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***“Nobody puts Baby in a corner” - an analysis of Dirty Dancing with a gender and class perspective***



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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes how Hollywood portrays gender and class in films through dance, more specifically in Emile Adrolino's *Dirty Dancing* (1987). Due to the film's immense popularity, it has become a cultural phenomenon and a part of the fabric of our society's cultural context. This paper examines how Hollywood uses certain narratives to tell a story and how the art of dancing can be used as a tool within a storytelling structure. This paper will be looking closely at Johnny, the handsome main dance instructor of a Catskills resort which the protagonist, Baby, becomes infatuated with, and how his character is written to be typically masculine or not, based on Connell's theory of masculinity. Additionally, Bourdieu's theory is used as a tool to examine how class differences are portrayed in the film.

Key words: *Class, masculinity, popular culture, Hollywood, dance, Dirty Dancing.*

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# 1. Introduction & Background

Whenever the first beats and lyrics of “I’ve had the time of my life…” are played to a group of people, whether it is a nightclub, a party, or on the street, chances are that someone will start dancing and singing along. The spontaneous dancing is not simply because of the song’s catchiness; another contributing factor might be that the song was featured in a certain '80s film classic. *Dirty Dancing* is an American romantic drama released in 1987 (Naish, 2017), and is considered as one of the classics today. The film takes place in the summer of 1963 and follows the 17-year-old Frances “Baby” Houseman who is vacationing in an upscale resort in the Catskills with her family. While staying in the resort, she soon falls in love with the handsome main dance instructor, Johnny. Due to the fact that Johnny’s dance partner, Penny, decides to get an abortion because of an unwanted pregnancy, Baby becomes Johnny’s new dance partner. Despite their different backgrounds and status, her being a guest at the upper-class resort and him being a worker, they begin a romantic relationship. *Dirty Dancing* (1987) takes place in a summer resort mainly visited by the upper class and is about young love, self-expression through dance, exploring sexuality, but the narrative also illustrates social differences between class and gender in society (Boyd, 2007).

The relationship between the characters in the film differ depending on their social and economic statuses. Class status is portrayed as having power over a person in many scenes in the film, such as unwritten rules or/and norms connected to social status. The film symbolizes how different political power dynamics like class and gender associate with one another and how it either negatively or positively impacts a person. The film provides an opportunity to analyze how these aspects are expressed and take form through dance.

Gender norms in society are connected to certain expectations and even unwritten rules of how women and men should act (Connell & Pearse, 2015:13). The term masculinity and the multiple meanings of masculinity will be discussed in this essay. The way certain characters are portrayed such as their appearance, actions, movements and verbal and non-verbal expression, will be analyzed from a gender and class perspective. One of the key aspects of this essay is the focus on how masculinity is depicted in the film and analysis of if and how they reproduce or disprove/act against norms and male stereotypes.

The term class usually is understood as involving one's economic status but it also affects a person in other features of their life (Connell, 2005:77). In this analysis, the focus is mostly on how Hollywood created the film context of class differences for a more in-depth analysis of class. Bourdieu's theory on the *economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital* will be used in a sense on how it can be seen through different environments and styles of dancing. Additionally, Bourdieu's concepts, such as *fields* and *habitus*, will be helpful to strengthen the study.

## 2. Purpose and research questions

This study aims to investigate how Hollywood uses class divisions and gender in its narrative related to the art of dance in *Dirty Dancing* (1987). The title "Dirty Dancing" might lead readers to the conclusion that the discussion in this paper is of a film mainly about dance. Apart from the dancing, the film touches on many complex elements such as gender, class and the differences between them in society. It is important to consider these divisions in society as popular culture not only imitates real life, it also reproduces hegemonic power structures (Strinati, 2004:211). Therefore it is an interesting subject to do a qualitative textual analysis focusing on the art of dancing with a perspective on gender norms, specifically masculinity, class differences and how they are connected.

Popular culture can be interpreted in various ways, not least by the film industry where Hollywood actively has sought to produce profitable films by following popular trends in society through the narrative. In dance films such as *Dirty Dancing* (1987), the focus is mainly on the dancing though many elements can be found for one to analyze thoroughly. Through certain movements, dance styles can reflect status and culture as for "high" culture and "low" culture. It can even encourage different forms of society's power structures. Therefore our research questions are:

- *How is dance represented in Dirty Dancing in relation to masculinity and class?*
- *How does Hollywood use class and gender as a part of the narrative in Dirty Dancing?*

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Qualitative textual analysis

In the field of media studies, two main methods are applied; quantitative methods and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods rely on gathering data, measuring and observing, while qualitative analysis deals with interpreting and analyzing media texts to understand the presented reality being portrayed through media (Ekström & Larsson, 2010:16,21,119). According to Ledin and Moberg, we are surrounded by texts in our everyday lives. Per the definition by Ledin and Moberg, texts consist of different systems of symbols. There are written texts in place, comprised of a system of letters on paper, a computer screen, a bulletin board or other. When widening the 'text' concept, it applies to other systems of symbols that create meaning. In this case, these could include speech (sound), pictures and symbols of music, clothes, computer programs and architecture. With these symbols, we create meaning and construct a world of texts. We read newspapers, listen to radio, watch television, read and write emails, google information et cetera. Ledin and Moberg argue that by studying society we can gain a better understanding of why texts look the way they do (153:2010). By analyzing and interpreting texts, we learn more about ourselves and how society appears and functions (ibid). A textual analysis will be applied on *Dirty Dancing* (1978) by approaching the chosen scenes as a system of symbols to be analyzed and dissected.

When carrying out a textual analysis, it is important to keep in mind that even though the text itself is diligently read and interpreted, there is a risk that the context might be neglected. Ledin and Moberg emphasize that context involves intertextuality (155:2010). Intertextuality according to them, is about interplay between texts and participants (ibid). When deconstructing a text, the main goal is often to understand it the way the sender had in mind when constructing the text (Ledin & Moberg 2010:160).

### 3.2 Narrative analysis

The idea of narrative can be applied in the context of a human condition such as personal identity or practice. Narratives are also important for understanding the world and events that occur in various ways in real life; therefore it's also used in different forms of media. Mostly it follows

specific structures so audiences are able to better follow a storyline, such as having a beginning, middle and an end. Narrative meaning is often created by one sequence after another through a structure of a story for the ending to be clear. A plotline is a sequence of events where the narrative of each sequence affects the next through the principle of a cause and effect and can be a notion of a retrospective idea (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015:21-24,27-29). Furthermore, the narrative in a film is specifically structured to tell a story, such as *Dirty Dancing*, in an order that requires the audiences to watch the film from beginning to end. Without a structured narrative, it is impossible to sum up a plot, because a story is created to have meaning for audiences of a film and to generate as real a story as possible. This is why narratives are an essential factor in media (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015:30-32). The analysis is therefore focused on the narrative and its meaning from one action to another, adhering to a certain structure chosen for this analysis.

In short, qualitative textual analysis allows us to interpret the film as a media text and analyze how gender and class are depicted. Narrative analysis will assist us in understanding the meaning of the structure in the narrative of the film. The use of narrative analysis as an additional tool for the textual analysis of selected scenes will aid the analysis and explanation of the whole film text, elucidating how class and gender are depicted in the narrative. The result will generate what the film text entails for audiences through interpretation of the narrative structure in the storytelling.

### 3.3 Material & Focus

As *Dirty Dancing* (1987) is nearly two hours long, it seemed redundant to do an analysis of the whole film, which resulted in us delimiting our material to a few scenes. When choosing scenes to analyze we found it fitting to focus on three scenes, one in the beginning of the film, one in the middle, and one in the end. Scenes where both dialogue and dance occurred seemed suitable for this particular analysis for the reason that they seem to aptly represent both gender norms and class differences through Hollywood narrative. Gathering data required watching the whole film in order to select scenes that met the criteria. Although the analysis is based on three scenes, few other scenes of interest are also discussed.

### 3.4 Critical reflection

Qualitative methods, such as textual analysis, have received critique for being based on subjective interpretation and not being supported by quantitative data (Ekström & Larsson 2010:15). In textual analysis combined with narrative analysis, there is much weight on interpretation. With this paper we do not claim objective truth. We are well aware that our interpretation is based on and perhaps limited to our own frame of reference and therefore, do not claim to deliver a neutral reading (Ledin & Moberg 2011:153). Even though narrative analysis is only used as a complementary tool to strengthen the textual analysis there is still a risk of confusing the two processes of the interpretation. Although in this case, narrative analysis is an adequate addition and a useful tool to textual analysis. Using narrative analysis binds us to the certain structure of narratives from one sequence to another, additionally we need to interpret and analyze each scene keeping in mind the sequence that happened before and the following. All sequences have meaning to each other and are connected, therefore it is important to analyze each scene correctly to avoid the analysis of one sequence taking over the analysis of the whole film.

## 4. Theory & concepts

### 4.1.1 Theory on Masculinity

The Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity derives its original elements from class, gender, psychology and sociological theory structured by interviews with teenagers, their parents and teachers. Connell began her research in the late '70s for what later became the theory, when questions were raised because of educational inequality in Australia (Wedgwood, 2009:330-333). Connell's approach is to recognize the variety of masculinity and femininities, in a way of standards of non-normative behaviour which means it should be about what people actually do and not about gender expectations. Masculinities and femininities differ depending on historical and cultural contexts and are performed by people that are of different generations, race and class, which dictates why it should be considered in plural not singular (Demetriou, 2001).

## 4.1.2 Hegemonic masculinity & other relevant concepts

*Hegemonic masculinity* is one of the main concepts in Connell's theory on masculinity and focuses on recognizing the multiple masculinities based on culture and an individual in time both external and internal (Demetriou, 2001). In both modern American and European culture, hegemonic masculinity is a stereotypical belief of masculinity that shapes the socialization and desired achievements of young males. Hegemonic masculinity is believed to include having to compete with one another, not being able to express emotions other than anger, oppression of showing weakness, and depreciation of women and all feminine elements in men (Connell 2005:22,54,68-70).

Connell (2005:77-78) explains *Hegemonic masculinity* from two layouts, domination of women and the hierarchy of intermale dominance which also affects the hegemony over subordinate masculinities. The main purpose for the theory is to provide an understanding of how and why men keep this dominant social role over women in society and other gender identities, which are perceived as feminine. Connell reformulated the concept to include gender hierarchy, different meanings of masculinity in other forms of structure, looking at the process of social embodiment and through the psychological social dynamics of the multiple ways of the concept masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009). The concept of *Hegemonic masculinity* is relevant especially when analyzing the first and the second scene regarding the behaviors, language and personal positions of different characters depending on class and gender differences.

*Masculine Complicity* means that masculinity is constructed in ways that cast light on the patriarchal dividend without the exact definition of patriarchy. Essentially, some men like to play football, others prefer fatherhood and marriage. Connell also brings attention to the importance of *masculine bodily experiences* such as anything to do with appearance and movements, embodiment through sports, sexual desires and various ways of behaviours (Connell 2005: 54-55,79-80). These concepts have an important part in the analysis in the second and third scene, when Johnny shows his respect to other characters' requests other than his own and his bodily strength and movement regarding his dance profession.

Elements of hegemonic masculinity are not restricted to the power men have over women as the legitimate patriarchy, but also affect various types of masculinity (Wedgwood, 2009). According to Connell, men have made an effort to reform their masculinity, partly because of feminist criticism but also devotion to personal growth in relationship with oneself and female lovers. *Moment of engagement* with hegemonic masculinity means to be connecting to their feminine side at the same time as rejecting masculine aspects that are taught to men at a young age. This process extends into awareness and sexual attraction to women only and Connell calls it *heterosexual sensibility*. Connell argues that men become aware within their social practice by adapting femininity and is connected to its roots to the relationship with their mother and childhood experiences. *Moment of separation* is related to when a man is getting in touch with nature and is about men's *renunciation* regarding their sexuality and emotional expression, men hold back their patriarchal behaviour towards women and instead they choose to be passive and vulnerable. It extends to the reflection of the relationship men have with their mother as a development into a relationship with another woman. *The annihilation of masculinity* represents yet another dimension of masculinity and can be explained as a reformation. By breaking barriers with the goal of being open, men can be vulnerable and honest towards another woman other than their own mother and thereby undoing masculinity in order to find their own identity (Connell, 2005:8-12,120-123,130-136). The above mentioned concepts derived from Connell's Hegemonic masculinity theory are used in the analysis to be able to explain Johnny's romantic verbal, non-verbal and physical masculine expressions towards Baby which can be recognized in the second and third scene.

Connell also discusses historical concepts that define masculinity. One such concept is the *Essential* definition which categorizes certain characteristics or dispositions as masculine and defines these as the core of masculinity. Freud flirted with the essential definition and viewed masculinity, which can include a man being risk taking or/and aggressive for an example as a contrast to feminine passivity. Connell argues against this definition for the reason that her theory is building on a complex and multifaceted masculinity (Connell, 2005:68). Essential masculinity is used in the analysis of the third scene when Johnny is showing strength and stepping out of his comfort zone and is discussed further in chapter 5.3.

### 4.1.3 Bourdieu's capital, habitus & fields

The French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu presents his theory of class distinctions with central concepts such as *capital*, *habitus* and *fields* which he coined in his ethnographic research of the Kabyle peoples of the Berbers in Algeria (Broady, 1988). Bourdieu's work emphasized how social classes uphold their social privileges through generations despite the false promise of post-industrial society having equal opportunities for all through education. These concepts will be of assistance in the analysis to help bring to light the class discrepancies in *Dirty Dancing* (1987). Habitus is one of Bourdieu's most influential yet enigmatic concepts. It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we gained due to our life experiences (Broady, 1988). Broady describes habitus as the symbolic capital engraved into the body, a system of dispositions. This results in social experiences, collective memory, ways of moving and thinking being ingrained in people's bodies and minds (Broady, 1988:6). Bourdieu (1977:82) suggests that habitus is a product of history, producing individual and collective practices, in accordance with the schemes created by history. In fact, Bourdieu claims that habitus is handed over from generation to generation: "...it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us." (1980:79). From Bourdieu's perspective there are some positions, such as the priest or the prophet, already prepared within a cultural field. The task of sociology is to map out the subtil game that leads certain people to develop certain qualities (habitus) (Broady, 1988:9). Bourdieu explains different types of capital. To be able to present an argument, a short introduction to the different types of capital and how capital works is vital. It is worth defining what Bourdieu means by the term 'culture' as he does not mean culture in any general sense, but culture that is bound to society's power hierarchies, what often is called "fine culture", in other words the dominating, legitimate culture which is accepted in schools and careers in social fields where power is wielded (Broady, 188:3). Cultural capital is based on people's beliefs. Broady takes the position of a literary professor as an example, the cultural capital of this title relies on school teachers, librarians, and basically in lacking meaning for more educated people to believe that literature is of value. Broady explains that cultural capital only works as capital if it is recognized, if there are markets that award it value (Broady, 1988:5). Cultural capital exists mainly in people's bodies as knowledge, experiences, ways to interpret and think, talk and move. But there are also, in Bourdieous language use, in "objectified" and "institutionalized" forms, for example

educational institutions, museums, books, newspapers, theories and techniques (Broady 1988:5). According to Bourdieu (1984:127-131), a *field* is the setting in which any interaction such as production, circulation, and appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status occurs. The field also denotes the competitive positions held by the different actors participating in the struggle to get access by accumulating, exchanging or monopolizing various power resources or *capital*. A field emerges when people contend for symbolic and material assets that are available and common to them (Broady, 1988:5). The structure of a field is a state of power ratio between actors or the institutions involved in the struggle, or if you will, a state in the distribution of the specific capital controlling the future strategies that have been accumulated from previous battles (Bourdieu, 1984:127-128).

## 4.2 Previous research

There have been previous studies looking at the portrayal of class differences and forms of masculinity in Hollywood films. Jade Boyd (2004) explores the dancing body through the dynamics of race, gender and class. Specifically, she focuses on the popular dance film *The Last Dance* (2011). The article also looks at the tensions between classical and popular dance. Boyd (2004) emphasizes that dance styles are encoded with meanings that create and embody cultural values and claims that popular teen-dance films have the tendency to reaffirm conventional norms when it comes to the cultural image of dance. Her work was done using critical dance studies perspective combined with a cinematic analysis.

*Dirty Dancing* (1978) has also been the topic for research. In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen*, Colleen Dunagan and Roxane Fenton (2014) explore how *Dirty Dancing* (1987) was filmed and edited to portray Baby 'becoming a woman'. This chapter argues that the film is mainly a gendered coming of age story and that Baby Houseman's dancing allows her to embody normative femininity and attain sexualized womanhood. Moreover, Dunagan and Fenton (2014) explore the usage of racially marked dance forms such as the Mambo and how they are used to display the characters coming more and more in touch with their sexuality. Additionally, this chapter places *Dirty Dancing* (1987) in a dialogue with the sociocultural climate of the time the film was set and the time of the film's production. In a detailed textual analysis, Stephen Lee Naish (2017) deconstructs *Dirty Dancing* (1987) from beginning to end.

Using textual analysis, Naish analyzes the film and touches on social themes like class politics, the failings of liberalism in Sixties America and beyond, abortion, courting and sex out of wedlock, the collapse of the family unit, and all this set against a generational shift, which according to Naish, was imminent in 1963, the year the film takes place.

The mainstream narrative features of storytelling specific for Hollywood films were examined in a study by Kristin Thompson (Boardwell, 2006:35) and was described as consisting of a four-part structure formulated through the central feature of classical storytelling. Hollywood films are built from one sequence to another with different events happening depending on the plot of the film. The four large parts in a Hollywood storytelling featured parts are *Setup*, *Complicating Action*, *Development* and *Climax* plus the *Epilogue*. Analyzing *Dirty Dancing* (1987) from a Hollywood perspective will gain understanding how Hollywood narratives are structured throughout a film and how they portray class differences and gender through the art of dance in different parts of the film. It has been suggested that the Hollywood plot structure engages the audience to have mental and emotional experiences (Boardwell, 2006:35-42). This narrative structure used in film will be kept in mind when performing an analysis of *Dirty Dancing* (1987). Additionally, the Hollywood structure follows William Labov's basic narrative structure (Labov, 1972).

The term *popular culture* is relevant in this paper and will be mentioned in the following chapters. Therefore, Storey and Strinati's research will be of assistance in our analysis. According to Storey (2012), popular culture can be explained as something that is liked by many people and then it is possible to explain further through various reasons why and in what context (Storey, 2012:5). The definitions of popular culture that fit this study are the concepts of hegemony and postmodernism. From a hegemonic view, it would be referred to in a way that dominant groups rule over the subordinate groups in society. This can be any form of political culture power structure inequality within society. The balance of hegemony can be used to analyze various conflicts within and across popular culture involving class and gender, which fits the subject of the study (Storey, 2012:10-12). From a view of postmodernism, popular culture signs and media images affect the way we understand reality and an extension of the way we define ourselves and the way we see the world. The media has played a huge part in constructing

our perception of social reality. Because of popular culture, consumption through media determines what we purchase and how we consume it, such as streaming services to be able to watch certain films or tv shows. It could be said that images possibly determine our narrative (Strinati, 2004:211-213).

While all these studies are important to the field and have been assisting this paper in gaining a better understanding and laying out the groundwork for this analysis, this study will contribute to the field by discussing some aspects that are not included in previously mentioned articles. By focusing on the dancing in the film, the film text can be analyzed on a deeper level.

### 4.3 Critical reflection

Using Bourdieu's theory can be problematic when analyzing a popular culture text. In our case, *Dirty Dancing* (1987) is made by a team of writers, producers, cameramen, set decorators and portrayed by actors who read a prepared script. It is important to note that a film, or any popular culture text for that matter, does not reflect reality. Although, it can be analyzed in hope of gaining understanding of how popular culture texts can impact reality or vice versa.

Connell's theory on masculinities certainly helps with analysing the chosen scenes, though it can be problematic to interpret masculinities as everyone has different understandings of the term and different frames of reference and therefore it could be difficult to connect it to the theory. Connells theory is based on culture, and a lot has changed in perspective of gender since the film was released, both culturally and socially. We need to keep in mind that socialization can affect our judgement on how we interpret the masculine characters in *Dirty Dancing* (1987) in combination with how we find ourselves understanding society today from a gender perspective.

## 5. Analysis

The choice of scenes that will be analyzed further in the following chapters, are scenes that strengthen the argument of this essay. The first scene is from the beginning of the film and provides more depth to the characters and also a glimpse to the direction the narrative is heading. The second scene shows the deep feelings the protagonists have for one another. Lastly, the third

scene is the most iconic scene of the film and brings us to the significance of the plot of which ties together all the parts as a resolution for the whole point of the film.

## 5.1 First scene

From a Hollywood narrative structure, the first scene is a part of the *Setup* which includes the first act and usually happens 12 to 15 minutes into a film. The audience gets to know the characters and the setup also often includes an inciting accident/incident that happens (Boardwell, 2006:35-36,41). The first scene (00:13:12) shows Baby's first introduction to the world of "dirty dancing". Baby is on an evening walk when she notices a lively noise coming from the staff quarters. On further inspection, she realizes that a party is going on. One of the staff, Billy, is a childhood friend of Baby, agrees to let her in if she promises to not tell anyone about the party. Baby is taken by surprise when she sees the way the staff are dancing. Hips grinding against each other, people dancing very close and hands going up and down each other's bodies. This way of dancing is a big contrast to what Baby is used to. The scene highlights the differences in how the working-class, represented by the staff, and the upper-class, represented by the guests, spend their free time in their respective comfort zones (*Dirty Dancing*, 1987).

*BABY: "Where'd they learn to do that?"*

*BILLY: "Where? I don't know! Kids are doing it in the basements back home. Want to try it?"*

Baby shakes her head as a sign of refusal.

*BILLY: "Can you imagine dancing like this on the main floor, home of the family foxtrot? Max would close this place down first"...*

*JOHNNY: "Yo, cuz. What's she doing here?"*

Johnny immediately notices that Baby is new. This might be because he knows everyone who works there and notices a new face. It might also be because she looks different. The way she is dressed and the way she stares. Perhaps he knows right away that she is one of the guests and not one of the workers, therefore not invited to the party. The party is supposed to be a secret, the boss and the resort's guests are not supposed to know anything about it. Because of that reason it

might be that Johnny is a little bit nervous about the fact that she found the party and she is one of the guests of the upper-class and she possibly could tell on them.

The staff quarters can be interpreted as one of Bourdieu's fields. For a field to function, actors are needed to put in effort, to be willing to play the game, gifted with *habitus* that help them understand the rules (Bourdieu 1991:128). When entering the party, Baby is not familiar with the rules. Just by entering the party she is breaking the rules, as she is not one of the workers. Johnny questions her being there and looks displeased. When speaking in terms of social class, Baby is of upper-class while Johnny is of working-class. But in this particular field, Johnny finds himself in a higher position than Baby. His social capital is seen when he and Penny walk into the party and everyone cheers. Baby knows no one and is not even allowed to be there. The workers have a shared social capital (feeling of collective identity, sharing the same values and beliefs), which Baby is not a part of (Broady, 1988:6). It can also be noticed when Johnny asks Baby to dance. Johnny possesses habitus (Symbolic capital which is settled in the body. The result of social experiences, collective memories, the way he moves his body and thinks that is engraved in his body and mind) and he teaches her how to dance 'dirty' (ibid.).

The movie is set in the 1960s and the music used in *Dirty Dancing* (1987) captures that period. After the Second World War, more opportunities opened up for women, they had, for example, greater freedom with respect to education. New sexual behavioural patterns and norms, in particular among college students, also developed. Different decades are characterized by different music genres. The Rock and Blues genre of the '60s fired up the younger generation. People were attracted to the music, not only for how the music sounded but also because of the songs' lyrics and how the songs were performed. The musicians expressed their sexuality through their songs and how they moved during the performance of the songs. The young people enjoying Rock and Blues, drawn to how sexuality was expressed by the musicians, were regarded rebellious since, in 1960, sexual expression was considered something that belonged in the private sphere, not something that could be shown or enjoyed openly. It is noteworthy that the lyric's narrative was mostly about sexual acts between people and objectification of women (August, 2009).

From a gender perspective, the scene shows the staff quarters at first glance the dance partners paired up as men and women. It was especially noticeable because of the clothes they wore, women wore skirts with tank tops or dresses and the men wore shirts with pants and some had hats on. It is even easy to spot where the hands are placed on the bodies in the moment of dancing depending on the gender, girls having their hands around the men's neck and the men usually had their hands low on the girl's waist or the buttocks. This could easily be interpreted as somewhat a gender role affected by socialization in sport/art of dancing but also the male heterosexual sexuality (Collins & Pearse, 2015: 36-37). Possibly, this is the way the narrative portrays people's sexuality in the film as a symbol of heterosexuality, it could be interpreted as patriarchal or it could be interpreted as being a part of a style of dancing or the narratives are highlighting the sexual tension between the characters. The song that is playing at the party is *Do You Love Me (The Contours, 1962)*. The lyrics of the song infer although not openly, sexual arousal but the narrative does encourage a certain style of dancing that could be denotations of "dirty dancing". Examples from the lyrics are "I can really shake 'em down", "I can really move", "Ah, work it all baby", "Now tell me baby, Do you like it like this". The lyrics' connotation is highly personal and would depend on what kind feelings are evoked in the listener when hearing a song. It is therefore possible that this song was chosen for this scene as it could be interpreted as sexual, especially since the movie was released in the 1980s (August, 2009). So it could even be seen/regarded as the popular culture attaching the norms in society at this time period. In western culture, it is said that through dance, body and nature are connected to women while the mind is connected to men and reason. Boyd talks about this as showing the patriarchy as for the men are supposed to be more intelligent while the women can only think with their bodies (Boyd, 2004).

Johnny walks into the staff quarters very confident, as mentioned above, he is within his place of shared *social capital*. His presence gives away his power position among his team of dancers, which could be interpreted as a sign that he is well respected. He doesn't need to oppress his masculinity among these people. According to Boyd (2004), classical Hollywood films tend to prefer characteristic representations of white male as independent, ambitious, professional and sexually confident. The narrative confirms Johnny's power position as a dance instructor and frontman for a socially inferior group of people who are also integral to the story's premise in the

microcosmos the resort represents. They are a part of resort life, but exist outside its mainstream elements. Johnny bridges both worlds and his position automatically elevates his status. This could be interpreted as *hegemonic masculinity* in a sense that he comes off as being the boss of his fellow dancers and portrayed with obvious marks of his masculine features as a desirable man. *Hegemonic masculinity* is associated with class relations and has to do with man's leading position in social life. Johnny sees Baby, he acts like she is on his territory and asks Billy, his cousin, why she is there in front of her as if she is not even present to answer the question herself (Connell, 2005:75-78).

### 5.1.2 Just dance?

It is interesting to ask oneself what dance brings to a film as the audience often neglects to think about its meaning. It certainly is entertaining to watch a skilled dancer do an intricate number, but it can be argued that dance scenes add more than just entertainment. Dance is an ancient art form and a form of expressing oneself. The way dance is used in films is often just to add a little “flare”, but can even enhance the narrative. In fact, performance is an important part of narrative. Scholars have argued that race and gender are socially constructed through a series of manifested repetitive acts/gestures reinforced by specific cultural codes and that the perceptive meaning of what it means to be a man or a woman, a member of a particular race or class, is embedded in our cultural practices of these codes and reinforced by our repeated performance of these practices (Monroe 2014:188). In this particular scene, one could argue that gender is performed, seen through the respective genders dance moves. Dance can be a form of storytelling when dialogue fails. When a character is happy beyond words, it can be fitting to make the character burst out into dance instead of trying to make it clear through speech. Love is another feeling often depicted in dance. With the rise of musicals in the early part of the 20th century, dancing moved on from stage to screen (Washington Post, 2018).

Different dance styles have different cultural values. As Boyd explains it; dance styles are encoded with meanings that create, reflect and embody cultural values, and dance is a medium through which agency and/or independence can be enabled. Boyd points out that dancing became popular in the period right after the second world war among the working class and was mostly exciting because of the bodily satisfaction of dancing and was therefore connoted as deviant

sexual act/display (Boyd, 2004). Boyd even goes so far to say that tensions between high-culture and pop-culture are numerous in American dance narratives and operate to reflect upper-and middle-class social divides, as well as racial inequality (Boyd 2004:69). Dunagan and Fenton (2014) assert that *Dirty Dancing* (1987) is marked by class difference and signifies classed spaces in society and that it can be seen in the dancing in the film, observing that ballroom dance represents the (upper) middle-class world of the adult resort guests while the film marks the vigorous world of the working-class entertainment staff (2014:7).

## 5.2 Second scene

The second scene (01:06:40) that is analyzed here is the *Development* which is the third part of Hollywood narrative structure and which marks the midpoint of the film and is the second part of act two, then usually everything has fallen into place again after the dramatic tension from the complicated action that typically lasts for 25 to 30- minute length until the development begins. *Complicated actions* means that a conflict and tension has occurred and the direction for the protagonist has turned which is the second act and happens approximately 25 minutes into the film. The scene (25:13) portrays Penny having an illegal abortion, making her unable to perform with Johnny for the rest of the season. This leads to Baby taking her place as Johnny's dance partner for the final dance show of the season which changes the whole dynamic of the film in comparison to how the film started (Boardwell, 2006:28-29,36-37).

The narrative in this second scene is presenting Johnny and Baby's love for each other with them training for their performance for the final dance and shows Baby who has greatly improved her dance techniques. Their romantic relationship has developed at this point and they are having a playful dance session. In this scene, Baby is much more confident with dancing than she was in the beginning and is giving Johnny tips and critique because he is distracted with her presence.

BABY : “Two, three, cha-cha-cha. Hey! My space, where is my pleasing arc? Spaghetti arms! ... Would you give me some tension, please? You are invading my dance space... this is my dance space, that's yours.... Lets cha cha... Don't look down, look right here”

The roles have switched in this scene as Baby is the one who is playfully instructing Johnny which then turns into a romantic role play to the lyrics of the song *Love is Strange* (Mark & Sylvia, 1965).

Socialization has affected our opinion on gender norms from a young age as in girls wear pink and are polite while boys wear blue and are strong. These norms then carry on to the next generation and the next (Connell & Pearse, 2015:96-99). The physical expression through dancing, Johnny practicing in this scene shows a passionate and gentle man, attributes that are not often considered 'manly'. One might not describe it as being masculine because the people's expectations and norms of gender roles have been constructed by society throughout history and have clouded people's judgement in defining what being a man is (Connell, 2005:25). It is for example often referred to men's characters as being more aggressive than women's and men's bodily strength being stronger and/or faster than women's. This is often related to men's hormones as for the high or low testosterone level in a man and therefore are often expected to be violent in their behaviour and body movements (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 36-37). Additionally, it is worth thinking about that if men and women are always spoken about as two separate unions, the terms *feminine* and *masculine* wouldn't exist (Connell, 2005:69-71).

This scene can be interpreted as an expression of love, showing a man, who is a dancer, being in love and using his talent as a romantic gesture. Dance is an art that requires soft movements and as for our interpretation it could easily be seen as feminine. Baby is showing power and determination as she is not just passively following his dance steps this time but their roles are reversed. Development of a *moment of engagement* is a specific experience of the body and physical sensibility. This extends to the term *heterosexual sensibility* and is when heterosexual men embrace themselves through their feminine side and can be related to an intimate connection with a woman and their choice of profession such as Johnny being a professional dancer (Connell, 2005:121-125).

Johnny is having a *moment of separation* by forming a romantic relationship with a strong woman like Baby in this scene. The narrative is showing Johnny's side as a caring lover who can be sensitive when being in love through dancing. Johnny's *reunification* in this scene shows him

separating himself from hegemonic masculinity, choosing to be passive, his performance is characterized by loving and emotional expressions with Baby. He is passionate in the way he moves his body and the way he looks at Baby, even his behaviour seems to be controlled by his feelings he has for Baby. The quality of men's *reunification* is that men have the capacity to show they care and to be sensitive (Connell, 2005:131-133).

The scene continues with Neil, who has feelings for Baby and is also in charge of the dance show, appears unexpectedly and interrupts the dance. Johnny and Baby turn to their normal positions as two individuals that are not involved with each other romantically. Baby starts doing dance steps like she is practicing on her own. Neil came to talk about the dance show. Johnny suggested some ideas from his students about a dance that they prefer to perform and does a quick dance move to show him. This can be interpreted that the narrative is showing Johnny's *masculine complicity*. Johnny does not encourage hegemonic masculinity in every situation and can be considerate of his students' wishes on which dance they would like to perform and not taking credit for it (Connell, 2005:79).

Neil quickly cuts him off: "*Whoah, whoah, you're way over your head here..*" And continues to explain his idea of changing the last dance of the summer from the *Mambo* to the *Pachanga*. Johnny, showing his discontent with Neil tearing down him and his ideas, he answers "*Right*". Neil reminds Johnny of his lower status in the hierarchy of the resort by saying "*Well, you're free to do the same tired number as last year if you want but, uh, next year we'll find another dance person that will be too happy to...*". Johnny cuts him off "*Sure Neil, we'll end the season with the Pechanga. Great idea*" with an almost sarcastic tone.

This scene shows how Neil, who is the grandson of the resort's owner, is showing his masculinity and power through his economic status in comparison to Johnny as a part of the working-class. From our interpretation it could be analyzed as Neil hinting at the class differences between him and Johnny as a way of impressing Baby and willingly humiliating Johnny in front of her. *Hegemonic masculinity* could be explained as a different political power structure between groups of men. Johnny has power as an experienced dancer and has more knowledge when it comes to dancing but Neil has a higher class status and is in a power position

because of his grandfather, in this case the class hierarchy rules over the dance profession (Connell, 2005:77-80). It would make more sense that Johnny, who is the dancer, had some saying in which dance styles should be performed but in the scene it can be seen how the class difference affects his masculinity in a way of him not defending himself properly.

*“Sometimes he’s hard to talk to but the ladies seem to like him”*. Neil says this within earshot of Johnny, perhaps in an attempt to humiliate him. The way Neil implies that Johnny is not smart or even worth having a conversation with allows for the interpretation that Neil is aiming to put down Johnny for being in a lower social class than him. Neil further exercises his power over Johnny (via his work position) and reminds him of his lower class status by saying:

*“Make sure he is giving you the full half-hour you’re paying for, kid”* with these words, Neil reminds both Baby and Johnny that he is a worker and therefore beneath them.

Naish states: *“Johnny Castle is brutish masculinity. He has the look of a handsome street tough. He comes from a lower working-class background; later on we’ll learn he comes from a family of unionized house painters and day laborers. If he weren’t a dancer his other option in life could have been as a prize boxer”* (Naish 2017:24). Collins would probably disagree with Naish on this statement. As we have presented above, Connell’s idea of masculinity is much more complex than Naish’ perception of masculinity. In the book *Masculinities* (2005), Connell says that studies of definitions of masculinity are implicated in the history of institutions and of economic structures. Masculinity is not just an idea of what a man ought to be or from his personal identity. It has different interpretations depending on different cultures in the world and is also combined with social relations (Connell, 2005:29). Although Naish at times is humoristic in his writing, his understanding of masculinity seems quite materialistic and focused on looks.

When viewing this scene from a class perspective it is clear that the dialogue between Neil and Johnny is a form of power play from Neil’s side. It seems that Neil is very aware of his position and capital (Broady, 1988:6). Being the grandson of the owner of the retreat, he knows he can influence his grandfather into certain decisions and wants other characters to be aware of that as well. This can even be seen through the whole film. In almost every interaction Neil has with

another character, it seems he tries every time to make the other character aware that he is in a position of some power. Even though Neil is lacking knowledge of dance, he insists on choosing the final dance of the season. It seems that in some cases, when a person of immense power enters a field, which he has little knowledge about, can still use his capital to get what he wants (Bourdieu, 1984:127-128). According to Ryan and Lenos (2012:112), spoken words are essential for the meaning in a film. Speech can be a form of action and can vary in purpose. A character's verbal expression can be crystal clear or obscure but is always put in place to drive the plot forward. In this instance, Neil's words are used to exhibit his power over Johnny to both characters in the room.

### 5.2.2 Dancing

The dancing in *Dirty Dancing* (1987) is both a natural element in the story, as it takes place in a summer resort where dance lessons are provided as the film revolves around a dance instructor, and also a way of storytelling. By approaching dance as text itself in the popular culture text, there is more data to be gathered and analyzed, possibly resulting in a deeper analysis. Koven (2015) argues that people perform cultural identities in storytelling interactions (2015:387). In this scene, one could interpret that Baby's performance represents dominance while Johnny's performance represents subordination, depicting their class statuses and enhancing the narrative through performance. Dunagan and Fenton (2014) argue that to all appearances, the film links spontaneous dancing with sex and sexualized body awareness (2014:13). This playful scene portraying Johnny and Baby dancing while flirting in the studio communicates to the audience that the love between the two characters is growing and also shows Baby becoming more confident in her dancing. Dunagan and Fenton even go so far to suggest that this scene shows that the transgressive nature of their now sexual relationship also leads to the narrative events to cast them both, momentarily, out of their social positions (ibid.).

## 5.3 Third scene

The third and last scene (01:28:37) we analyze is perhaps the most famous scene from the film. From a Hollywood perspective the *climax* (01:09:20) happens after the *development* around minute 70 and lasts for 20-30 min until the *epilogue* starts. The *climax* is the third act and builds up attention for the *epilogue*. Johnny has been fired from his job because he was wrongly

accused of stealing but is innocent. Now the climax has presented the resolution to a new harmony and balance, and lastly the *epilogue* is presented (Boardwell, 2006:28-29,31,37-38,41-42). Johnny comes back for the final performance of the season despite the fact he has been fired. In Hollywood narrative, epilogue is the final act and should reveal if the protagonists Johnny and Baby achieve their goal or not. Johnny walks in confidently and looks over the crowd to find Baby. As soon as he comes to the table where Baby and her parents are sitting, he says:

JOHNNY: *“Nobody puts Baby in a corner”*.

This sentence is straightforward and could also be interpreted as passionate. The narrative has changed from Johnny being a boy that was ordered around and never able to have his own opinions. He is showing masculinity at its core which is the *essential* definition of stereotypical masculinity, Johnny is facing all of the people that he once was afraid of standing up to, he has decided to take a risk and show his masculinity as the one in power to get what he wants. Baby is seen as very passive in this scene and it is interesting since essential masculinity is an activity in contrast with feminine passivity (Connell, 2005:68-70). If one would imagine what a definition of a man was when reflecting on popular culture at the time the film was set then it's possible the narrative wants to shine a light on that. As the scene carries on, Johnny walks onto the stage, past his former boss, who had just fired him, and all the performers during their act. Slowly everyone stops singing and Johnny walks straight to the mic and says:

JOHNNY: *“Sorry about the disruption folks, but I always do the last dance of the season. This year somebody told me not to. So I'm gonna do my kind of dancin' with a great partner... who's not only a terrific dancer...but somebody who's taught me...that there are people...willing to stand up for other people...no matter what it costs them.”*

Johnny pauses for a second as if he is moved by his own words with pride and then he turns his head to look at Baby that stands next to him. He carries on and says:

JOHNNY: “*Somebody who’s taught me...about the kind of person I want to be. Miss Frances Houseman*”

After the message has been delivered by Johnny pouring his heart out with courage and independence the lights turn off and Billy gets the record ready and “(I’ve had) The Time of My Life” (Bill Medley, Jennifer Warnes, 1978) starts playing. The spotlight is turned on and is now only shining on Johnny and Frances as he puts his arms around her, their eyes locked on each other. They start to dance in a way that could be interpreted sexual and intimate which could be the denotation of the “dirty” dancing. They dance as if nobody is watching and instead the dancing indicates their love for one another and they are finally dancing the final dance in the way they wanted to express themselves.

This could be seen as an act of Johnny coming of age in a sense of becoming a man and standing for his desire. It could also be interpreted as *annihilation masculinity* as for the process of shaping a relationship with a strong woman. Johnny is reconstructing his masculine identity and making space for his feminine side which could be related to him publicly representing the romantic relationship with Baby in being vulnerable and open with his feelings for her. This is noticeable because it takes courage and strength to be in the position of belonging to the working class, by exposing himself completely and taking back power despite the class differences. The narrative is casting light on Johnny’s maturity on him having a romantic relationship with Baby and not being afraid of showing his identity through his way of dancing with independence and control without shame (Connell, 2005:53-55,134-136).

Johnny’s friends cheer by shouting and clapping their hands together and join him to become his background dancers. Johnny suddenly stops dancing, looks at Baby and gives her a nod as a sign that they should perform the lift that they had practiced so many times. She runs towards Johnny and he catches her perfectly and lifts her up.

Connell elaborates further about embodiments in athlete practises through different sports. In this scene, Johnny is performing his kind of dance style among the people of the upper-class in the art of “dirty dancing” even though it is disapproved of by the upper-class. Although, when

looking at body strength in sports as being masculine, at this moment of the scene is about breaking the norms between the class differences as being deviant and daring. The lift symbolizes his body strength as a masculine dancer and could even be interpreted as Johnny showing hierarchy among the upper-class with this bodily performance through his skill of dancing (Collins, 1995:54).

This scene in *Dirty Dancing* (1987) is explained by as the resolution of the post feminist cycle. Both Baby and Johnny have become better versions of themselves which also represents their love for each other despite the class difference. It is Johnny's moment for maturity and Schreiber carries on and describes this transformation as "a revelatory moment in which he or she realizes the other character's importance to his or her life." (Naish, 2017:56).

A few depictions of class differences can be seen in this scene. Johnny interrupts the final anthem sung by the staff knowing well he is disrupting the program and breaking the 'rules' in that particular social setting. When Johnny starts dancing into the crowd, the staff celebrates that he is taking back the last dance of the season which he was prohibited to perform. The act could be seen as a metaphor of an uprising of the working-class. Naish makes an interesting observation, pointing out the lyrics in the anthem that is sung by the staff before Johnny interrupts: "As promised in Kellerman's anthem, the classes have "come together as one." *It still makes sense that what we are witnessing is actually a perfect utopian vision inside Frances' own head.*" (Naish, 2017:58).

Dr. Houseman (Baby's father) goes up to Johnny, telling him he was wrong to assume and accuse Johnny that it was him that "got Penny into trouble", and that he is a man who admits when he is wrong. It is not quite the apology that Johnny would have wanted, as what he truly longs for is to be accepted by her family, but it is a step into the right direction. Dr. Houseman still does not accept Johnny dating his daughter, and was clearly happier when he believed her to be dating Neil, the grandson of the owner of the resort. It could be argued that Dr. Houseman sees that Johnny lacks the habitus that is needed to provide for his daughter. Perhaps, he is worried that Johnny doesn't have the means to care for Baby. Not only is Johnny lacking in economic capital, but also symbolic capital. To Baby's father, Johnny lacks the symbolic capital that he would need

in order to take care of Baby in the ‘real world’. Although Johnny has plenty of symbolic capital, which is readily converted into economic capital, as a dance instructor in the context of a summer resort in the Catskills, that capital will not be as valuable outside the resort (Bourdieu 1977:179). One could make the assumption that Baby’s father was more accepting of Neil because he has more capital, both economic and symbolic.

### 5.3.1 “Can you lift me up like in Dirty Dancing?”

This scene is considered the epilogue of the film, the dancing enforces that and adds further meaning to the narrative. One memorable part of the choreography is the renowned “*Dirty Dancing* lift”. This particular dance move has been referenced in countless films and TV shows and can be seen attempted by intoxicated club-goers on dance floors when the song “(I’ve had) The Time of My Life” (Bill Medley, Jennifer Warnes, 1978) is played and has become a part of our collective consciousness. The famous lift in the final dance can be interpreted in many ways and can be argued to have various meanings in the film. It could be interpreted to be the consummation of Johnny’s and Baby’s relationship, finally succeeding to do the long practiced lift in front of everyone at the resort. Dunagan and Fenton on the other hand argue that the lift represents Baby’s transformation into a dancer and a woman (2014:14). Additionally, to Dunagan and Fenton, this scene offers contradictions for Johnny’s character. The blending of ballroom and staff dance styles provides Johnny with a chance to escape the failed promise of the ballroom dance industry and show his own approach to dance (2014:15). As stories are often built up as a structure of beginning, middle and an end, certain themes and tropes are repeated through different stories. Faith Dickens writes about a reform narrative in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (Dickens, 2011). Dickens claims that a reform narrative features a male figure who is transformed with help from a virtuous female and in the case of *Beauty and the Beast*, it adopts the reform narrative focus on male change and its propagation of female innocence and virtue. This form of narrative has become a trope in romance stories and especially seen in fairy tales. This trope can also be seen in *Dirty Dancing* (1987). The change and growth of the male protagonist in the film (Johnny) is evident while the female protagonist (Baby/Frances) has, apart from her improvement in dancing, no change in character. Dickens argues that this reform narrative model is problematic from a feminist perspective due to its portrayal of change as an

exclusively male experience and leaves no room for the female character to make errors (2011:84). Baby/Frances is throughout the film portrayed as virtuous and ethical while Johnny improves as a person. As Dickens puts it: “Thus, male characters enjoy both a freedom of space and a freedom to adapt and change, while the females must be confined to a mold of flawless behavior for the reform narrative to succeed.” (2011:84). One can also reflect on the meaning of class in this ending of the film. An interesting question to ask is why Johnny confides in Baby/Frances. Perhaps the reason she has such an impact on him is that he recognizes her social and economic capital and strives to be more like her (Bourdieu 1984:127-131). Even though the film depicts two young people falling in love and genuinely caring for each other, it could be argued that on some level, he knows that being connected to her will help him to increase his own social and cultural capital, leading him to greater possibilities in life.

## 6. Conclusion & discussion

Throughout the film there are clear signs of class differences, both clearly uttered through speech and presented through non dialogue. As the film revolves around a high-end summer resort in the Catskills, most of the guests visiting the resort are of upper-class which is clearly portrayed in the film. When it comes to dialogue, Neil is one of the characters in the film that through speech makes the class discrepancies clearer. An example of this is the second scene in the analysis, when Neil interrupts Baby/Frances and Johnny’s dance session to threaten Johnny’s job position.

The division between the social classes in the film are also exemplified through dance. The divides become clear in the first scene in the analysis. Baby/Frances enters a room filled with the working-class staff of the resort having a party and dancing in a way that she is not used to. The ‘dirty dancing’ depicted in this scene represents the working class in their own element which Baby/Frances, coming from an upper-class upbringing, has never encountered in this way. The analysis shows that class divisions are explicit throughout the whole film and is an important element to the narrative and that dance is used to further create a narrative of divides between the social classes.

Analyzing *Dirty Dancing* (1987) with assistance of Connell’s theory on masculinity, proved to be very accurate with a sense of the fact that masculinity cannot be described through one

definition. It is worth being aware of the fact that this analysis is based on fictional characters in a film with different aspects of interpretation depending on what was happening in a particular scene. The narrative represents many definitions of masculinity through the art of dancing for example the way of dance movement, dance position, the male characters appearances and attitudes in the moment of dancing. It is clearly discernible in the way the narrative portrays male heterosexuality through dance, essentially how heterosexual men act towards women in a patriarchal society. This is exemplified in the first scene, the camera shots are focused on the bodies which makes it easy to see how the men are moving their hands up and down every inch of the women's bodies. This could easily be interpreted as inappropriate as it supports males dominant behaviour over subordination of women. In the second scene the narrative has changed direction and shows a behaviour of a heterosexual man in love with a woman. It is interesting to see how in that scene, the way they are dancing does not even come close to showing a man being inappropriate towards a woman if compared to the first scene in how allegedly the dance movements are portrayed. Dance is also used in the film as being something that one can be proud of and determined by through masculine body strength and manhood. An example of that is the third scene, whereas the narrative uses the dance as being a romantic way a heterosexual man expresses his love to a woman and change in masculinity supposedly coming of age.

For future studies on this subject, it would be interesting to look further than the content of the film text and perhaps conduct interviews to hear what the audience thinks. This could be achieved by conducting semi-structured interviews which could give nuanced answers (Ekström & Larsson, 2010: 58,60). This analysis has been conducted with the framework of gender and class theories, but is nonetheless from our own perspective. With interpretation of texts, the understanding depends on the reader's own frame of reference. It can also be counterproductive to constantly try to analyze class differences and gender norms depicted in popular cultural texts as there is a risk for instead of understanding them better and removing them, further locking them in and reproducing them. In a capitalist and patriarchal society, there will always be divides between the social classes as well as gender, which popular culture texts are likely to continue representing.

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