bird College and am currently embarking on my dissertation for my MA in Dance Research at Rambert School.
My research aims to investigate how subtle gender biases in Ballet training disproportionately disempower women, trans people and non-binary people, thereby contributing to inequitable outcomes in artistic leadership. I then wish to develop and test practical interventions for educators that can help reduce these biases, thus supporting more equitable leadership pathways. In order to achieve this, I want to hear from young people of various gender expressions to identify recurring patterns of biased feedback/culture/opportunities in Ballet training. The aim is to humanise and contextualise the broader trends in the sector, highlighting individual stories to identify potential links between training experiences and leadership outcomes. Anonymised quotes from the focus group may be used in a CPD course for educators delivered at Bird College, digital resources for Ballet teachers, social media content, and future CPD courses and publications. All identifying details except for your training context (i.e. full time) and gender expression will be removed to ensure participants cannot be recognised.
I very much hope that you would like to take part. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.
Why is this research being done?
To build awareness around gender inequity in Ballet leadership and provide real-world solutions for educators to foster more balanced outcomes.
Why are you being invited to take part?
To support building a picture of recurring patterns of biased feedback/culture/opportunities in Ballet training, I would like to organise a focus group of approx. 8-10 people with experience of full-time training which includes Ballet. These students will be over 18 and any gender expression. I ask that by volunteering to take part, you agree that any discussions you engage in will show mutual respect for all people and their gender expressions.
What will happen if you choose to take part?
You will be invited to a 1.5 hour focus group where we will discuss your experiences of gender biased feedback/culture/opportunities in Ballet training. This will be held in-person on college premises. The focus group will be recorded for the purposes of transcription only.

You will be able to participate as little or as much as you wish within the focus group discussion. You can take breaks, refuse questions, leave the room or withdraw consent to participate at any time without explanation. I will mediate the conversation to ensure the psychological safety of all participants. Your academic standing or opportunities within the college will not be impacted by your decision to participate or not in this focus group.
Will anyone know what I have said in the focus group?
No. Unless there is anything you specifically ask me not to use, I will use your focus group responses in my research. However, I will use pseudonyms for all participants so no-one will be able to identify you. The only context I will include about you is in relation to your training context and gender expression. Recordings will be used for transcription purposes only; footage or audio will not be seen/heard by anyone but me. Instead, your quotations will be used in writing or potentially in videos via AI-avatars.
Could there be problems for you if you take part?
I understand that discussion around gender can be difficult or triggering. Please feel assured that a safe space will be created, and gender affirming language will be used throughout. You are entitled to pause, stop or leave at any point in the focus group. You are entitled to withdraw your consent for me to use your anonymised quotations at any time, up until 1st July 2025 when I will start publishing content.
What will happen to the results of the research?
Once the focus group has finished, I will: • Transcribe the recordings • Permanently delete the audio and video recordings • Analyse the transcription for recurring themes • Use quotes in the CPD course either in writing or delivered in video via AI avatars. • The transcription will be securely stored and password-protected for 10 years to allow for future iterations of this research project.
Do you have to take part?
It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. I hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it a valuable experience. There will be no repercussions on grades or opportunities for those who choose or choose not to take part.
Where can you seek support?
To access LGBTQIA+ mental health support you can find a list of great organisations by clicking here.
Confidentiality and Data Protection
All information will be handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and/or General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) from May 2018. Only I will see/hear the original recording of the focus group, once it has been transcribed I will permanently delete it. The recordings and transcription will be stored in a password protected folder.
Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you would like to be involved, please complete the [online consent form](#).

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, please don't hesitate to email me – anna.morgan@birdcollege.co.uk

Appendix C: focus group consent form

18/09/2025, 00:46

Anna Morgan - Focus Group Consent Form

Anna Morgan - Focus Group Consent Form

**INVISIBLE BARRIERS. VISIBLE CHANGE:
CONFRONTING GENDER BIAS IN BALLET'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY**

anna@danceteachertraining.org [Switch account](#)



Not shared

* Indicates required question

RAMBERT
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Full Name

Your answer

Date of birth

Your answer

Gender expression/pronouns

Your answer



https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScs9Wxqu1RZ7IE_prYb0EcAhvvgZ29tf9wCpJ1KM2lhVwvYTA/viewform

1/4

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. *

☐ Yes

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. *

☐ Yes

I agree to take part in the above study. *

☐ Yes

I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded *

☐ Yes

☐ No

I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being video recorded *

☐ Yes

☐ No

I agree to the use of my anonymised quotes in publications, CPD courses, published resources and social media *

☐ Yes

☐ No



I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research. *

☐ Yes

☐ No

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Appendix D: dancer survey

18/09/2025, 00:50

Gender and Ballet leadership - Dancer questionnaire

Gender and Ballet leadership - Dancer questionnaire

This survey is for you if:

- You have ever participated in Ballet classes at any level, regardless of your current involvement, age or gender identity
- This includes experiences from **recreational** to **pre-professional** and **professional** levels.

Introduction:

My name is Anna Morgan and I am inviting you to take part in this survey to contribute towards my research into gender and leadership in Ballet, titled '**Invisible Barriers, Visible Change: Confronting Gender Bias in Ballet's Leadership Journey**'

I am an MA student at Rambert School and this research will be used to inform my dissertation project.

Consent:

By completing this anonymous survey, you are consenting to me using your anonymous answers to inform my research.

Purpose:

This survey explores gendered experiences in ballet training to better understand how gender dynamics influence participation, opportunities, and leadership outcomes in ballet.

Estimated Time: 5-10 minutes

* Indicates required question

Skip to question 1 *Skip to question 1*

Demographics:

1. What is your current age? **Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55+

2. What is your gender identity? **Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Cisgender woman
- ☐ Cisgender man
- ☐ Trans woman
- ☐ Trans man
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

3. At what levels did you participate in Ballet training? (Select all that apply) **Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Recreational (e.g., after-school classes, local dance schools)
- ☐ Vocational (e.g., ballet-focused schools, conservatoires)
- ☐ Pre-professional (e.g., advanced training with career intention)
- ☐ Professional (e.g., working in a ballet company)
- ☐ Other: _____

4. At what age did you first participate in Ballet training? **Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Under 5 years
- ☐ 5-9 years
- ☐ 10-14 years
- ☐ 15-18 years
- ☐ 19+ years

5. Are you currently involved in Ballet? (Pick the description which is the best overall fit for your current circumstances) **Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, as a student
- ☐ Yes, as a professional dancer
- ☐ Yes, as a teacher or coach
- ☐ Yes, in a leadership role (e.g. choreographer, artistic director)
- ☐ Yes, in an administrative role
- ☐ Yes, as an audience member
- ☐ No, but I was involved in the past
- ☐ Other: _____

General experiences in Ballet training:**6. Do you feel that your gender identity influenced your experience in ballet training? ****Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, positively
- ☐ Yes, negatively
- ☐ No impact
- ☐ Unsure

7. **Did you notice any of the following during ballet training?** (Select all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Teachers were more or less likely to know students' names depending on gender
- ☐ Different behaviour expectations or boundaries were applied based on gender
- ☐ Absence or attendance was treated differently depending on gender
- ☐ Scholarships and special opportunities were more readily given to certain genders
- ☐ Praise and recognition patterns differed depending on gender
- ☐ Students were selected for competitions or roles even when not the strongest technically, influenced by gender
- ☐ Students were discouraged from certain movements or roles due to gender expectations
- ☐ No noticeable gender-based differences
- ☐ Other: _____

8. **Did you ever feel expected or pressured to conform to gender norms in ballet?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes, frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

9. **Were there gender-specific expectations regarding behaviour, movement quality, or artistry?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes, frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Leadership and career aspirations:

10. **'The majority of my Ballet teachers were of the same gender expression as me.'** *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

11. **As a professional Ballet dancer, I have worked with at least one choreographer who is a...** (Tick all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Cisgender woman
☐ Cisgender man
☐ Non-binary person
☐ Trans person
☐ I have not been a professional Ballet dancer

12. **As a professional Ballet dancer, I have worked with at least one artistic director who is a...** (Tick all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Cisgender woman
☐ Cisgender man
☐ Non binary person
☐ Trans person
☐ I have not been a professional Ballet dancer

13. **Were there any practices or experiences in ballet training that encouraged you towards leadership roles (e.g., choreography, artistic direction)?** *

(Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Being chosen for choreography opportunities, competitions or workshops
- ☐ Opportunities to lead group activities or warm-ups
- ☐ Regular creative or critical thinking tasks within Ballet classes
- ☐ Mentoring or guidance from teachers or leaders
- ☐ Access to leadership training or programmes
- ☐ Praise or recognition that encouraged creative thinking
- ☐ No experiences encouraged me towards leadership roles
- ☐ Other: _____

14. **From your current perspective, how common is it for women, trans, or non-binary individuals to be in leadership roles such as Artistic Director or Choreographer in ballet?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very common
- ☐ Somewhat common
- ☐ Rare
- ☐ Very rare
- ☐ Not sure

Leadership pipeline and training outcomes

15. **In ballet, the experiences gained during training can influence leadership outcomes later on. Which aspects of ballet training do you think can impact leadership outcomes? (Select all that apply)** *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Casting decisions and role assignments (e.g., lead roles vs. ensemble)
- ☐ Feedback or corrections given in class (e.g., encouragement of creativity vs. conformity)
- ☐ Opportunities for creativity or improvisation
- ☐ Exposure to leadership examples (e.g., choreographers, artistic directors)
- ☐ Selection for external opportunities (e.g., competitions, workshops, summer schools)
- ☐ Praise and recognition patterns in class
- ☐ Peer dynamics and social hierarchy in classes
- ☐ Gendered expectations for behaviour or movement quality
- ☐ None of these influence leadership outcomes
- ☐ Other: _____

Final questions (optional):

16. **Can you share an example of how gender influenced your ballet training experience?**

17. **Do you believe your ballet training prepared you for leadership roles (e.g., choreographer, artistic director)? Why or why not?**

18. **What aspects of ballet training do you think could better support leadership aspirations, especially for women, trans, and non-binary individuals?**

19. **Is there anything else you would like to share about gender and leadership in ballet?**

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Appendix E: teacher survey

18/09/2025, 00:54

Gender and leadership in Ballet - Teacher Questionnaire:

Gender and leadership in Ballet - Teacher Questionnaire:

This survey is for you if:

- You are a Ballet teacher in the UK
- You teach Ballet to students aged 18 and under at any level

Introduction:

My name is Anna Morgan and I am inviting you to take part in this survey to contribute towards my research into gender and leadership in Ballet, titled '**Invisible Barriers, Visible Change: Confronting Gender Bias in Ballet's Leadership Journey**'

I am an MA student at Rambert School and this research will be used to inform my dissertation project.

Consent:

By completing this anonymous survey, you are consenting to me using your anonymous answers to inform my research.

Purpose:

To gather accurate statistics on gender ratios in UK ballet classes for students aged 18 and under. The results will be used to highlight gender representation in ballet training compared to leadership roles.

Estimated Time: 2 minutes

Instructions:

- Please report on the ballet students **you personally teach** across all settings, including all schools or studios where you teach.
- **Combine the totals** for all settings, but **only count each student once** even if you see them multiple times a week.
- Only include students aged **18 and under**.
- If you are unsure of exact numbers, please provide your best estimate.

* Indicates required question

Skip to question 1 *Skip to question 1*

Demographics:

1. What is your role in Ballet education? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Freelance/self-employed ballet teacher
- ☐ Ballet school owner and teacher
- ☐ Employed ballet teacher
- ☐ Other: _____

Untitled section

2. What region of the UK are the majority of your Ballet classes located? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ England
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ Northern Ireland

3. What is your own gender identity? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Cisgender woman
- ☐ Cisgender man
- ☐ Trans woman
- ☐ Trans man
- ☐ Non binary
- ☐ I prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Gender Ratios in Your Ballet Classes

4. **How many ballet students aged 18 and under do you currently teach?** *
- (Please provide the total number of unique students across all settings where you teach. Remember to only count each student once, even if they attend multiple classes per week.)

5. **How many of these students are girls?** *

6. **How many of these students are boys?** *

7. **How many of these students are trans?** *

8. **How many of these students are non-binary?** *

9. **How many of these students prefer not to disclose their gender expression, or you are unaware of their gender expression?** *

10. **Is there anything else you would like to share about gender representation in your ballet classes?** *

Appendix F: focus group thematic analysis

Focus Group Initial Codes:

Participant:	Quote:	Keywords:	Initial Code:
Craig	'there was a few teachers here that I would say, praise the guys more, and certainly give feedback more. Because we're guys, yeah, and it's so noticeable, and that's hard.'	'praise the guys more'	Disproportionate praise
Craig	'At the time, yeah it's fine because I'm getting better. But then, like, you leave the class, and you're like, ooof, 'it's hard to be the only one getting praised because then everyone else comes out like "that was a waste of my time"'	'only one getting praised'	Disproportionate praise
Rebecca	'so particular teachers would praise the male identifying students more often. And for me, I would then come out of the class and think, well, that was a bit of a waste of my time... I was doing just as well as, if not better than, and it would be that we wouldn't get seen.'	'praise the male identifying more often'	Disproportionate praise
Rebecca	'let's have a look at someone, one particular person, for 15 minutes whilst we stood at the side and watched. Now that would better us if you watched, but also our training has been different between male identifying and female identifying, so if I'm watching a male student be taught how to do a double tour for 15 minutes as my female training, that's not helping me for my assessment, let's say, because I had to do the fouettés and the grand jeté.'	Watching from the side	Disproportionate time/attention
Rebecca	'at my dance school, was very lucky to have quite a few male identifying and that would always be the case that they got more attention, maybe for encouragement purposes, I potentially might see that as.'	More attention for boys/men	Extra encouragement due to rarity
John	'Yeah, in terms of ballet, I think it's very binary. There's always been feminine and masculine steps and dances.'	Ballet is binary	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
John	'there's always been, I'd say more attention on me as a male in those ballet dance classes, mostly because usually I was either the only or one of the very few boys in my classes, and I would need time to learn those dances that I would have to do by myself. '	'more attention on me as a male'	Disproportionate time/attention
John	'There is definitely a perceived focus of the male gender in dance, mostly because there are less of us so it's seen as more unusual or rare. So then instantly you can see that, like a lot of teachers look and go ooh there's a boy in my class. And like Rebecca said it is a lot to do with encouragement purposes.'	Boys seen as 'unusual or rare'	Extra encouragement due to rarity
John	'But I think there's other ways to encourage boys in dance, rather than just almost segregating them in class. Because I a lot of the time in at my dance school being trained by myself, I	Boys separate to girls	Boys/men feeling alone within dance

	always did feel separate to the girls in my class. And, yeah, so feeling alone outside and inside wasn't always the best.'		
Tess	'So when we're having three ballet lessons a week and they're only an hour and 15 minutes, and 15 minutes is spent on one singular student or three students, and the rest of us are waiting at the side, it does feel like I'm not getting the most out of my small, short amount of time in ballet.'	Waiting at the side	Disproportionate time/attention
Olivia	'I think that a lot of the time female presenting students are held to a higher standard. So even in the classes where you feel like it is that the teacher is giving everyone equal attention, you still feel as though you are often getting negative feedback, as in, you're getting told something you're doing wrong, whereas the male identifying next to you is getting positive feedback. And I feel like I've noticed quite often that a boy my class will get a 'well done', 'that was so good', and then a girl my class would do like, three pirouettes, and it's like, 'oh, but the third one'.	'female presenting students are held to a higher standard'	Higher performance standards for girls/women
Olivia	'And I think that the praise is focused towards male identifying a lot more often, and it's exactly what Rebecca and Tess were saying about how a lot of the time you're stood at the side of the class, just watching people getting all this extra attention, and you just feel a bit useless.'	Girls/women watching boys/men get extra attention	Disproportionate time/attention
Dylan	'I think female presenting people are held to a much higher standard'	Girls/women held to higher standard.	Higher performance standards for girls/women
Billie	'Growing up, let's say I feel like I did get more praise for being a boy, like standing out because I was the only one in my class in every style I did.'	'more praise for being a boy'	Disproportionate praise
Billie	'And I think I was getting more praise as a boy but at the same time I didn't really want to be recognised as one, so I did it quite by exposing'	Discomfort being recognised as a boy	Discomfort with gendered assumptions
Billie	'I obviously wanted to be told I was doing well, but only for my actual technical ability, you know, not just because I was the only boy'	Praise desired for genuine reasons	Disproportionate praise
Billie	'in jazz and ballet. I actually don't know where my talent would have gotten me because I was only put in that group, just because of how I was born, like I didn't really feel like I was my talent was taken into consideration.'	Distrust of opportunity	Disproportionate opportunities
Seren	'I'm in the groups with all the male dancers, but there's people in my class that are definitely better than me at ballet, and others who are not as good as others at ballet, and we're all just there because it's the same sex.'	Distrust of opportunity	Disproportionate opportunities
Seren	'this year I did the female track for the assessment, and the treatment was completely different to first year. First year, it was like, 'you guys need to do this... oh you can only do one tour? That's so fine. Just do one tour there. Great job. You've	Extra workload for girls/women	Higher performance standards for girls/women

	got there in the end.' And then this year, was like, 'why aren't you doing 16 fouettés?'... I didn't realise how much extra female identifying had to do until I was in those shoes.'		
Olivia	'...if they've shown up one time and they've forgotten their uniform, and no-one's said anything... there's one class where we'll come in and they're in shorts, or they're just in their socks saying they've forgotten their Ballet shoes today, or their wearing a shirt... And one time I had my little hoops in and I get told to take them out and there's a boy just stood in the middle in a T shirt with a giant hoop earring... for some reason the female identifying have to be streamlined and slicked back and everything, and that's just an expectation, and they have to be able to see every single part of your body, but for some reason, with the male identifying, it's totally OK to not be held to that standard, and especially in terms of body image. Like sometimes I would love to wear a shirt to Ballet. Because sometimes I don't want to go to Ballet simply because I have to wear basically a swimsuit, but I have to or I'm going to get told off. '	Differing allowances for uniform by gender	More rigid uniform standards for girls/women
John	'I feel like I've worn all sorts for ballet, like I've just worn a tight top and tights. Sometimes I'll come in a leotard and tights but it doesn't really matter, because it never gets brought up.'	Boys/men uniform 'doesn't really matter'	More rigid uniform standards for girls/women
John	'in terms of getting away with things based on your gender, yes, that is so true. I'm able to get away with so much more than a female in my class, I think, and then it would be 'ahh it's just John he's being cheeky'. I feel like I can get away with a lot of things just because I'm smiling at the teacher where I've seen other people have gotten told off for the same things I've done.'	'able to get away with so much more than a female'	Stricter behaviour expectations for girls/women
Ruby	'I've been with both girls and boys for years now, and I still think, like, if a boy does something slightly funny it's like, oh he's the class clown, it's always that, whereas if it's a girl it's like 'ugh she's so annoying' or 'she's having a moment.'	Different interpretations of same behaviour	Stricter behaviour expectations for girls/women
Craig	'while we were learning the piece, the teacher was at the front, and on the side of the boys we were all just messing around, laughing and stuff, and if the girls spoke, it was like [makes slapping gesture to indicate punishment], and then we just keeping being like messing around, messing around with something like, and we all left, and we're like, wow, because even the guys were like that was crazy.'	Boys/men showing poor behaviour	Stricter behaviour expectations for girls/women
Rebecca	'one of my best friends got screamed at the house down by this particular teacher, because she said, 'No, we actually choreographed it like this', and that was 'disrespectful.' 'You are rude.' This teacher said it was 'disrespectful. You never, ever do that to a director or choreographer.' However, from the other side of the room, literally, there was a line down the middle. From the other side of the room, it was jabber jabber jabber, actually like play fighting in the room, and that was	Girls/women reprimanded for behaviours when boys/men are not.	Stricter behaviour expectations for girls/women

	actually like, we wouldn't dare move, because we would be shouted at.'		
Rebecca	'I would say overall a female having a bit of personality and having the same fun as a male identifying would be classed as disrespectful rather than having fun, and I've rarely seen someone be called disrespectful as a male identifying person.'	Boys/men not seen as disrespectful	Stricter behaviour expectations for girls/women
Olivia	'If a female presenting person came up, and they had disheveled hair, and they were missing a ballet shoe, I just feel like the perception even from the other students as well is always just overwhelmingly, they don't care, they are unprofessional, they don't take it seriously. But I feel like there's so much more leeway for male identifying students that it's 'oh maybe they're having an off day', or, 'oh, they're just having a bit of fun, but they are serious.'	Leeway for boys/men.	More rigid uniform standards for girls/women
Jamie	'a couple months ago, we had a cover teacher, and he held us to all of the same standard. And I think it was then really interesting how he then treated the male identifying students, who were messing around and who were not dancing how they should be. And then they were clocked really fast and really harshly. And then what I found interesting was that all the boys really liked that, it was like 'oh actually, I've always been doing it wrong but I've been told that it's fine,' and those lessons were actually, I feel as a class, were actually really good, because we were all getting feedback, and all the boys had to work hard, and had to sweat, because they were actually being held to same standard.'	Boys/men enjoyment of tough feedback.	Boys/men desiring honest critique
Craig	'especially in third year now, I'm finding that I really don't need praise. I can work out what's fine, I can think that was fine but that was shit. And so I need teachers now to be like this is how to fix it, I don't need the ego boost, I want the teachers to go fix this fix this fix this, and it'll push me more and I'll get more out of a class, rather than going 'Craig you're great'.	Dislike of empty praise.	Boys/men desiring honest critique
Jamie	'I think I've had two very different experiences. One of like lots of praise, you're going to do this and it's so cool. But then it's like the other thing of like ughh you're a boy doing Ballet.'	'Ughh you're a boy doing Ballet'	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio
Craig	'in secondary school I was really really badly bullied for about year seven to year nine. Like, glue sticks chucked at my head, scissors chucked at my head, like people pushing me around the corridors and stuff for doing ballet.'	Bullied for doing Ballet	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio
John	'So secondary School was probably some of the worst years of my life personally, but mostly because I was severely bullied, and it was mainly because of dance, especially ballet. You know, you'd always be called like a ballerina, or people mockingly doing some of the steps. Which then led to other things. And it was always boys and boys making fun of you because ballet is traditionally seen as effeminate and only for girls.'	Bullied as Ballet is effeminate	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio

John	'I think that was the main reason why I was bullied for dancing, because I danced I was therefore gay, and therefore that's not a good thing. It was very homophobic.'	Ballet = gay, homophobic bullying	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio
Dylan	'I don't think the bullying comes from the fact that you were a boy in dance, it stems from the fact that people see it as someone as feminine.'	Perception of femininity causes bullying	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio
Olivia	'I went to an all girls' school - and I was always getting bullied. I was always getting called a lesbian, and I wore trousers, and it was like 'Oh my God'. And so I actually started telling everyone I did ballet so that they would be like, 'oh a girl!'	Ballet to prove femininity	Trans/non-binary experiences outside of ballet studio
Olivia	'I've always had a lot of very masculine attributes and behaviors that are normally attributed to boys. And it always felt like I was putting on a character going to ballet and everything. And I just hated that part... I now have managed to separate that ballet is not anything to do with femininity and being a heterosexual female. It's just ballet, and it is a sport, and it's a discipline that I love, and I love it for that reason. But yes it's taken so long for that to happen.	Ballet not related to femininity and heterosexuality	Discomfort with gendered assumptions
Ruby	'mum had seen I was naturally very flexible, so she thought let's put her into dance and see what, and see what's going on. When she put me in, I remember one of my mom's friends from work saying, 'oh, that'll like, girly her up. Oh, that'd be so good, she'll be a little princess.'	Ballet to make a child more girly.	Experiences for girls/women outside of ballet studio
Rebecca	'from my perspective, being a dancer on the outside, from non dancers, it's a desired quality as a female. I get the comments when I'm speaking to men, because I'm into guys, I'm straight, and it'll be so what do you do? I say, 'I'm a dancer', and it'll be 'oh so you're flexible then' (<i>other women participants joined in with 'flexible' recognising the familiar question</i>). So yes it's a desired quality, and it makes me feel good as a female that I'm a dancer, but then I get things like that, and then I'm like, oh I should just not say I'm a dancer, because it's almost like men then fancy me because I'm a dancer, not actually because of me. So I feel like it's desired which is a nice thing, but also can be a negative thing.'	Society's view of women in dance.	Experiences for girls/women outside of ballet studio
Rebecca	'in school where you speak to the careers person and they'd be like, 'okay, but you're too smart to be dancing. You're a really smart female, you could do something really - you shouldn't be dancing. What's your backup plan?' I say 'there isn't one. This is the plan.'	Dance for girls/women not a real career.	Experiences for girls/women outside of ballet studio
Craig	'my oldest uncle had a son really recently, and, he's cute and lovely, and he wanted to start Ballet, and my uncle was like, 'no you're gonna go and surf instead and play the guitar, because that makes you more masculine than Craig is' while I was in the room!'	Family bigotry about Ballet.	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio

Dylan	'my little cousin now, if he's dancing around and being a bit of a nummy and doing things that are particularly more feminine, his mum's fully embracing that and laughing about it and saying 'ah a little Dylan's on the way'. But if his dad was to see that, it's like, 'no, that's Dylan, and that's an exception and that's okay. We love him, but not my son.'	Family bigotry about Ballet.	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio
Seren	'I struggled a lot because I was always under the impression that I was only going to make it if I was a boy.'	Success more likely for boys/men.	Discomfort with gendered assumptions
Seren	'But having to go in, especially in the studios having to wear tight clothing, especially for me is very dysphoric and looking at yourself every single day, and a lot of people probably feel exactly the same, but looking at yourself in the mirror in a leotard and just tights, and then just like seeing every little thing'	Dysphoric to look at yourself every day.	Gender dysphoria
Seren	'having to then decide, so for me I know that I have to decide in the morning how I'm going to look that day, because then I have to choose whether I want to be true or if I want to be somewhere 'middly', because I need to fit a certain aesthetic.'	Deciding identity to present each day.	Discomfort with gendered assumptions
Seren	'if I want to wear the female uniform I then have to do extra things in the morning to make sure that I can actually do a class in the pink tights and just a leotard because it's so much more revealing. You're literally there with your arse out, and it's like 'OK let's see if I can do that today'. That's just not the best.'	Extra preparation for girls/women uniform.	More rigid uniform standards for girls/women
Rebecca	'And it comes to ballet, and I'm in a leotard, and my legs are big, which is not a typical ballerina for a female. It's the flip side, because we have the need to be tiny. The male identifying is like 'I want to look bigger, I need to be bigger. I'm gonna go to the gym and pump and pump', whereas I think I'm gonna try not do too much, too many weight bearing things at the gym, because I don't want to build any more muscle mass, but without my muscle mass, I wouldn't be the dancer I am because of my power. But it's still, I can't lie. I'm still coming out of this, still thinking, 'OK you need to look slim and toned, rather than muscular and strong' and that, for me has been a big thing.'	'we have the need to be tiny'	Discomfort with gendered assumptions
Rebecca	'I've done a lot of pas de deux in my life, but I've always felt too heavy for the boys. By no means am I saying that I'm big, I know I'm not, I'm a heavier person because of muscle mass, and I've always felt really nervous going into pas de deux because I think I'm going to be heavy for this boy, they're not gonna be able to lift me.'	'I'm going to be too heavy for this boy'	Expectations for partnering
Rebecca	'recently, in <i>College Choreography Project</i> , I did a pas de deux where I was the lifter, and I was on the other side of things, and I felt so much more confident being the lifter... I felt so much more confident knowing that I had the control rather than I'm too heavy for this man to lift me, and it's always been the nerves thinking 'they're going to think I'm fat, they're	Confident to be in control.	Expectations for partnering

	going to think I'm so fat if they lift me' when actually I know I'm not. I just have very strong muscle mass which is heavy.'		
Olivia	'I'll go with my partner and I just stand there and I'm just silent and like, it's just awkward, and I feel like I'm too heavy because of my muscles and everything, like oh yeah they're taller than me but have you seen my legs?'	Body proportions vs partner's.	Expectations for partnering
Olivia	'I feel like the minute that I suddenly have to be someone I don't feel like it does war with my gender expression a lot, because I probably will always choose female presenting tracks from the industry because that's how I look. I look like having long-ish hair and stuff. But it's really been hard to have to be the dainty, the tiny, feminine, little person when I really love being strong. And I do a lot of exercise to build muscle, and I'm very proud of the muscles I have, but then you get in Ballet class, and it's like, oh my God, I look very silly in this... I don't look like a female that does ballet because of my muscle and everything, and it's really tricky to feel like a whole person in ballet. Like I feel like I'm kind of a half... You're this separate version of me right now, and sometimes I do feel a bit weird coming out of class, I feel like I've kind of just been acting.'	'I feel like I've kind of just been acting'	Gender dysphoria
Craig	'I was having just as much fear about that, because sometimes we have five partners at a time, just constantly going. And I was like, if I get the third person not as high as the first person, they're going to think I'm weak as hell, or that they're not good enough for that, or that they're different to the first person. There's so much pressure about like, shit, they've all got to be the same height, my arms were shaking, and I was like, what if they go out and laugh at me because I'm weak?'	'they're going to think I'm weak as hell'	Expectations for partnering
John	'I think there's quite a bit of pressure on boys in pas de deux as well, because you really don't want to make the girl feel heavy. Because if you've got five partners, and you're struggling because you're on the fifth partner and you've done it about 10 times, you really don't want to make that person feel bad about themselves, so you're like right you just need to just get them up.'	'pressure on boys in pas de deux'	Expectations for partnering
Ruby	'I'm a little bit more like masculine presenting as a female, and that's just the way I like to be. It's just like it's form of the way I express myself, and because that's how I'm comfortable. But then I think when you're made to wear a leotard, pink ballet tights, and you are looking at yourself in the mirror, and you're going, 'oh wow' and the only thing you see is your hips, your boobs, your legs and you're going, oh goodness, it all just kind of adds up and you think I feel so insecure right now, but like that's try to pass that and just focus on the dance.'	Difficulty to look at body.	Discomfort with gendered assumptions
Tess	'we started doing pas de deux, and it was that, 'oh my god, I'm huge.' I'm not huge, but that sort of thing because 'I can't do it because they're gonna think I'm heavy', and I would sit out of pas de deux and I'd just say, 'I can't do it today because I've hurt my knee. I've hurt my wrists actually. My heads feeling a bit sore today.' And then like, still, even now, I pick my own	Excuses to miss pas de deux.	Expectations for partnering

	partner, which is awful, because I can't judge someone based on what they look like, if they'll be able to lift me or not.'		
Olivia	'when I don't get the opportunity to go on the big, slow music, I'm kind of fuming, because jumps are my thing. But I'm just I'm just terrified of everyone being like 'ughhh you're going for the attention'.	Choosing big jumps for attention.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Ruby	'especially with <i>male teacher</i> , he was very much there are no male steps there are no female steps it's just Ballet, we were able to do tours we were able to do manege, like everything was just ballet steps, which was a dream. I loved that.'	'everything was just ballet steps'	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Ruby	'I knew what I wanted to do but there were steps there that were deemed more masculine and I just kind of felt like eyes would be watching me. And it was just the sense that I couldn't do it because I was a female, even though I kind of was like I really want to do it, but then I would just go do you know what, I'll just do the female one this time, just because I don't want people watching me and thinking I'm trying to prove something. But no, instead I just wanted to try that. I would love to just get the chance and get encouraged a little bit more during training in class, to try maybe something a bit more masculine.'	Desires encouragement to try male steps.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Rebecca	'Just on the back of that, Ruby said she's not doing it to prove a point, but in my own pride. I do it to prove a point! In my pride, 'ok you can do four pirouettes, <i>so can I!</i> ' Seeing <i>fellow student</i> flicking his head around doing two tours, I can do that much neater, much tidier, much better than you. And that was a pride thing for me, like I can do that.'	Proving it's possible to out-do the boys/men.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Billie	'I usually do the more feminine track, and when I'm queuing to go up and do that I am getting really nervous that I'm going to get judged by my classmates, or that even though the teachers aren't mentioning anything, they might think 'why is he doing that?' So I find it really hard to actually fully embrace that and perform, and I find the performing aspect quite difficult, like allowing myself to truly perform how I feel to this music, because I think it's different to what people expect I should be doing.'	Classmate judgement.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Billie	'I find that quite a disconnect really, what I feel in my body compared to what I should be showing. And, within the industry, I do worry that if I do more of a feminine track, I am training in a way that isn't actually going to be useful. So the reason I'm a bit older than a lot of the others in my year is because I had two years off because I thought I actually couldn't do this, be in the industry and be fully affirmed, and be happy doing it rather than being forced into roles and just dancing in ways that didn't suit me. So I was always battling that in class and I find it quite difficult to fully embrace it.'	Disconnect from body to movement requirements.	Gender dysphoria
Seren	'trying to learn the female track in lessons, was really difficult, because I felt like I was just getting eyes the entire time.'	Feelings of being judged.	Discomfort with gendered assumptions

Seren	‘But then sometimes I do want to do the jumps, and I do want to leap around. And it's then like, well if you're doing that then you must be a boy. It's like, no I just want to try!’	Experimentation.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Seren	‘it's been very difficult because teachers don't want to get things wrong, which is great, teachers don't want to get things wrong, but then I don't get any feedback at all because they don't want to assume, they don't want to say something that could be wrong or taken as rude or against who I am. And I'm like, ‘just give me the feedback.’ Some people are not getting the corrections they need, because I feel like some teachers are scared to give corrections because they don't want to be seen as a villain’	Desiring feedback, teachers afraid to offend.	Trans students desiring honest critique
Craig	‘my second year ballet feedback, I sat down and got told to sexualise my ballet dancing more to play up to the gay men who run the industry. And it was just like the first time I've ever experienced that, and that was just interesting.’	Playing up to gay men.	Sexualised feedback
Jamie	‘Yeah I got told the same.’	As above.	Sexualised feedback
Dylan	‘And me’	As above.	Sexualised feedback
Tess	‘I got told also, I'm not a man, but I got told to sexualise the way I look, as that's going to be an asset to me.’	Playing up to straight men.	Sexualised feedback
Dylan	‘the power trip and the sexualisation and the advantageous behavior by these men who are so powerful. And untouchable.’		Sexualised feedback
Olivia	‘with Ballet steps, sometimes I think I'm not going to do that exercise because I'm not very good at it, because I've never been taught how to do for example, a double tour. And I was just thinking that if I had have been taught that I would do that exercise every time, and then maybe I'll go into the industry and then because everyone had actually been trained in all of the steps, everyone could do everything and it's just really silly to say you can't do that because of how you were born, when actually, it changed the entire industry if you just trained everyone on all of these steps. When we go into the industry, they might be like, ‘ah wait, we wanted to do a tour but we can't because none of you have ever been taught one’ but why can't we just do it?’	Training opportunities for all steps.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms
Jamie	‘in class back home, I was the only male, so I learned all of Option A, all of the girls stuff, and then I in the fortunate position where I could have private coaching for all of the other B stuff, so that in class, it wasn't all about me. And I felt like because I did pointe work and I was able to do all of the female variations, it made me as a dancer much better as I could do anything. I'd be like ‘yeah, sure, this’ and I could change the style, and I feel like why can't we just all try everything, and then, even if in our tracks in auditions we don't do certain things, then we don't do it, but I think there's an overall gain from doing everything.’	Training opportunities for all methods.	Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms

Focus Group Themes:

Theme:	Codes grouped under this theme:	Example quotes:
Disproportionate attention, praise and opportunities for boys and men	Disproportionate praise Disproportionate time/attention Disproportionate opportunities Extra encouragement due to rarity Desire for honest critique	'I feel I did get more praise for being a boy' 'there's always been... more attention on me as a male in those ballet dance classes' 'I was only put in that group...because of how I was born' 'there are less of us so it's seen as more unusual or rare... it is a lot do with encouragement purposes' 'I don't need the ego boost'
Stricter expectations for girls/women	Higher performance standards for girls/women Stricter behavioural expectations for girls/women More rigid uniform standards for girls/women	'female presenting students are held to a higher standard' 'I'm able to get away with so much more than a female in my class' 'when you look at the male uniform list... I feel like I've worn all sorts for ballet... it doesn't really matter'
Discomfort with gendered expectations	Discomfort with gendered assumptions Experiences when not adhering to gendered vocabulary norms Sexualised feedback Trans students desiring honest critique Expectations for partnering Gender dysphoria	'I was getting more praise as a boy but at the same time I didn't really want to be recognised as one' 'I feel like I've kind of just been acting' 'when I don't get the opportunity to go on the big, slow music, I'm kind of fuming, because jumps are my thing.' 'I sat down and got told to sexualise my ballet dancing more to play up to the gay men who run the industry' 'teachers don't want to get things wrong, but then I don't get any feedback' 'we have the need to be tiny' 'they're going to think I'm weak as hell' 'in the studios having to wear tight clothing, especially for me is very dysphoric'
External perceptions of gender in Ballet	Experiences for boys/men outside of ballet studio Boys/men feeling alone within ballet Experiences for girls/women outside of ballet studio Trans/non-binary experiences outside of ballet studio	'I was severely bullied' 'I always did feel separate to the girls in my class' 'feeling alone outside and inside' 'being a dancer on the outside, from non dancers, it's a desired quality as a female' 'I was always getting called a lesbian... I actually started telling everyone I did

		ballet so that they would be like, “oh a girl!””
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Appendix G: dancer survey thematic analysis

What aspects of ballet training do you think could better support leadership aspirations, especially for women, trans, and non-binary individuals?

Participant ID:	Age:	Gender identity:	Levels reached:	What aspects of ballet training do you think could better support leadership aspirations, especially for women, trans, and non-binary individuals?	Key words:	Initial codes:
1	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	I think a generally more inclusive approach where everyone is able to try anything would foster opportunity and autonomy, which would in turn lead to more options within career choices. Removing labels such as girls and boys exercises/music options. Equal opportunities given to all when auditioning for shows or dance pieces, rather than, for example, there being a much higher chance of being cast as a role if you are male-identifying than female-identifying.	'More inclusive approach' 'Equal opportunities given'	Gender non-specific training Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
3	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Allowing individuals to express creative interest in choreography, also allowing individuals to swap gender specific roles such as practicing all allegro regardless of gender	'Express creative interest' 'Swap gender roles'	Creative skills nurtured Gender non-specific training
9	45-54	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Opportunities to learn from teaching or leading perhaps smaller teams or younger students or even just one exercise in class. Business education - all aspects of dance that is not the performing of the ballet itself. A greater understanding of Ballet as a bigger picture so you can see outside of the bubble. Exposure to a wider array of tutors, examiners, choreographers etc.	'Learn from teaching or leading' 'Business education' 'exposure'	Leadership skills embedded into classes Additional leadership training outside of studio More diverse gender representation in leadership
11	18-24	Cisgender woman	Vocational	Just more equality and kindness.	'Equality and kindness'	Kindness & respect
12	18-24	Trans man	Pre-professional	Ballet should emphasize asking questions and creative exploration more heavily. They should also provide less gendered training so that students have choice in the movement they are doing. The freedom to ask questions and to make my own choices has pushed me to become a more confident dancer, which supports me in leadership settings.	'Asking questions' 'Less gendered training'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Gender non-specific training
14	35-44	Cisgender woman	Professional	Non-gendered roles when possible (for example maybe not lifting it the person is not training for it properly)	'Non-gendered roles'	Gender non-specific training

16	35-44	Cisgender woman	Recreational	I think right from the start boys and girls are separated by what they wear. Obviously there are some physical differences that need to be considered, but a more neutral approach could be beneficial vs. the classic head-to-toe baby pink look for girls and black/navy for boys. In terms of syllabus and training methodology, allowing all gender representations opportunity to learn the same steps and aspire to equal artistic qualities will open the door for every dancer to find a place for themselves, regardless of gender and body type. Dance classes should be holistic and teach the whole person, not just the technique. So activities and exercises should provide opportunities to develop creativity, collaboration, leadership and critical thinking. This would support confidence and ambition in a wider variety of skills rather than just being able to perform a perfect pirouette. Teachers and other influential professionals must be aware of the impact their language and behaviour can have on their students and ensure their practice is equitable and inclusive. In the professional world, space needs to be made for representation of female/trans/non-binary role models - both in terms of narratives and themes of professional works, and in choreographic or leadership roles within the industry.	'Learn the same steps' 'Teach the whole person' 'Language and behaviour' 'representation'	Gender non-specific training Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Training for educators More diverse gender representation in leadership
22	45-54	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Seeing these genders in leadership positions and being promoted in a positive fashion.	'Promoted in a positive fashion'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
23	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Extra opportunities outside of just technique training. Whether that be more creative work, opportunities for showcasing, career discussions, Q&As etc	'Extra opportunities'	Additional leadership training outside of studio
26	18-24	Non-binary	Pre-professional	Stop being binary all the time and accepting each and every one of your students is different which is why they need different resources, it's not us who have to "adapt" to you, it's not anyone's responsibility that someone doesn't know how to respect and teach to everyone no matter who they are or where they come from and viceversa from some students to teachers. Stop making everything one way or the other (plz stop the "boys" movement and "girl" movement its just movement). And personally letting us ppl with afro hair have our own roots and show up how we want bc I've been told I look "unprofessional" when 1 my hair doesn't even get on the way and 2 I have severe dysphoria. And the most importantly for me, almost none of my ballet teachers through my 10 years training ballet have let me wear	'Stop being binary' 'I don't feel comfortable'	Gender non-specific training More leniency in uniform

				anything other than tights even tho I dont feel comfortable with them and that should be discussed		
27	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Better body image/ positive praise. A lot of the time the positive praise was given more freely to the boys in class.	'Better body image' 'Positive praise'	Body positivity Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
28	18-24	Cisgender man	Vocational	A lot of my ballet teachers are female indentifying. I think female only classes lead by female teachers could help promote leadership aspirations in ballet.	'Female only classes led by female teachers'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
29	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Treating women as just as important and valuable as men. Trying not to favour men just because they are male but for their merits, and doing the same for women. Not allowing men in ballet class to take up all the space (literally and figuratively).	'Not to favour men'	Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
32	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Opportunity to create ballet choreography, or opportunities to dance for the sake of dance during training, rather than completing technical exercises only	'Create ballet choreography'	Creative skills nurtured
33	18-24	Cisgender woman	Vocational	The encouragement, experience and opportunities to know that we can achieve these goals- as much as it appears it is not an even playing field dancers should know that they have every right to these roles	'We can achieve these goals'	Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
34	18-24	Non-binary	Recreational	Teachers being more accepting and evaluating students based on ability and capabilities instead of favouring them because of their gender.	'Based on ability'	Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
37	18-24	Cisgender woman	Recreational	A lot more confidence could be built from a younger age in ballet training to give them the belief that this would be possible, as this never seems like an option or that we would be good enough.	'Good enough'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
38	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	From a young age. Expressing dancing/ being a dancer isn't the only option within a career in ballet and how not being a dancer isn't a negative thing or that you've failed/ given up	'Isn't the only option'	Exposure to options in Ballet beyond performing
39	18-24	Cisgender man	Pre-professional	I think focusing in on the group rather than focus on just one person specifically male identifying students/performers	'Focusing on the group'	Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
40	18-24	Cisgender woman	Vocational	constantly looking at the bigger picture of dance- asking students why they love it and telling them all the great things dance can do for them. if all dancers were taught what a privilege it is to move their bodies in such a freeing way dancers would feel so much more empowered in their movements and i believe more inspired to do	'empowered'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training

				more with it. as for gender differences in training specifically, perhaps looking into class outfits. we all know 'female dancers wear this' and 'male dancers wear this' setting us apart visually from the get go. often in completely different colours and styles. why? what if a girl wished to wear the shorts?	'What if a girl wished to wear the shorts'	More leniency in uniform
41	25-34	Non-binary	Professional	making people feel comfortable in the studio space, which includes allowing and encouraging people to dress and present gender how they please. Allowing trans and nonbinary people in the room in the first place (lol)! Allowing people to take "mens" and/or "womens" technique classes, training both en pointe and flat if they'd like, learning to partner or be partnered, and explore movement stylings that are typically gendered. I think choreographic opportunities with peers would be a huge help. Women and trans people simply need to feel like they could have a future in dance and that often isn't the case. They need to get encouragement and just learn about the myriad routes to working in dance, and be confident that those options are available to them.	'Comfortable in the studio space' 'Explore movement stylings' 'Choreographic opportunities' 'encouragement'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Gender non-specific training Creative skills nurtured Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
43	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Opportunities created for advancement into leadership positions, training for leadership, and examples of others in leadership positions.	'Advancement into leadership' 'Examples of others'	Additional leadership training outside of studio More diverse gender representation in leadership
46	25-34	Trans man	Pre-professional	Letting go of hierarchy in class, minimizing competition and instead support each other. Both from teachers and colleagues or students. Different ways of giving feedback during and outside of training. Focus more on personal goals and growth.	'Letting go of hierarchy'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
47	25-34	Non-binary	Vocational	A more open mind when it comes to traditions and how those can be modernized	'More open mind'	Modernisation
48	18-24	Cisgender man	Professional	Maybe more freedom and critical thinking, instead of just being told what to do and being punished for something you did that went outside the expectation and norms. I think a discussion of why things are like they are can make students reflect on what could actually benefit a workplace in the future instead of just accepting the ways that has been before. And to encourage asking questions, a quiet student isn't a good student. Being obedient won't make you a good leader.	'Critical thinking' 'Encourage asking questions'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Encouraged to have a voice
49	18-24	Cisgender woman	Recreational	be inclusive!! stop the man lifts the woman things	'inclusive'	Gender non-specific training

54	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Allowing them the chance to have a voice in class. Allowing them to take the lead for a warm up, choreograph a port de bras for the class, have the big solo, stand front and centre in the group dance (we only had 1 male student in our class so he was always at the front and had the big solos, whilst I agree that we should be promoting ballet to younger generations of boys; it did make all of us girls feel that we were never good enough).	'Have a voice' 'Stand front and centre' 'Never good enough'	Encouraged to have a voice Leadership skills embedded into classes Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
55	55+	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	When I moved from ballet training into a contemporary dance training environment in the 1980s, everything changed. Creativity and individuality were praised and valued. Choreographic skills were more important than body type. The ballet teachers in this environment treated us as adults and ballet became fun again.	'Creativity and individuality' 'Treated us as adults'	Creative skills nurtured Encouraged to have a voice
57	45-54	Trans woman	Recreational	an understanding that certain choreography is only 'typically' male or female and that any dancer who can execute it can dance it	'Any dancer'	Gender non-specific training
59	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	More representation by role models.	'representation'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
60	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Mentoring. Tutoring. Case studies of how people progressed. There were a bunch of interviews online during covid on YouTube with professional dancers - Under-story.com - leaders- about their setbacks, successes and they gave advice - it was from the contemporary world though - could one be made for ballet?	'Mentoring. Tutoring' 'Case studies'	Mentorship More diverse gender representation in leadership
62	18-24	Non-binary	Vocational	Freedom of arm positions and artistry - to build confidence - even if these are more masculine arm choices	'Freedom'	Gender non-specific training
63	18-24	Cisgender woman	Professional	Class sizes. I think a more intimate class where everyone feels like an individual might help boost confidence. Also moments in class where a student gets asked to lead the counts through the exercise for example might be nice	'More intimate class'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
64	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	To be honest, most of it, judging on what I experienced. The class content should be applicable for all, as well as any leadership opportunity, praise and feedback.	'Applicable for all' 'Praise and feedback'	Gender non-specific training Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
66	35-44	Cisgender man	Professional	I think it is good that we see more and more women in leadership. The example brings forth new examples. I think since ballet is so black and white for the gender part there are not enough examples that show what an enrichment trans	'More women in leadership' 'Give them more space'	More diverse gender representation in leadership

				and non binary individuals can give to the artform. So for now I would say we should push to give them more space. For example hold choreographic competitions by or with just trans dancers. This will give more examples which in turn hopefully brings forth more examples		Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
67	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Education vocational schools have opportunity to lead etc	'Opportunity to lead'	Leading by example
70	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Opportunity for all to perform exercises or movements 'traditionally' made for men or women. The opportunity to do whatever they want.	'Whatever they want'	Gender non-specific training
71	18-24	Cisgender woman	Professional	It's difficult to hope for better ballet training that uplifts students more than create harm. Unfortunately, I feel like my story of teaching is based off of a desire to fix the culture. I think overall, addressing the unequal cultural dynamics, shifting to a collective, equal power approach to class would support leadership aspirations. If we cultivated voices from the start, then they won't have to learn how to suddenly say their opinion. A lot of dancers feel like they can't say their opinion because they fear "rocking the boat" being "difficult" and eventually losing their job. We need to train dancers to use their voice and do it amidst the prevailing culture.	'Fix the culture' 'Cultivated voices'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Encouraged to have a voice
74	25-34	Non-binary	Professional	Not dictated movement quality's for certain genders. Allowing everyone to try everything would improve everyone's creativity and own personal style - diversifying our movement language meaning when we step into jobs we have more to offer. Allowing opportunity for creative tasks with feedback.	'Personal style' 'creative tasks'	Gender non-specific training Creative skills nurtured
76	25-34	Non-binary	Pre-professional	Non-hierarchy. Equality. Communication. Asking questions. Wanting to learn. There's no teachers without students and I think that is something that most of the teachers I've had seemed to forget.	'Non-hierarchy'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
77	45-54	Cisgender woman	Professional	Building of self esteem and positive mindset throughout. Everyone trained equally regardless of a teacher's personal views in whether or not a student will be successful.	'Building self-esteem'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
79	18-24	Non-binary	Pre-professional	Praise given to dancers that are not cis men should also carry the expectation that we can work in the leadership roles within the ballet opportunities. Moreover, creating more opportunities for women, trans people and other gender diverse dancers to choreograph would irrefutably help. Giving all dancers the agency to learn different ways of moving unrestricted by gender and not pressuring dancers to perform a certain way or	'More opportunities' 'Agency to learn different ways'	Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders Gender non-specific training

				only praising dancers who conform to gender is a way that this could be improved.		
81	55+	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	More women in AD, CEO and choreographer roles.	'More women'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
83	18-24	Cisgender man	Pre-professional	Potentially for allowing exploration in the style and how the style is performed for different body types as well as for performers with different technical backgrounds. Although it is very understandable that the technique needs to be learnt, I believe it is very important to allow each training dancer to find their own way of performing this as it allows for creative ownership.	'Exploration of style'	Gender non-specific training
85	35-44	Female	Recreational	General reduction in misogyny would mean that women's opinions and voices could be better heard and respected.	'Reduction in misogyny'	Addressing cultural misogyny
91	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Treating people with basic human dignity would be a start.	'Basic human dignity'	Kindness & respect
93	45-54	Cisgender woman	Professional	Allow dancers to train in all aspects of ballet, females would get much stronger if they danced the boys section of the class and boys would improve their footwork if they joined in the point section, then there would be no issue with trans and non binary.	'All aspects of Ballet'	Gender non-specific training
94	35-44	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Involve students in mini productions all year in creative and leading roles. Make it part of curriculum and showcase their progress whatever the level of achievement.	'Part of the curriculum'	Creative skills nurtured
95	25-34	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Making it clear what leadership roles are available and what they involve. Offering a well-rounded education in vocational/professional training that allows a pathway up to these roles. Have choreography opportunities and competitions (maybe blind the judges to the Choreographers so that there's no bias from names etc.). Have some relevant business and admin classes. Get people in leadership roles to do talks and Q&As.	'Well rounded education' opportunities'	Creative skills nurtured Additional leadership training outside of studio
96	18-24	Cisgender woman	Professional	All students should be treated equally, particularly allowing women/girls and feminine presenting people to have a voice that's isn't confined into the "perfect ballerina" archetype. Allowing them to express their personality with confidence and respecting that everyone is entitled to their autonomy. I'd like to note, non binary people that are masculine presenting (in my experience) do not suffer from these oppressive social conditions that feminine presenting people do in ballet.	'Treated equally'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders

97	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	I think just general encouragement. It's hard to stand out as a girl when there's 25 girls to 5 boys per class.	'Hard to stand out'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
100	35-44	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Early exposure to choreography opportunities which are not often experienced before pre-professional level so some dancers don't get the opportunity to try something they would be great at before giving up dance completely	'Early exposure'	Creative skills nurtured
103	18-24	Cisgender woman	Vocational	Specific non male genders in leadership days like the boys in ballet taster days. Also more emphasis on strong, confident and energetic movement for female dancers, as I firmly believe learned patterns in the body, especially from a young age as ballet often is, influence our social interactions and aspirations. I also think the more boys/men we can get into ballet, the less 'rare' they will be, and therefore will receive less special treatment, favoritism and fast tracking over girls who are equally as good.	'Non male genders in leadership days' 'Emphasis on strong' 'Less special treatment'	Additional leadership training outside of studio Gender non-specific training Get more boys/men into Ballet
105	55+	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Encouraging teaching amongst peers, helping each other out, working in groups to create choreography, just this will enable people to use their voice in class. Encouraging questions and answering them from a place of honesty and kindness.	'Teaching amongst peers' 'Working in groups' 'Use their voice'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Creative skills nurtured Encouraged to have a voice
107	18-24	Non-binary	Pre-professional	I think empowering all different bodies to take part in ballet, find the joy with the technique of ballet and then the artistry chosen by the student to be placed on top. Encouragement to show up as themselves and that they are 100% enough as themselves. Empowerment to lead warm ups and create a class dynamic that feels more open and authentic.	'Empowering all different bodies' 'Show up as themselves' 'Open and authentic'	Body positivity Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Leadership skills embedded into classes
108	18-24	Cisgender woman	Vocational	I would like to see more specialist functional training across the board for all genders: pointe work, jumps, stamina and turns.	'Specialist functional training'	Gender non-specific training
113	55+	Female	Professional	None Ballet is an Art form and should be taught the same to everyone	'Same to everyone'	No improvements to be made
118	45-54	Cisgender woman	Professional	Choreographic competitions. Encouragement of non traditional performances. Giving dancers more of an active role and responsibilities in projects related to training such as costume design and execution, lighting and sets, and backstage work.	'Choreographic competitions' 'Active role'	Creative skills nurtured Exposure to options in Ballet beyond performing

119	45-54	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	There should be more attention to these difference and better more visible rolemodels. Rewrite history.	'Visible role models'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
124	25-34	Cisgender woman	Vocational	Widen the spectre of acceptable bodies in a wider set of roles.	'Acceptable bodies'	Body positivity
125	55+	Cisgender woman	Professional	More emphasis on creative thinking and confidence building regardless of sex/gender	'Creative thinking'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
127	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	being allowed more choreographic opportunities within class as a safe environment to experiment	'Safe environment to experiment'	Creative skills nurtured
130	18-24	Cisgender man	Pre-professional	Unfortunately, (and I hope this makes sense and comes across right)I think the trick isn't to think what can we do for women/trans/non-binary, but to think what are we already doing for men and then apply that to everyone else.	'what are we already doing for men'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
131	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Allowing students to be curious, voice their thoughts	'curious'	Encouraged to have a voice
134	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	More opportunities for women to take on creative tasks.	'Creative tasks'	Creative skills nurtured
136	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	I believe teaching students the relationship between creating a ballet exercise and the music is a good first step. We have had lessons where as students we can create an exercise but then we have never been taught how to fit this with the music. We have been told "oh the pianist will try and follow" this is great but then I believe I haven't actually learned any skills to do with a leadership role.	'Never been taught how'	Creative skills nurtured
138	18-24	Non-binary	Pre-professional	Access to scholarships and funding based on merit not gender	'Based on merit'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
141	18-24	Cisgender man	Vocational	Not having a set way the lesson needs to go and give students the ability to contribute to each others learning and be able to vocalise what they need	'Vocalise what they need'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
143	18-24	Cisgender woman	Vocational	Uniforms requirements definitely. One of my training institutions required us to wear only a leotard and shorts regardless of the weather or any insecurity's. Also not being trained in specific choreography as it's not a 'female' move.	'Uniform requirements' "Female' move'	More leniency in uniform Gender non-specific training
144	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Equality with in it. That females can do the male stuff and the male can do females	'equality'	Gender non-specific training

146	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Allowing all genders to participate and experiment with all styles of movement quality etc. which would usually be expected to be binary would encourage a more even playing field and encourage a more open and creative mindset.	'Open and creative mindset'	Gender non-specific training
147	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Give these people more opportunities when creating or casting	'Creating or casting'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
150	18-24	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Allowing women, trans and non-binary individuals to have access to more leadership roles within a professional environment could help leadership aspirations.	'More leadership roles'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
151	25-34	Cisgender man	Professional	Easing on up abusive tactics, that technically work, but leave very lasting side effects... Also, treating everyone with same standards, when it comes to things that can be evaluated in those terms... Also expanding the whole idea of gender in ballet (how it's supposed to look best on women or men) and rather focusing on the idea of how it should look in ballet in general (specifically when referring to pure classical technique) ... Honestly, making guys do pointe work... it improves strength and foot articulation...	'Same standards' 'How it should look'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training Gender non-specific training
152	35-44	Cisgender man	Recreational	Ballet has a reputation for being more feminine, so having openly men, trans and non-binary people just in classes in general would help.	'feminine'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
153	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	More interaction/ 2 way communication	'communication'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training
157	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Tutors just being fair to everyone	'fair'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
158	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	I think giving more options for women to take lead roles	'More options'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
159	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	being supported in class where the are male identifying students who are being praised at all times while female identifying students are not	'supported'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
163	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Putting them more in leadership/choreographing positions	'leadership/choreography positions'	More diverse gender representation

						n in leadership
164	18-24	Cisgender man	Pre-professional	It would be amazing to see all people especially young people getting the opportunities that the cis male people do in ballet as being given opportunities to work with choreographers and to be given more leadership roles such as dance captains or assistant choreographers can be incredibly beneficial to their career. And on the other hand don't just use men to show off as they are also there to learn and improve.	'Leadership roles'	Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders
166	18-24	Cisgender woman	Recreational	I think the 'normal' dress code could be altered to fit people's desires	'Dress code could be altered'	More leniency in uniform
167	18-24	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Pushing opportunities to develop own choreography, helping people find their individuality in style. More discussion on further opportunities in the dance world rather than just performance.	'Own choreography' 'Further opportunities'	Creative skills nurtured Exposure to options in Ballet beyond performing
170	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Freedom to create more in class, to challenge gender roles with movement stereotypes, removing the segregation between genders in young syllabus training.	'Freedom' 'Challenge gender roles'	Creative skills nurtured Gender non-specific training
175	25-34	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Understanding of neurodiversity, masking of all varieties (neurodiversity masking, hiding gender expression as they are figuring it out) in those individuals that you mention, and how this can impact a student's ability to concentrate/learn and grow creatively. More inclusive and less prescriptive uniform (more mix and match approach, than "boys" and "girls" set outfits) that allow the student to feel like themselves, are potentially able to be more flexible financially (as those individuals mentioned may be less likely to get financial aid than cis boys if they are financially unstable). Less gendered syllabus (talking from my experience with RAD, what I have seen of ISTD too) from when students are small all the way through to adv grades. It is great that students can now pick the "girls" or "boys" exercises for the RAD vocational exams regardless of their gender expression even, but if a child hasn't physically been prepared in the lower grades and encouraged to build strength etc then how would they ever safely in a timely manner build to do the "boys" exercises and vice versa for foot strength for pointe.	'Masking of all varieties' 'Mix and match approach' 'Less gendered syllabus'	Positive, learner-centred, holistic training More leniency in uniform Gender non-specific training
176	18-24	Cisgender man	Vocational	More creativity and expression from a younger age	'More creativity'	Creative skills nurtured

179	35-44	Cisgender woman	Professional	All genders learning all steps, inclusive language, more uniform options, all genders having the option to do pointe work, all genders partnering	'All genders learning all steps'	Gender non-specific training
180	25-34	Cisgender woman	Vocational	Open classes for any gender	'Open classes'	Gender non-specific training
181	35-44	Cisgender woman	Vocational	More shared creative experiences. Giving dancers more voice to create their own work as part of training- hopefully this happens more now.	'shared creative experiences'	Creative skills nurtured
182	25-34	Cisgender man	Vocational	Opportunities to feel seen in workshops, having more female/trans/non-binary leaders coming in.	'feel seen'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
184	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Less binary ways of teaching ballet - let everyone do everything, stop making the boys special for no reason - it doesn't do anyone any favours	'Less binary'	Gender non-specific training
185	18-24	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Giving them more creative freedom when younger to gain more confidence in creative elements.	'creative freedom'	Creative skills nurtured
187	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Broadened coursework for those interested in business skills, choreography, pedagogy, etc.	'Broadened coursework'	Additional leadership training outside of studio
190	35-44	Cisgender woman	Professional	Probably all aspects. Especially if you're trans and non-binary individuals because when I think back to my training, there were no opportunities for them. When I graduated in 2001 nobody around me was trans or non-binary. Granted I did grow up in west MI which is an extremely conservative area. I do know two dancers who were female at birth and now one is a trans man and one is non-binary. It's extremely obvious to me that being in ballet held them back from their true gender identity. So they ended up coming out in their late 20s or early 30s. And looking back, those people were a lot like me as far as their creative leadership potential and their intelligence level. But they were way less feminine/girly/graceful. When I mentioned my 'feet not being good enough... My feet were definitely "better" than theirs, and I was hyper extended.. And they both were not, so I feel like they got ignored so to speak. But they still performed with our youth company and graduated through our program and then they ended up training in modern dance like right away after graduation. So I think once they got to college, being embraced by the modern Dance community perhaps helped them with their gender identity, but I think being in a ballet style company all the way through high school delayed their comfort level or I don't really know the right way to say it, but I definitely think it impacted the timing of their	'delayed their comfort level'	Gender non-specific training

				gender expressions. I imagine it delayed them being able to come out because of their experience being a ballerina for so long. And in the 90s, if things in our training had been different I'm sure they would have been comfortable coming out sooner and they would have still been able to do ballet or be involved in ballet in a similar way as me or other Women who were presenting in the more typical ballet body type. The only real opportunities in our training were for performing and maybe if you look a certain way you would move on later. And then they would hand select people to say oh you should teach, but nobody was guiding us towards choosing a university program or choosing other styles of Dance where we could Fulfill our individual body types potential. So like we didn't even know that we could go out in the dance world and succeed unless we fit the cookie cutter mold, I personally was able to like fly under the radar and eventually become director and a teacher because I was like Feminine enough and ballerina body type enough almost like "ballerina body type passing." I don't really have the best vocabulary for this. Haha which reinforces my point that I couldn't access that many educational opportunities to be able to develop my skills to communicate effectively to my own broader Dance community. Now in 2025 my dance community absolutely does include people that don't move a certain way or "look like ballet dancer" and I feel like I'm at a deficit sometimes how to make them feel included and supported. Even with something as simple as letting boys Explore pointe work.... We do have one student Who trains and performs on pointe. But there's no regular trajectory in our program to make that like a standard part of our training and I don't even know how necessary it is. At this point, I just wait for the students and the parents to ask me about it. But given the current model Our studio uses Most of the boys would be really technically behind to be considered for pointe work at the age of 12	'nobody was guiding us'	Additional leadership training outside of studio
192	25-34	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Choreography classes a more 'contemporary' and collaborative approach to teaching and choreographing. For example in a elite youth contemporary dance company we allways contributed to the creation and themes of our works ballet this was never an option	'contributed'	Creative skills nurtured
196	25-34	Cisgender woman	Recreational	Equal opportunity	'Equal'	Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
197	25-34	Cisgender woman	Professional	Education in how companies are run. I believe many look at the role and decided they either	'Education'	Additional leadership

				can't do it or see that it wouldn't work in a way they wish.		training outside of studio
202	25-34	Cisgender woman	Vocational	- more focus on creativity - aligning the exceptions for men and women. Holding everyone to the same standards	'Creativity' 'Aligning' 'same standards'	Creative skills nurtured Gender non-specific training Equal praise/opportunities for all genders
203	45-54	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	More opportunities whilst training to do more	'More opportunities'	Creative skills nurtured
204	25-34	Cisgender woman	Professional	More representation and education about leaders of all genders, less of the narrative that we are 'lucky' to be there as 'there are hundreds of other dancers who would want to be here'	'leaders of all genders'	More diverse gender representation in leadership
205	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Less focus on weight for females.	'Less focus on weight'	Body positivity
206	35-44	Cisgender woman	Pre-professional	Better guidance on potential career paths and support for fully-rounded careers ie even running a freelance business wasn't talked about during my training. Mentorship where possible. Focus on opportunities for leadership experience during training ie leading small group practice or "dance captain" type experience.	'Better guidance' 'Mentorship' 'leadership experience'	Exposure to options in Ballet beyond performing Mentorship Creative skills nurtured

Themes:

Theme:	Codes grouped under this theme:	Example quotes:
Embedding leadership into training	Leadership skills embedded into classes Mentorship Encouraged to have a voice Exposure to options in ballet beyond performing Additional leadership training outside of studio Creative skills nurtured	'Opportunities to learn from teaching or leading...' 'Mentorship where possible.' 'And to encourage asking questions, a quiet student isn't a good student. Being obedient won't make you a good leader.' 'Better guidance on potential career paths and support for fully-rounded careers...' 'Business education - all aspects of dance that is not the performing of the ballet itself.' 'Allowing opportunity for creative tasks with feedback.'

Reform studio culture	Kindness & respect Body positivity More leniency in uniform Positive, learner-centred, holistic training	'Treating people with basic human dignity would be a start.' 'Less focus on weight for females.' 'More inclusive and less prescriptive uniform...' 'Non-hierarchy. Equality. Communication. Asking questions. Wanting to learn.'
Gender equity and representation	Gender non-specific training Equal praise/ opportunities for all genders More diverse gender representation in leadership Get more boys/men into Ballet	'Allow dancers to train in all aspects of ballet' 'Access to scholarships and funding based on merit not gender' 'More representation and education about leaders of all genders' 'the more boys/men we can get into ballet, the less 'rare' they will be, and therefore will receive less special treatment, favoritism and fast tracking over girls who are equally as good.'
Systemic and institutional change	Leading by example Addressing cultural misogyny Modernisation Training for educators	'Education vocational schools have opportunity to lead etc' 'General reduction in misogyny would mean that women's opinions and voices could be better heard and respected.' 'A more open mind when it comes to traditions and how those can be modernized' 'Teachers and other influential professionals must be aware of the impact their language and behaviour can have on their students and ensure their practice is equitable and inclusive.'
No change needed	No improvements to be made	'Ballet is an art form and should be taught the same to everyone'

Appendix H: ballet company choreography data

Ballet Company Choreography													
Season	The Royal Ballet		English National Ballet		Birmingham Royal Ballet		Scottish Ballet		Northern Ballet		Totals per season across all 4 companies		
2024-2025	Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		
	Total choreographers:	12	Total choreographers:	5	Total choreographers:	11	Total choreographers:	12	Total choreographers:	15	Total choreographers:	55	
	Total men:	9	Total men:	3	Total men:	5	Total men:	5	Total men:	13	Total men:	35	
	Total women:	3	Total women:	2	Total women:	6	Total women:	7	Total women:	2	Total women:	20	
	Total % men:	75%	Total % men:	60%	Total % men:	45%	Total % men:	42%	Total % men:	87%	Total % men:	64%	
	Total % women:	25%	Total % women:	40%	Total % women:	55%	Total % women:	58%	Total % women:	13%	Total % women:	36%	
	Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		
	Total acts:	29	Total acts:	8	Total acts:	12	Total acts:	8	Total acts:	14	Total acts:	71	
	Total men:	24	Total men:	5	Total men:	9	Total men:	3	Total men:	11	Total men:	52	
	Total women:	5	Total women:	3	Total women:	3	Total women:	5	Total women:	3	Total women:	19	
	Total % men:	83%	Total % men:	63%	Total % men:	75%	Total % men:	38%	Total % men:	79%	Total % men:	73%	
	Total % women:	17%	Total % women:	38%	Total % women:	25%	Total % women:	63%	Total % women:	21%	Total % women:	27%	
2023-2024	Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		
	Total choreographers:	11	Total choreographers:	8	Total choreographers:	8	Total choreographers:	6	Total choreographers:	12	Total choreographers:	45	
	Total men:	10	Total men:	6	Total men:	7	Total men:	4	Total men:	10	Total men:	37	
	Total women:	1	Total women:	2	Total women:	1	Total women:	2	Total women:	2	Total women:	8	
	Total % men:	91%	Total % men:	75%	Total % men:	88%	Total % men:	67%	Total % men:	83%	Total % men:	82%	
	Total % women:	9%	Total % women:	25%	Total % women:	13%	Total % women:	33%	Total % women:	17%	Total % women:	18%	
	Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		
	Total acts:	29	Total acts:	15	Total acts:	11	Total acts:	10	Total acts:	11	Total acts:	76	
	Total men:	28	Total men:	12	Total men:	10	Total men:	6	Total men:	10	Total men:	66	
	Total women:	1	Total women:	3	Total women:	1	Total women:	4	Total women:	1	Total women:	10	
	Total % men:	97%	Total % men:	80%	Total % men:	91%	Total % men:	60%	Total % men:	91%	Total % men:	87%	
	Total % women:	3%	Total % women:	20%	Total % women:	9%	Total % women:	40%	Total % women:	9%	Total % women:	13%	
2022-2023	Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		
	Total choreographers:	18	Total choreographers:	9	Total choreographers:	10	Total choreographers:	4	Total choreographers:	12	Total choreographers:	53	
	Total men:	17	Total men:	7	Total men:	9	Total men:	1	Total men:	10	Total men:	44	
	Total women:	1	Total women:	2	Total women:	1	Total women:	3	Total women:	2	Total women:	9	
	Total % men:	94%	Total % men:	78%	Total % men:	90%	Total % men:	25%	Total % men:	83%	Total % men:	83%	
	Total % women:	6%	Total % women:	22%	Total % women:	10%	Total % women:	75%	Total % women:	17%	Total % women:	17%	
	Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		
	Total acts:	22	Total acts:	19	Total acts:	18	Total acts:	6	Total acts:	10	Total acts:	75	
	Total men:	19	Total men:	15	Total men:	17	Total men:	2	Total men:	9	Total men:	62	
	Total women:	3	Total women:	4	Total women:	1	Total women:	4	Total women:	1	Total women:	13	
	Total % men:	86%	Total % men:	79%	Total % men:	94%	Total % men:	33%	Total % men:	90%	Total % men:	83%	
	Total % women:	14%	Total % women:	21%	Total % women:	6%	Total % women:	67%	Total % women:	10%	Total % women:	17%	
2021-2022	Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		
	Total choreographers:	10	Total choreographers:	4	Total choreographers:	8	Total choreographers:	5	Total choreographers:	4	Total choreographers:	31	
	Total men:	9	Total men:	3	Total men:	6	Total men:	5	Total men:	4	Total men:	27	
	Total women:	1	Total women:	1	Total women:	2	Total women:	0	Total women:	0	Total women:	4	
	Total % men:	90%	Total % men:	75%	Total % men:	75%	Total % men:	100%	Total % men:	100%	Total % men:	87%	
	Total % women:	10%	Total % women:	25%	Total % women:	25%	Total % women:	0%	Total % women:	0%	Total % women:	13%	
	Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		
	Total acts:	23	Total acts:	10	Total acts:	13	Total acts:	6	Total acts:	8	Total acts:	60	
	Total men:	22	Total men:	7	Total men:	11	Total men:	6	Total men:	8	Total men:	54	
	Total women:	1	Total women:	3	Total women:	2	Total women:	0	Total women:	0	Total women:	6	
	Total % men:	96%	Total % men:	70%	Total % men:	85%	Total % men:	100%	Total % men:	100%	Total % men:	90%	
	Total % women:	4%	Total % women:	30%	Total % women:	15%	Total % women:	0%	Total % women:	0%	Total % women:	10%	
Total per company for all 4 seasons	Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:		Totals by credited choreographers:				
	Total choreographers:	51	Total choreographers:	26	Total choreographers:	37	Total choreographers:	27	Total choreographers:	43			
	Total men:	45	Total men:	19	Total men:	27	Total men:	15	Total men:	37			
	Total women:	6	Total women:	7	Total women:	10	Total women:	12	Total women:	6			
	Total % men:	88%	Total % men:	73%	Total % men:	73%	Total % men:	56%	Total % men:	86%			
	Total % women:	12%	Total % women:	27%	Total % women:	27%	Total % women:	44%	Total % women:	14%			
	Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:		Totals by choreographer per act:				
	Total acts:	103	Total acts:	52	Total acts:	54	Total acts:	30	Total acts:	43			
	Total men:	93	Total men:	39	Total men:	47	Total men:	17	Total men:	38			
	Total women:	10	Total women:	13	Total women:	7	Total women:	13	Total women:	5			
	Total % men:	90%	Total % men:	75%	Total % men:	87%	Total % men:	57%	Total % men:	88%			
	Total % women:	10%	Total % women:	25%	Total % women:	13%	Total % women:	43%	Total % women:	12%			

Ballet Company Choreography (All 5 companies over last 4 seasons)

Totals by credited choreographers

Total choreographers:	184
Total men:	143
Total women:	41
Total % men:	78%
Total % women:	22%

Totals by choreographer per act

Total acts:	282
Total men:	234
Total women:	48
Total % men:	83%
Total % women:	17%

Appendix I: CPD presentation slides

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THE END!

ANNA MORGAN (she/her)

INVISIBLE BARRIERS, VISIBLE CHANGE

ADDRESSING GENDER BIAS IN BALLET
TRAINING TO CREATE EQUITABLE
ARTISTIC LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS

HELLO!

My name is Anna Morgan (she/her)

Within ballet I am a teacher,
creative, journalist and researcher.

I love ballet *and* I envisage a future
where it is just as excellent while
also being **inclusive**, **transparent**
and **progressive**.



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SESSION AIMS:

01

Explore **what**
the current
picture of
gender in ballet
leadership
looks like

02

Explore
why these
imbalances
exist

03

Explore **how**
we can work
towards
change

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During this session we will use
live polls via Mentimeter...

By participating in these polls, you agree that your answers will anonymously
appear on screen, and may be used in my written dissertation.

Type into your browser:

<https://www.menti.com/alm6j1jhixcw>

Or use the QR code:



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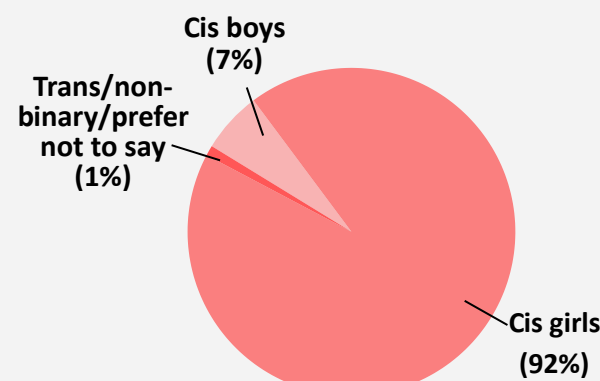
Q&A

THE END!

Ballet in the UK - the current picture:

102 UK-based ballet teachers were surveyed, who collectively taught **7555** students under the age of 18.
ballet company data refers to the **largest 5 UK ballet companies**, ranked by number of dancers.

% of UK ballet students under 18 by gender expression:



Percentage of UK ballet students under 18 who are cis boys:

7%

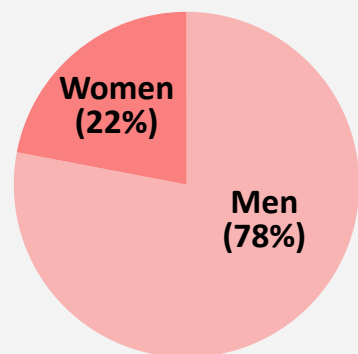
% of artistic directors in UK's 5 largest ballet companies by gender expression:

Men (100%)

Percentage of artistic directors who are men:

100%

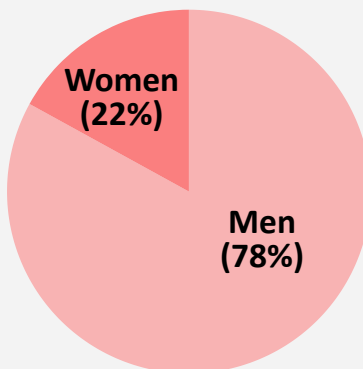
% of choreographers whose work featured in the past four seasons, by gender expression:



Percentage of choreographers for the past 4 seasons who were men...

78%

% of choreographers of each act featured in the past four seasons, by gender expression:



Percentage of acts choreographed by men in the past 4 seasons...

83%

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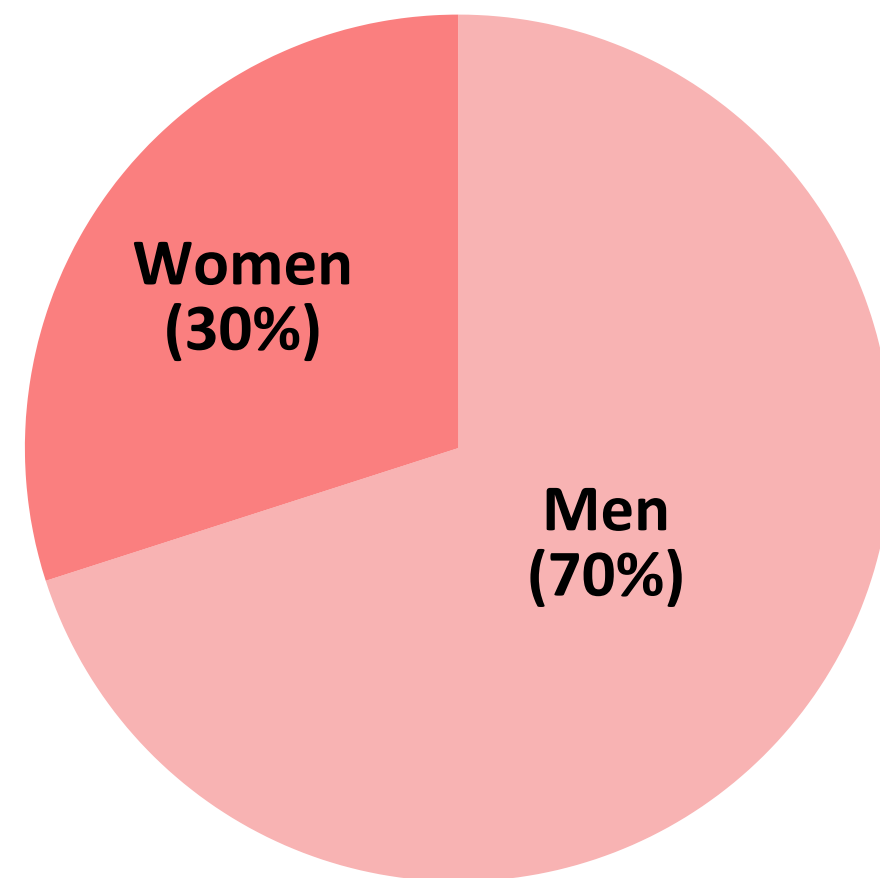
Ballet globally - the current picture:

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS:

2025:

There are 217 artistic directors of major ballet companies globally. Of these:

- 65 are women (30%)
- 152 are men (70%)

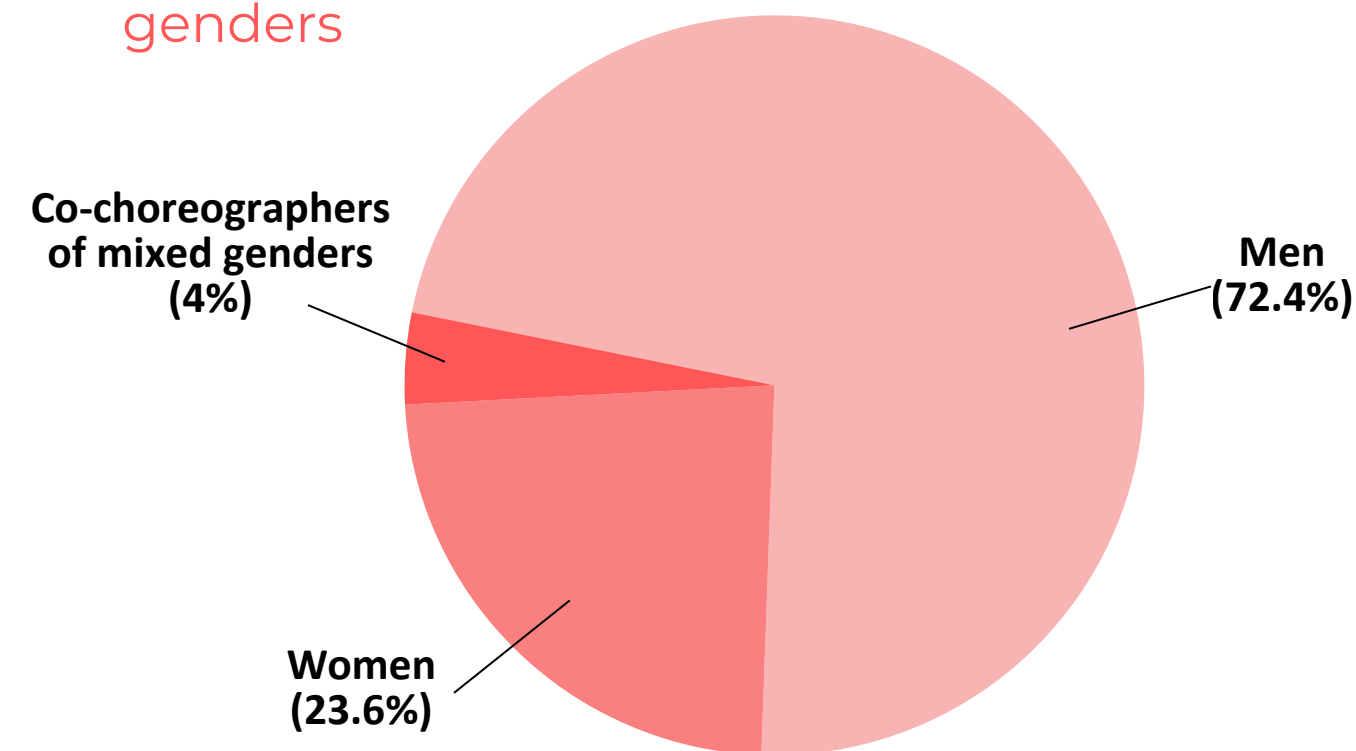


CHOREOGRAPHERS:

2023-24:

Of the 250 works programmed by ballet companies in English speaking countries:

- 59 were choreographed by women
- 181 were choreographed by men
- 10 were co-choreographed by people of mixed genders



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“
Female audiences,
donors, and
students continue
to support an art
form that routinely
marginalizes women
in all respects.”

***Liza Yntema,
President and Founder of
the Dance Data Project***

(Yntema, quoted in Women's Media Center, 2019, para. 15).

(Image courtesy of the Dance Data Project)

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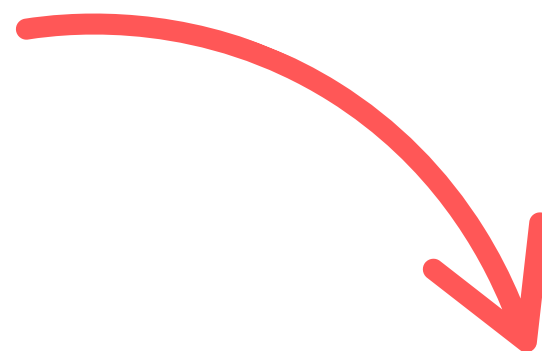
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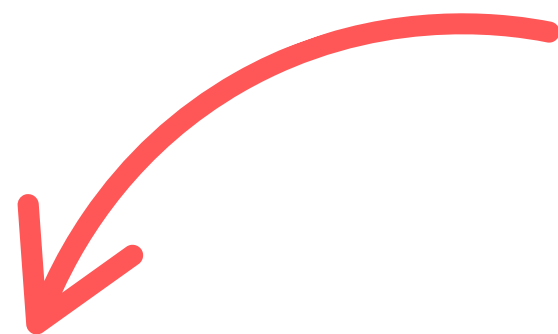
THE END!

WHY THIS RESEARCH AREA?

In 2016, I went to see English National Ballet's 'She Said', a triple bill of 3 women choreographers



At the time, Tamara Rojo was both principal dancer and artistic director of ENB.



Rojo said she had commissioned this production, because despite having danced professionally for 25 years, she'd **never danced a piece choreographed by a woman.**

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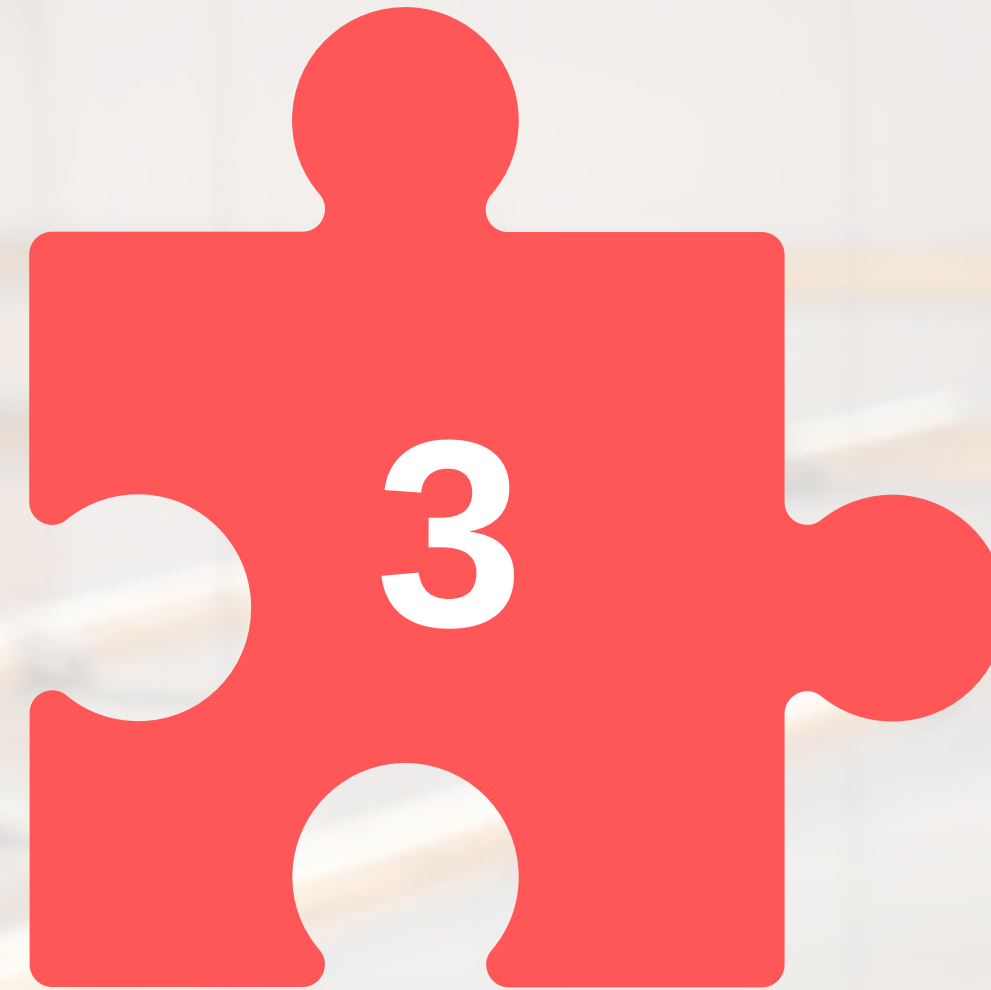
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**Disproportionate
praise,
opportunities
and expectations**



**Binary gender
expectations**



**The need for
pedagogical and
curricular reform**

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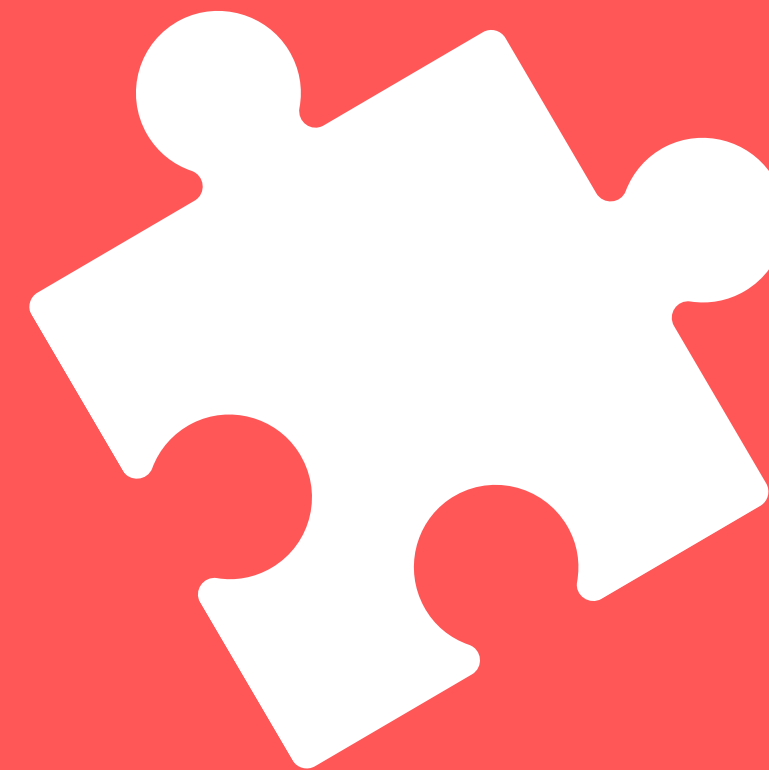
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PUZZLE PIECE 1: DISPROPORTIONATE PRAISE, OPPORTUNITIES & EXPECTATIONS



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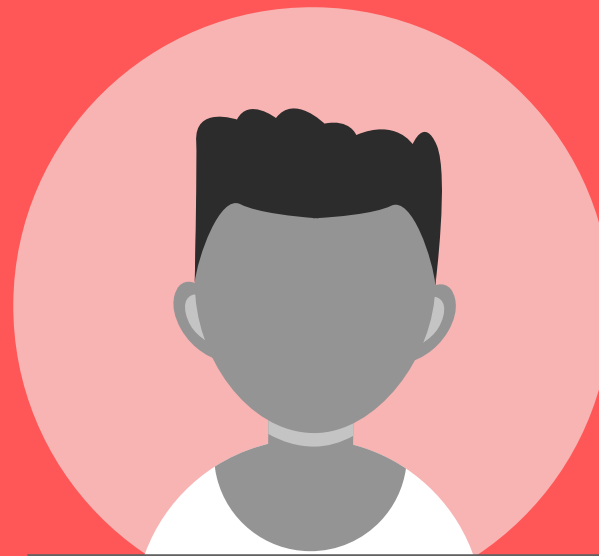
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS...



Billie (he/they)
Gender questioning



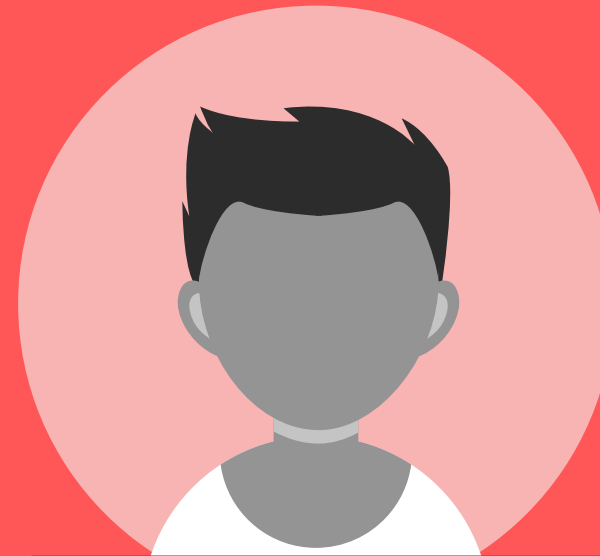
Craig (he/him)
Cisgender man



Dylan (he/him)
Cisgender man



Jamie (he/him)
Cisgender man



John (he/him)
Cisgender man



Olivia (they/them)
Non-binary



Rebecca (she/her)
Cisgender woman



Ruby (she/her)
Cisgender woman



Seren (she/her)
Trans feminine



Tess (she/her)
Cisgender woman

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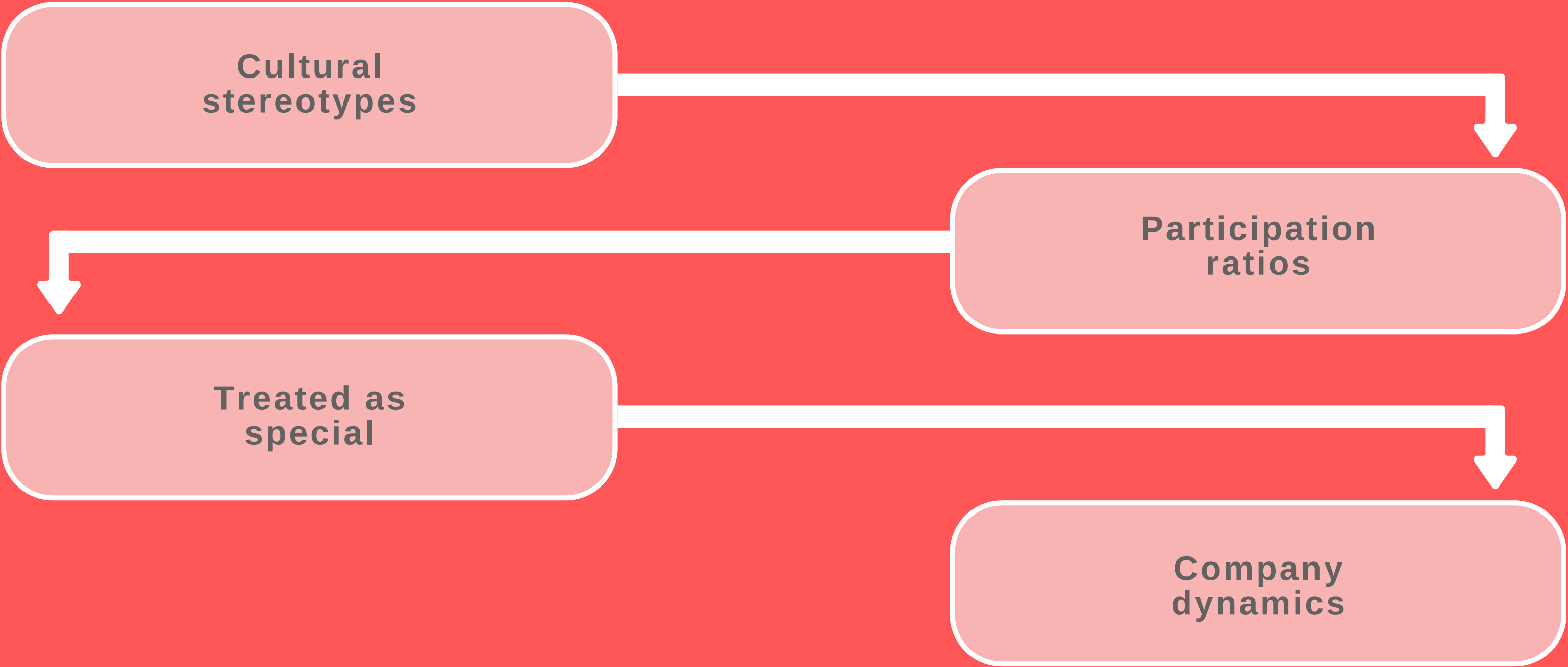
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HOW DISPROPORTION EMERGES...



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CULTURAL STEREOTYPES:

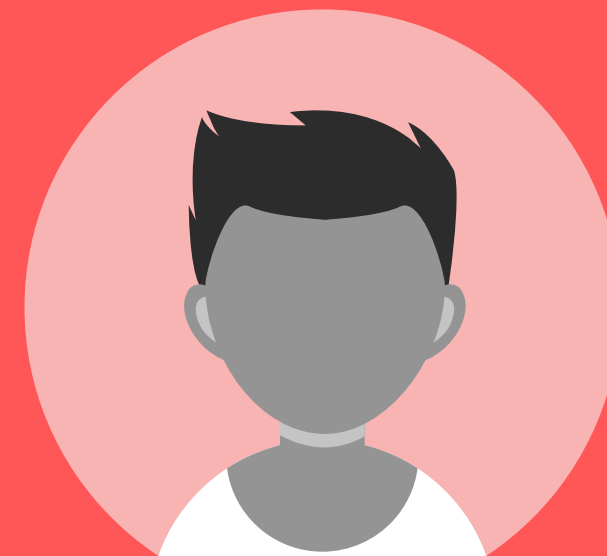


Craig (he/him)
Cisgender man

“...in secondary school I was really, really badly bullied... like people pushing me around the corridors and stuff for doing ballet.”



“...because I danced I was therefore gay, and therefore that's not a good thing. It was very homophobic.”



John (he/him)
Cisgender man

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CULTURAL STEREOTYPES:



Rebecca (she/her)
Cisgender woman

“ —

...being a dancer on the outside... it's a
desired quality as a female.

— ”

“ —

I was always getting called a lesbian... I
actually started telling everyone I did ballet
so that they would be like, 'oh, a girl!'

— ”



Olivia (they/them)
Non-binary

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THE END!

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPECTATIONS...

What does the existing research tell us?



“...dance is often considered a feminised activity which can lead to boys who engage in dance being bullied and having to manage the ‘gay male dancer’ stereotype.”

***Helen Clegg,
Helen Owton
and Jacquelyn
Allen-Collinson***

(Clegg, Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2017, citing Polasek & Roper, 2011; Risner, 2014)

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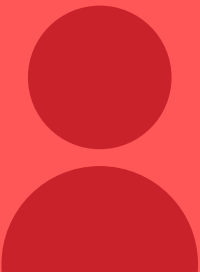
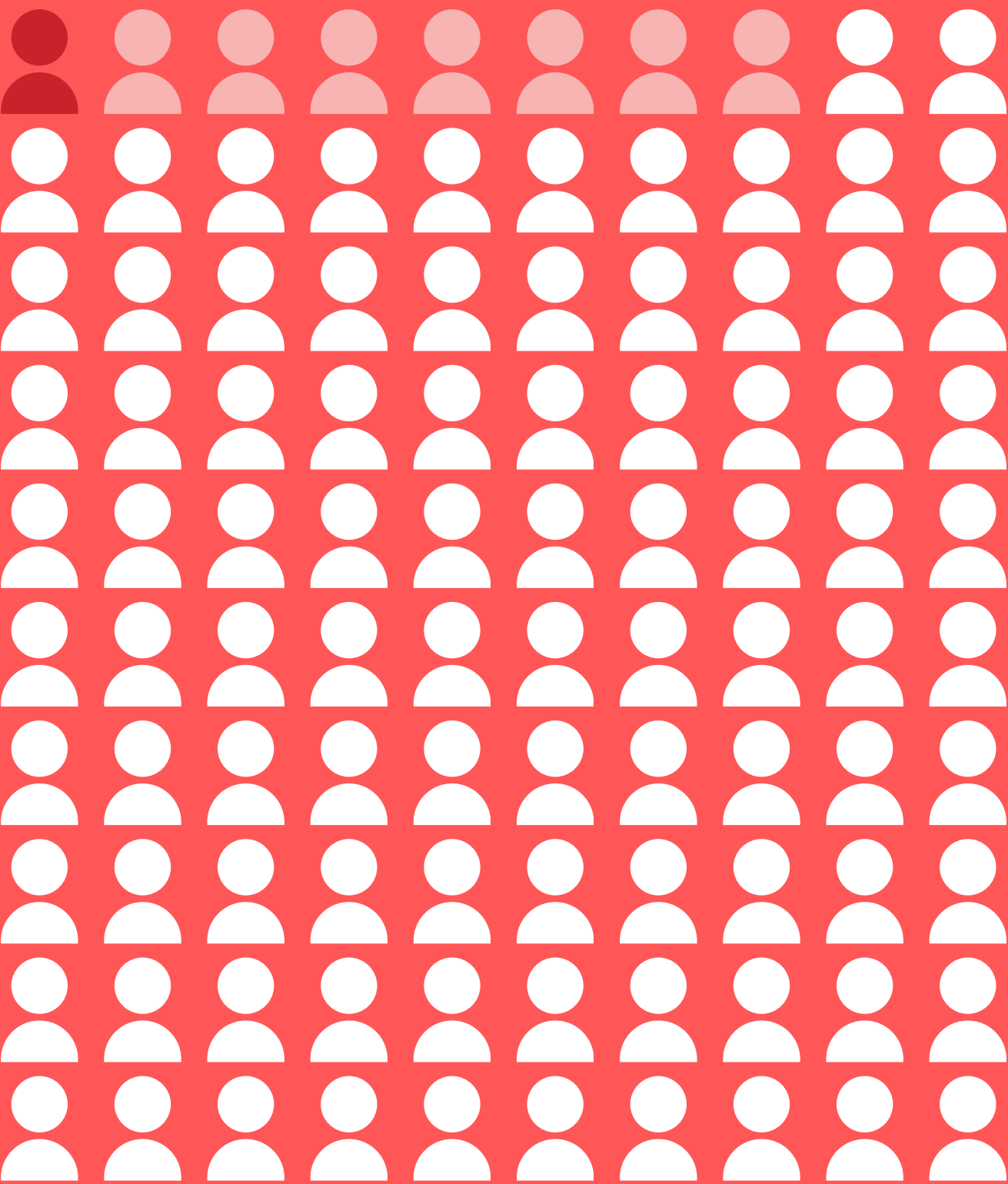
POLL 3

Q&A

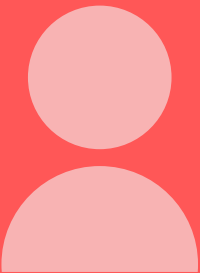
THE END!

HOW DISPROPORTION EMERGES...

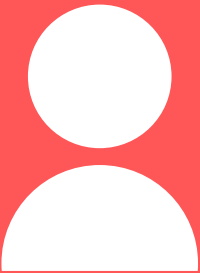
Gender of under 18 students in UK ballet classes...



Trans/non-binary/
prefer not to say



Cis boys



Cis girls

Session structure:	
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THE END!	

DISPROPORTIONATE PRAISE...



Rebecca (she/her)
Cisgender woman

“

...particular teachers would praise the male-identifying students more often... I was doing just as well as, if not better than [them], and... we wouldn't get seen.

”

“

...it's hard to be the only one getting praised

”



Craig (he/him)
Cisgender man

Session structure:

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Q&A

THE END!

DISPROPORTIONATE PRAISE...



Billie (he/they)
Gender questioning

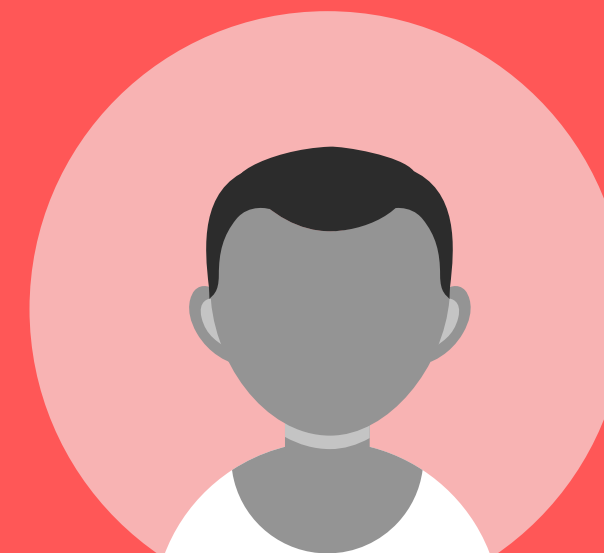
“

I obviously wanted to be told I was doing well, but only for my actual technical ability... not just because I was the only boy.

”

“

I don't need the ego boost, I want the teachers to go 'fix this fix this fix this'... rather than going 'Craig you're great'



Craig (he/him)
Cisgender man

”

Session structure:

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Q&A

THE END!

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPECTATIONS...



Ruby (she/her)
Cisgender woman

“...if a boy does something slightly funny it's like, oh he's the class clown... whereas if it's a girl it's like 'ugh she's so annoying’”

“

I would say overall a female having a bit of personality and having the same fun as a male-identifying [student] would be classed as disrespectful... I've rarely seen someone be called disrespectful as a male-identifying person.



Rebecca (she/her)
Cisgender woman

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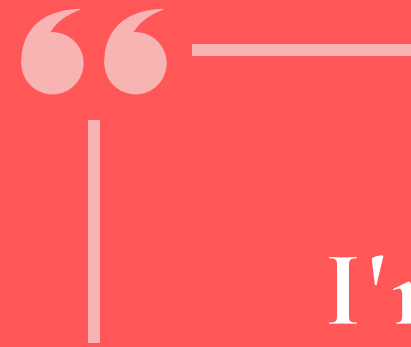
Q&A

THE END!

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPECTATIONS...



John (he/him)
Cisgender man



I'm able to get away with so much more than a female in my class... it would be 'ahh it's just John he's being cheeky'. I feel like I can get away with a lot of things just because I'm smiling at the teacher.



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Q&A

THE END!

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPECTATIONS...



Craig (he/him)
Cisgender man

“

...the teacher was at the front, and on the side of the boys we were all just messing around, laughing and stuff, and if the girls spoke, it was like [makes slapping gesture to indicate punishment]

”

“

From the other side of the room, it was jabber jabber jabber, actually like play fighting in the room... but *we* wouldn't dare move, because we would be shouted at.



Rebecca (she/her)
Cisgender woman

”

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Q&A

THE END!

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPECTATIONS...

What does the existing research tell us?



“Even when they’re teenagers and in school, the boys get the scholarships, are feted, are courted... but the girls... know that if they speak up or show individual personality, they’ll be replaced.”

Sharon Basco

Wirth, L.M. (2022). Cultural, political, and choreographic developments of feminism in classical ballet. Honours thesis, Butler University.

Session structure:

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Q&A

THE END!

COMPANY DYNAMICS...

What does the existing research tell us?

“

Because boys are in short supply,
teachers loosen the dress code in
order to keep them enrolled,
while they hold girls to rigid
standards that require obedience
and conformity.

”

Chloe Angyal

Angyal, C. (2021). Turning pointe: How a new generation of dancers is saving ballet from itself. New York, NY: Bold Type Books.

Session structure:

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Q&A

THE END!

COMPANY DYNAMICS...

What does the existing research tell us?



“
The conformity of the corps
prevents the innovative risk-
taking required to produce
new and interesting work.
”

Colette Kelly

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal, 2

Session structure:

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Q&A

THE END!

COMPANY DYNAMICS...

What does the existing research tell us?

“Men tend to interact with choreographers in more intimate settings... You don't really get that when there's forty-two swans in the room.”



Colette Kelly

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal, 2

Session structure:

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THE END!

COMPANY DYNAMICS...

What does the existing research tell us?



“ For these men, the path to choreographic success had a logic; it was clear, well-lit, and supported by those in charge (such as Peter Martins). ”

Colette Kelly

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal, 2

Session structure:

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DISCUSSION 3

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Q&A

THE END!

COMPANY DYNAMICS...

What does the existing research tell us?

“—
We are still
training women to
be pretty and nice
instead of being
exceptional and
beautiful leaders.”

Helen Pickett

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal, 2



Photo Credit: Mihaela Bodlovic

Session structure:

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PIECE 3

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Q&A

THE END!

COMPANY DYNAMICS...

What does the existing research tell us?

“

...men are in alignment with their agentic gender role when they act as leaders. However, when women use the same agentic strategies, they are often seen as not being feminine and not acting according to their gender roles.



”
Lisa DeFrank-Cole and Renée Nicholson

DeFrank-Cole, L. and Nicholson, R.K. (2016). 'The slow-changing face of leadership in ballet: An interdisciplinary approach to analysing women's roles', *Leadership and the Humanities*, 4(2), pp. 73–91.

Session structure:

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**PUZZLE
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DISCUSSION 3

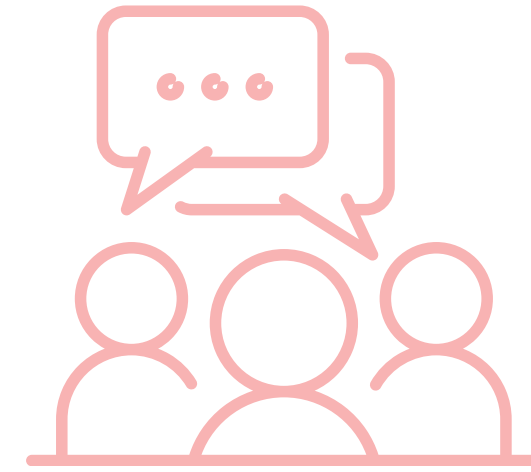
POLL 3

Q&A

THE END!

PUZZLE PIECE 1 - DISCUSSION POINT:

If boys and men are consistently given more **praise** and **opportunities**, while girls and women are held to **stricter** and more **punitive** standards...



What might be the **downstream effects** on **leadership outcomes**?

Session structure:

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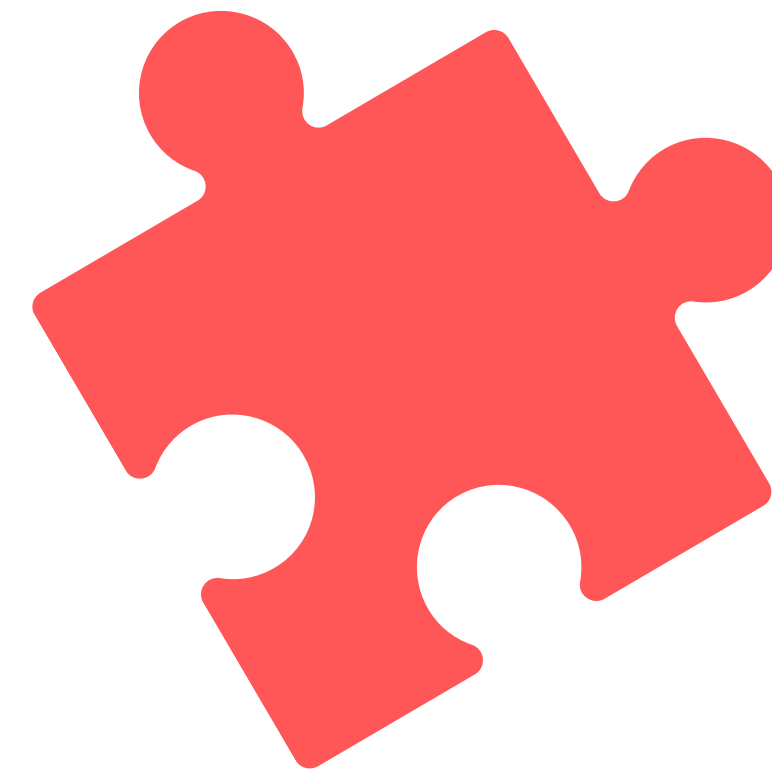
DISCUSSION 3

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THE END!

PUZZLE PIECE 2: BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS



Session structure:

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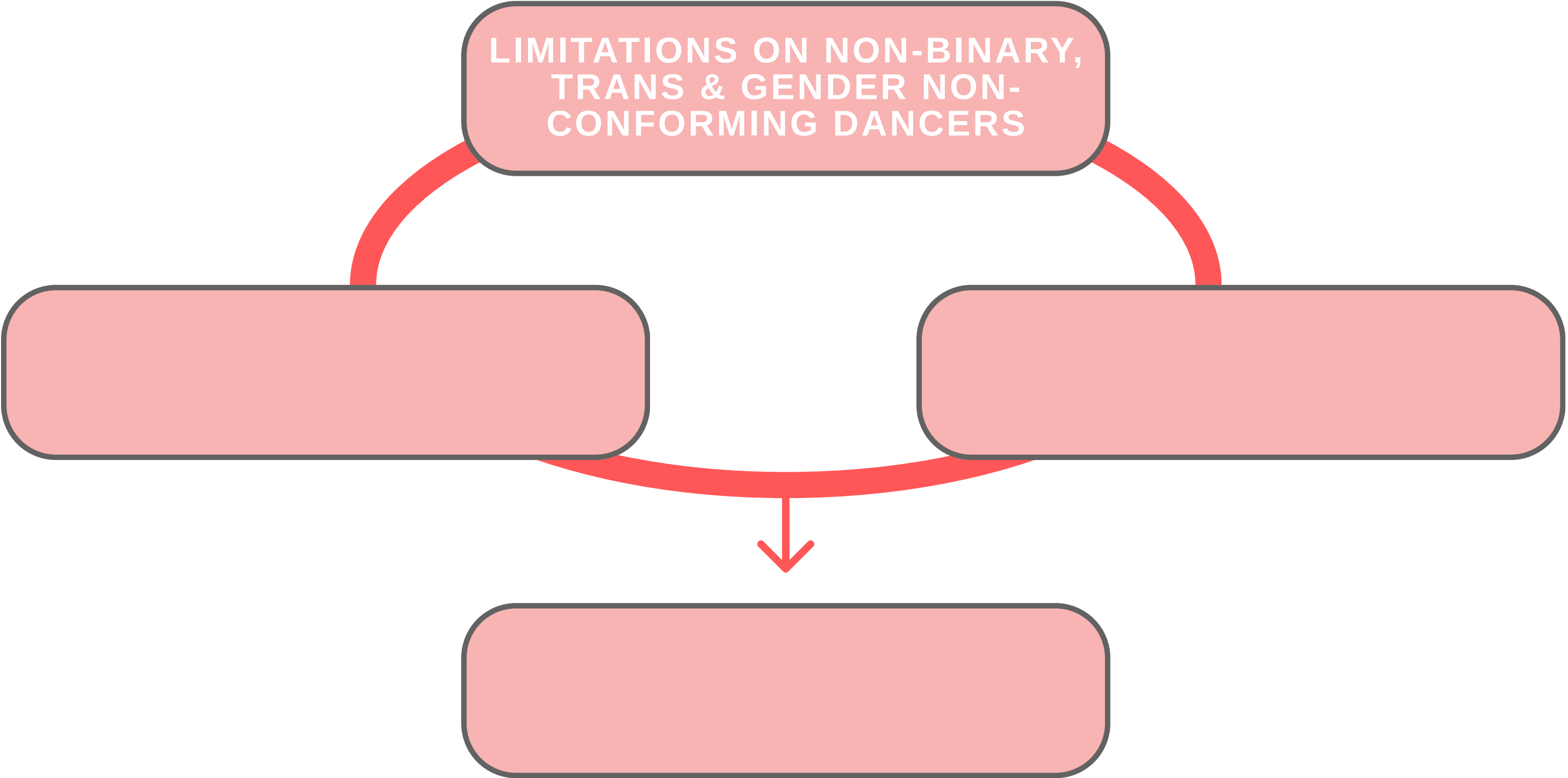
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THE END!

BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...



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THE END!

BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...



Olivia (they/them)
Non-binary

“

...it does war with my gender expression... it's really tricky to feel like a whole person in ballet.

”

“

...having to wear tight clothing, especially for me is very dysphoric... And then choosing if I want to wear the female uniform I then have to do extra things in the morning to make sure that I can actually do a class in the pink tights and just a leotard because it's so much more revealing. You're literally there with your arse out, and it's like 'OK let's see if I can do that today'.



Seren (she/her)
Trans feminine

”

Session structure:

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POLL 3

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THE END!

BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...

“ —

I couldn't really express my
artistry at its fullest in
classical ballet, since it's
very gendered

— ”

Leroy Mokgatle
Demi-soloist,
Staatsballett Berlin

Bauer, C. (2024). 'Leroy Mokgatle lives her dream at Staatsballett Berlin', Dance Magazine, 1 December. Available at: ([Yntemi, quoted in Women's Media Center, 2019, para. 15](#)). [Accessed: 24/02/2025].

Session structure:

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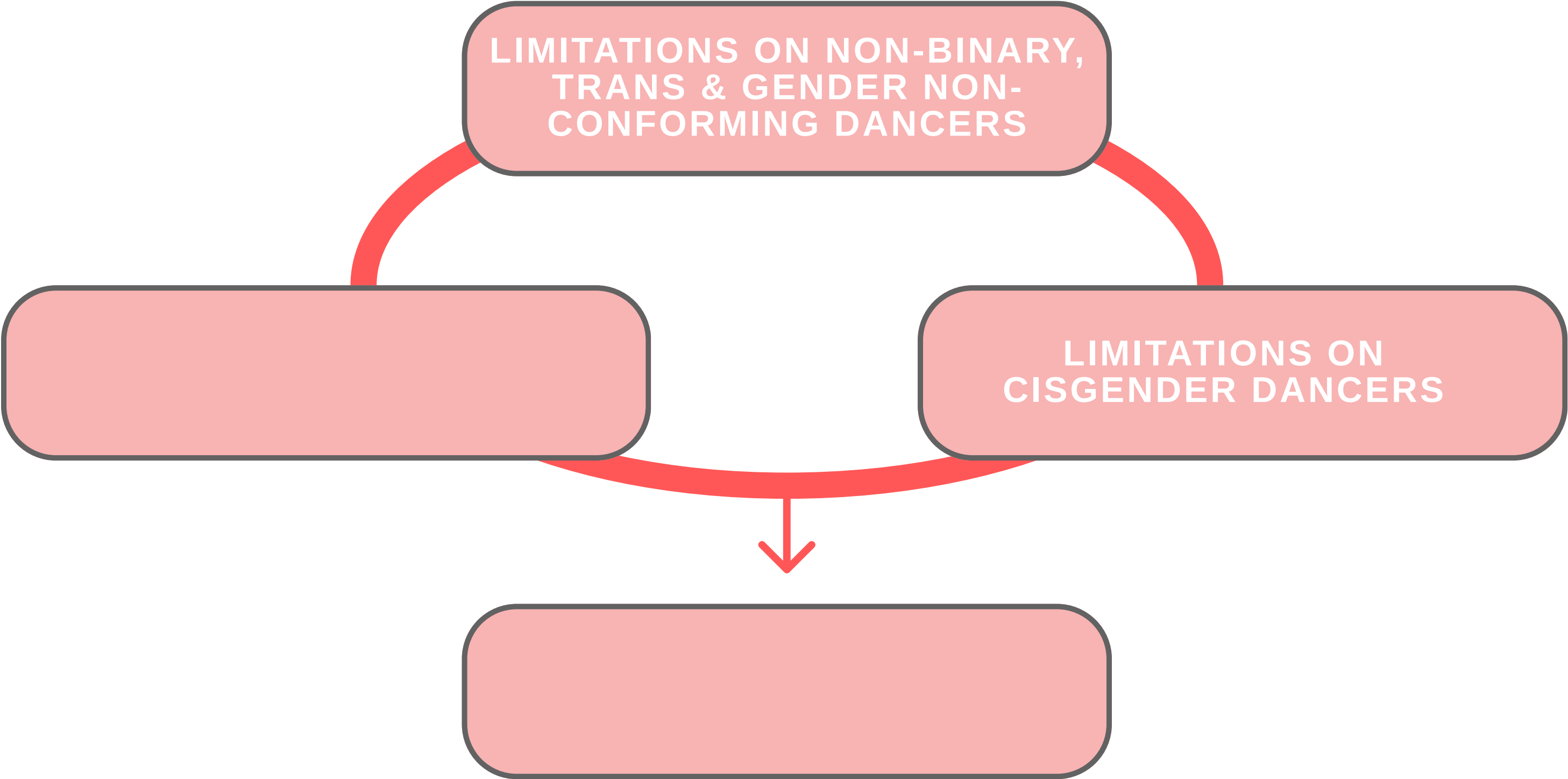
DISCUSSION 3

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THE END!

BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...



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BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...



Ruby (she/her)
Cisgender woman

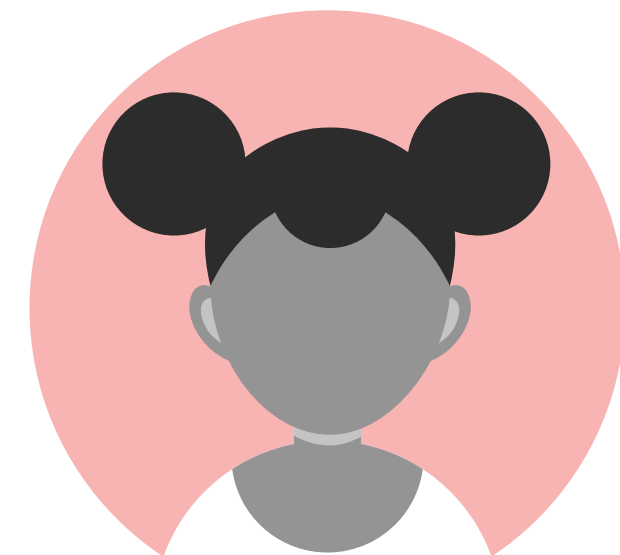
“

I knew what I wanted to do but... I don't want people watching me and thinking I'm trying to prove something.

”

“

I do it to prove a point! In my pride, 'ok you can do four pirouettes, so can I!' Seeing [name] flicking his head around doing two tours, I can do that much neater, much tidier, much better than you.



Rebecca (she/her)
Cisgender woman

”

Session structure:

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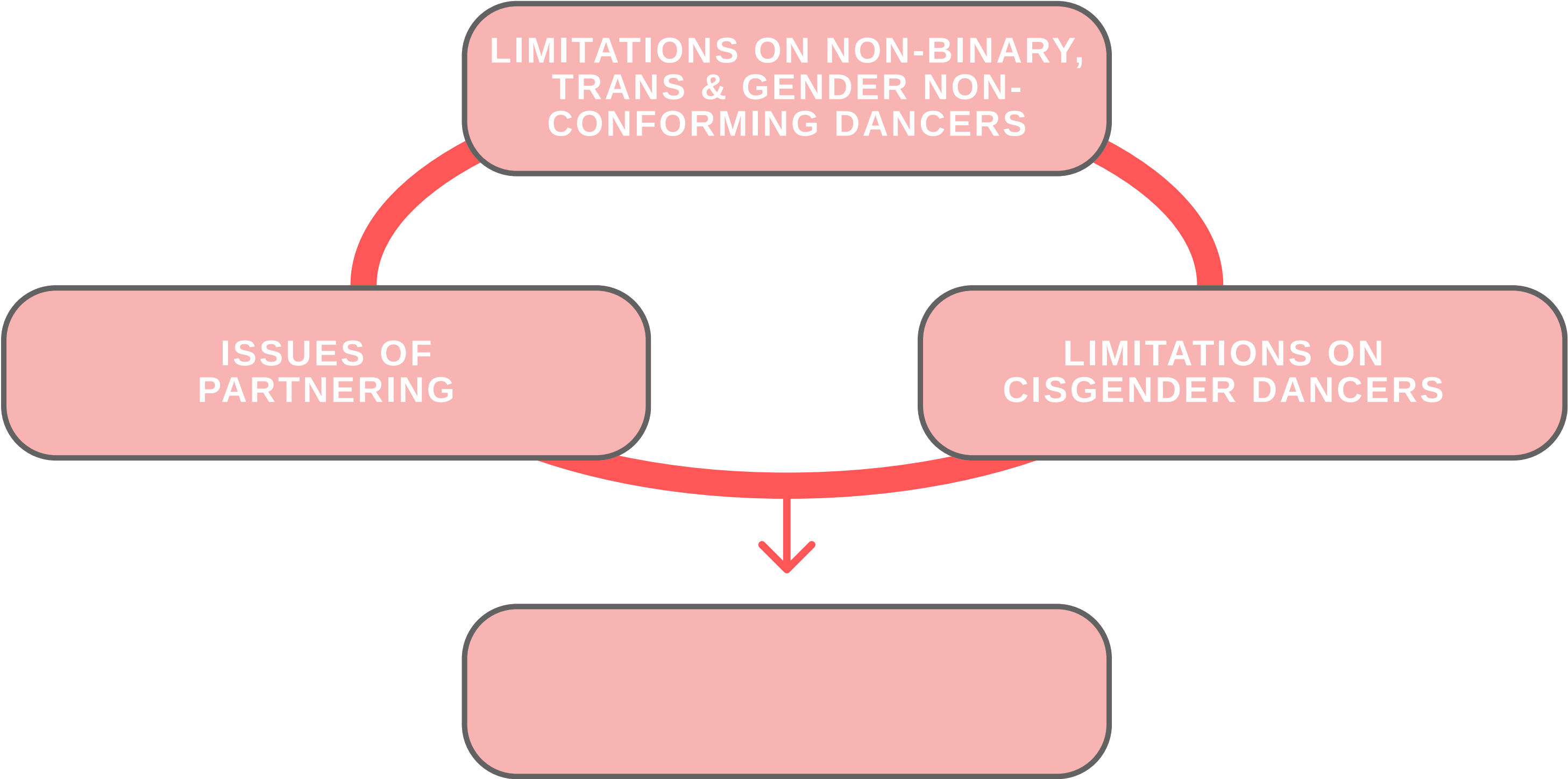
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THE END!

BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...



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Q&A

THE END!

PARTNERING...



“ —

...they're going to think I'm
so fat if they lift me

— ”

“ —

I feel like I'm too heavy because
of my muscles... like oh yeah
they're taller than me but have
you seen my legs?

— ”



Session structure:

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Q&A

THE END!

PARTNERING...



...sometimes we have five partners
at a time, just constantly going...
if I get the third person not as
high as the first person, they're
going to think I'm weak as hell...

There's so much pressure about
like, shit, they've all got to be the
same height, my arms were
shaking, and I was like, what if
they go out and laugh at me
because I'm weak?



Session structure:

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THE END!

BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS:

What does the existing research tell us?

“...a move towards a pedagogy that is gender free and empowering for all genders is required... that allows for children to explore the full range of gendered expression.”



***Helen Clegg, Helen Owton and
Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson***

Clegg, H., Owton, H. and Allen-Collinson, J. (2017). 'Challenging conceptions of gender: UK dance teachers' perceptions of boys and girls in the ballet studio', *Research in Dance Education*, 19(2), pp. 128–139.

Session structure:

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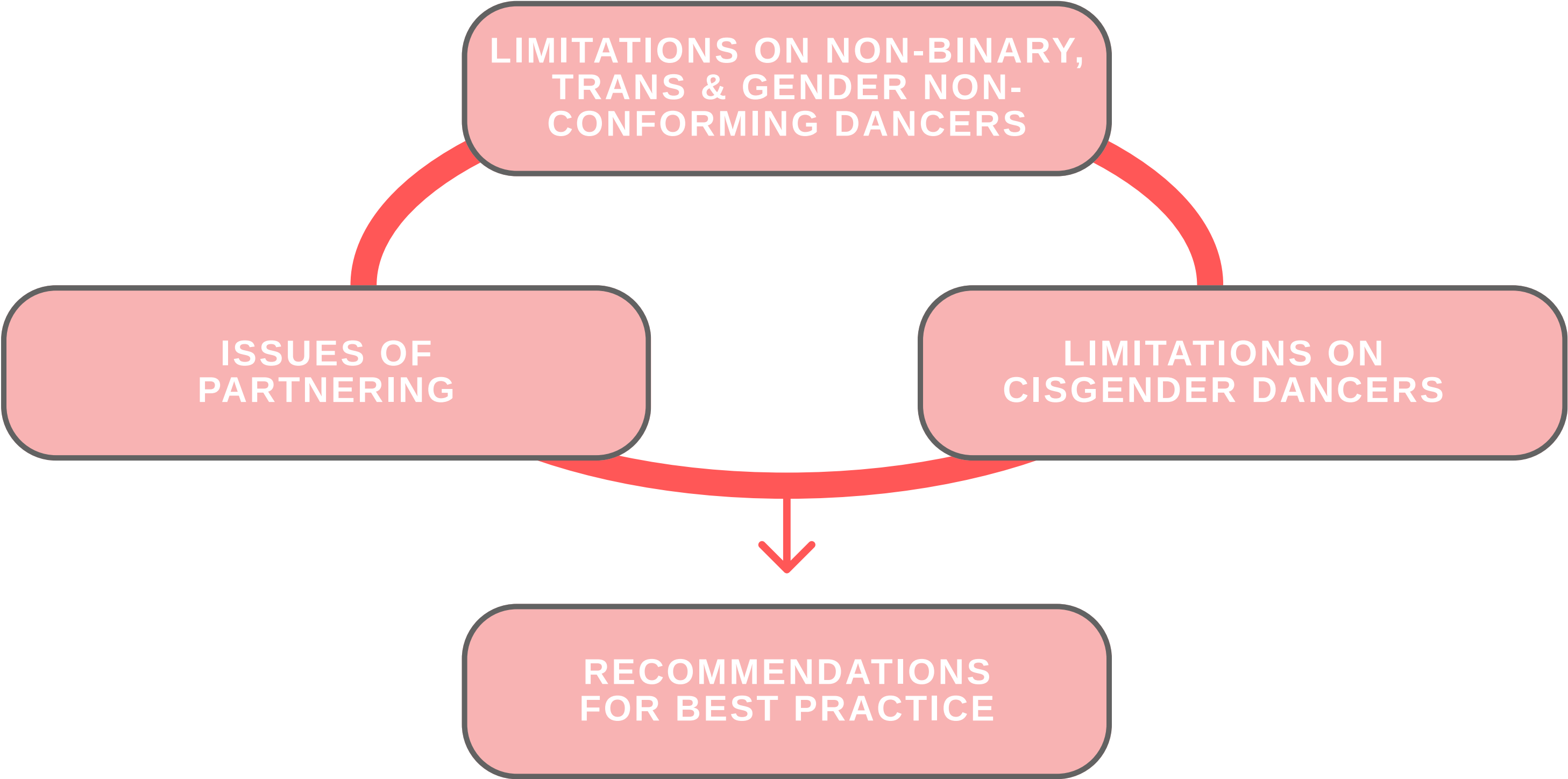
DISCUSSION 3

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THE END!

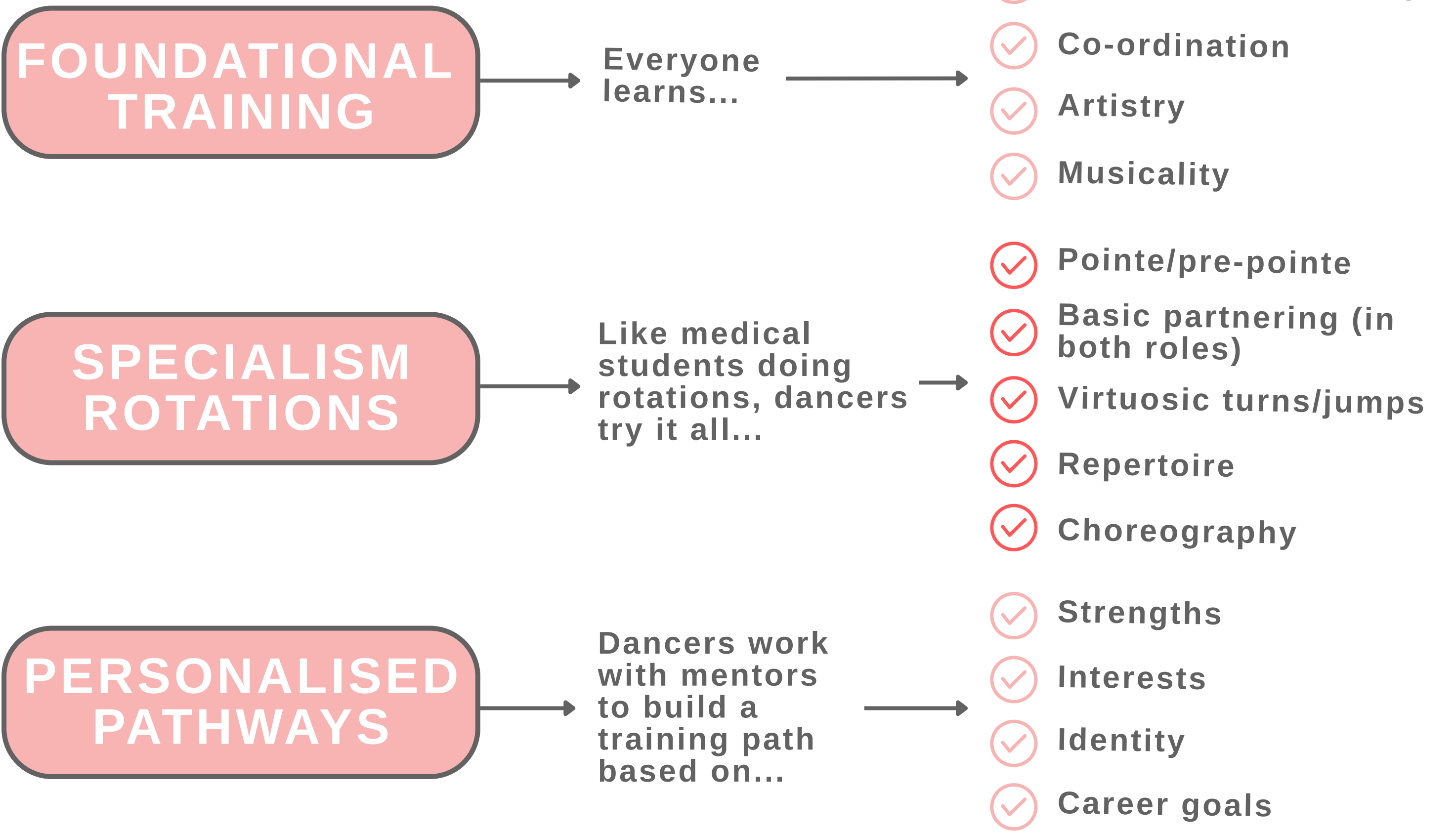
BINARY GENDER EXPECTATIONS...



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- DISCUSSION 2
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- DISCUSSION 3
- POLL 3
- Q&A
- THE END!

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE:



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THE END!



Supports all dancers who don't fit the very narrow boxes of traditional ballet ideals (the majority)



Prepares dancers for demands of modern ballet companies

GENDER EXPANSIVE TRAINING



Provides ballet companies with a truly diverse mix of dancers to cater to current and future audiences



Develops a range of skills for careers in and beyond performing ballet

Session structure:

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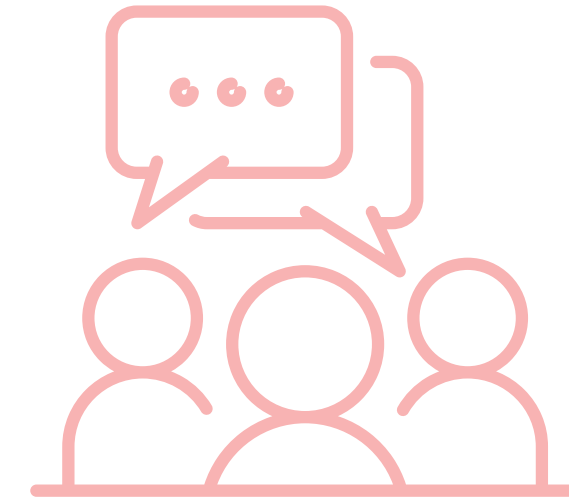
Q&A

THE END!

PUZZLE PIECE 2 - DISCUSSION POINT:

If ballet training is structured around strict **male/female binary** roles...

What impact does that have on who **belongs**, who **progresses**, and who can eventually **lead**?



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THE END!

PUZZLE PIECE 3: THE NEED FOR PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULAR REFORM



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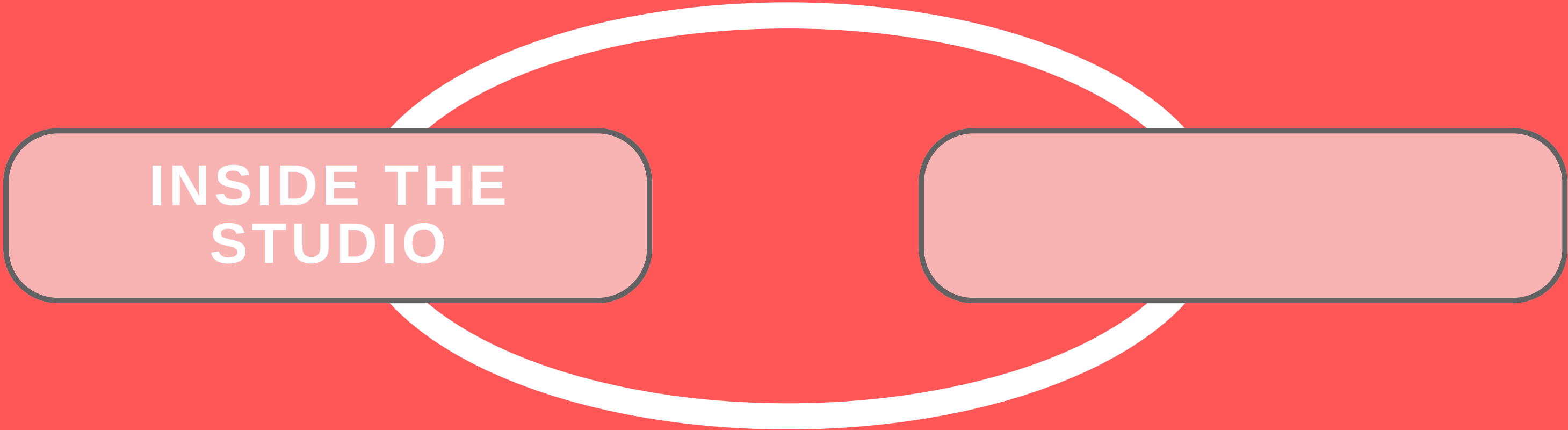
DISCUSSION 3

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THE END!

THE NEED FOR PEDAGOGICAL & CURRICULAR REFORM...



INSIDE THE
STUDIO

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THE END!

PEDAGOGICAL REFORM - INSIDE THE STUDIO...

What does the existing research tell us?



**Move away from
the banking model**



**Towards a feminist
pedagogical
approach**

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Q&A

THE END!

KEY PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST PEDAGOGY:

What does the existing research tell us?



Reformation of the relationship between professor and student



Empowerment



Building community



Privileging the individual voice as a way of knowing



Respect for diversity of personal experience



Challenging traditional views

Session structure:

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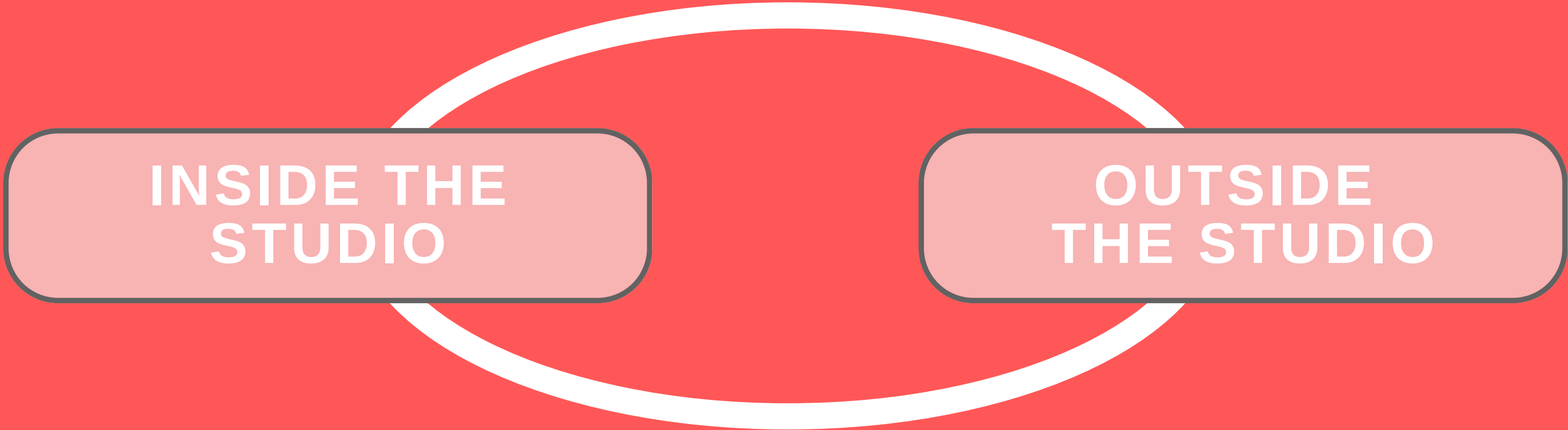
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THE END!

THE NEED FOR PEDAGOGICAL & CURRICULAR REFORM...



INSIDE THE
STUDIO

OUTSIDE
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THE END!

'MORE
REPRESENTATION
AND EDUCATION
ABOUT LEADERS
OF ALL GENDERS'

'MENTORSHIP'

CURRICULAR REFORM:

'BUSINESS EDUCATION
- ALL ASPECTS OF
DANCE THAT IS NOT
THE PERFORMING OF
THE BALLET ITSELF.'

'BETTER GUIDANCE ON
POTENTIAL CAREER
PATHS AND SUPPORT
FOR FULLY-ROUNDED
CAREERS.'

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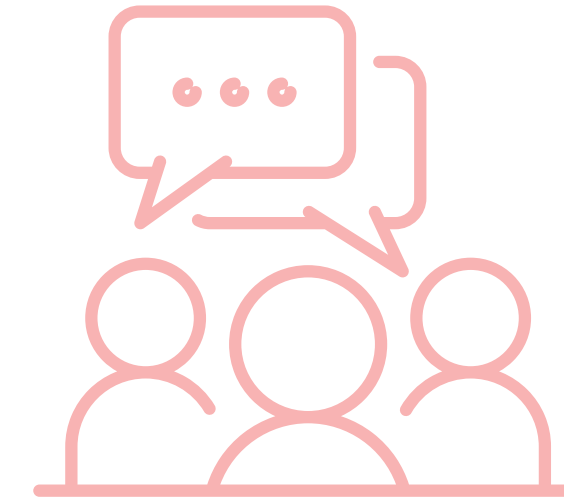
POLL 3

Q&A

THE END!

PUZZLE PIECE 3 - DISCUSSION POINT:

If we want to see more **equity** in **leadership**...



What do you think needs to change about the way we **train ballet**?

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POLL 3:



Session structure:

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THE END!



**Session
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DISCUSSION 3

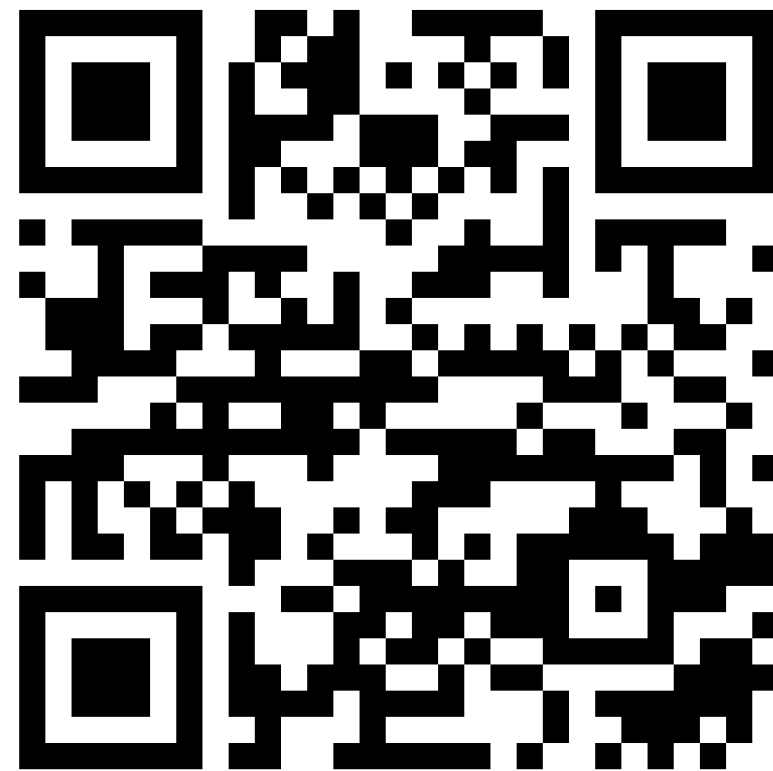
POLL 3

Q&A

THE END!

THANK YOU!

For more information on
my research or for a full
bibliography from today's
session:



Session structure:

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Q&A

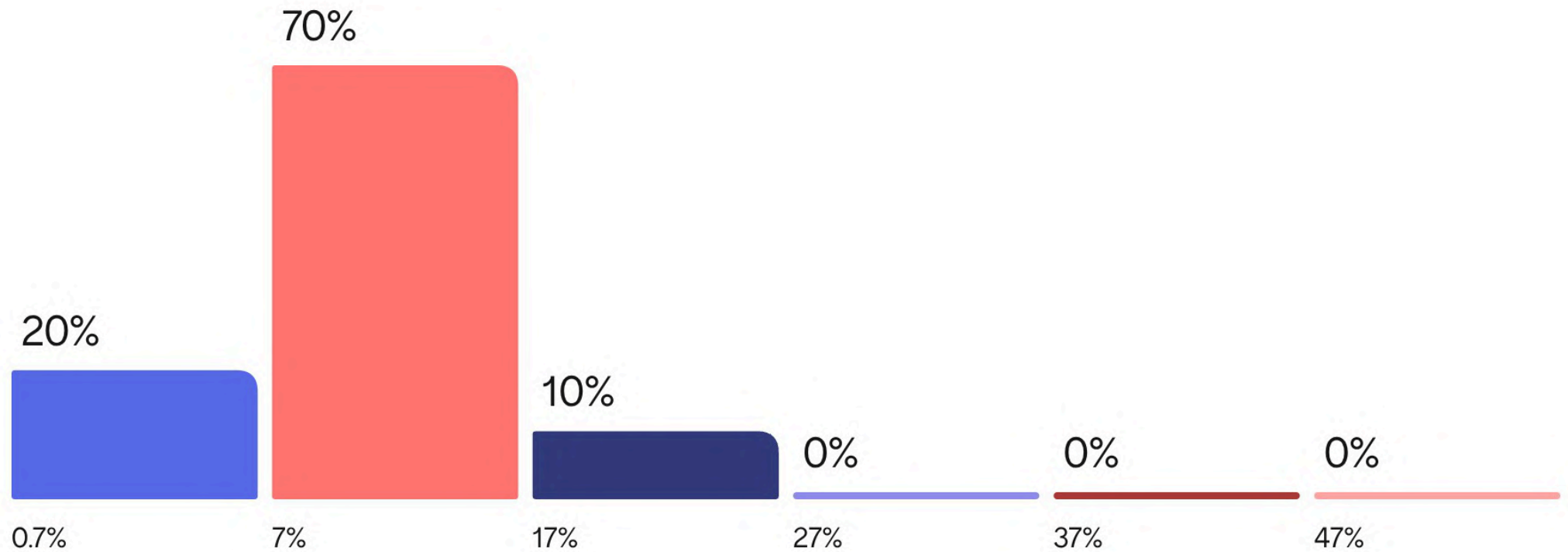
THE END!

Appendix J: Mentimeter slides

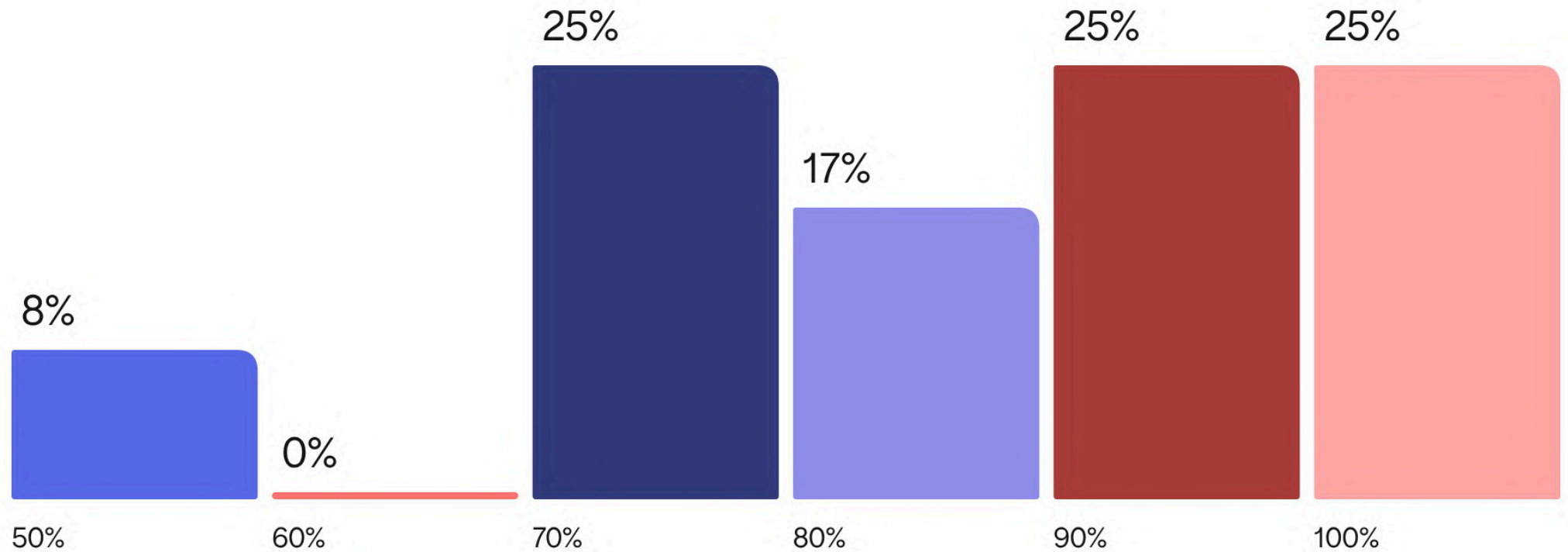
You made it!

Hold tight for the first question...

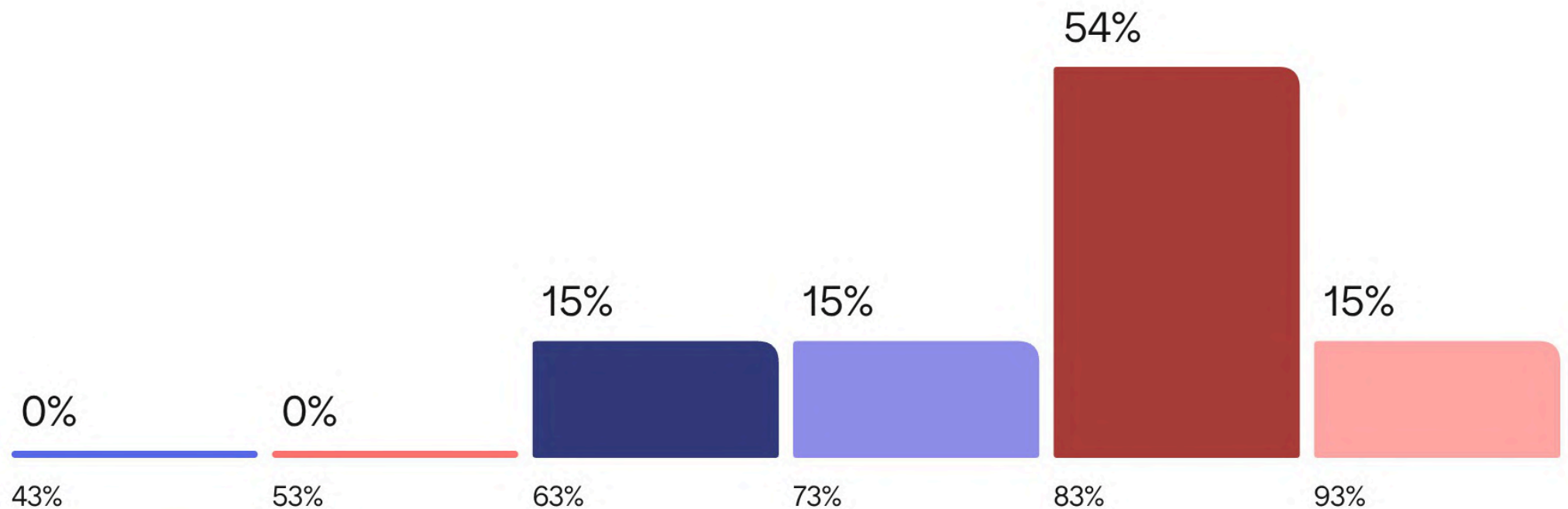
In UK Ballet classes, what % of under 18 students are cisgender boys?



In the largest five UK Ballet companies, what % of Artistic Directors are cisgender men?



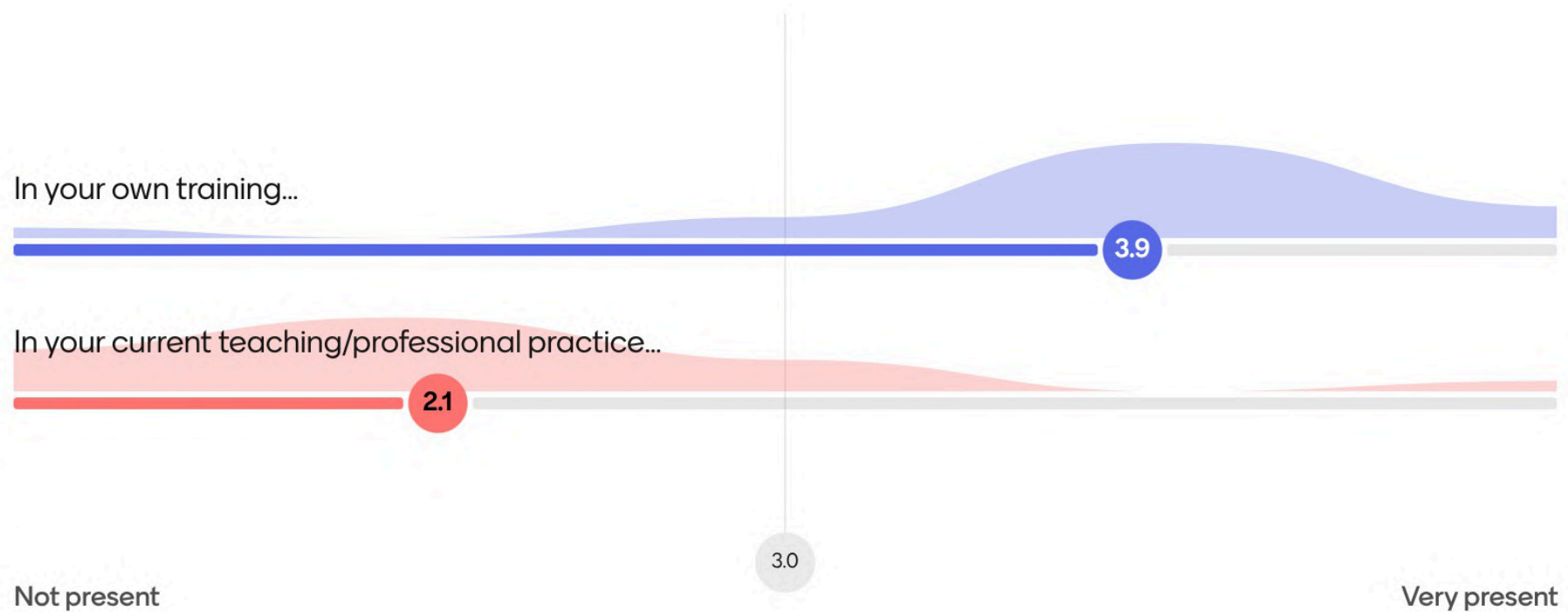
In the largest five UK Ballet companies, how much of the work performed in the last four seasons was choreographed by cisgender men?



We've seen that the majority of Ballet's artistic directors & choreographers are cisgender men. What reasons can you think of that might explain this?



How present do you think binary gender expectations are/were...



What is one idea or fact that has surprised you, or made you think differently about something today?

no muslces
pathway to ballet leaders
the female pioneers
cannon pipeline
more awareness
extremity of situation
change is still slow
gendered skills
company pathway
acceptance

What is one action you could take, or one area where you might think differently about your role, in relation to building gender equity in leadership?

To listen to the language used by students within the classroom - encourage powerful language used by all

Teaching more contemporary partnering/ contact improvisation to give a different perspective on partnering and reduce the assumption on gendered partnering skills

Being a rebel is a source of creativity, encourage rebels of all genders

Maintain an open, encouraging, explorative learning environment for all dancers to evolve their skills, employability and onward career paths.

To be more aware of this within existing class dynamics and within own practice

encourage students who want to start their own work that challenges norms and stereotypes

Appendix K: teacher digital resource



ANNA MORGAN (she/her)

MA: Rambert School

INVISIBLE BARRIERS, VISIBLE CHANGE

**A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE
FOR TEACHERS ON
GENDER IN BALLET**

**INFORMED BY NEW
UK RESEARCH**

September 2025

AIMS OF THIS RESOURCE...



Explore **what** the current picture of gender in ballet leadership looks like



Explore **why** these imbalances exist



Explore **how** we can work towards change



Hello!

My name is Anna Morgan, and for the past two years I have been researching **gender equity in ballet's artistic leadership** as part of my MA at Rambert School.

Within ballet I am a teacher, creative, journalist and researcher.

I love ballet **and** I envisage a future where it is just as excellent while also being **inclusive, transparent and progressive**.

As teachers and leaders we hold huge influence over **individual journeys** and the **collective future** of our art form.

I hope you will find this resource both informative and empowering. When we work together, I truly believe we can build a **bright future for ballet**.

Anna x



A note on language...

Throughout this resource, I use the terms **women** and **men** to encompass both *cisgender* and *transgender* individuals who identify as such. Where distinctions are necessary for context, I have specified using the prefixes **cis** or **trans**. I have adopted this approach rather than using the terms *female-identifying* or *male-identifying*, (except when quoting others verbatim) as these modifiers can be perceived to undermine the legitimacy of trans people as women or men.

(Language, Please, no date; Seed&Spark, no date;
Seattle Riot, 2019; University of Oxford, no date).

HOW THIS RESEARCH WAS BUILT...

I gathered brand new UK data and combined it with existing research to reveal the current picture of gender equity in UK ballet...



I surveyed 207 dancers & former dancers...

...to find out about their experiences in ballet training.



I surveyed 102 ballet teachers...

...to find out the gender ratios of the 7555 students they collectively taught.



I reviewed existing research & statistics...

...to give context to my findings.



I analysed data from the UK's largest 5 ballet companies...

...to see gender ratios of artistic directors & choreographers



I held a focus group

...to delve deeper into lived experiences.

Here is what I discovered...



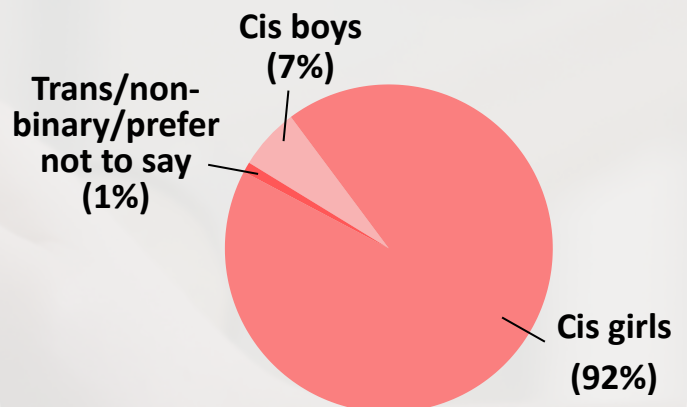
THE CURRENT UK PICTURE...

*In 2025, boys make up just **7%** of UK ballet students...*

Percentage of UK ballet students under 18 who are cis boys:

7%

% of UK ballet students under 18 by gender identity:



*Yet our largest five ballet companies are all **led by men**...*

(The Royal Ballet, English National Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Scottish Ballet, Northern Ballet)

Percentage of artistic directors who are men:

100%

% of artistic directors in UK's 5 largest ballet companies by gender identity:

**Men
(100%)**

(No openly trans, non-binary or other gender-diverse individuals were identified in this data)

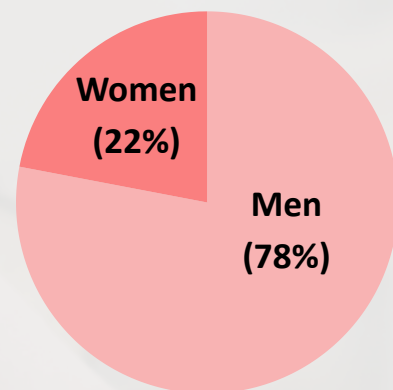
THE CURRENT UK PICTURE...

*If we look at the choreographers for the past four seasons in those same companies, the majority were **men**...*

**Percentage of
choreographers for
the past 4 seasons
who were men...**

78%

**% of choreographers whose
work featured in the past four
seasons, by gender identity:**

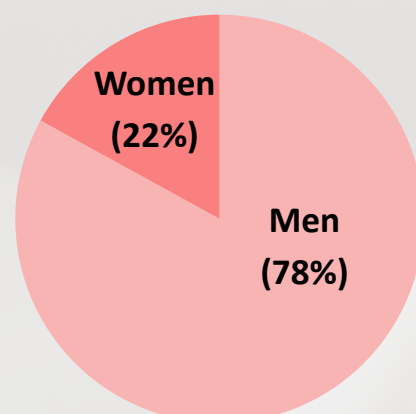


*But counting choreographers alone misses something... Men are credited more often **and** they're more likely to create full-length works. When we break productions down by act, the gap grows even wider:*

**Percentage of acts
choreographed by
men in the past 4
seasons...**

83%

**% of choreographers of each act
featured in the past four
seasons, by gender identity:**

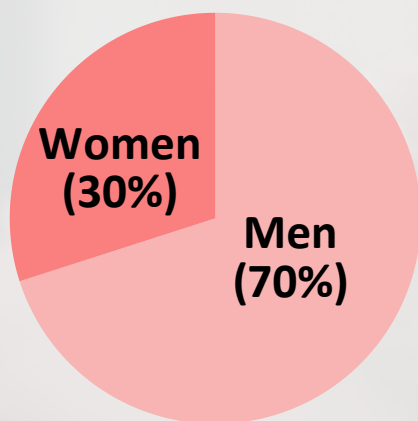


(No openly trans, non-binary or other gender-diverse individuals were identified in this data)

IS IT JUST THE UK?

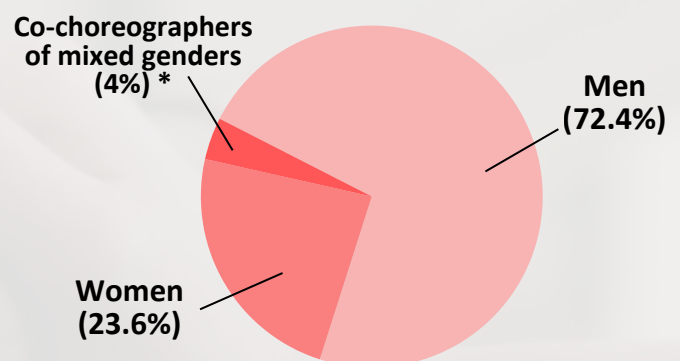
*No, statistics from the Dance Data Project show us this is a **global issue**...*

% of artistic directors globally by gender identity:



Dance Data Project - Global Leadership Report 2025

% of choreographers in English-speaking countries by gender identity:



* I.e. a collaboration between a man and woman

Dance Data Project - English Speaking Company 2023/2024 Season Programming Report

“Female audiences, donors, and students continue to support an art form that routinely marginalizes women in all respects.”

**Liza Yntema,
President and Founder of
the Dance Data Project**

(Yntema, quoted in Women's Media Center, 2019, para. 15).

(Image courtesy of the Dance Data Project)

But why?

We can see that ballet classes
are predominantly filled by
young girls.

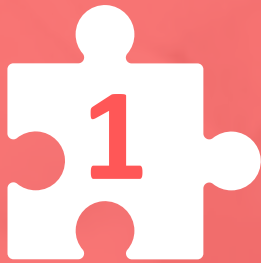
Audiences and donors, too,
are mostly **women.**

So why are most artistic
leaders **men?**

The vast majority of artistic vision and
creative output we see on UK ballet
stages is through the **male lens.**

**So what's causing this? The data I
gathered, and the research that's
already out there, reveal some clear
patterns. Let's take a look...**

THERE ARE 3 PIECES TO THIS PUZZLE...



**DISPROPORTIONATE
PRAISE, OPPORTUNITIES
& EXPECTATIONS**



BINARY GENDER NORMS



**THE NEED FOR
PEDAGOGICAL &
CURRICULAR REFORM**



1

**DISPROPORTIONATE
PRAISE,
OPPORTUNITIES &
EXPECTATIONS**



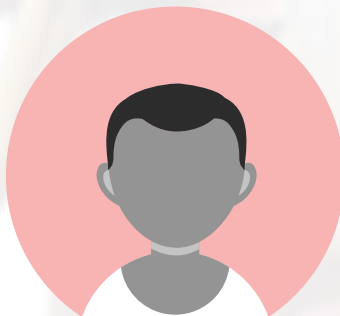
LET'S QUICKLY MEET MY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS...

...because we'll be hearing about their lived experiences in ballet training...

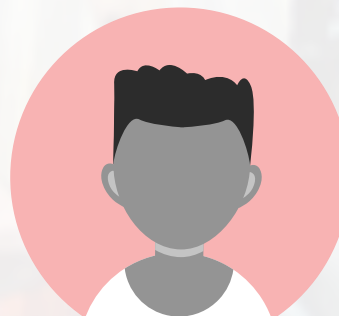
(These are pseudonyms alongside self-identified pronouns & gender identity)



Billie (he/they)
Gender
questioning



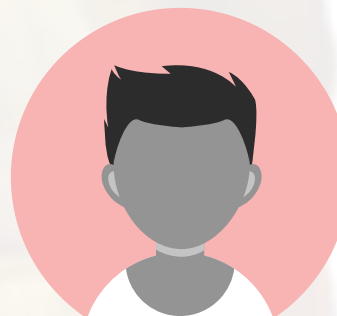
Craig
(he/him)
Cisgender man



Dylan
(he/him)
Cisgender man



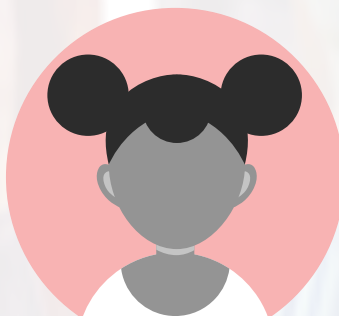
Jamie
(he/him)
Cisgender man



John
(he/him)
Cisgender man



Olivia
(they/them)
Non-binary



Rebecca
(she/her)
Cisgender woman



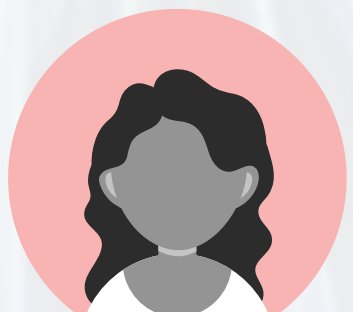
Ruby
(she/her)
Cisgender woman

PARTICIPANTS WERE...

- ▶ Aged 20 - 21 years
- ▶ All in full-time training with a curriculum which includes ballet



Tess
(she/her)
Cisgender woman

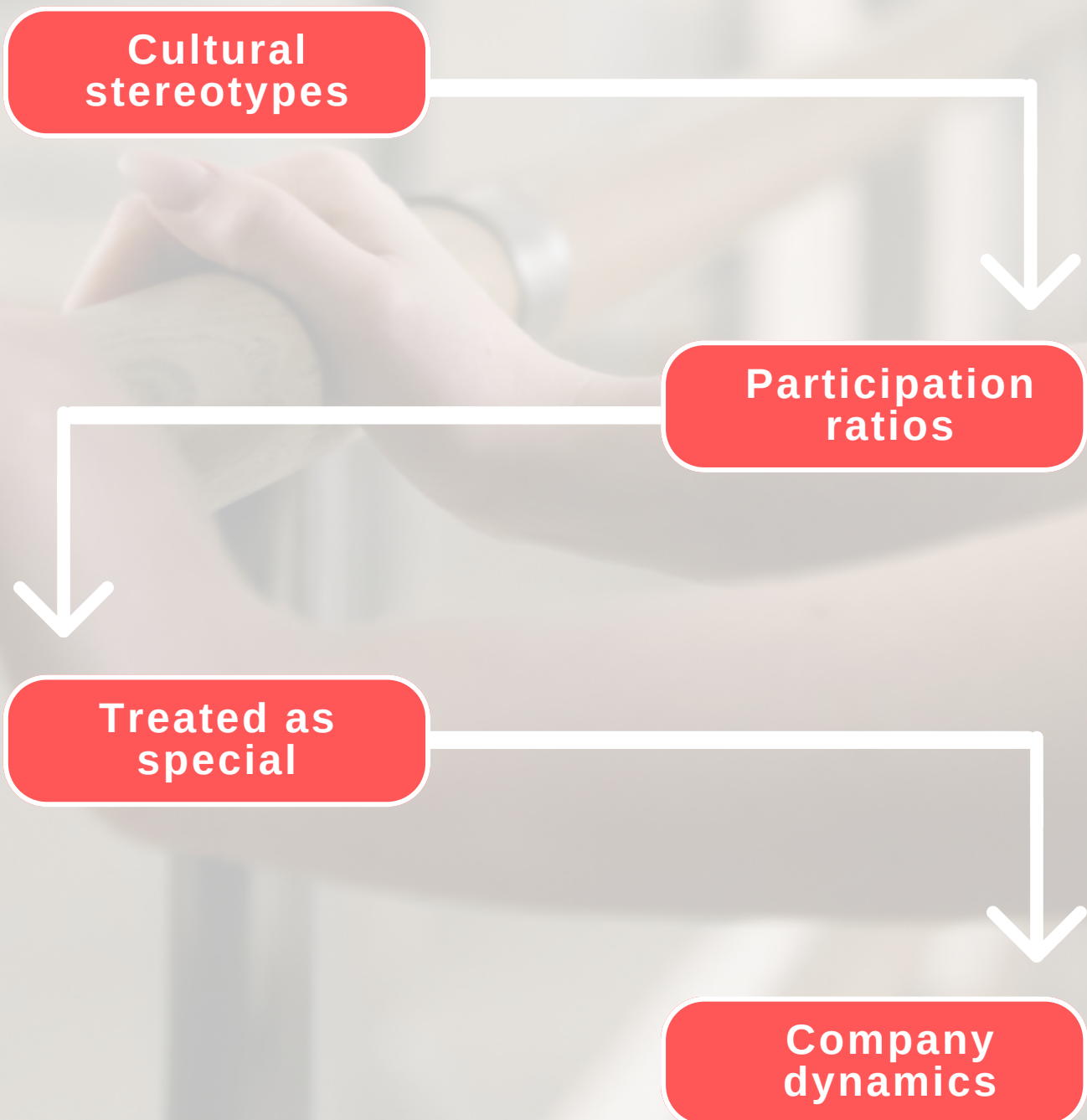


Seren
(she/her)
Trans feminine

THE DISPROPORTION PIPELINE...



We can trace *leadership outcomes* back through a clear *pipeline* which starts before a child steps foot in a ballet class...



CULTURAL STEREOTYPES...



I think every boy or man I've taught or known has faced negativity for doing ballet. Western society is both homophobic and misogynistic. In its eyes ballet = feminine and feminine = bad/weak.

“

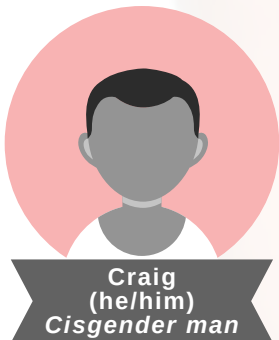
Dance is often considered a feminised activity which can lead to boys who engage in dance being bullied and having to manage the 'gay male dancer' stereotype.



”

(Clegg, Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2017, citing Polasek & Roper, 2011; Risner, 2014)

This was reflected by the men in the focus group...



“

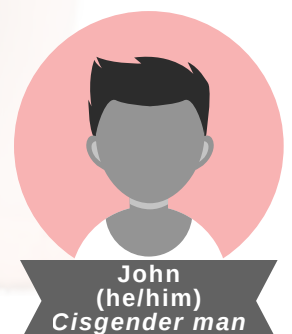
...in secondary school I was really, really badly bullied... like people pushing me around the corridors and stuff for doing ballet.

”

“

...because I danced I was therefore gay, and therefore that's not a good thing. It was very homophobic.

”

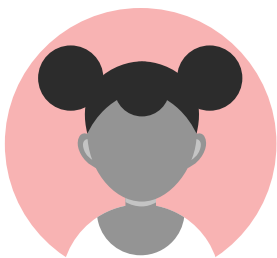


FROM RARE TO SPECIAL...



Ballet is seen as less culturally acceptable for boys, so very few take part. Often, minority groups are poorly treated, but in ballet, the boys' rarity makes them a precious commodity...

The women in the focus group sensed this dynamic...



Rebecca
(she/her)
Cisgender woman

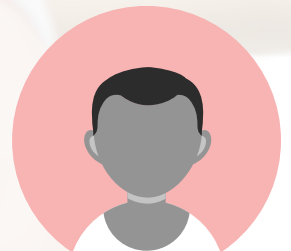
Particular teachers would praise the male-identifying students more often... I was doing just as well as, if not better than [them], and... we wouldn't get seen.

But the men, and participants assigned male at birth, were also aware and uncomfortable with this treatment...

“

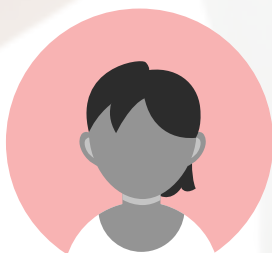
It's hard to be the only one getting praised...

I don't need the ego boost, I want the teachers to go 'fix this fix this fix this'... rather than going 'Craig you're great'



Craig
(he/him)
Cisgender man

”



Billie (he/they)
Gender questioning

I obviously wanted to be told I was doing well, but only for my actual technical ability... not just because I was the only boy.

”

DIFFERENT STANDARDS...



Outside the studio boys often face stigma or bullying for doing ballet. But inside, the dynamic flips: girls are held to stricter expectations while boys have more freedom...

“

You have to be perfect, not only in class but in attitude and decorum and you have to fit in and be quiet. And the boys in some cases are allowed to just get away with murder... allowed to be creative... allowed to try things... They can just do whatever as long as they keep showing up.



”

Ashley Boudier
(former NYCB Principal)

Angyal, C. (2017) Behind the tutus, ballet is a boys' club, this ballerina wants to fix that., HuffPost. Available at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/behind-the-tutus-ballet-is-a-boys-club-ashley-boudier-wants-to-fix-that_n_58c9302ee4b01c029d77a81f (Accessed: 11 March 2024).

The focus group participants agreed...



Rebecca
(she/her)
Cisgender woman

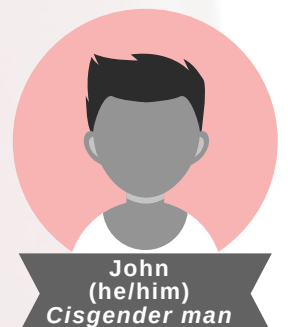
“

Overall, a female having a bit of personality & having the same fun as a male-identifying [student] would be classed as disrespectful... I've rarely seen someone be called disrespectful as a male-identifying person.

”

“

I'm able to get away with so much more than a female in my class... it would be 'ahh it's just John he's being cheeky'. I feel like I can get away with a lot of things just because I'm smiling at the teacher.



John
(he/him)
Cisgender man

”

COMPANY DYNAMICS...



These patterns continue in professional companies. Women are expected to conform, men are encouraged to be individual. Men aspire to create, women are considered muses...

“

The conformity of the corps comprises a system of institutional control that constrains the creative agency of female ballet dancers.



”

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal, 2, doi: 10.52214/curj.v2i1.4113.

In many companies, leadership works like a boys' club. The men in charge handpick their protégés to succeed them...

“

For these men, the path to choreographic success had a logic; it was clear, well-lit, and supported by those in charge (such as Peter Martins).

”

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal, 2, doi: 10.52214/curj.v2i1.4113.

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COMPANY DYNAMICS...



The same behaviours and character traits criticised in women are often celebrated in men...

“Men are in alignment with their agentic gender role when they act as leaders. However, when women use the same agentic strategies, they are often seen as not being feminine and not acting according to their gender roles.”

DeFrank-Cole, L. and Nicholson, R.K. (2016). 'The slow-changing face of leadership in ballet: An interdisciplinary approach to analysing women's roles', *Leadership and the Humanities*, 4(2), pp. 73-91.

“We are still training women to be pretty and nice instead of being exceptional and beautiful leaders.”

Helen Pickett, world-renowned ballet choreographer

Kelly, C. (2015). 'Dancing up the glass escalator: Institutional advantages for men in ballet choreography', *Columbia Undergraduate Research Journal*, 2, doi: 10.52214/curj.v2i1.4113.

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Photo Credit: Mihaela Bodlovic



Joining the dots...

From **childhood** right through to **company life**, **boys** are treated as **special** and encouraged to be **creative**, while **girls** are treated as **replaceable** and expected to be **obedient**.

If men have been consistently praised, supported, and promoted, is it any wonder they feel **more empowered** than women to aspire to **artistic leadership roles**?



1

Reflection moment...

*Can I recall any moments in my own teaching where I've unintentionally given more **praise, attention** or **freedom** to some students over others?*





BINARY GENDER NORMS

BINARY NORMS...



Ballet has clung tightly to rigid ideas of masculinity and femininity. These binary expectations limit dancers and determine who feels they belong, and who doesn't...

For trans, non-binary or other gender-diverse people, ballet can be a hard place to feel welcome...



“...it does war with my gender expression... it's really tricky to feel like a whole person in ballet.”

“...having to wear tight clothing, especially for me is very dysphoric.”



BINARY NORMS...



Bauer, C. (2024) 'Leroy Mokgatle lives her dream at Staatsballett Berlin', Dance Magazine, 01/12/2024. Available at: <https://www.dancemagazine.com/leroy-mokgatle/> [Accessed: 24/02/2025].

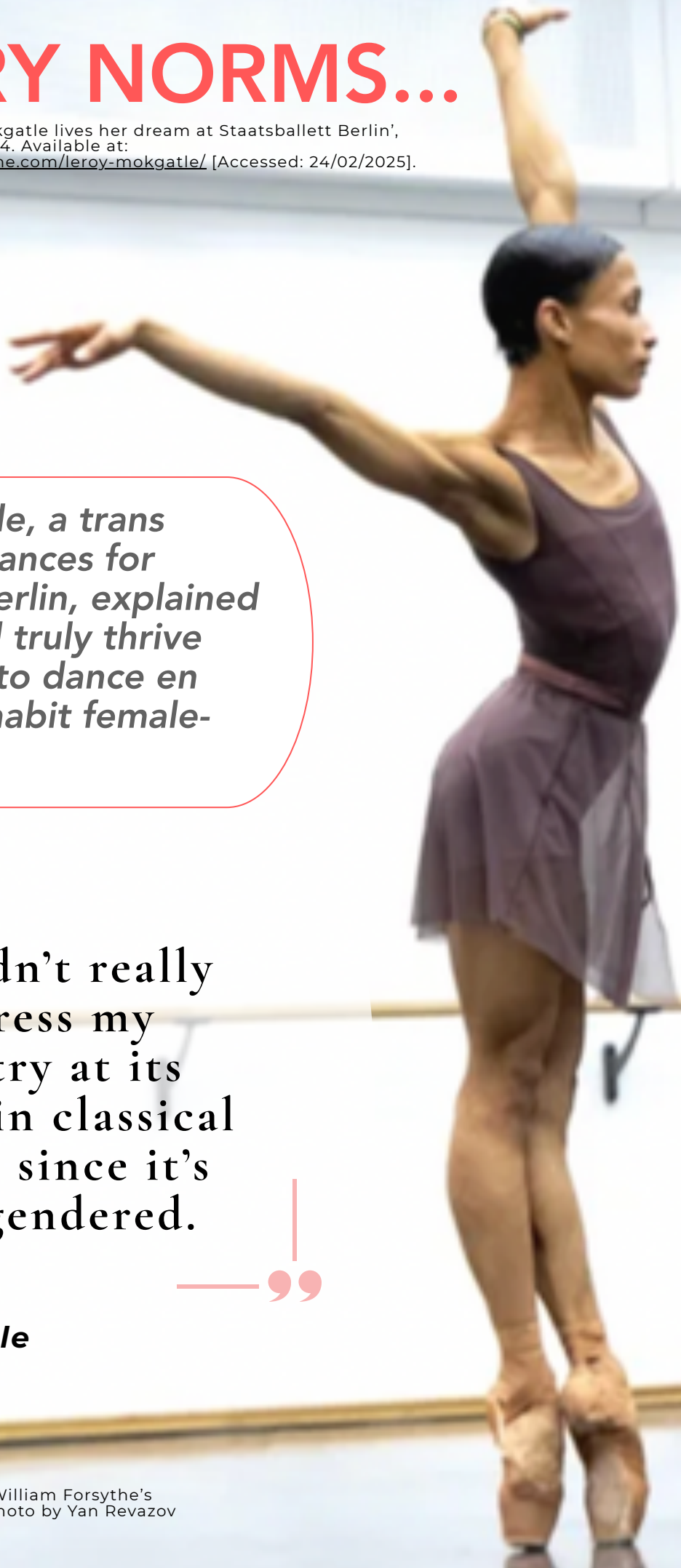
Leroy Mokgatle, a trans woman who dances for Staatsballett Berlin, explained how she could truly thrive once allowed to dance en pointe and inhabit female-coded roles...

“ I couldn't really express my artistry at its fullest in classical ballet, since it's very gendered. ”

Leroy Mokgatle

Leroy Mokgatle rehearsing William Forsythe's Approximate Sonata 2016. Photo by Yan Revazov

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LIMITS FOR CIS DANCERS...



It's not just trans, non-binary and other gender diverse dancers who are disadvantaged by the binary approach. Cis dancers are also limited...

Throughout the survey and focus group, dancers said they wanted opportunities to explore vocabulary and qualities not traditionally assigned to their gender identity...



I would love to just get the chance and get encouraged... to try maybe something a bit more masculine.

I do it to prove a point! In my pride, 'ok you can do four pirouettes, so can I!' Seeing [name] flicking his head around doing two tours, I can do that much neater, much tidier, much better than you.



Throughout the data, women commonly said they wanted to try traditionally masculine vocabulary. Men also reported wanting to try pointe work or explore qualities generally considered too feminine.

OK, BUT WHAT ABOUT PARTNERING?



This is one of the most common questions I'm asked when I talk about approaching gender in ballet...

Dancers across gender expressions felt pressures to conform to the binary physicality required in ballet partnering. Women discussed the pressure to be thin and light...



“...they're going to think I'm so fat if they lift me”

Men reported feeling pressure to be strong and muscular...

“There's so much pressure about like, sh*t, they've all got to be the same height, my arms were shaking, and I was like, what if they go out and laugh at me because I'm weak?”



*Partnering is not only about **men lifting women overhead**. Modern choreography increasingly uses **fluid partnering** and **weight sharing**. Understanding both roles makes all dancers better partners.*

AESTHETIC PRESSURES...



Ballet clings to rigid ideals of the '**perfect ballet body**'. Men tall and muscular. Women shorter and ultra-slim.

Women ballet dancers continue to be at disproportionately high risk of **eating disorders**.

This further disempowers women dancers from achieving leadership roles: being **chronically under-fuelled** undermines health, capacity to self-advocate, and ability to take up the physical and metaphorical space necessary to become a leader.

There is an **accepted career pipeline** whereby choreographers and artistic directors must first perform in professional ballet companies. Therefore, any dancers whose bodies or identities do not conform to the **binary ideal**, are excluded from professional ballet. **Without professional experience, leadership roles are unattainable.**



Joining the dots...

All dancers are restricted by ideas of who can explore which **techniques, vocabulary and qualities.**

Ballet's rigid gender ideals discourage and exclude **trans, non-binary** and other **gender-diverse** dancers at both training and professional level.

These **narrow ideals** exclude many **cis** dancers too. A tall, muscular, cisgender woman or a short, slight, cisgender man, regardless of their **choreographic talent or artistic vision**, are unlikely to reach leadership roles due to being **excluded** from professional ballet in the first place.



Reflection moment...

Can I think of ways where I might be **reinforcing binary ideals** of what it means to be masculine or feminine within my ballet classes?





3

THE NEED FOR PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULAR REFORM

PEDAGOGY PROBLEMS...



Lasting change at the top can't happen without us first reforming the way dancers are trained...



A Brazilian philosopher named Paulo Freire created the concept of...

'the banking model'

Ballet training has long-operated in line with this model.

*Freire explained teachers cannot simply **deposit knowledge** into a student as though they're a **passive vessel**, like depositing money in a bank. Instead, students must become **active participants** in their own learning.*

Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Young girls tend to start ballet classes many years earlier than boys, and are trained to be...

“ — good girls who do what they're told. — ”

Stinson, S.W. (2005). 'The hidden curriculum of gender in dance education', *Journal of Dance Education*, 5(2), pp.51-57.

When boys enter ballet, they are encouraged to be...

“ — challenging, energetic and daring. — ”

Clegg, H., Owton, H. and Allen-Collinson, J. (2017). 'Challenging conceptions of gender: UK dance teachers' perceptions of boys and girls in the ballet studio', *Research in Dance Education*, 19(2), pp.128-139.



Joining the dots...

Ballet's long-standing use of the banking model creates a learning culture of **obedience** and **hierarchy**.

This is bad for all dancers, as it stops them from being able to **critically engage**, **question**, be **creative**, and **lead**.

But it's girls who are often exposed to this style from an **early age**, training them to be **quiet**, **disciplined** and **compliant**.

This means the majority of dancers in the training pipeline are discouraged from the very qualities required to be a leader - **confidence**, **assertiveness**, **boldness**, **creativity**, perhaps even a **rebellious streak**.



3

Reflection moment...

How much of my current teaching reflects a model of **hierarchy** and **obedience**?
What could I do to encourage dancers to have more **voice**, **agency** and **creative freedom**?





A TEACHER'S TOOLKIT FOR CHANGE...

Recommendations for a
best practice approach to gender
for ballet teachers and schools...

**DRESS
CODES**



**GENDER
NON-SPECIFIC
TRAINING**



**FEMINIST
PEDAGOGY**



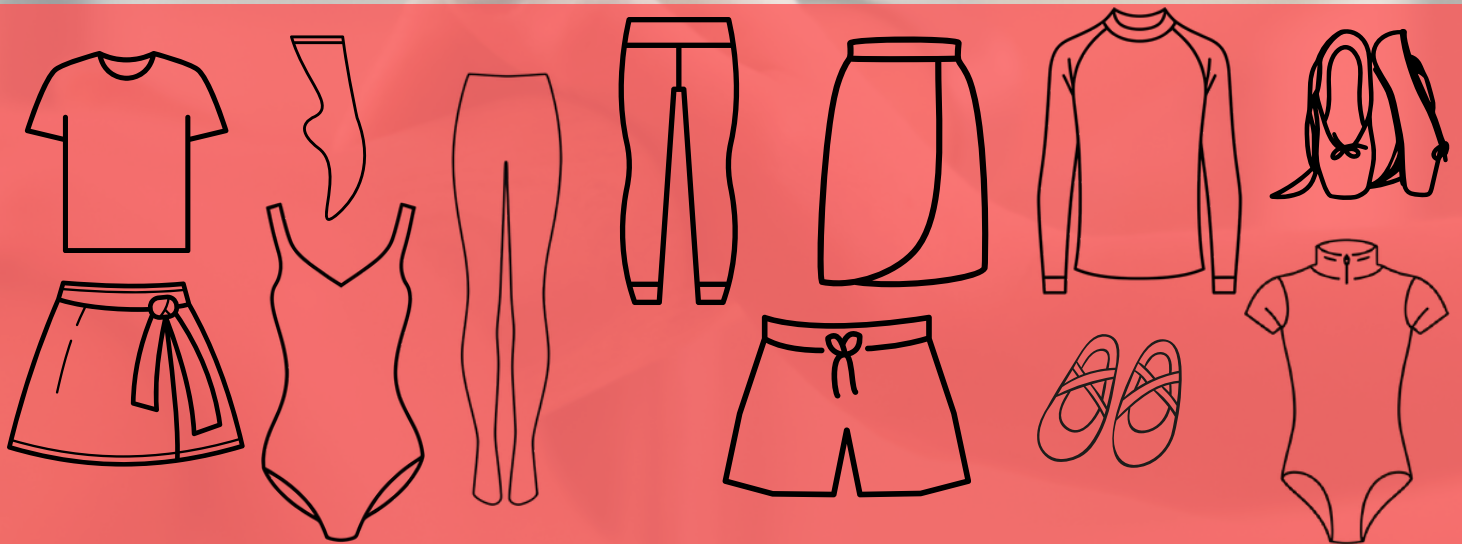
**LEADERSHIP
TRAINING**



DRESS CODES



*Traditional ballet dress codes present binary options of a **masculine or feminine uniform**. A modern approach is to offer a **capsule collection**: a small, versatile set of items that dancers can mix-and-match...*



THIS APPROACH...



Ensures dancers are dressed safely & appropriately for training.



Offers flexibility for body confidence, identity, and preference.



Encourages individuality and agency rather than conformity and obedience.

GENDER NON-SPECIFIC TRAINING



*Traditional ballet training often separates ‘**male**’ and ‘**female**’ technique, methods & qualities. Instead, a **skills-based training approach** expands each dancer’s training experience. Here’s how that could look...*

1

FOUNDATIONAL TRAINING

(Recreational level, or early stages of vocational)

All dancers explore...



Fundamental technique



Artistry



Co-ordination



Musicality

Gender does not need to affect training content.

2

SPECIALISM ROTATIONS...

(Vocational/pre-professional training)

Like medical students training as generalists before doing rotations & selecting specialisms, dancers try it all...



Pointe/pre-pointe



Basic partnering (in both roles)



Virtuosic turns/jumps



Repertoire



Choreography



GENDER NON-SPECIFIC TRAINING



3 PERSONALISED PATHWAYS... (Latter years of vocational/pre-professional training)

Dancers work with mentors to build a training path based on...

- ✓ Strengths
- ✓ Identity
- ✓ Interests
- ✓ Career goals

THE BENEFITS OF THIS APPROACH:



All students can explore the vocabulary, skills, qualities and expression which best suit their **physicality** and **identity**



Ballet companies benefit from employing a **diverse range of dancers** who are versatile technicians, nuanced artists, and represent a range of identities who are more **relatable to a modern audience**.



Dancers who choose to pursue careers in ballet **beyond performing**, e.g. teachers or future artistic leaders, will have a **broad overview of skills**.

FEMINIST PEDAGOGY



*Ballet has long relied on **hierarchical teaching** styles which train **passive rule followers**. A move towards a **feminist pedagogical approach** will empower a generation of dancers who can **think, question, & lead**...*

KEY PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST PEDAGOGY...



Re-thinking teacher/student dynamics...

No more all-knowing teacher and passive, silent & ultra-obedient student. Shift to a focus on shared power and a learner-centred approach.



Empowerment...

Uplifting all dancers, not just those who would traditionally 'fit' in ballet.



Building community...

Creating safe spaces for connection & collaboration.



Valuing individual voice...

Knowing each dancer's perspective is important.



Respect for diversity...

Celebrating differences & centring lived experience.



Challenging tradition...

Never justifying decisions with 'that's the way we've always done it'.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING



*In traditional ballet training models, leadership skills are rarely taught. **Embedding leadership opportunities** into curricula prepares dancers to aspire to, and succeed in, **roles beyond performance.***

INSIDE THE STUDIO...

*With a **feminist pedagogical approach** to ballet classes, leadership skill-building will become **embedded** into their training...*

*Students will **take charge** of their own learning, focus on **collaboration**, engage **critically** with material and concepts, offer their **opinions**, **lead** tasks, explore their **creativity**, and more.*

OUTSIDE THE STUDIO...

Whether you teach in a local dance studio or a full-time vocational school, leadership skills can be nurtured in big & small ways beyond the studio...

- > Mentorship opportunities (e.g. teachers, alumni, professionals)
- > Careers sessions
- > Attending guest talks/panels
- > Exposure to leaders from a diverse range of backgrounds
- > Work experience opportunities (e.g. choreography, fundraising, event planning)



Reflection moment...

*Based on what I've read today, can I think of **three changes**, big or small, that I might put into practice moving forwards?*





Thank you!

for taking the time to
read and reflect.

**This resource is just a small snippet of my
research, there's so much more I wish I
could share with you!**

**If you want to join me in geeking out on
this topic even more...**



(A full
bibliography
can be
found here)

Head to my research website

Or get in touch via socials!

