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**DANCE MOVIES: TWO DECADES OF
STEREOTYPIC FILMIC GAZE**

**A MASTER THESIS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
FOR COMPLETION OF NORDIC MASTERS IN
DANCE (NOMADS)**

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ABSTRACT

Dance has a conscious or unconscious appeal to its audience. It is hardly indulged for its own sake but it is always consciously cultivated to serve social, religious and aesthetic functions... (Enem, 1975:68)

This thesis examines and attempts a critique of the film genre of dance movies otherwise known as dance films or screen dance as well as the stereotypes in the storyline of most dance movies within the scope of this study. The study tries to identify the problems and suggest possible solutions. The scope of the research centres on the repetitive dramatic plots, which is also referred to as the 'stereotypical gaze', prevalent in the storylines of the dance movies selected as case study. The study brings into focus recurrent themes such as dance battles, competitions, triumph of the underdog, merging of dance styles, unique characterizations, class differences, male gaze and stereotypic costuming, all of which constitute the stereotypic gaze in dance films. Identifying the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance movies, investigating the impact of the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance films and suggesting the benefits of creating new and creative storylines in future dance movies are the main objectives of this study. The case study utilised in this research comprises dance films produced between 2000 and 2020. Through a mixed methods approach that adopted quantitative and qualitative research techniques with a modified and adaptable use of thematic analysis.

The stereotypical plots as well as the high point have contributed to the steady rise and subsequent decline of the dance film genre over the 20-year period. According to the research, the stereotypic gaze is a prevalent element in dance films and its major effects are reinforcement of biases and harmful norms. The recommendation will be the development of creative plotlines in future dance films which should signify a positive transition of the genre from a dependence on sensationalism and exaggerated drama to utilising the art of dance in storytelling in more creative ways. Lastly, it is important to state that the researcher's position for this Master's Thesis is wanting to make a

difference and explore ways of change in the film industry. The researcher has an agenda to identify the stereotypical plots of the dance films, however, different attitudes towards the research focus are also explored in the thesis as well as a recommendation and suggestion for future use.

Chapter One

Research Introduction

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the research topic and establish the context of the research focus. This research is situated within the ambit of the dance film industry and seeks to examine the prevalence and impact of stereotyping and stereotypical gaze in dance films. The research aim, objectives and questions are highlighted in this chapter as indicators of the stages of the research process. A brief overview of the study's methodology is provided and the chapter ends with a brief outline of the thesis's structure.

Background of Study

Since the early days of motion pictures, dance movies have been a popular genre in the movie industry and have served as a means to introduce the African-American community to Hollywood (Shresthova, 2011). Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, the film industry was the main means of acquainting mainstream audiences around the world with hip-hop dances (Aldridge and Stewart, 2005; Flores, 2012). Defrantz (2006) called it the “breaksploitation” era, where every producer who wanted to ride the pop-culture wave incorporated break dancing into their movies. Although the wave started in the late 20th century with classics like *Flashdance* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984), dance movies peaked in the early 21st century (Benvenga, 2022). Boyd (2004) highlights the influence of the current societal climate on dance movies produced in each era. She explains that it helps viewers develop a bird's eye view of their societal issues since movies are supposed

to reflect society. In her analysis of the 2000 film “*Save the Last Dance*”, Boyd drew a nexus between dance styles and pop culture teen-dance movies of the early 21st century. Her summary reiterates the big problem of cyclical and unimaginative plots that often plagued these dance movies.

According to Boyd (2004), the series of events that consist the plot of dance movies is typically anonymity between the antagonist and protagonist or a depiction of the protagonist’s struggles against societal challenges. The rising action and climax of the plots usually consist of the protagonist challenging the antagonist and the status quo for the better part of the film until the conflicts are resolved when the protagonists overcome every challenge they encounter until they finally triumph. While the chain of events often leads to a happy ending and consequently satiation for the viewers, the film subtly reaffirms certain stereotypes. Similarly, Woo (2015) noted the stereotype of dance movies’ characters as the protagonists (typically a teenager leaving their comfort zone to thrive in an unknown world). Woo (2015) also identifies the metaphoric use and interpretations of dance styles to depict social class and realities, with contemporary dances like ballet representing the upper class and hip-hop, the lower class. The final dance in most dance movies plots merges these contrasting styles as seen in *Save the Last Dance*, *Step Up 1* and *2*, *Street Dance 3D*, *High Strung*, and *Centre Stage* for an explosive performance. The audience is happy, and it sends a message of harmony and possible coexistence between all classes.

While the plot sequence described above is a safe choice for production companies to retell stories that have a proven track record of positive audience response, this plot sequence would be considered uninventive in today’s eclectic and rapidly evolving film market. Scholars suggest that the rapid dwindle in dance movies as a genre in terms of demand, popularity and box office performance can be traced to the prevalence of stereotypicality in plot and their subsequent de-romanticization (Kumar et al. 2022).

Statement of Problem

A number of scholars are of the opinion that dance should be consciously cultivated to serve social, religious and aesthetic functions and asides entertainment, dance is both a reflection of culture and an instrument for improving the negative parts of social religious and cultural reality (Fink et al. 2021). However, the majority of the dance movies produced between 2000 - 2020 have focused

on the latter, (aesthetic) functions than the cultural, social, religious therapeutic, other relevant and intangible functions of dance. While there have been studies on individual dance movies like the *Step Up* franchise and particularly *Step Up 2: The Streets*, there is a dearth of studies on the replication of storylines across the dance film genre.

Dance Movies were popular categories of film in the early 2000s after its introduction at the tail end of the 20th Century. With the proven success of the pilot film, *Center Stage*, producers attempted to replicate the commercial success in other dance movies. Unfortunately, with over fifty films produced in that period, each one is similar to the last because of the heavy reliance on the stereotypic film gaze, which as Torres (2016) puts it, leaves the audience with a sense of having watched the same sequence consecutively. While a few studies have highlighted the problem with screen dance and the stereotypic filming gaze, there are no materials investigating it in depth, thus failing to give producers and directors a reason to deviate from the norm. This body of work aims to bridge that gap and suggest new angles for filmmakers to explore in subsequent dance movie productions. The findings of this research could be immensely useful in reviving a film genre that has since declined for lack of diversity in storyline. This work will juxtapose a few selected dance films between 2000 and 2020 and the analysis of this study would start with the high point and steady rise of the genre over the 20-year period.

Research Aims

This thesis aims to highlight the nexus amongst all the selected films and examine the use and impact of the stereotypical film gaze in these films. Going by this, the aims of the study are as follow:

- To identify the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance movies
- To investigate the impact of the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance films
- To indicate the benefits of creating new and creative storylines in future dance movies

Research Questions

With the above research aims in mind, the following research questions will be investigated during the course of the study:

1. What constitutes a Stereotype in Dance Movies?
2. What is the Stereotypic Gaze in Dance Movies?
3. What impact does the Stereotypic Gaze have on filmmaking and the dance movie industry?
4. What can filmmakers do differently in subsequent dance film productions?

Limitations of Study

This research is a thematic, qualitative and quantitative analysis of dance in movies otherwise known as dance movies or dance films and the repetitive stereotypical dramatic plots that focus on dance battles, competition, triumph of the underdog, and territorialism. However, it is important to note that this research will not cover filmmaking as a whole, instead it will highlight some aspects that are useful to dance films.

Although, many studies and online source sites categorise musicals as dance movies especially when rating the movies according to popularity and prominence, this thesis does not encapsulate it in the genre. Technically, there are only similarities between the two types, however, the singing element and stage performance in the former separates it essentially from the latter. The exclusive timeframe limit of 20years between 2000 – 2020 also narrows the scope of this research despite dance films being a product of the 1930s.

Overview of Methodology

The method of research utilised in this study is the mixed methods approach. This method comprises a combination of the thematic analysis, qualitative and quantitative research approaches

in facilitating the research process and discovery (Dawadi et al. 2021). Qualitative analysis will be conducted through thematic and content analysis of the selected dance movies. The quantitative analysis of this study will consist of numerical and soft data analysis. Quantitative analysis is employed to examine and establish a recurring pattern between the commercial performance and the stereotypic gaze ratio in the selected dance films. The sampling method used is the non-probability sampling method as data was derived from books, journals, scholarly articles and reputable websites. It is important to note that the qualitative approach is predominant in this study. Hence, the qualitative analysis influences the quantitative results.

Dissertation Structure

This thesis has a five-chapter structure with each chapter constituting a phase of the research process. The first chapter provides an introduction into the focus scope and background of the research topic. The second chapter presents an extensive review of relevant extant literature on the stereotypical gaze in dance films as well as other theories, findings and debates related to the research topic. The third chapter is a comprehensive layout of the methodological choices of this study. Chapter four presents important details about the selected films as well as a comprehensive presentation of both the qualitative and quantitative results of the research. The fifth chapter concludes the thesis and contains the key recommendations inspired by the findings of this research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of fundamental concepts and theories surrounding the research problem. The review includes an examination of the typical plotlines of dance movies and various cinematic techniques used in presenting them and critiques their mirroring of society through fixed ideas. Subsequently, the chapter closes with a summary of key findings from the review.

What is a Stereotype?

The term stereotype is derived from two Greek words meaning “solid” and “impression” and was first used as printing terminology. It was first used in socio-cultural and psychological studies by Walter Lippmann, who studied the subject of stereotypes extensively, in 1922 (Vilinbakhova, 2013). A review of extant literature on the scholarly definitions of stereotypes revealed that the term generally refers to a mental attitude that conforms to a fixed pattern based on a general mental image believed by a group (Hentschel Heilman and Peus, 2019). It also typically denotes an oversimplification of an opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment as well as a general image or characteristics attached to particular types of persons or things. It is a set of inaccurate and simplistic generalisations about certain persons which allow others to treat or categorise them accordingly (Connor et al. 2020; Caprapriello et al. 2009; Tajfel 2010). Stereotypes can be applied to race, politics, demographic groups, genders and activities, with varying degrees of accuracy (Bordalo, et al, 2015). Also, stereotypes may be positive or negative. Pertaining to social groups, Durante and Fiske (2017), view stereotypes as a false and derogatory generalisation of traits of groups of people, usually influenced by the stereotyper’s own bias.

What is a Gaze in a Movie?

A gaze simply means an intent look in its natural sense, but its meaning, as used in cinema, is more complex. Laura Mulvey first drew attention to it when discussing the “Male Gaze” as part of a feminist theory in her book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative* (Mulvey, 1975). According to her, male domination in the film industry translates to representations of women being constructed from a masculine point of view. Camera movement and direction in a movie focus on translating these representations to appeal to specified senses in the viewer (Cores Sarria, 2015). Thus, films inadvertently appeal to a “male gaze”. The audience’s interaction with the movie makes them more interested in specific characters than others. Gaze-guided viewing of a movie controls the narrative and response of the audience (Vesterby et al., 2005). Mulvey (1975) explains that the effect of the gaze extends beyond the audience’s interpretation into the commercial realm and social interaction as a whole. The gaze ascribes meaning to a piece of art, whether by the creator or the viewer (Reinhardt, 2012). Lacan (2020) also posits that the filmic gaze allows identification and self-determination of the viewer. The viewer is able to understand the themes in the movie and identify with the characters and stories.

As profound as the filmic gaze is, scholars like Fried (1998) consider it unnecessary because it waters down the creativity and organic interaction of the viewer. He argues that controlling the narrative in that manner imposes an idea on the audience rather than allowing them to form individual opinions (Reinhardt, 2012). Mulvey (1975) recognises movies’ ability to reflect society and promote idealism as cinema creates a blend between reality and fantasy where the gaze comes into play (Sassatelli and Mulvey, 2011). Additionally, the camera controls the viewer’s perspective for the pleasure of the man and, in this case, propagates an existent stereotype. Her theory relies heavily on directing techniques from the introduction of the characters to the final cut (Mulvey, 1989).

The Stereotypical Gaze in Dance Films

According to Weinlich and Pädagogische (2020), stereotypes play significant roles in societal and cultural communications, especially where identity and identification are involved. When used in films, they serve as an effective tool for identifying traits of certain groups of people and attaching certain values, which are meant to be reflective of real-life perceptions of these groups of people,

to them (Eriss and Khosh Salighe, 2023). However, stereotypes in films can be restrictive in their portrayal of real-life characteristics.

In this same light, Schloss (2009) argues that there is a disconnect between movies which are meant to be representations of reality and real life itself. He argues that addressing the problem of misappropriation of semantics could solve the problem of stereotypes in storytelling to a large extent. According to him, while dance is only a fraction of hip-hop, hip-hop is not an isolated concept like dance and music but a culmination of these things. Hence, despite the stereotypic depiction of the genre in films, at the heart of hip-hop culture lies a discipline akin to martial arts and contact sports. Schloss (2009) warns that in accepting hip-hop as a culture (through cinematic representations), directors must be wary of making it the entire focus. His warning stems from the stereotype of associating the genre with African-American people, which is false despite their affiliation and vast contribution to the industry. The 2020 Netflix film *Into the Beat*, set in Germany with German actors, proves Schloss' submission that hip-hop transcends the African-American culture. However, it also reiterates that stereotypes can transcend boundaries despite cultural differences.

Meanwhile, some scholars suggest that academic studies seem to contribute the most to the stereotypical gaze in dance movies because of their propensity to compartmentalise and separate concepts into good and evil (Hew et al. 2021; Petchauer 2009). There is either an understatement or an overestimation of the impact of hip-hop (Schloss, 2009). However, a quick analysis of *Step Up Revolution* (Step Up 4), a 2012 film will reveal grey interpretations of some concepts in hip-hop: the film leaned heavily into Graffiti art as one of the calling cards of the protagonist's crew, 'The Mob'. The artists learn to use their bodies to paint to understand the body fluidity and movement before putting colour on walls or any other medium. Schloss (2009) concluded his research by asserting that no one can genuinely understand hip-hop without a personal relationship with the genre and that is what many of the films ironically preach. In essence, his discourse seeks to point out the limitations of filmic renditions stemming from their stereotypical portrayal of storylines and character traits.

Appropriate Term for the Research Focus

Terminologies such as Screen Dance, Dance Films, Dance Movies, Cine-Dance and so on, are often used interchangeably to mean some form of cinematic presentation involving dance performances. Rosenberg (2016) found it necessary to distinguish the genre from similar concepts such as Cine-Dance and Dance Film. Justifying this position, Rosenberg (2016) noted that these other concepts are not entirely wrong but merely divisions of Screendance and also argues that screendance is preferred because the word "screen" can be used loosely. That is, the performance can be rendered and projected using any means including television, computer screen or even a wall screen (Rosenberg, 2016).

On the other hand, dance film combines film technique and choreography which creates a layer of relevance beyond the staged performance in a film while cine-dance involves the contemplation of human movement simultaneously with recording, editing and montage which results in an authentic cinematic dance (Lund, 2010). These, according to Rosenberg (2016) should not be critiqued on the same pedestal as screendance. Moreso, where many screendance main characters are actors who know how to dance rather than dancers who know how to act. He summarises his argument by stating that screendance is more about the audience than the art form, which is not wrong considering it is made for a dramatic plot, and dancing is merely a vehicle to drive home its underlying themes. Rosenberg ended his critique by saying the dearth of academic discourse on the genre does not help. The extant literature is outdated in light of recent developments, making it inadequate (Rosenberg, 2016). The researcher would refer to dance movies or films for the purpose of this research.

Conceptual Framework

The literature on dance films focuses on five focal points: Directing Technique, Transcending Location, Merging Genres and Dance Styles, The Encounter, Community and Resistance and the Relationship between Corporeal Movement and Narration. Each of these techniques will be discussed below.

Directing Technique

In preparing this research paper, one of the phenomena discovered is that cinematographers with no experience in dance, when called on to film dance, often make the same stereotypical choices in different projects (Siebens, 2002). For Dodds (2001), directing is a major challenge in making dance on screen. This is because there is a limit to what the camera can capture, ultimately influencing the dance positions. And condensing full-scale acts such as ballets into a short, less than three-minute sequence remains a problem. Stage dance typically has a limited setting, so there are only so many movements a dancer can implement in one act. On the other hand, dancing for a screen provides the luxury of merging scenes from different angles so that the only limit is as far as the director is willing to go.

Furthermore, with the integration of advanced technology into film and its accessibility on streaming platforms, directors have to decide which is more critical – the quality of film celluloid or videotapes. In other words, is the film made for the big screen or the small screen? Films made for the big screen, that is, cinema, are typically more elaborate than those made for streaming services, which is the focus of this thesis. Additionally, there is also the complexity of how many takes are required to make the perfect shot. While there are one-take actors who make direction easy, the particular skill is not common. Therein lies the problem for dance movies. With choreographies so complex that it is difficult trying to fit them into a short scene, dealing with the inevitable multiple takes waters down the craft. This becomes more complicated when the scene involves a group of dancers rather than a singular character because one person's mistake cancels out the perfection of others.

Monaco (2000) posits that the codes of conduct of an art form are inextricably linked to technical features of the medium. Yet, most of the dance films from the early 2000s fail to uphold this tenet. The tendency to forego technicality for a maximum of three hours of stereotypical romance is rampant. The justification for this is usually to appeal to the emotions of the audience. Dodds highlights the concept of “The Close Up”, where the camera focuses on a character to capture their innermost thoughts on film. Another aspect of the directing technique which Dodds (2021) emphasises as part of screen dance is exploring time and space. Directors employ a technique influenced by the legendary Deren Maya – Real-Time versus Slow Motion (Deren, 1960). It is a part of "the close up" movements slowed down despite the world moving at regular speed. This

technique targets the audience's emotions because, at that moment, cinematic tropes come into play. Sequences like this allow for stereotypical gazes, from the main character's introduction to the supporting cast. Later on in the research, we address the effects of "The Close Up" in detail by juxtaposing selected films of the early 21st century.

Transcending Location

Roberts (2010) highlights a significant difference between film time and theatre time. He explains that dance movements in screen or film dance differ from live theatrical performances, especially in the seamless blending of scenes. These time jumps allow for cinematic aesthetics but can also leave room for plot holes and questionable character arcs. Brannigan (2011) also points out the possibility of flawed transition of main characters going through normal scenes into dance scenes. For instance, it is typical to see a character move from doing something regular to dancing in Bollywood films which thrive on dance breaks in flash mobs.

Merging Genres and Dancing Styles

Marrying different dance genres into one film is a common trope for presenting stereotypes in dance movies. The recurrent theme these films seek to present is "Harmony", and in the early 2000s, this was done by merging vernacular styles with acceptable dancing methods. Thus, it is not surprising that one in every five films has a storyline about someone from the lower class (using the vernacular style) finding themselves, through dance, attempting to fit into a higher class (contemporary style). Eventually, they fail at it and combine both dances into one grand performance for the climactic ending. In movies with the Battle Dance themes such as the *Bring it On* franchise, dance is a symbol of different things, from social class to race, feelings, and success. This art form raises another stereotypic gaze in dance movies - symbolism. Directors attach certain styles to negativity or radicalness and spend the film's duration refining the dance. Boyd (2004) in her analysis of the 2001 dance movie, *Save the Last Dance*, pegs race, class, gender and dance style as the defining factors of the stereotypes portrayed in the film. She reinforces the argument that stereotypes can either reinforce misconceptions or debunk them. Boyd lays the foundation for her analysis by first deconstructing the cinematic tools at play to help the reader

understand the themes used in the film. In films with battle dance themes, the movie ends in a competition where the characters follow the rules until the climax and nothing is off the table.

The Encounter, Community, and Resistance

Hip-hop in America originated from the South Bronx area considered the “ghetto” amongst the minorities living there in the late 1960s through to the early 1970s. The unique style of dancing, deejaying, and graffiti art caught the attention of curious producers who sought to replicate the famous block parties on screen (Setyawati, 2016). These block, or sometimes, club parties feature in most dance movies as the meeting point for the Hip-hop crew where the main character undergoes a major life transformation. These scenes become the meeting point for the community for every encounter and planning their resistance. Setyawati (2016) noted that the parties started as a means to redirect the African American and Latino residents living in the Bronx’s energy from the unfortunate gang violence that plagued the area to positive creativity through artistic expression. However, the author failed to realise that hip-hop is not restricted to the Bronx or African Americans. Rajakumar (2012) called hip-hop an element of youth culture and included other Afro-Caribbean and Puerto Rican immigrants in his mix. They strove for respect and originality, which is why breakdancing is mostly about improvisation and creating signature dances (Rajakumar, 2012).

Hip-hop music gained mainstream popularity in the 1990s and subsequently was transmitted to the big screens with movies such as *Hello, Center Stage* (2000), *Bring It On* (2000) and *Save the Last Dance* (2001), among others. It is important to note that these pioneer films were renewed for sequels six to seven years after release – undoubtedly a result of the copycats between those years – with the exception of *Bring It On* which got five more installments. The success of those films led to a slew of replications over the next 20 years. From *Bring It On 2 – 6* (2004 - 2017), *Take the Lead* (2006), *Save the Last Dance 2* (2006), *Center Stage 2* (2008), *Honey 1 – 4* (2003, 2011, 2016, 2018), to *You Got Served 1 & 2* (2004, 2011), *Step Up 1 - 5* (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014), *Stomp the Yard 1 – 2* (2007 - 2010), *StreetDance 1 & 2* (2010, 2012), *High Strung 1 & 2* (2016, 2018), *Into the Beat* (2020), and more.

However, while it can be interesting to see a proven sequence with different characters and scenery more than once, there is only so much of a *deja vu* the audience can endure. Recurring stereotypes and tropes bore audiences quickly. Dodds (2001) blames the political influences of filming companies behind the scenes for this problem. When a formula is proven successful, filmmakers tend to take advantage of this until viewers' ratings decline. For Schweinitz (2011), capitalism is a major driver of stereotypical representations in screendance. The business arm of the film industry focuses on an audience-coordinated product hence the repetitive plot lines and story arcs. As far as Battle Dance on Film is concerned, only Battle of the Year deviated slightly from the overall trope of the "Triumph of the Underdog." Schweinitz (2011) states that there is a subconsciousness in the audience awakened by underlying stereotypes. Essentially, the need for assured returns leads to incessant remakes, poorly-made second parts and franchises of masterpieces (case in point *Step Up*, *Stomp the Yard*, and *Bring It On*), and the retelling of real-life stories with embellishments. What do those three movies have in common? The three elements of Encounter, Community and Resistance. Battle Dance is often about two opposing groups fighting for the top spot at the movie's end. The audience meets the main character (MC) in **The Encounter**, usually, the underdog, giving them a reason to support that person. Then, they meet **The Community**, the group working with the MC. The Community and MC merge in the encounter as they face their opposition for the first time. That opening sequence gives the audience background information by highlighting the "Good Guys" versus the "Bad Guys". The entire Film then navigates through the journey of the MC and their community on their way to overcome the bad guys, **The Resistance**. Conclusively, Dodds (2001) states that financial gain should not take precedence over craft and overall aesthetics.

Relationship Between Corporeal Movement and Narration

Dodds' (2001) concept of "the close-up" comes into play once again when analysing the corporeal movement and narration relationship. A character's step is merely a tiny drop in the ocean in the large scheme of things. On this note, there are widely divergent views from critics, with scholars like Sontag (1964) maintaining that no matter how well dance is condensed into film, it detracts from the authenticity of the film while other scholars such as Michael Bay are willing to accept dance in films changing dynamics (Lyman, 2001). Deren's (1960) work emphasises that TV and film direction allows for many movements that original choreography would not

accommodate. Bollywood dance films are a prime example of the use of cinematic theatrics that defy the laws of nature, where a lacking dance group somehow pulls a cohesive and often incredible stunt that knocks the more skilled team out of the competition. Roberts (2012) made a tacit point when he asked if actors should make the movements or the editor. At what point does cinematic creativity become too much of a farce for the audience?

Mitoma (2003) points out Elizabeth Zimmer's changing views from siding with critics like Sontag (1964) to becoming more accommodative of screendance. Lyman (2001) insists that filmmakers deal with an immediacy that makes them use bodily movements to the fullest. He believes what critics like Sontag (1964) consider watering down is merely creativity and encourages everyone to embrace it more often. For instance, the invention of the DVD changed the way movies are watched forever. Now, the audience can control the characters with commands such as rewind, fast forward, loops, and speeds.

In looking past the stereotype, one can appreciate screen dance for what it is – documentation of dancing styles, (Mitoma, 2003). Going by that submission, the question is, “Does Screen Dance really threaten the art form's value, or is it just hysteria from a dying breed of geniuses?” Why did it take Hip-Hop a long time to break into the mainstream media despite the abundance of ‘breaksploitation’ films in the 1980s? Directors did not market Hip-Hop as a commodity worth buying (Schloss, 2009). Rosenberg acknowledges the somewhat necessity of Screendance as a genre and qualifies it as “less a performance,” and more “a deconstructed photo session,” with the corporeal body working in tandem with the camera to produce the perfect esthetic (Rosenberg, 2012). He sees it as a compression of an elaborate art to fit into a small screen with additional elements throughout its production process altering its original form. The corporeal body in Screendance can afford to make mistakes because the post-production editors can correct them, unlike live performances.

Boyd's (2004) take on the Corporeal movement is quite different as she explores a feminist approach by criticising the male gaze. She argued that Western culture demonizes the human body by attributing it exclusively to the woman and belittling it while exalting the mind as belonging to men (Boyd, 2004). By making that dichotomy, directors tend to use the female's body movements

as sexual tools to please the male gaze whereas it can be more. That's why dance movies typically consider breakdancing especially by women, crass while dance styles like Ballet are "refined."

There is a need for a fresh perspective and representation in screen dance to revive the genre since it died down in the mid-2010s. Rosenberg agreed with this submission in his book, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Rosenberg, 2012). He wrote that the genre needs to establish a solid foundation and employ critiques of its dramatic plots to solidify its position as a unique genre of movie. Rosenberg's argument starts with the misuse of semantics like Schloss although he focused on naming the genre rather than its inspiration. He however agreed with Amy Greenfield's argument in her journal article, *Dance as Film*, that Dance and Film (Movie) can indeed form a great union since they both contain similar elements of Time and Space (Haller, 2007). Rosenberg emphasised that without granting Screen Dance the same latitude as its counterparts in the film industry, it will remain a marginalised genre and his projection came to pass with the decline in dance movies between 2012 when he published his book and 2022, at the time of this thesis. It is evident in the ratings online as stereotypical Dance Movies earn low ratings (40 per cent or less) despite being fan favourites while unique storylines earned 70 per cent to 100 (Rotten Tomatoes, 2021).

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive review of contemporary literature concerning .. and other relevant subtopics of the stereotypical gaze in dance films. Going by this, this chapter describes the chosen methods that have been utilised during the course of the research process as well as appropriate justifications for their selection. To reiterate, this study seeks to examine the prevalence and impact of stereotypical gaze in certain selected dance films. In elucidating the structure of the research methodology, Saunders et al's research onion framework (2019) has been employed. This framework was chosen to guide this chapter because of its suitability in documenting the methodological choices made by the researcher.

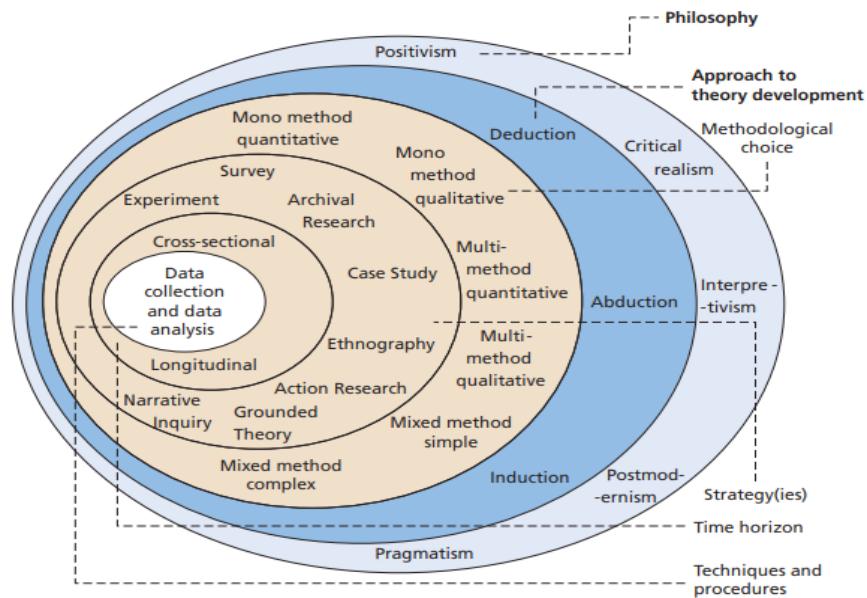


Figure 1: The Research Onion Framework. Source: Saunders et al. (2019)

Research Philosophy

The term research philosophy denotes the totality of the beliefs, assumptions and worldviews that guides, shapes and informs the perspective of a researcher in the process of knowledge discovery (Mauthner, 2020). The epistemological worldview is the research paradigm guiding this study and

according to Zarman (2018), the epistemological school of thought accounts for what is termed the personal worldview, which has a significant influence on how aspects of reality are conceived and interpreted. This is suitable as this thesis concentrates on interpretation rather than quantification. Hence, the interpretivist research philosophy - within the epistemological paradigm, is ideal for this thesis since it aims to analyse and examine the phenomenon of the stereotypical gaze in selected artwork (dance films). This choice of research philosophy is similar to the creative process of filmmaking where directors and producers approach dance films based on personal, individual experiences (Nevill, 2019). Interpretivism will enable the researcher to capture the nuances of stereotypic gaze in the selected dance films as well as highlight the flaws in the genre that leave room for stereotyping.

Research Approach

Dankasa (2015) states that there are three main approaches to theory development in research: the deductive, inductive and abductive approaches. The abductive approach, which is the chosen approach in this research, unites the deductive and inductive reasoning systems. According to Zelechowska (2020), the abductive approach allows the researcher to harness both the insights of both the objective, numerical reasoning and interpretive, cognitive reasoning. The prevalence of the stereotypic gaze in the dance films under study is established through objective, numerical analysis which illustrate the recurrent patterns in terms of similarities in dialogue, costumes, dance, and storylines. On the other hand, the impact of this stereotypic gaze is elucidated through interpretive analysis. While it is an unconventional choice, the abductive approach was selected for this study because its principles are in tandem with the interpretivist research philosophy and the mixed methods approach. Additionally, applying both the inductive and deductive approaches will enable the researcher to adequately account for the vast genre of dance movies.

Research Strategy

Research strategies comprise the overall plan and methods for the discovery and development of findings in a research project. The major research strategy employed in the course of this study is the Case Study strategy. As Crowe et al. (2011) note, the case study strategy situates the examination of complex phenomena within a highly specific environment, and in the case of this

study, it contextualizes the examination of phenomena to a few sets or items. The nature and scope of the research topic and the mode of data collection form the basis of the selection of the case study approach for this research. Popular dance film franchises like *Center Stage*, *Step Up*, *Bring It On* and *Save the Last Dance* amongst others as well as other prominent stand-alone movies constitute the case studies for this research. Employing a case study approach aided in narrowing the scope of this study since the topic of screen dance is wide – and the page number restriction of this thesis warranted delimiting the research scope. However, this study concentrates on popular titles that are not only representative productions of their era but are also sure to strike a chord with dance movie enthusiasts, critics and scholars. Many of the films selected for this study have become cult favourites with significant impact on pop culture and mainstream entertainment, as reflected in the development of fans pages dedicated to these films and costume features in every Halloween and themed party.

Research Design

A research design is the overall framework and blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Asenahabi, 2019). This thesis takes on a mixed methodology by employing a quantitative and qualitative design. As Dawadi (2021) state, a major advantage of the mixed methodology is that it promotes exhaustiveness in research's findings as the strength of the qualitative method mitigates the weaknesses of the quantitative approach and vice versa. Due to the nature of the research topic, the methodology amalgamates the qualitative and quantitative research designs although the former is predominant and thus, the qualitative information has a more significant influence on the study's findings. The mixed methodology alongside the abductive reasoning is the most suitable study strategy for this project as it allows for a highly detailed and comprehensive examination into the stereotypic gaze of the selected dance films.

Time Horizon

The premise of this thesis states that there is a stereotypic gaze in screen dance and it is impossible to confirm and indicate that accurately without establishing a pattern. To establish this pattern, popular dance movies including box office hits between the years 2000 to 2020 were selected. The selected case study films highlight the rise and decline of the genre during this period. Thus, the longitudinal time horizon is suitable for this study because it compresses an otherwise vast genre

and enables the researcher to examine its rise and decline over the years. The alternative option is the cross-sectional horizon, which would be unsuitable since screen dance is still in existence despite its lack of dominance in recent years and the case study films for this project span two decades.

Data Collection and Analysis Method

The data in this research is largely collected from movies, journals, articles, reputable movie sites and books. The selected movies are central to the study's question and scope. Consequently, much of the analysis in this study will consist of comparisons and contrasts that establish recurrent patterns that form stereotypes in their storylines. It is important to note that previous studies undertaken by scholars on the evolving genre of dance films and the reason for its similar storylines serve as complementary evidence for the premise of this research. Content and thematic analyses of the dialogue, costumes, and dance styles in the case study movies will be conducted to confirm the existence of a stereotypic gaze in screen dance. These analyses will also help to highlight what informs the stereotypic plotlines and the positive and negative consequences. This study employs a non-probability sampling method as the data will be collated from specific, chosen movies, books, journals, articles, and reputable websites. Soft data and numerical analysis will constitute the quantitative analysis used for this study.

Ethical Considerations

According to Vanclay et al. (2013), ethical standards and processes are crucial to upholding the integrity of the research process, the accuracy of the data collection as well as subjects under study. Important aspects of ethical considerations include confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, withdrawal, plagiarism, voluntary participation and transmission of the research's findings. The major ethical concerns that may arise from this research is plagiarism and safeguarding the accuracy of the research findings. To address this, the sources of primary and secondary data utilized in this study are appropriately identified, cited and referenced throughout the text and at the list of reference after the last chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive explanation of the methodological approaches adopted for this research and the reasons for their suitability. Saunders et al's (2019) research onion served as

the primary framework guiding the structure of documenting this study's research methods. The research philosophy of interpretivism, the abductive reasoning approach and the mixed methodological approach were identified as being pivotal to this study's research design. Additionally, the case study research strategy and data collection from movies, books, articles and journals through the non-probability sampling method were also identified as being critical to the study's research strategy.

Chapter Four

Analysis and Results

Introduction

Every research project that involves the collation of data should also contain the process for data analysis and interpretation, which involves examining the data and coming to enlightening conclusions based on the analysis. In this section, the study's quantitative and qualitative procedures for analysing the presence of the stereotypic gaze in selected dance movies produced between year 2000 and 2020. The quantitative method in this study comprises numerical and soft data analysis that elucidates important information such as year of production, commercial and box office performance and serves to establish the recurrent elements of the stereotypic gaze in the

dance films. The qualitative techniques for analysing the data of this inquiry have been content and thematic analyses. Content analysis involves assessing communication patterns within qualitative data. This method enables researchers to employ both narrative and observational strategies to make inferences and deductions about recurrent patterns. Thematic analysis involves a structured evaluation of data and an indication of patterns, themes and sub-themes.

Overview of Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study were centred on

This major aim has guided the entire process of research and helped to organise data collection and analyses. The following are the aims of this study:

- To identify the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance movies
- To investigate the impact of the stereotypic gaze on the audience, the film industry and the society at large
- To elucidate the benefits of creating new and creative storylines in future dance movies

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis of this study comprises soft data and numerical analysis that highlight the following; year of production, commercial and box office performance as well as provide a quantitative perspective to the recurrent elements that constitute a stereotypic gaze in the dance films.

Highest Grossing Dance Movies for this Case Study

	Dance Movie	Opening Weekend	Lifetime Gross in the US
1	Magic Mike (2012)	\$39,127,170	\$113,721,571
2	Black Swan (2010)	\$1,443, 809	\$106,954,678

3	Save the Last Dance (\$23,444,930	\$91,057,006
4	Magic Mike XXL	\$12,857,184	\$66,013,057
5	Step Up	\$20,69,573	\$65,328,121
6	Stomp the Yard	\$21,833,312	\$61,36,221
7	Step Up 2: The Streets	\$18,908,826	\$42,400,223
8	Footloose (2011)	\$15,556,113	\$51,802,742
9	Step Up 3D (2010)	\$15,812,311	\$42,400,223
10	You Got Served (2004)	\$16,123,105	\$40,363,810
11	Step Up Revolution (\$11,731,708	\$35,074,677
12	Take the Lead	\$12,775,000	\$34,742,066
13	Honey	\$12,856,040	\$30,308,417
14	Billie Elliot	\$215,681	\$21,995,263
15	Center Stage	\$4,604,621	\$17,200,925
16	Step Up All In	\$6,469,857	\$14,161,590
17	Any Body Can Dance 2	\$119,423	\$892,133
18	Planet B-Boy	\$27,777	\$273,870
19	Any Body Can Dance (ABCD)	\$95,236	\$222,098
20	Battlefield America	\$113,882	\$172,000

Table 1 - Highest grossing dance movies in this case study

Dance Movies between 2000 – 2020

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Center Stage	Save the Last Dance	Gene Kelly: Anatomy of a Dance	One Last Dance	Bring it On Again	Mad Hot Ballroom
Bring It On	Bojangles	Dance	Honey	Shall We Dance	Rize
Billie Elliot	The Way She Moves	Challenge	The Company		Ballet Russes

The Dancer	Dying to Dance	Dancing at the Moon		You Got Served	
	Dance of a Dream	Gotta Kick it Up		Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights	

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Step Up	Stomp the Yard	Step Up 2: The Streets	Bring it On: Fight to the Finish	Step Up 3D
Bring It On: All or Nothing	Ballet Shoes	Make it Happen	Jump	Leading Ladies
Take the Lead	Bring it On In It to Win It	Center Stage: Turn it Up	Love and Dance	Black Swan
Love & Dance	How she Move	All God's Children Can Dance	B-Girl	Freak Dance (Step Up and Get Served)
Let's Dance	Planet B-Boy		Mao's Last Dancer	Turn the Beat Around
	Feel the Noise		Let's Dance	Flamenco, Flamenco
	Let's Dance (French)		Fast Forward	Street Dance 3D
			Nine	Burlesque
				Tutu Match

				Standing Ovation
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2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Footloose (remake)	Step Up Revolution	Teen Beach Movie	Make Your Move	Magic Mike XXL
Honey 2	Come Dance with Me	Battle of the Year	Step Up All In	Breaking Through
You Got Served: Beat the World	Battlefield America	Any Body Can Dance (ABCD)	Cuban Fury	Born to Dance
Go for IT	Magic Mike	The Way we Dance	Ballet 422	Any Body Can Dance (ABCD)2
Body Language	Street Dance 2		Desert Dancer	Our Last Tango
Jig, the Dancer			Mad About Dance	Full Out
Dance Fu			Make A Move (Nigerian)	Chocolate City
Dance Marathon (Polish)			Lap Dance a.k.a. Monica	Dancing it's On
Queens Destiny of Dance			One Chance to Dance	Lift Me Up
				How to Dance in Ohio
				A Ballerina's Tale

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
High Strung	• Dance Academy	• Step Sisters	• Let's Dance	• Into the Beat (Germany)
Honey 3: Dare to Dance	• Rebels on Pointe	• Battle	• And then We Danced	• Work It
Grease Live!	• Heart Beat	• Suspiria (remake)	• Step Up China	• Feel the Beat
A Time to Dance	• Dance to Death	• High Strung: Free Dance		• Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate
Center Stage: On Pointe	• Step, Move, Dance your Life	• Ballet Wow		
Dance Camp		• Dance Baby Dance		
The Dancer		• Break		
		• Honey: Rise Up and Dance		
		• Dance or Die		
		• To the Beat		

Table 2 – Production years of the selected dance films

Stereotypical Gaze in Dance Movies (Recurring Elements)

Battle	Single Dance Style	Challenging Authority	Celebrity Appearance	Merging Dance Styles	Documentary Elements	Death
Step Up 2: The Streets (2008)	The Black Swan (2010)	Center Stage (2000)	Honey (2003) – Ginuwine, Missy Elliot (Hip-Hop Artists)	Save the Last Dance (2001)	Step Up 3D	You Got Served
Step Up 3D (2010)	Stomp the Yard (2007)	Step Up 2: The Streets (2008)	You Got Served (2004) – Lil Kim (Rapper)	Center Stage (2000)	Yeh Dance	Honey 3: Dare to Dance
Step Up 5: All In (2014)		Step Up 3D	Bring It On 3: All or Nothing (2006) - Solange Knowles, Rihanna (R&B Singers)	Step Up (2006)	Billie Elliot	Save the Last Dance
Bring It On 1 (2000) – 6 (2018)	Honey 3: Dare to Dance (2016) Straight-to-video	Footloose (2011)	Stomp the Yard (2007) – Chris Brown (R&B Singer)	Step Up 3D (2010)		Honey 2

Honey 2 (2011)	Take the Lead (2006)	ABCD: Any Body Can Dance (2013)	Chris Brown – Battle of The Year	Step Up 4: Revolution (2012)		ABCD: Any Body Can Dance
Honey 4: Rise Up and Dance (2018)	Stomp the Yard 2: Homecoming (2010)			Bring It On 5: Fight to The Finish		Step Up
StreetDance 3D a.k.a. The Moves (2010)				Save the Last Dance 2 (2006) Straight- To-Video		Step Up 2: The Streets
StreetDance 2 (2012)				High Strung: Free Dance (2018)		
You Got Served 2: Beat the World (2011)				Center Stage 2: Turn It Up (2008)		
				Center Stage 3: On Pointe (2016) TV Movie		

				Magic Mike (2012)		
				Magic Mike XXL (2015)		
				High Strung (2016)		

Table 3 - Stereotypical Gaze in Dance Movies (Recurring Elements).

From the information highlighted in the above tables, it is evident that Dance Movies peaked between 2010 to 2014 before hitting a steady decline.

Popular Franchises of Screen Dance

Franchises, for the purpose of this research, refer to movies with more than two parts in succession in the same fictional universe or similar storylines in different locations with recurrent characters.

Center Stage

Center Stage 2000

Centre Stage: Turn it Up 2008

Centre Stage: On Pointe

Bring It On

Bring It On

Bring It On Again 2004

Bring It On: All or Nothing 2006

Bring It On: In It to Win It 2007

Bring It On: Fight to the Finish 2009

Bring It On: Worldwide Cheers Mack 2017

High Strung

High Strung 2016

High Strung 2: Free Dance 2018

Save the Last Dance

Save the Last Dance 2001

Save the Last Dance 2 2003

Step Up

Step Up 2006

Step Up 2: The Streets 2008

Step Up 3D 2010

Step Up Revolution 2012

Step Up All In 2014

Step Up China 2019

Honey

Honey 2003

Honey 2 2008

Honey 3: Dare to Dance 2016

Honey 4: Rise Up and Dance 2018

One movie from each franchise has been selected in this study for analysis as well as juxtaposition with other movies from the same franchise and standalone movies. This will serve to indicate the similarities that constitute stereotypic gaze before proceeding to the reasons and a proposed solution in the next chapter.

Thematic and Qualitative Analysis

Content Analysis of Selected Dance Movies from Some Popular Franchises

This part will deal with synopsis, notable dialogue, costumes and dance styles of some of the selected movies which will later be explained in the next part of this chapter.

Bring It On: All or Nothing

Synopsis

The movie opens with a high school party where the cheerleaders break into a cheer routine and the team makes fun of Britney Allen (Hayden Panettiere, the main character) and it turns out to be a nightmare when she wakes up in class. Britney has the perfect life – the hottest boy in the school is her boyfriend and she’s the most popular girl which makes her cheer captain. *Bring it On* leans into the male gaze by making Britney desirable to both the counter love interest and audience through her naivete and virginity. She promises her boyfriend her virginity by homecoming dance and the sequence then moves to their practice where she cheers for her boyfriend. It also shows Britney acting under the influence of her mean best friend Winnie who wants her life.

Upon getting home, she learns that Rihanna (billionaire business mogul and singer) is hosting an audition for her new TV show. Unfortunately, Britney has to move with the family to a smaller community - Crenshaw Heights (CH henceforth). Winnie becomes a de jure captain and manipulates Britney into giving up cheering. The music turns upbeat as she moves to CH indicating a shift into Hip-Hop culture. There are groups b-boying and b-girling when she pulls into the parking lot with her Beetle while listening to Pop music causing people to stare. The CH squad is visibly different from the team because they have Cheerleaders of different sizes and races which is what Hip Hop indicates. She stumbles into Camille (the head of the Crenshaw Heights squad) in the encounter and insults her mother (a no-go area in Hip Hop).

Camille does not take that lightly and she gets ready to fight but her other friends (Letty and Caresha) hold her back. They tell Brittany what she did but she clarifies that it was a misunderstanding. Brittany realises the differences between her old school and the new one based on social differences when she discovers CH lacks basic education supplies including books and computers nor do they have high quality food in the cafeteria. Another cafeteria dynamic occurs

here where the CH lead squad debut a new routine on the table (similar to High Strung club scene). Everyone has a niche in the cafeteria and the group she joins leaves her alone on the table. Out of frustration, Brittany hides in the bathroom to ugly-cry and stumbles into the main love interest, Jesse, upon getting out causing her to fall on her back. He encouraged her to stick it out and she goes to watch the cheerleaders at the pep rally where she learns about the try-outs. Camille challenges Brittany to try-out and she impresses them on the first try (a plot parallel similar to *Save the Last Dance*) although she shows off. They ask her to join the squad but she reacts with pride. On her first day, one of the guys, Tyson, smacks her bum again and she responds by groping his groin (parallel to Chemille's at the step scene in *Save the last Dance*). As the movie progresses, Britney struggles to navigate the cultural and socioeconomic disparity between her old life and her new one. She, however, earns the acceptance and recognition of her new teammates when she works to bring the Crenshaw Heights team to success.

Notable Dialogue

“Pacific Vista has never had a fat cheerleader.” – Winnie on Brianna who's not fat but has a round bum.

“Honey, you're smart, you're pretty, you're blonde. You'll make plenty of friends.”

“You're old, your life is over, I'm a senior, my boyfriend is a quarterback, I'm a cheerleader dammit!” – Britney to her parents

“Looks like we're about to get some 'snow' on Campus.” – When Holly walks into the school

“Hey Brittany... don't join a gang.” – Winnie to Brittany even though Crenshaw Heights is a decent law-abiding neighbourhood which she had never visited.

“It's not usually the first thing I tell a girl, because the cute ones don't usually go for the queer-leaders.”

“You don't know her... Oh I do, Miss fancy fancy fingernails... she don't get what it takes to be a warrior.” – Camille about Brittany when Jesse calls her out for stereotyping.

“Spirit is what makes life fun even when it isn't.” (Parallel with hip hop description.)

“What you guys have that they don't have is your spirit.” – Brittany to Camille.

Costume

There are transitions from cheerleading outfits into camo print combat tops and pants to fit into the Hip Hop aesthetics when the characters take the dancing to the streets.

Dance Style

The dance styles used in the movies include; cheerleading, stomping, krumping, and Hip Hop. The Crenshaw Height Warriors add the krumping as their secret weapon in the final competition when they “take it to the streets”.

Save the Last Dance

Synopsis

The first sequence shows the main character Sara Johnson (Julia Stiles) alone on a train thinking about ballet when a stranger asks to sit by her side. The said stranger picks up her ballet magazine and asks her about dancing to which she replies she used to but not anymore. Sara arrives in New York City, to live with her estranged father after her mother’s death and Sara and her father have a strained relationship. On getting to school, her supervisor tells her that contemporary dance is self-explanatory and a dance sequence (directing technique and corporeal movement) merges her old life to the new one showing her mother’s death and the reason she doesn’t dance anymore.

She attends a predominantly African-American school as a Caucasian which makes it a little difficult to blend in. Sara joins a social studies class where she gets into a heated debate with the love interest (Derek). She meets Chenille (Kerry Washington) who helps her socialise and mix with the right crowd (the community similar to the one in *Bring it On*.) Behind the group is another group of boys including Derek. Sara tells Chenille about their spat in class to which the former replies that he is her brother (there is a parallel with *Bring it On: Fight to the Finish* where the main character's love interest is her nemesis’ brother). At the Steps, Sara watches Chenille handle a sexual harasser with confidence (hip hop gives confidence) which inspires her.

Later on in the movie, Sara and Derek start a relationship which bothers everyone because it’s interracial. Chenille later admonishes her for not realising the gravity of her relationship with Derek saying she took one of the few good ones.

Sara learns contemporary dance from Derek and debuts their new routine at the Steps. Ultimately, Sara begins to rediscover her passion for dancing and starts to blend ballet with hip-hop, creating a different dance style. The movie climaxes on the Julliard audition in which Sara must overcome personal obstacles and deliver a dance performance of ballet and hip-hop fusion.

Notable Dialogues

“It’s just a little hip hop,” Chenille tells Sara when they see two ladies freestyle dancing.

“Cool outfit,” Sara to Chenille on the night of the party, to which Chenille replies, “Slammin” – Use the right language.

“Steps (dancing club) ain’t no square dance (ballet).” – to Sara

“That’s okay, I dance in circles, probably around you.”

“It’s country, and you look country in it,” Chenille on Sara’s dressing.

“It’s not the music I had to get used to. It’s not the first time I’ve heard hip hop.” - Sara. Suggesting hip hop isn’t restricted to New York.

“Hip Hop is more like an attitude” – Derek to Sara.

“Have you seen anyone get shot yet?” Lindsay asks. Jesus Sara, you’re in the freakin’ ghetto, I’m talking about the drivebys,” Sara’s friend from her former school who’s never been to the city yet she judged it based on her bias.

“I saw the look on your face. When I see you do it, you’re goofy and happy.” – Derek to Sara

“How do you know I love ballet just because you saw me do a ‘stupid leg trick’” – Sara to Derek.

“What do you want? You’re the one that’s gonna have to make it happen.” – Derek to Sara

“That’s a black man’s life; Menace and Mayhem.... All I have is my respect. I know who the hell I am.” Malakai to Derek. (Simultaneous drive-by and dance sequence)

Costume

Sara’s style switches from plain Jane girl-next-door pants and shirt to coats and scarfs. .

Dance Styles

Ballet and Hip Hop.

Step Up 2: The Streets

Synopsis

The film opens with a voiceover from the main character, Andy (Brianna Evigan), talking about the elusive streets. It gives the audience a perspective into her life and a reason to connect/empathise with her situation. She walks onto a train where the audience meets the crew for the first time in a flash mob on the train. Her actions nearly get her into trouble leading her guardian to threaten her with relocation to another town. It also hints to the audience that her parents are dead, hence the need for a guardian. Andy is reluctant to leave, so she enlists her older cousin Tyler Gage (from Step Up One) to convince her guardian. Tyler challenges her to a battle, saying that if she wins, she can continue dancing with her crew, while a loss would mean she will attend the same American School of Ballet that helped him achieve discipline and change his life. She loses the battle and has to attend the school where she meets “prim and proper” students who expand her worldview. Naturally, she struggles to fit into the new group causing a rift between her and her old crew – A merging of worlds.

Her old crew notes that she is changing, so they cut her off, and she forms a new crew banding misfits in her school together. At their first battle in the streets, the band of misfits lose to the seasoned 410 crew, causing Andy to deny them publicly. The 410 embarrasses them and reminds them that they do not belong in the streets, so they return to school. One of the 410 members, Missy, leaves the crew because of a moral superiority saying she did not like their bullying actions. She joins Andy and the new crew and trains them to battle at the next ultimate competition. There is a significant plot shift when she changes into a dress at her friend’s family party. Mulvey’s male gaze theory is evident in introducing the main character to the leading love interest as he observes her before she does him. Throughout the film there are energetic and intense dance sequences ranging from hip-hop and breakdancing.

Notable Dialogues

“Do I look like some Prince Prima Ballerina?” – Andy to Tyler.

“I can turn amateurs into professionals... She’s just a street dancer,” another judge replies, “I thought you could turn anyone to a professional.” – the ballet instructor who watches Andy audition with Hip Hop.

“I thought I could train you, turn you into the dancer you could be...” – Director Collins to Andy after the vandalism episode.

“Dance is about having something to say,” – Andy to Director Collins at the final battle (*Step Up 2: The Streets*, 2008).

Costume

Andy is a tomboy, so she dresses like a man in Hip Hop clothing – baggy pants and crop tops.

Dance Styles

They dance Ballet at the American School of Ballet and incorporate Hip Hop dance styles like breakdancing, krumping and twerking. They also dance Salsa at Missy’s house because she is Latina.

High Strung

Synopsis

High Strung is a 2016 dance drama that features elements of dance music and romance. Ruby Adams, the main character, is a Midwestern classical ballet dancer who goes to New York city to pursue dreams of becoming a professional ballerina. Her journey becomes intercepted with that of Johnnie Blackwell, a struggling violinist and street musician. As the movie progresses, they both form an improbable partnership that leads to the fusion of dance (classical ballet and hip-hop) and music (violin). John initiates a secret plan that would give both of them an edge in winning a major dance competition. They win for their merging of different genres and beat other experienced dance crews – which illustrates the theme of the triumph of the underdog. High Strung is the first Dance Movie to focus on Violins and fuse tap dance to Hip Hop. Despite its stereotypic gaze, its fresh focus on string music endeared it to the audience.

Notable Quotes

“The music is always burning inside me. I don’t know where it comes from, I only know that if it stays there within, I will be consumed.” – Jonathan Blackwell’s opening monologue

“I can’t remember when I started dancing. It’s always just been who I am. Valencia said, Feel the music, hear the Dance’.” - Ruby’s opening monologue.

“Music is like dance. It’s a link to the soul. They can make people laugh; they can make people cry. It can inspire. With a power like that, why won’t you want to share it with the world?”

“I just want to be perfect.” – Ruby to the instructor.

“And what happens when you achieve perfection? You stop then? It’s imperfections that keep us alive! You push further and further.” He replies.

“It’s a long road. It never ends. As dancers this is our journey.”

“Completely inundated,” one of the judges said while another replied saying, “I disagree, don’t we want to evolve? Don’t we want to progress?” – a representation of the real-life dilemma on classical dance and merging genres (High Strung , 2016).

Costume

Jonathan typically wears all-black as the brooder of the movie, the ballerinas wear dresses, athleisure wear, and leotards, while the switch step crew wear jeans, joggers, t-shirts, and tanks.

Any Body Can Dance

Synopsis

The opening sequence features a dance competition *Dil Se (Heart)* which becomes the ultimate focus of the characters in the movie. One of the antagonist crew Jahangir Dance Company – JDC – falls mid-performance, a move that guarantees point losses in a competition yet the group wins against another flawless team. Later, the choreographer, Vishnu discovers Jehangir, his friend and business partner bribed the judges for the win hence he quits the team. As a consequence of his actions, he learns of his replacement publicly.

Jehangir seeks to appeal to the international audience by transforming his dance company into a ballet plus contemporary group because he believed the traditional Indian dance and hip hop was not sophisticated enough. Vishnu leaves to return to his hometown but sees some boys fleeing authorities with Parkour and becomes intrigued. As fate would have it, (because predestination is a major element in Indian culture and movies) the boys run into his friend, Gopi’s apartment. Gopi encourages Vishnu to start a team in the local community and laments his coerced acquittal from professional dancing due to his weight gain – the corporeal body. With Vishnu’s group, DDR, the

audience learns that dance is not about perfection because all body types and characters are part of his crew.

Realising he can improve the dancers' lives by training them for the Dil Se Competition, Vishnu discovers a new purpose and calls his firing fate. He finds an abandoned space (a plot feature that is also present in *Save the Last Dance*, *Honey 3: Dare to Dance*) and transforms it into a dance studio then merges rival gangs into one (*Bring it On: In It to Win It*). Although Vishnu hits a few hiccups when the boys fail to submit to authority, he eventually gets them to comply by teaching them the five elements of Dance including: discipline, attitude, new, confidence, and expression.

Every time a new member joins the group, they use hip hop to introduce themselves (hip hop is about self-expression). DDR (the underdogs) dance to express while JDC the antagonists, dance to impress. In their first public performance as a team, they flop due to their lack of synergy but eventually, they improve and deliver an emotional dance performance after the death of one of their members (*You Got Served*, *Step Up*). The audience at the competition is moved by this performance and the DDR team win undisputedly despite not following the rules (A plotline similar to *Bring it On: All or Nothing*).

Notable Dialogue

“Focus on your act, don't worry” – Vishnu to JDC crew pre-performance.

“There's only one thing I can do and that's dance.” – Vishnu to Jehangir when he quits

“For me, dance is life, it's like water to fish.”

“God created this world, the plants and animals, leaves dance in the breeze, rivers flow like rhythm, fish swimming, birds flying... dance is everywhere.” – Vishnu to Gopi

“Attitude gives birth to expression. Use your body to project your feelings and emotions” – Vishnu to DDR. This line of speech is similar to the conversation Marlon and Katya had in *Into the Beat* and Derek and Sara in *Save the Last Dance*. Every time a ballerina or non-hip hop person is learning the dance for the first time in dance movies, attitude is always one of the first lessons.

Costume

The ghetto kids wear tattered and dull-looking clothing while the posh students in JDC wear neat athleisure outfits. Their performance outfits also channelled the traditional Indian attire – the Sari for the women. In one scene, the group wore clown outfits to perform after Jehangir referred to them as the jokes of the competition.

Standalone Screen Dance

Unfortunately, time constraints permitted only one dance movie analysis in this heading hence the selection of an international language one. The intention is to demonstrate the transcension of the genre and hip hop as a style across continents.

Into The Beat

Into the Beat is a 2020 dance drama film that follows the story of Katya, a young ballet dancer with an overbearing mother. Katya's mother has dreams for her daughter to succeed in the ballet world. However, Katya's world takes a new turn when she discovers a love for hip-hop. The opening sequence shows the main character, Katya, dancing Ballet in a studio after the instructor singles her out for a solo performance. There are little snide remarks in the background, letting the audience know some of her colleagues are envious. The camera zeros in on Katya's performance, giving the audience a chance to fully assess her costume and style – she is wearing a classic ballet uniform consisting of a leotard, tutu, stockings, and flats with her hair pulled into a tight bun – directing technique. The camera follows Katya, and there is a back and forth between timelines that becomes clear after about five full scenes.

Katya's father is a ballet dancer with the German company, which explains why the other students believe the teachers favour her over them. Also, within this sequence, the movie's central dilemma is introduced in the form of the fictional New York Ballet School. Fifteen students are vying for a single spot in the international exchange program, and there is pressure on Katya to earn the spot since her father is an accomplished dancer within the company. She is not enthused with the news from her expression, so the audience learns that ballet is not her passion. The camera focuses on her father before his outstanding performance, and the ominous music playing hints at the tragic fall in the following sequence. With her father's career stalled and most likely over, Katya feels even more pressure to help him live vicariously through her.

Feeling overwhelmed, Katya takes a bicycle ride to clear her head, and she crashes, causing her to cuss in frustration. A group of friends stumble upon her and offer to fix her bike at their club if she follows them – the encounter. She agrees and discovers the **Battle Land**, which her new friend introduces to her in a passionate speech saying, “The battle land is a huge playground. It doesn’t matter who you are, how old you’re from, or how long. It’s a perfect place to dance and hang out”. Katya then watches the habitants of the Battle Land in awe as they dance in different styles from Slow Motion to Flashdance, Choreography, and Hip Hop dance. They encourage her to join in the flashmob, and she does but does not get the steps, so she feels like a fish out of water.

On getting home, she watches YouTube videos of other dance crews to learn the new style that fascinates her. Upon returning to the club, she meets the love interest, Marlon, and attempts to impress him with what she learned online. He rebukes her for copying an established group’s style and encourages her to find her unique dance. Marlon teaches her more about Hip Hop, including *Biting*, which is copying a signature dance and passing it off as one’s own – individuality, creativity, originality. In one of their bonding scenes, they go on an adventure into a docked ship and encounter the security guards. Then when one officer grabs Marlon, Katya starts krumping (a dance style that mimics a fight used to intimidate another or protest.)

Notable Dialogues in the Movie

“Something special is radiating from you today,” Instructor to Katya after she starts going to the Hip Hop club.

“This is dancing. It’s like electricity. It starts in your gut, rushes through your whole body...” (Into The Beat, 2020).

Dressing

Katya lets down her hair as she becomes more involved with Hip Hop compared to tying it up neatly into a bun when she was strictly a ballet dancer.

Thematic Analysis of the Selected Movies

Recurrent Stereotypic Themes in Dance Movies

Presentation of Themes

In order to establish a stereotype, there must be recurrent patterns (mentioned above) and, in this case, themes, which encompass costumes, dialogues, and plot.

S/N	Themes
1.	Dance Battles
2.	Dance Styles Merging
3.	Class Differences (Racial Gaze)
4.	Competitions
5.	Triumph of the Underdog
6.	Unique Characterizations
7.	Costuming

Table 4: Presentation of Themes

Battle

Hip-Hop dance promotes individualism and creativity hence the concept of battling where individuals or groups (crews) dance against each other in an impromptu competition to determine who has the superior routine. Battling is so ingrained in breakdancing communities that it is disrespectful to refuse a challenge (Schloss, 2009). Typically, the main character confronts an antagonist in a dance battle that might escalate into a violent outburst. In some cases, the crews battle against each other, which may also become a conflict, as seen in *You Got Served*, *Honey 2*, *Step Up 2: The Streets*, *Step Up 3D*, *Step Up All In*, *Center Stage: Turn It Up*, *Stomp the Yard* and *Bring It On* franchise to mention a few. Schloss (2009) further suggests that battling is the foundation of all forms of hip-hop, from dance to rap (music) and other aspects of popular dance culture. Similarly, according to Alridge and Stewart (2005), battling is a product of territorialism, especially regarding a crew of dancers who seek to protect their turf and reputation.

Dance Styles Merging

Many screen dance films have shown an ability to merge different dance styles into single performances and according to Rosenberg (2012), this is one of the genre's endearing features. Although a few dance movies concentrate on one dance style as their focal point, many of them fuse different dance genres into a singular performance in the course of their storylines. Ballet and Hip Hop are the two most recurrent styles in every dance movie, while others like Salsa and Tango appear occasionally. The Oscar-winning film *Black Swan*, 2010, focused on Ballet and interpreted the traditional Tchaikovsky story through a modern lens as a psychological thriller. Other representative movies like *You got served* and the *Step Up* franchise utilise the dynamics of hip-hop dance in telling modern yet similar storylines.

Class Differences (Racial Gaze)

Dance movies use dancing styles to depict class differences and attribute each one to a particular race. Admittedly, dances often have origins and thus, people of different ethnicities are attached to different dance styles. The constant limitation of each dance style to its originating region reinforces stereotypes. It also accounts for the cliché reaction of Peter Orlow in *Into the Beat* when he discovers his daughter, Katya, wants to abandon ballet for hip-hop. Dance movies typically attribute perfection and upper classism to ballet while reserving hip hop for lower class people. He also cautions her about 'hip-hop people' corrupting her good manners when in fact, the club members never did anything criminal or immoral in the movies. He assumed their negative influence on his daughter, based on their culture and stereotypical perceptions of hip-hop communities during the time the movie was produced.

Additionally, the main character in hip-hop movies is usually from the lower or middle class which is often considered the wrong side of the tracks. Typically, their love interest is an upper-class ballet dancer like *Centre Stage*, *Save the Last Dance*, and *Step Up* franchise or a person who is considered 'prim and proper' like the *Bring it On* franchise and *Stomp the Yard*. Also *Into the Beat*, a German movie production, reflects the fact that Hip Hop culture transcends America despite originating from the Bronx and later New York. This reinforces the reality that other counties and regions have adopted foreign dance styles over the years.

Competition

On the converse side of dance battling is dance competition. Dance movies without hip hop as the primary dance style, use elements of competition instead of battling. They either have outright face-offs such as the *Bring it on* franchise and *High Strung*, or underlying competitive tension such as is seen in *Centre Stage* and *Black Swan*. As many film scholars have noted, without an antagonist whether physical (as in another character) or abstract (as in situations) the audience cannot empathise with the protagonists' condition. Importantly, the infusion of dance movies drives the next theme – Triumph of the Underdog.

Triumph of the Underdog

Dance movie enthusiasts have often asked rhetorically, “Is it a Dance Movie without the underdog(s) winning the battle”? The main purpose of the underdog's triumph trope is to tug at the audiences' heartstrings and contribute to the emotional satiation of the audience. Notably, the dance movies without the underdog winning performed well in the cinemas despite fear of the opposite. Prime examples are *Step Sisters* and *Battle of the Year*. While in *Step Sisters*, the storyline insinuated the underdogs had the better routine but lost due to bias and a sense of cultural preservation by the judges, the underdogs lost in *Battle of the Year* because the defending champions were better which is more realistic.

Unique Characterizations

Schloss highlights a pivotal point in breakdancing – it is an artform for teenagers by teenagers, but it evolves with them even as they enter their adulthood (Schloss, 2009). This fact is evident in *Step Up Revolution* and *Step Up All In*, where there is a mix of older and younger main characters. Best friends Sean and Eddy, the main characters in both movies, navigate managing their responsibilities as adults and pursuing their dream of making money through dancing.

Stereotyping in Costume

Although dance movies perform excellently in terms of creativity by incorporating modern designs in traditional costumes, there is a stereotypical profiling of dancers based on their dance styles. For example, ballet dancing characters often appear in expensive-looking outfits and prim looks to

reinforce the status of ballet as a high-profile dance style. However, this presents a jaded view to the audience as not all ballerinas wear their hair in tight neat buns outside their performance nor do all hip-hop dancers wear sweats and cropped tops.

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Suggestions

Introduction

This chapter summarises the main results of the research's investigation into the prevalence of the stereotypic gaze in the dance film genre. It also presents the inferences made from those results and offers recommendations for different industry stakeholders on what future dance films' plotlines should include. This research's objectives were to examine the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance movies, investigate the impact of the stereotypic gaze on the audience, the film industry and the society at large as well as elucidate the benefits of creating new and creative storylines in future dance movies. Quantitative soft data, and numerical analyses as well as qualitative content and thematic analyses constitute the techniques used to evaluate the data and reach certain findings. The following sections will highlight and describe the key findings from this study's inquiry. On the basis of these findings, this study will also draw conclusions, explore implications and offer critical insights to dance film producers and directors that can help inform the plot of their future projects.

Summary and Conclusions

Stereotypic gaze in the dance film genre was the main concern of this study. Twenty dance films produced within a twenty-year period (2000 – 2020) were analysed in this research which used non-probability sampling to choose the dance movies under study. The quantitative analysis provided important information (specifically commercial performance and year of production) on the case studies. The thematic or content analysis investigated the plot synopsis of the chosen films with a view to establishing recurrent storylines within the dance movie genre. Dance battles, dance styles merging, class differences, competition, triumph of the underdog, unique characterisations and stereotyping in costume selection were among the themes identified in the thematic analysis of the selected movies.

Objective 1: Examine the stereotypic gaze in the selected dance movies

The result of the study indicates that the stereotypic gaze is a reiterative phenomenon in the dance films under investigation. According to the analyses, several of the selected dance films feature regular plotline tropes that constitute the stereotypic gaze. Much of the diegesis of the dance films under study hinge on sequences of events that include dance battles, illuminating class and racial differences, dance competitions, the triumph of the underdog, conformist costuming and an eclectic mix of characters. While the similarity in theme and plot design have proved to be entertaining, they are largely formulaic and lacking in originality.

Objective 2: Investigate the effect of the Stereotypic Gaze in the Dance Film Genre

According to the analyses of this research, the major effect of the stereotypic gaze in dance films are reinforcement of biases and harmful norms. In terms of gender, many dance films perpetuate traditional gender roles and norms which limits the range of expression for dancers across all genders. Stereotypical dance film plots also depict underrepresentation in terms of race ethnicity and body types in the world of dance. More importantly, stereotypes in dance films are harmful because they encourage closed-mindedness in plot development and leave little room for growth, learning and improvement. Also, a proven formulaic plot can only do so much and does not guarantee the financial returns that producers typically prioritise over the art form. Although elements like battle, competition and territorialism are intricacies of Hip Hop, overreliance on these elements subtract from other important factors and to protect the relevance of the genre, it is paramount for dance filmmakers to explore other perspectives and angles.

Objective 3: Elucidate the benefits of creating new and creative storylines in future dance films

It was deduced from the findings that the development of creative plotlines in future dance films will signify a positive shift from the genre's present dependence on sensationalism and exaggerated drama to a primary focus on utilising the art of dance in storytelling. Dance films can provide profound and meaningful cinematic experiences for the dance movie enthusiasts and the mainstream audience. Examples include *Step Up Revolution* where dance was depicted as a tool

and voice for the poor and oppressed people in Miami against exploitation and subjugation, *Take the Lead* where a dance teacher employed dance as a tool to teach peace, teamwork and proper mannerism in a school that had unruly kids as well as *Shall We dance* where dance saves a man's marriage.

Recommendations and Suggestions: What can filmmakers do differently?

Based on the study's findings, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed and may be useful for producers, casting directors, choreographers and other stakeholders in the dance film industry:

- **Explore a wider variety of dance styles:** It is very essential to know that film makers also have their understanding of the market and what works. Based on the data, it is clear that the dance movies that follow the typical pattern of depicting ballet as the sophisticated dance style and hip hop as the ghetto genre have a lower level of audience appreciation than they did in the beginning. On the contrary, the Dance Movies, which focused on one style and used a different plotline, became box office hits and critics' choices and won coveted awards. A prime example is the psychological thriller *Black Swan*. *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights* also spotlights how exploring different dance genres in dance films can be an enlightening, entertaining, and commercially successful strategy.
- **Utilise more creative costumes:** The typical attire of Hip Hop characters centres predominantly on sportswear, athleisure, casual styles and typically low-brow brands. However, this disregards the fact that the dance genre is not restricted to the ghetto even though it originated from there. Increasing the creativity of costuming will precipitate artistic innovation in the dance film genre and contribute significantly to visual impact, character development and overall storytelling effect of dance films.
- **Embrace other aspects of Hip-Hop:** Gang dynamics heavily influence territorialism in Hip Hop. While it still exists in the 'hood' (ghetto settings) and even in corporate society (Greengard, 1996), it is not the entirety of the ghetto and by extension Hip Hop. The four main elements of hip hop are DJing, MCing, breakdancing and graffiti. However, in dance movies, there is more focus on the breakdancing parts than on the other three aspects. A

seamless fusion of all aspects would greatly enrich the plotlines of future dance films. An effective strategy producers can undertake in achieving this is to invest more in pre-production research and engage filmmaking processes that promote a fully immersive experience such as utilising method actors who embody the entire personality of the characters they portray.

- **Adoption of more realistic storylines:** As reflected in the theme of the triumph of the underdog, dance movies are predictable because the audience can tell that no matter how much challenges the protagonist (who is usually the underdog) faces in a dance film, they always emerge victorious. However, more realistic storylines can help to provide better representation of the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the film's characters and audience as well as contribute to the film's authenticity and relatability. Some movies have actually been able to transcend the stereotypic storylines and use dance for more socially relevant topics other than aesthetics e.g. *Step Up Revolution (4)*, *Shall We Dance*, *Take the Lead*. Dance movie producers and directors can explore more of the social, therapeutic, cultural and intangible relevance of dance.
- **Deromanticizing Dance:** This is perhaps the most controversial suggestion of this thesis albeit a necessary one. Deromanticizing dance in future dance film projects is important in ensuring the mainstream audience appreciate dance movies as a genre on its own rather than a sub-genre of other prominent film categories such as romantic movies. Adjusting the directing technique and costumes to focus more on the craft of dance rather than on an overshadowing love story, will be significant in reinforcing the fact that dance movies can be much more than star-crossed lovers meeting up and merging their dance styles

Limitations and Future Research

There are a few limitations on the study. The sample size was limited to a number of dance films produced between 2000 and 2020. Future studies might use a more extensive and varied sample to obtain an exhaustive knowledge of the prevalence and impact of the stereotypic gaze in dance films. Additionally, the study relied on analyses that involved the researcher making deductions and inferences from the content and thematic analyses of the data, which inadvertently led to findings that might contain some of the researcher's biases and constraints. Future research might take a more objective approach in examining the stereotypic gaze of dance films through both

qualitative and quantitative techniques. The researcher is also one with a theatre, dance and anthropology background with little or no knowledge about film making. A film makers perspective and dance film makers perspective on this topic will also open a different level of understanding the situation, challenges and possible solution. The majority of the dance films analysed in this study were produced in the United States and United Kingdom. Future studies could investigate the research topic in a more diversified context such as in international film industries.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study offers insightful analysis into how recurrent stereotypic plotlines have negatively impacted the dance film genre as well as recommendations for how directors, producers and other industry stakeholders can swerve from the status quo and revive a movie genre that has gone into decline.

Conclusively, dance movies can perform the important role of both exalting dance as an art form and also portraying how dance, as posited by Enem (1975) in the beginning of this study, can be consciously cultivated to perform therapeutic, social, cultural, ritual and religious functionalities rather than the cliché storylines that lowers the appeal of the screen dance genre to the mainstream audience continually consuming the same and familiar routines and stereotypic storylines.

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