

**“Like a Haven: Not Work, Not Home!”  
Ballet as Escape Ritual for Middle Class Working Women.**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper stems from an ongoing ethnographic study of women who attend adult ballet classes in Atlanta, Georgia. The project draws on narratives collected in one-on-one interviews and fourteen months of participant observation. The primary aim of this research is to explore the motivations behind these women's engagement in an activity traditionally associated with tots and teens, not working women and mothers. I am interested in how these women explain their involvement in ballet, and how they situate their classes in relation to the rest of their lives. I examine what their narratives tell us about the physical and psychological burdens of contemporary work and family life, as well as the ways in which modern women are and are not able to escape these burdens.

The paper that follows divides into two. In Part One, I explore why the women I am studying represent what philosophers call a "category mistake." I show how these women are acutely aware of their "deviancy" both in terms of age/appearance and in terms of the ideology of "good" (i.e. intensive, self-sacrificing) mothering that is dominant in the U.S. I discuss the ways in which these women both reproduce and challenge the discourses that mark their participation in ballet classes as "deviant."

Following Janice Radway, who examined reading-as-escape both in terms of act and content, the second part of my paper examines how my interviewees explain their choice of ballet, specifically.<sup>1</sup> For while the mothers in the group spoke of a generalized desire for "me time," *all* of the women in the group commented on the unique lures of ballet as an escape from their work lives. For example, several of the women in the group state that ballet allows them to get in touch with "feminine" selves that are perforce muted at work. Others claim that ballet helps them to recapture a sense of themselves as free and unencumbered.

At the end of Part Two, I draw attention to some of the contradictions within and across these women's narratives. For while some of their statements on ballet versus work seem relatively straightforward, others are deeply complicated. I show, for example, how descriptions of ballet as freedom from pressure and surveillance are hard to reconcile with descriptions of ballet as pressure and surveillance. Having outlined a series of discrepancies and incongruities, I then suggest different ways in which we might begin to theoretically account for them. In my conclusion, I outline a number of directions for future research and summarize some of the ways in which this project challenges us to revise our thinking--perhaps even our policy-making--around work and leisure, motherhood and family.

## Part One: “Everybody’s kind of quizzical: ‘What? Why?’”<sup>2</sup> Rejecting, Respecting and Re-writing the Rules.

### INTRODUCTION

#### *i)The ballet context*

In 2000, a low-budget British film about a boy who loves ballet made a big splash at the box office. But while Billy Eliot successfully challenged one stereotype about ballet--that it’s only for girls--it left intact another: that it’s strictly for youngsters. Ask anyone to describe a typical ballet class and they summon up images of precocious six-year-olds or primadonna teens. The world of ballet, as we imagine it, has everything to do with youthfulness and nothing to do with getting old. In popular ballet narratives--and Billy Eliot is no exception--adults invariably star either as proud, pushy, or protesting parents, or as washed-up instructors who live vicariously through their talented young prodigies.

The idea of ballet as somehow incompatible with adulthood is neither a new nor a purely popular perception. Even the most cursory glance at the literature on dance theory and history reveals the extent to which ballet has, since its inception, flaunted its separation from real world cares and concerns and embraced a kind of romanticized “juvenescence.” A longstanding feature of ballet, its artistic *raison d’etre* in fact, has been its glorification of youthfulness and weightlessness, an aesthetic preoccupation that has had interesting repercussions in terms of the construction and perpetuation of gender stereotypes. As dance critic Lesley-Anne Sayers notes, ballet’s imaginary is deeply gendered and glorifies, “perpetual virginity, an idealized and ethereal femininity that reaches for the sky and the domain of the gods, rather than for the earth and its associations with mothering and nature.”<sup>3</sup>

Sayers highlights a series of dichotomies that are central to understanding the aesthetic appeal of ballet: virgin/mother; ideal/real; ethereal/heavy; sky/earth; sacred/profane; light/heavy. It is worth restating that these are by no means simply academic categories. These binaries dominate popular perceptions of ballet including, as we shall see anon, those of the participants in this study. What is also crucial to stress here is that ballet’s association with all things ethereal goes beyond the realm of the purely aesthetic. Certainly, this association is, above all, a matter of performance artistry; historically the ballerinas that have garnered the most praise have been those sylphs who, having perfected the art of effortless grace, were admirably compared to “birds, butterflies, feathers, moonbeams, shadows.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the plot lines of romantic and classical ballet endlessly idealize the tragic figure of the beautiful young maiden, that lovely ingénue sylph who, being too good for this world, is fatally damaged by contact with its players. However, behind the scenes of ballet’s ethereal performances exists a very real story about arrested development. L.M. Vincent has described ballet’s body-requirements as “on a collision course” with normal hormonal development, and countless observers have noted that ballerinas steal the show when it comes to perfecting the art of the eating disorder.<sup>5</sup> The important point here is that ballerinas do not simply perform a kind of suspended youthfulness, they often live it too.

A corollary of this is that, at both the practical and aesthetic level, ballet has long been at odds not only with aging, but also with motherhood. Historically, ballerinas who found

themselves pregnant were pressured to abort,<sup>6</sup> and those who carried to term invariably dumped their offspring on grandparents, siblings or friends.<sup>7</sup> Today, the “problem” of motherhood can be avoided/delayed (via contraception), and is not infrequently rendered moot due to significantly high levels of amenoreah.

In popular discourse, narratives about ballerinas being forced to “choose” between motherhood and career are commonplace. Alan Parker’s 1980 hit musical Fame included a plot line about a suitably narcissistic, haughty, aspiring ballerina having an abortion. The 1977 film Turning Point revolves around the emotionally charged reunion of two friends who both trained to be ballerinas but who, as the film’s title suggests, had to make either/or decisions about family versus career. One chose motherhood, the other went on to be a star. The message that ballet and motherhood are perilously opposed even gets conveyed in ballet fictions aimed at child audiences. In Mal Lewis-Jones’ 1994 Ghost at the Ballet School, for example, the spoiled anti-heroine Amanda Renwick turns out to be the daughter of a “once great ballerina who died in childbirth at the height of her fame.”<sup>8</sup> Haunted by a woman who made the fatal mistake of combining motherhood and ballet, Amanda “suffers under a huge psychological burden, a secret that leads her first to theft and then to mental collapse.”<sup>9</sup> Still in the realm of popular discourse but moving from fictional to real-life stories, we can note that the very recent media fuss surrounding Darcy Bussell’s determination to combine her role as the Royal Ballet’s principal ballerina with the role of mother provides further evidence of just how unusual it is for a ballerina to try to fuse career and family.<sup>10</sup>

In speaking of the problematic relationship between ballet and motherhood in this way, I do not wish to make a case for ballet over motherhood or vice versa. Rather, what I am trying to highlight here is the way in which “ballet” and “mother” operate as antithetical terms. Understanding this opposition gives us part of the story as to why adult ballet dancers represent a “category mistake.” Another way to get at this same issue is to zoom in on the term “mother.”

## *ii) The mothering context*

Motherhood is arguably as much about ideology as it is about biology. In the United States, motherhood has long been a subject of heated controversy, and we have a long list of names--Hillary Clinton, Bobbi McCaughey, Louise Woodward, Andrea Yates--as well as terms--Welfare Queen, Single Mom, Mommy Track--each of which refers to a specific battle in the seemingly never-ending war over what it means to be a good/bad mother. These debates have been well documented by countless cultural critics, including, most recently, several Sloan center scholars.<sup>11</sup>

While no consensus has been reached on exactly what makes a good mother (though being white, over twenty, middle-class, and married is always a start), there does appear to be a general agreement on one thing. Christian or Jew, Republican or Democrat, soccer mom or supermom, a good mother should be inexhaustibly devoted to her children. Myths of maternal selflessness have a long history that is well traced in scholarly works on motherhood such as Shari Thurer’s 1994 Myths of Motherhood.

Drawing on the work of Sharon Hays, Theresa Arendell notes that one of the interesting things about the ideology of intensive mothering is that it offers otherwise “deviant” working mothers a shot at salvation.<sup>12</sup> The picture Hays and Arendell describe works something like this: Working moms, always-already suspect, can work off some of their “deviancy” by

demonstrating that their employment does not compromise their ability to be intensive mothers. The proposition is, as Arendell rightly notes, somewhat ludicrous “no woman, no matter how well intentioned or organized, can be in two places at once.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that the ideology of intensive mothering ignores the economic realities of contemporary family life (work is increasingly not a “choice” for parents of either gender but a necessity), and despite the fact that previous eras have witnessed backlashes against overly intense “smother-mothers,” this idealized model continues to shape public discourse.<sup>14</sup> Popular culture representations valorize the child-centered mother, and nowhere is this more evident than in the world of advertising, where countless products are pitched as aids to the busy-but-devoted modern mother; she who manages to be all things to all man, all of the time. Whether the ad in question is for individual diner rolls that busy mom can bake “fresh” from the freezer according to the erratic rhythms of her typically overscheduled family, or for an antihistamine pill that will allow allergic mom to look appropriately enthusiastic all through junior’s soccer season, the message is a consistent one: The virtuous modern mother juggles multiple roles but never forgets, in principal or practice, that her number one job is to put her kids’ needs first.

An obvious corollary of the ideology of intensive mothering is that good mothers never get to put their own needs first. If the ideal mother is child-centered, it logically follows that--for working mothers in particular--little or no time is available for the pursuit of non-work or non-family related activities. One could argue that there is in fact no problem here, in that expert psychoanalysts long ago established that mothers don’t actually have needs of their own.<sup>15</sup> On a less facetious note, we might want to consider how this curious elision of maternal subjectivity operates linguistically in contemporary American culture. While we all understand that “working mothers” go to work, that “teen mothers” are (too) young, and that “single mothers” parent without a partner--*in other words that the premodifiers in these phrases consistently describe the action or state of being of the nouns that follow*--we curiously also understand that soccer moms don’t score goals and that stage mothers don’t tread the boards.<sup>16</sup> That we so readily get it that these latter mothers provide the emotional and infrastructural support necessary to sustain a child’s extracurricular life, *and are not actively engaged in the pursuit of interests of their own*, reveals how thoroughly we have internalized the ideology of intensive, self-sacrificing motherhood. Following this cultural logic, “ballet mom” would refer to a mother who enables her child to pursue his--though more likely her--balletic aspirations. It would conjure up the image not of a forty-year old in a leotard, but of a smiling mother driving an SUV filled with pink-clad tots to their first ballet recital.

I do not wish to overstate the case here, nor imply that there are no circumstances under which mothers get to have hobbies. However, I do think some preliminary observations can be sketched out about who gets to engage in what kinds of pastimes, when, and where. Three modes of distinction seem prominent: physical/non-physical, productive/non-productive, at home/away from home. Note that in the examples above (where mom is helper and not active participant), the pastimes referred to are physical, non-productive, and based outside of the home. The hobbies we associate with moms, by contrast, are non-physical, productive, and home-based.

What I am suggesting here is that a pastime like ballet challenges stereotypes about “her indoors” in a way that other, more traditional hobbies do not. For one thing, ballet is very physical; its practitioners wear tight clothes, move constantly, and sweat. Ballet, and this is a point we return to in Part Two, is hard work. Second, unlike say scrapbooking or romance reading, ballet is not a home-based activity and therefore cannot be squeezed into odd moments of domestic downtime. In this sense, it constitutes a far more radical disruption of norms. To put

this another way: you can do scrapbooking and still be an omnipresent mom; to do ballet you have to leave. Finally, ballet doesn't produce anything tangible for the family. Scrapbooking arranges, documents, and gives permanence to family history; cooking feeds people; knitting and sewing clothe people and/or decorate the domestic environment; gardening produces food and/or beautifies the home and garden. Ballet, by contrast, is notably non-productive and non other-directed. At most it produces a performance, but that is a very fleeting thing, lost as soon as it is found. Moreover, ballet performances, like all performances, involve a "look at me" narcissism that is at odds with cherished myths of maternal self-abnegation.<sup>17</sup>

### *iii) And so to the puzzle...*

If ballerinas aren't supposed to grow up, and grown-ups aren't supposed to do ballet, then how to account for, how to understand, the women who are the focus of this ethnography? What does their dancing do to our deeply-engrained notions about the meaning of "childhood," "adulthood," and "motherhood"? How do they account for their "deviance"? What can we learn from listening to their narratives?

The following paper begins to explore these questions. I start by describing my methodology and summarizing a few of the key demographic and personality traits that were dominant among the women who participated in this study. I then move into a more detailed discussion of some of the major findings of this research.

I want to make clear at the outset that this paper does not cover all the themes that emerged from this research. The majority of the interviews were extremely rich and detailed, and they shed light on a number of issues that merit closer inspection. I could, for example, explore in depth the role of consumerism in ballet-as-hobby, or the way in which childhood ballet experiences effect later participation in dance classes. I could have focused exclusively, rather than briefly, on the poor body image that most of my interviewees had, and the interesting paradox whereby participation in ballet classes appears to simultaneously ameliorate and exacerbate this problem. Another issue that emerged in this study that I touch on only peripherally here but is worth further analysis is depression. Several interviewees reported high (i.e. clinical) levels of depression, even though none of my questions asked about this. Were I to redo the study, I would include additional data-gathering tools such as the Beck's Depression Inventory, in an effort to get more data on what seemed to be a prevalent and significant theme.

Of necessity however, I have narrowed the focus of this paper down in such a way as to highlight the themes that are of most relevance to the Sloan research agenda. Accordingly, this paper focuses on issues of home and work, looking particularly at how my interviewees try to balance work, family, and "free" time. I should also note that Part One focuses disproportionately on the mothers in the group. The voices of non-mothers are certainly included in Part One--not least because their perspectives often serve to highlight a point about the unique demands of motherhood--but it is not until Part Two that I pay equal attention to their stories.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The primary data source for this paper is a series of taped one-on-one interviews with women who attend adult ballet classes in Atlanta.<sup>18</sup> A total of 24 formal interviews were conducted, ranging in length from 20 to 80 minutes. These interviews took place between August

2001 and April 2002. Eighteen of the interviews were conducted over the phone and six were face-to-face (2 in my office, 1 in a participant's office, 1 in my home, 1 in a participant's home, and 1 in the ballet studio). Each interview followed the same basic format; women were asked a series of background questions (age, marital status, etc), followed by questions grouped under four main headings: personal ballet history; body image and health, work and family. At both the beginning and the end of the interview, women were asked to comment on what they like about ballet and why they make time for it in their lives.

This study also draws on "participant observation" data. In addition to interviewing these women, I have also danced alongside the majority of them in various classes during the past 14 months. This participant observation has enriched this study in a number of ways. Most obviously, my membership in the group under study greatly eased my ability to recruit participants. It also, I would argue, led to a higher degree of trust than might otherwise have existed between observer/observed. While I would not deny that my status as a university researcher automatically produces a certain hierarchy of surveillance, I would argue the resultant inequity was lessened by my simultaneous status as class peer. I might add that my lack of ballet training was perhaps specifically helpful here, in that the women I interviewed were generally better dancers who had seen me struggle with basic steps on more than one occasion. In other words, whatever intimidation my job-title/role produced was, I suspect, significantly reduced by my superbly inept in-class displays.

My role as participant-observer has also been helpful in that it has given me an experientially based comprehension of what these women are talking about when they describe both the rigor and release of ballet. Having this embodied understanding has enhanced my ability to comprehend how and why certain aspects of ballet (notably pressure, pain, performance anxiety) are dealt with/rationalized. Finally, my ongoing participation in the classes that many of my interviewees attend(ed) has allowed me to trace not only the contradictions within their narratives, but also, at times, the contradictions between what they say about what they do and what they do.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The women who participated in this study range in age from 23 to 63, with the average age being 33. All are amateur dancers, which is to say that they do not dance for a living and never have. However, all but 4 did ballet in their youth (in grade school, high school and/or college), and the majority of these had extensive ballet training (i.e. they took 2-4 classes a week, performed in recitals, went on pointe and/or aspired to be a dancer). Of the four women with no history with ballet, one had done gymnastics and the other had done other kinds of dance throughout her life. Regardless of prior experiences dancing, all the women interviewed had been away from ballet for a significant period of time (4-20+ years) before resuming their current dancing schedule of 1-3 ballet classes per week.

Of the 24 women who participated in this study, 9 were mothers and 6 had "at-home" children (kids aged 0-18). Of those 6, 5 were married and 1 was a single parent. All but 3 of the women in this study worked full-time outside the home. One of these 3 was recently retired, and 2 were at home with infants. It is appropriate, I believe, to group these latter two women along with the other working moms in that their "at-home" status constituted a life-stage shift rather than a permanent condition. Both women had successful careers up until the birth of their babies and, as the following quotes suggest, neither seemed to think of herself as a traditional

homemaker. In Paula's case, this was evident in the way that she moved in and out of the present tense while describing how ballet offers her a release: "I always need something like this that's completely different from my job. I mean my job is computer programming. I stood in front of a computer most of the day, have almost no interaction with people, and I program. And you've got to have a release from that, you've got to have something different." Given that Paula had been out of the workforce for over two years at the time of our interview, her tense shifts here seem rather revealing.

In the case of Amy, ambivalence about not being in the workforce seemed clearer still. Having described herself in the following terms: "Type A personality: Dean's list, make straight A's was the goal, and get the best job, and do the best job, and get promoted, and join all the organizations, and be the president of those..." Amy went on suggest the extent to which she misses her work self:

...it's been a big adjustment being a stay-at-home mom ... just because there's definitely not anything for me to achieve at or do or go or be and I just feel, like, well I'm raising my little girl and supporting my husband with what he wants to do and I keep the house nice and I have some friends and actually I'm at that point where I figure I've got to do something else! [laughs] I gotta have something for myself like, I don't know, if I try to write again like [my husband] is, or volunteer work or *something*. So I think that's kinda coming to a head here in a little while so we'll see. Because I've just always been really, really involved and now I just feel kind of lost sometimes so... it's just weird, it's just different, you have to remind yourself that you are doing an important job even though when people ask you what you do all day you say, "Well, we go to the park."

Amy's self-labeling as "Type A" raises a general point about the all of the women in this study that is worth highlighting from the outset. Very early on in the interviewing stages of this project it became startlingly clear to me that the women I was speaking with were somewhat atypical. Specifically, they shared some interesting characteristics both in terms of educational/employment histories, and in terms of personality type. For example, among the interviewees were a high-ranking police officer, a lawyer, a doctor, two financial analysts, a computer programmer, an IT specialist, a behavioral scientist, an actuary, an account manager, a marketing manager, and a death-row appeals advocate. In other words, half of the women in the group had excelled in traditionally male professions.

Equally remarkable was how so many of the women, regardless of their career fields, self-described as overachievers. The following quotes are typical of the ways in which both mothers and non-mothers in the group characterized themselves:

Brittany: [I'm] very goal oriented, I like to set goals and work to achieve them. I don't stop until I reach the goal I set for myself.

Kate: I put pressure on myself because I feel that people deserve my very best.

Elizabeth: I'm pretty much an overachiever. I always wanna get promotions and achieve the goals that are put in front of me at work. Definitely. Very much a

perfectionist... I always made straight As in school and I was in ballet and I was singing and I was in drama and very active and would get the leads in plays.

Casey: I was a brainiac kid... Because I have been so successful I almost have my own reputation to live up to.

Lucy: [I'm] such the over-achiever...

Paula: I definitely have a "Type A" personality. I mean I've always got to be good at what I do, you know? I was always, I don't know, you always do overtime, you always do extra, you always do whatever was needed on a project.

Cara: I'm a perfectionist, I always have been. I grew up being one. I come from a family of perfectionists. I have had for most of my life been fairly successful in what I've tried to do. I got good grades when I was in school. I got good grades in college, and I went to a good college. I got a good job.

Marissa: [I'm] probably bordering on a perfectionist. I think my achievements in life have driven me to have more achievements.

The significance of the preponderance of both "masculine" careers and "Type A" declarations will become clearer when we turn, in Part Two, to look at some of the ways in which these women account for their desire to dance, and at some of the contradictions inherent in their narratives.

## **DISCUSSION**

In my introduction, I suggested several reasons why the women who are the focus of this study do not mesh with our dominant stereotypes about ballet, adulthood and, in particular, motherhood. It therefore seems appropriate to begin by looking at how the women view themselves--and how they see themselves as being viewed--in terms of these categories. We can begin with the general observation that all of the interviewees have an acute awareness of the way in which their participation in ballet classes defies conventions. However, their feelings about their "deviance" shift significantly depending on two factors: a) the precise grounds upon which such judgments lie and b) the source of the judgment. Stereotypes about age and ballet are invariably attributed to others and appear to produce minimal anxiety. Much harder to ignore are those stereotypes about the appropriate size of a ballerina, which appear to have been deeply internalized. The question of whether it is appropriate to combine motherhood and ballet emerges only indirectly in these women's narratives but it is clear that, in addressing it, these women juggle both internalized and externalized judgments.

### ***i) Ballet and Age***

Several of the women in the group, mothers and non-mothers both, spoke of their participation in ballet in ways that suggested that they are only too well aware of the cultural script that renders ballet and aging oppositional terms. Significantly, however, their comments

on this topic were usually safely externalized; they don't consider themselves too old, but they know perfectly well that other people do. Sometimes, these "others" are imaginary and, as in this quote from a mother of three, can be interpreted as projections of the speaker's own anxieties: "You sometimes wonder what they're thinking, "What's *she* doing in there? She's so old!" At other times, though, the voice of judgment is attributed to specified actors. Joanna, for example, offered an elaborate account of the varied responses her coworkers have to her "over-age" dancing:

The people at work, they're the funniest. When you tell women at work they kind of give you that funny look, but then when you tell men they're like, "Oh, that's great! My daughter's taking ballet lessons!" You know, they're talking about their little five-year-old daughter or whatever. But they just think it's the greatest thing. They're like, "Oh, that's wonderful. That must be so much fun!" ... I guess because a lot of, you know, practically everyone I knew took ballet until a certain age and then they quit because they grew out of it or whatever. And I guess to go back to it a lot of people are like, "Why on earth would you want to do that again?" ... The women do because they've done it and it's like, "Oh, I quit doing that. I outgrew that. Why are you starting again?" But then the men just, I guess, like, it's just this great thing that you're taking time for yourself to do it. You know, they think of their little daughters in the cute little pink tights and just running around and whatever and they must be like, "Yeah, that must be fun." And I think just they don't understand really because they haven't done it.

While caution is called for when analyzing the attributed statements of others, the gender divide she describes here is interesting.<sup>19</sup> According to Joanna, both male and female coworkers associate ballet with childhood, but only her female co-workers go on to declare her adult dancing inappropriate: "*I outgrew that. Why are you starting again?*" The males, by contrast, are credited with being overwhelmingly supportive of the idea that grown-ups, like children, should get to play and have fun. In this sense, her narrative is richly suggestive of way in which women can and do give voice to the very judgments that undermine them. On the other hand, while Joanna herself makes no overt comment about this, her narrative suggests that the enthusiasm of her male coworkers might have something to do with their enjoying a certain infantilized image of her: "*You know, they think of their little daughters in the cute little pink tights and just running around.*" In other words, the delight of her male colleagues is arguably no less patronizing than the disdain of her female colleagues. Crucially, both genders link ballet with being a *little* girl.

While we lack sufficient information to truly understand the motivations of her coworkers, what we can say is that Joanna does not appear to be overly troubled by either set of reactions. Her segue into the story sets it up as a comic one ("*The people at work, they're the funniest!*"), and she ends by dismissing the ignorance of her male colleagues. This kind of spirited refusal to be affected by the judgments of others was consistent across many of the narratives I collected. Like Joanna, both Casey and Elizabeth are amused, rather than undermined, by the teasing they get. Moreover, they are similarly confident and adept when it comes to turning a judging gaze back on itself:

Casey: Some make the little tutu jokes and I'm like, "No, we don't wear tutu's, *don't be silly*, that's for little children." But it's nothing but good-natured teasing, it's not real teasing.

Elizabeth: [At work] the guys were like "We wanna come see you dance in ballet!" And they do this sort of mocking twirl [laughs] where they act like they have a tutu on and dance around in a circle. So they like to tease me, not in a mean way, but just being stupid.

*Why do you think ballet gets these reactions?*

I've always thought that people are insecure maybe about their own gracefulness because I think ballet is sort of perceived as this really graceful thing and requiring a lot of coordination so when people mock it I kind of think it's almost a projection of their own insecurities.

### ***iii) Ballet and Size***

The picture gets more complicated when age stereotypes combine with, or are superceded by, body ones. On the one hand, there were moments when my interviewees again demonstrated an ability to dismiss the judgments of others. One of the older women in the group recalled that her kids' response to her resuming ballet was to "make comments about the hippos in fantasia." Crucially, though, she laughed as she told this story, adding: "My kids were ornery about it but they come by it honestly, both their parents are ornery."

Far more frequently, however, my interviewees' comments on the issue of size suggested that they are deeply affected by the notion that you have to be thin to do ballet. Moreover, ballet-body ideals had a negative impact on the women long before they even stepped into the studio. Amanda recalled how apprehensive she had been about starting classes, "I was nervous that it would be all these young women with perfect bodies," and Jessica echoed her fears: "I've only recently gotten through that really self-conscious stage about my body so the thought of being in a big mirrored room with a bunch of skinny young women trying to dance was just too much to bear so I couldn't handle it." Casey, meanwhile, recalled how psychologically challenging her trip to buy her first ballet outfit was. Note that her description is littered with references to size:

Oh golly! All these thin little 12-year-olds and younger! And I went to that great big dance superstore and so it was one of those things where I didn't know what I was buying, so that's always a little intimidating - going into a sports store of any sort and being, like, [I] don't know what I'm supposed to get but I know that I should be getting something. And then finding something that fit which also was reasonably flattering was always kind of a struggle and the whole idea that though I don't think that I'm particularly heavy the fact that he's like, "Oh yes, you need large tights," and I'm like, I don't feel like I'm a large! But okay, I guess that's what I should be buying. And it was right.<sup>20</sup> All the sizing, he was very accurate and very helpful. But it was kind of intimidating, and all these young girls who were buying young girl ballerina stuff looking so slim and elegant in their ballet outfits was kind of intimidating.

Casey is by no means alone in viewing her body as deviant in relation to the “slim and elegant” balletic ideal. In fact, several women cited their incorrect bodies as the reason for their not pursuing ballet more seriously. Kelly noted that she has long been aware that her body is not made for ballet: “I’ve never been small or petite or anything remotely close to that and I remember wanting to do pointe in high school but knowing that my feet wouldn’t be able to support me.” For Donna the “problem” is not so much about weight as about shape: “I’ve always been basically thin but thought that I had bigger boobs than a ballet dancer should have.” For Shirley, it is one of height and weight: “I’m short. I’ve always been short, and ballerinas have always been tall and lean, and I’m just not tall and lean.” Jessica, meanwhile, revealed a generalized sense of just not fitting: “You realize there’s a certain aesthetic involved with ballet and I’ll never fit into that.”

For some of the women I interviewed, the “problem” of having the “wrong” kind of body is inextricably bound up with the “problem” of getting older. Kristy spoke of the discomfort of having to adjust to a significantly aged body: “My body has changed dramatically since I last took a class so that’s been hard to get used to.” Donna, who recalls feeling “very good about [her] body” when dancing as a youth, described coming back to classes and feeling “too fat here or not muscular enough there.” It is also worth noting that both in her interview and at odd moments in class, Donna referred critically to how her body shows signs of child-bearing.<sup>21</sup>

The age-shape connection can, however, work two ways. Women like Jody spoke with some pride about being in unusually good shape for their age, and for Caroline, accepting the cultural script about the appropriate size for ballerinas was curiously empowering to the extent that it enabled her to dismiss the related script about appropriate age. Recalling her family’s surprise at her return to ballet--“they thought it strange that I would feel comfortable wearing a leotard and tights at this age”--Caroline remarked, “It’s a good point but I’m fairly thin so I feel comfortable wearing that.” Her counter-response suggests that the deviance of aging can, in effect, be offset by the maintenance of an “ideal” ballet body; Caroline is able to dismiss anxieties about being the “wrong” age because she is the “right” size. While such recuperations do nothing to disrupt the hegemony of ballet body ideals, they do illustrate how some women are able to negotiate normative scripts in such a way as to come out feeling good about themselves.

A final point that needs to be made here is that these women who are so critical of their bodies are, as a group, very trim. Their average height was 5’5” (mean=5’6”), their weight 134 lbs (mean=132 lbs). In other words, these women are squarely within the “healthy” range on any height:weight ratio chart, indeed, if anything they border on being collectively underweight. I should also add here that it was often the slenderest women on the group who made the most disparaging remarks about their bodies. That slim women are experiencing themselves as too big suggests just how powerful a hold the balletic ideal--encapsulated in this 1911 review of Adeline Genee: “She might pirouette on a daisy and it would not bend”--has on their self-image.<sup>22</sup> This is never clearer than in this comment from Diana, one of the women in the group who is ordinarily very happy with her body: “It’s funny because I think of myself as very, very slim and trim and fairly athletic and I get in my ballet attire and I feel heavy.” We revisit this issue of heaviness--both physical and metaphorical--in Part Two.

### *iii) Ballet and Motherhood*

When it comes to the question of combining ballet and motherhood, the picture is more complex still. Gone from my interviewees’ narratives is the lightheartedness that accompanies

many of the references to age and dance, but gone too is the overt self-criticism that emerges around issues of body shape and size. Nonetheless, we do see women seriously engaging with what it means to combine ballet classes and family. There are a number of ways of getting at this, and what I want to focus on here is the rather revealing way in which different women spoke about why they like ballet. For while almost all of the women in the group described ballet as a necessary “break” from the stresses of everyday life, the mothers in the group were very specific about categorizing ballet classes as “me-time.” All but one of the quotes below come from mothers. Echoing Radway’s romance reading moms, these women describe ballet as, first and foremost, a sanctuary:

Amy: I had just had my baby and I just needed something just for me ... It’s just time just for me. So at the end of the day I’m like “Wow! That was a whole hour and a half just for me!” which is really good.

Sandy: I’m doing something I enjoy for me. It’s not for everybody around me. It’s unrelated to anything else that I do.

Elizabeth: I think I just wanted to do something nice for myself and just me. Having been married for four years I just wanted to do something that’s just for me. There’s so many responsibilities and things that I’ve been juggling and it’s nice to have something to go to a couple of hours a week and just sort of lose yourself.

Sarah: I feel like it’s very just self-gratifying. It’s not doing anything for anyone else, or it’s just really like one of those self things ... I go and the music just kind of relaxes me, and I can just get in a zone, kind of forget everything else. Like I’m not thinking about work, and I’m not thinking about my kids, I’m just thinking about dancing. So I think it’s a big time stress reliever.

Paula: I was looking for something that was just for me to do, for myself... The part that I like of it the most is while in there that’s all I think about, that’s all I’m doing. I’m like completely into doing the class, so I’m not sitting there worrying about “Is Tammy sick?” or “Do I have to pay some bills?” You know? Whatever. I’m just totally engrossed in the class.

Kate: It’s a totally selfish thing...Doesn’t benefit anybody but me, and I will never make money at it, and I’ll never do it professionally. But I just, it’s just something I really love, and it doesn’t benefit anybody else around me, just me...like forbidden chocolate.

Not surprisingly, these comments confirm that modern working women, especially those with children, see life as an endless juggling act, the breaks from which are few and far between. More interesting is that these women seem fairly convinced of their right to have some “me-time” away from work and family obligations. Given the pressure on mothers, and especially working mothers, to sacrifice self in the pursuit of intensive parenting, such claims are surely good news.

That said, these quotes simultaneously reveal that claiming “me-time” is problematic for moms, and one even suggests the degree to which it is morally suspect. Once again, a certain amount of interpretive caution is called for here, and we would need some kind of control group in order to make any definitive claims. Nonetheless, it does seem highly significant that when asked to talk about what ballet does for them, so many of the women spontaneously talk about what it *doesn't* do for others: “*It's not for everybody around me;*” “*It's not doing anything for anyone else;*” “*It doesn't benefit anybody else around me.* What I want to suggest, tentatively, is that this pattern of response would not be found if you were to interview comparison groups such as teenagers playing soccer or men on a golf course. In other words, I am arguing that these women's responses reflect their internalization of the discourse of good motherhood. Thus while their dancing itself challenges myths of maternal selflessness, their narratives about it reveal the power of such myths to shape their understandings of themselves and what they are and are not entitled to. In this sense, these women confirm Arendell's assertion that, “Even when resisted, mothering ideology forms the backdrop for action and assessment.”<sup>23</sup>

Given how culturally widespread and powerful the idea of intensive mothering is, we should not be surprised to see a certain amount of guilt creeping through in these narratives. Indeed, what is remarkable is that in only one case is it blatantly articulated. Kate's framing of her dancing as a “totally selfish” illicit indulgence is exemplary of the process Arendell describes whereby mothers themselves help reproduce stereotypes of maternal deviance: “Having internalized the values and dictates of the dominant ideology, mothers—the very subjects of the discourse—carry and participate in it; they contribute to their own policing, consenting to its dictates and judgments, mostly without reflection.”<sup>24</sup> Kate, it is worth noting, was a decade older than the other mothers with children at home, which may be one possible reason why she appears to have the most traditional views on this subject.

What is also interesting about Kate, however, is that over the course of her interview she revealed how a contemporary working mother seeking out pleasure for herself stands accused on more than one count. On the one hand, Kate's struggle had everything to do with trying to combine ballet with being a traditional (i.e. omnipresent) mom. In fact, she ended up quitting ballet largely because it interfered with her ability to put her kids' needs first:

I'll maybe do it again when [the] youngest goes to college... [the problem was] the scheduling. I had two kids at home, one was in soccer all the time, the other one was in choir all the time and juggling the cars between the 4 of us was kinda difficult. Also I have serious clinical depression and a child who is in the same position so between the two of us I really needed to spend more time at home...

On the other hand, at the point in her narrative at which Kate is *most* condemnatory of her dance hobby, she locates her deviance not in terms of missing out on contact time, but rather in terms of spending her time unprofitably. Her statement that ballet is “totally selfish” is directly followed by “Doesn't *benefit* anybody but me, and I will *never make money* at it, and I'll never do it *professionally*.” Here, we see maternal guilt that is less about not spending time with one's children, more about not using one's time in ways that are economically productive. Ballet, according to this logic, is a frivolous expenditure of time that could otherwise be used to further the well-being of the family. Thus Kate's narrative highlights the double-bind of contemporary motherhood: The good mother is one whose every hour is devoted, one way or another, to the health and well being of her family. Accepting this premise, Kate gave up her “forbidden”

pleasure. That she self-describes as depressed and that multiple studies point to the mental health benefits of exercise makes this particular act of maternal self-sacrifice all the more poignant.

The issue of maternal roles and rights becomes even more complicated when we factor in the reported reactions of my interviewees' family members. We can start by noting that there was a fairly clear divide between the non-mothers and the mothers in the group when it came to spousal support. The younger, childless women in the group consistently reported that their partners were very enthusiastic about their dancing. Elizabeth reported that her husband was "very supportive, especially since when I come back I'm always in a good mood... at my last job I was always in a bad mood after my work so he was always excited to see anything that would make me happy." Amanda reported that her husband was "extremely supportive" adding, "He likes anything that I do that keeps me active and makes me happy and stuff." Joanna's partner was initially skeptical, but soon came round when he saw how happy it made her: "I guess when I first told my boyfriend about it, he kind of looked at me funny like, "You're doing what?" But I was so excited about it that he got excited about it. And when--he knows about my work situation-- [her boss' lack of planning frequently forces her to work late] and so when I told him, "I'll have to leave work early on Wednesdays," he was ecstatic! I guess he's been really supportive of it." Finally, Jenny--who was 8 months pregnant at the time of our interview and therefore straddles the non-mom/mom divide in an interesting way--reported that her husband has reacted well to her return to ballet. Like so many of those quoted above, her explanation for his support hints at an issue that will be explored more in future research, namely the role of ballet classes as potential cure for depression: "he's most glad that I come home happy, that I've found something that I really enjoy."<sup>25</sup>

Among the mothers with at-home children, the picture changes and we begin to see how the added demands of having children appear to effect spouses' responses. Only one mother, Amy, reported that her husband was unreservedly enthusiastic about her ballet classes: "he thinks it's really nice that I'm doing something for myself." That Amy's dancing is not a cause of any marital tension may well have something to do with the fact that she is currently a "stay-at-home mom," her husband is currently on sabbatical, they only have one child, and that child is only a year old (i.e. not yet "overscheduled"). In other words, neither parent is overly stressed by work demands, both are unusually available for their child, and Amy's ballet classes do not complicate an already hectic family timetable. This point becomes clearer when we look at how the situation changes in families where when one or both parents are working full-time and where the kids are older.

Unlike Amy, Paula did not seem entirely sure about her husband's reaction to her dancing. "I think he's supportive about it," she said, adding, "because he knows, you know, otherwise I'm stuck with a 2-year-old all the time." Elsewhere in her interview, however, she made it clear that whatever support he offers is more a matter of principal than practice:

It's not always possible [to attend ballet] though because I do have the constraints of a 2-year-old that has to be taken care of, and a husband who has a fairly demanding job. I'm dependant upon either my husband being able to come home at a reasonable time, or finding a substitute, like a babysitter. So because he does travel a fair amount of time, and because he's not, I mean, on a normal day he doesn't get home at 7, he gets home later than that. So he has to make the effort for me to be able to go to ballet. Before Tammy was born it would have been much later than this, it would have been more like 8 o'clock, but I try to have him

get home by 7:30 at least. It's very difficult for him to do that though. He just seems to get wrapped up in work, and I probably shouldn't expect much more than that.

Paula's wording suggests that she both accepts and resents the extent to which her ability to go to ballet is dependent on her husband's ability to leave work. Though she "tries to have him home" (the wording here is interesting, suggesting as it does that the husband is not struggling to get away from work *and* that her attempts at control are futile), she is also resigned to the idea that his work schedule dictates the form and content of their lives: "I probably shouldn't expect much more than that."

Sarah similarly reported that negotiating for "me-time" was a source of some marital stress. Both she and her husband work, and they have two young kids. Once again, we hear of a spouse who likes the idea, but is less enthusiastic about the reality, of having a dancing wife:

I'm always juggling. But I've like pleaded with my husband to give me those times, and let me go do it. And I just kind of squeeze it in as best as I can, and there's weeks that I just can't do it. I think he likes that I found something that I just love, and feel so passionate about. And I think he sees, like, that my grace and my flexibility have improved... But, he doesn't like how it impacts him, in terms of like the kids, and that I'm gone 3 hours on Saturday, and that if I don't get to go because he has a meeting or something, I'm really upset about it. So I think he's as good as I guess he can be, but he would like it to like land during the week on my day off where it doesn't impact him....

Like Paula, Sarah struggles to carve out time for ballet, a process that involves ongoing negotiation with her spouse. Also like Paula, she seems to oscillate between resentment over those times when she has to miss class, and a rather ambivalent acceptance of the idea that things won't change: "I think he's as good as I guess he can be."

That Sarah speaks of "pleading" for the "gift" of time confirms just how precious time-as-commodity has become in dual-income middle class families. It also raises an interesting question about how gender roles operate in relation to this time crunch. Crucially, in both Paula's and Sarah's narratives, the male spouse is depicted as being the "keeper" of the wife's free-time. He has the power to enable or disable her dancing. It is worth adding here that both the spouses in question take time to exercise outside of their work hours. One runs marathons, the training for which is sporadic but intense, the other keeps regular appointments at a gym.<sup>26</sup>

A rather interesting twist on the whole question of spousal support comes from the narrative of Donna, the only single parent in the group. When asked to describe the reactions of her family and friends to her taking ballet classes, Donna had a good deal to say about her ex-husband, even though they no longer share a home. Her statements suggest the extent to which divorce does not bring an end to negotiations over how parental time should be spent:

I wouldn't even share with him that I'm doing ballet because he's constantly calling me with his ideas about how I should live, how I should spend my money, how I should spend my time, what I should and shouldn't be doing... He would like me to just be a cash cow and work from 8-9... At the moment we're in a conflict having to do with money and private school and whether there's money

for the kids to go or not, which actually there isn't, though he feels that I should work an excessive number of hours to provide private school for our kids rather than that they should go to public school, which is what I can afford. And I do need to have a life.

While we would do well to be cautious in the claims we make from data such as this (recently divorced couples are rarely reliable commentators on one another's virtues or vices), whether Donna accurately describes her ex or not is somewhat beside the point. What is important is that she *feels* extremely judged for her unprofitable use of time. In other words, she dances in the shadow of a powerful cultural script (attributed to her ex but surely far more diffuse in origin) that decrees that all her available hours should be devoted to improving her children's lives.

There is a clear echo here back to Kate's self-criticism about the unproductive nature of ballet though unlike Kate, Donna is adamant in her refusal to let such judgments dictate her actions. She makes very clear, however, that her ability to resist normative life scripts is relatively recent and has everything to do with getting older, getting divorced, and consciously interrogating the meaning of her past and present life:

Since getting divorced I've generally been just reevaluating, reassessing everything about myself and been trying to make everything as satisfying for me as possible... the phase that I'm at right now I'm the most attentive to what I really want out of life. In my younger years, I was very burdened by a lot of other things: "Do I need to be married? Do I need to become a mother? Do I need to become a doctor? How am I going to support myself without depending on someone else to support me?" And I couldn't really just get connected to what I need and what I want. I'm much more able to now. I have achieved a number of things so I have more freedom to now, and I also feel like in some fundamental way I am a dancer, I've always been a dancer, and need to be a dancer.

In highlighting the extent to which Donna is uniquely conscious and confident about her newfound determination to honor her own needs, I do not wish to thereby imply that the other mothers quoted above are, by comparison, passive victims of the ideology of intensive mothering. Indeed, we can usefully close out this discussion by noting a couple of the ways in which *all* of the mothers quoted above can be seen to resist normative scripts about maternal self-sacrifice.

To begin with, and it seems almost too obvious to note, almost all of the mothers in the group continue to attend classes on a fairly regular basis. In other words, even in the face of ideological and practical pressures, they still lay claim to "me-time." We might want to think of this attendance as an ongoing act of quiet rebellion.

A far less obvious way in which all of these mothers can be seen to be reworking the myth of intensive motherhood emerges in their comments on how their kids view their dancing. In every case, the mothers reported that their ballet classes are somehow good for their children. Their claims in this regard range from modest to grand, and from unselfconscious to overtly political. Amy, for example, says simply that her husband brought their baby daughter to her first recital and that she "thought it was neat." Sarah was more emphatic on this issue: "You know, my kids especially just were like thrilled, thought it was so cool. My daughter comes to classes,

and she just loves, I mean, she just thinks this is the greatest thing that her mom dances.” Paula was less exuberant in her characterization of her daughter’s reaction, but more explicit about the personal being political: “Tammy is interested in the fact that I’m going to dance. And I think as a kid she needs to know that it’s okay to go out and do things like that.” Finally, Donna was extremely confident both about her kids’ enthusiasm and about the ideological message her dancing sends them:

[My] son is very proud; he likes it – sometimes I push the furniture aside upstairs and I do some warm ups and do some splits and I stretch. And I sometimes choreograph some things, either by myself or with my daughter, and he always loves to watch and he enjoys that about me a lot and likes to see me doing it. . . . They think it’s great, they really love it. My daughter especially loves it. I think a lot why they love it is they have these divorced parents and their dad immediately went out and found somebody else, got married right away and is having a baby right away and then my kids see me finding myself through ballet and doing something to develop myself. It’s not, you know, the immediate pursuit of another person. It’s more desirable for them in that there’s nobody that’s going to take me away from them but also I think they see it--my daughter in particular sees it--as a great thing to find yourself, to make a change and find yourself.

Given that hegemonic myths of maternal devotion work from the (unproven) assumption that mothers who pursue their own needs risk the well-being of their children, these mothers’ claims that their dancing benefits their children are far more radical than they may first appear (indeed, are more radical than they themselves perhaps realize). Each of these statements rejects the zero-sum-game mentality that lies at the heart of traditional thinking about mother-child relations. However gently, each of these mothers is making the bold claim that both they and their children stand to gain from their taking a break from intensive mothering. In doing so, they are aligning themselves (albeit sometimes inadvertently so) with feminist commentators and scholars who have argued for a revisioning of the “institution of motherhood” such that maternal subjectivity could be recognized and celebrated as good for family life.<sup>27</sup>

In closing we can note a final irony here. While the mothers in my group can be seen as continually negotiating and challenging--with varying degrees of savvy and success--cultural stereotypes about what it means to be a good mother, they also, albeit unconsciously, reproduce them. This process is evident even here, in these women’s radical claim that their dancing is good for their children. For in a curious way, these moms are having their cake and eating it too; they enjoy ballet as a break from mothering but by defining it as good for their kids they are able to keep up in the mommy wars. In other words, while these women are rewriting the rules about what constitutes good mothering, they are still playing a game that involves self-surveillance and rating.

## **Part Two: “I get through Mondays because I look forward to ballet class!” An Ethnography of Boardroom Ballerinas**

In Part One, we looked at how these women view their ballet classes in relation to a series of norms surrounding age, size, and motherhood. I touched on some of the cultural stereotypes associated with ballet, insofar as these helped shed light on the novel nature of my interviewees’ hobby. More generally though, I focused more on the meaning of having “me-time” and less on the meanings of the specific “me-time” activity chosen. I also focused more heavily on the mothers in the group.

I want to now shift our focus in two ways. First, I want to look more at these women as a whole, for while there is some analytical legitimacy to separating them into mother/non-mother groups, such a move is not only politically fraught, it can also be analytically limiting. What is equally important is to recognize the many things these women have in common, most obvious of which is their shared involvement in the world of paid employment. Second, but very much related, I want to look in greater detail at some of the ways in which these women talk about how and why ballet provides such an important escape for them. What is it, specifically, about these women’s lives that draws them to ballet? What is it, specifically, about ballet that makes it such a good antidote? Focusing on the issue of ballet as escape from work, I outline some of the recurring themes here, in terms of both push and pull factors. I then go on to discuss some of the contradictions inherent in these claims about ballet as escape. In analyzing these contradictions, I try to offer theoretical explanations that push beyond reductive claims about false consciousness.

### **BALLET AS ESCAPE FROM WORK**

A recurrent claim made by my interviewees was that ballet provides a welcome break from work. Under this general heading, at least four subclaims can be identified: ballet as escape from the physical burdens of work; ballet as escape from work stress in a more generalized sense; ballet as an escape from pressure to excel at work; and ballet as escape from the masculine hegemony of the workplace. While all of these issues overlap in important ways, it is useful for the sake of clarity to examine each in turn.

*i)* Almost all of the women in this study referred at some point in their interviews to work stress. For several, the stress of work had a very embodied dimension, and they described feeling weighed down, encumbered, and overburdened. Jody, for example, had this to say about the physical demands of her job:

One of the things I know about my job that I know is not good is that it pulls me down. I have a vest that I wear and a gun belt and the vest slips here and at the back and by the end of the day I’m like this [she slumps over] and I have to consciously regroup. That’s not my natural way.

Women with more sedentary jobs, such as Paula, complained about being hunched over desks. Here too, though, the complaint is about not being able to move freely:

I stood in front of a computer most of the day, have almost no interaction with people, and I program. And you've got to have a release from that, you've got to have something different. So you know, that's why music and dance have always been my main hobby; things where you're using your body.

While work was often described in ways that stressed physical heaviness and torpidity, ballet, by contrast, was described using the vocabulary of lightness and freedom. For some women, the contrast was explicit and conscious; they talked about doing dance precisely so as to counterbalance their work days. Jody, for example, stated that her main motivation when she dances is "to be free of heaviness." Asked to elaborate, she had this to say about ballet as antidote:

You lose the gravity, you lose the stiffness you at some point it doesn't matter what age you are or what you came there with, what you were carrying around that day. You are free you are above, you've transcended is the point. And I actually feel when I'm done that I have actually rejuvenated my soul and my body too, but my soul more importantly.

Other women offered less spiritual but no less enthusiastic testimonies about ballet's ability to lift them up. Kelly spoke about how ballet works muscles she didn't know she had and makes her "walk taller." Anna was pleased that "ballet can make me better posture, because you're shorter you have to stretch your back." Amanda stated that ballet has helped her gain "more poise and grace." Both Diana and Paula raved about how the body lessons learned in ballet classes transferred into the rest of their lives: "I felt I was aware of my carriage and posture throughout the day;" (Diana) "It makes you think about your posture and poise and it really gives you a sense of, I think, regalness. Although I know that sounds kind of snotty. I think for me it really affected the way I carried myself." (Paula).

These women's comments on the theme of lightness vs. heaviness are fully in keeping with what we know of ballet's appeal more generally. Ballet, as I noted in the introduction, has always been associated with ethereality. Its aesthetic appeal has long been tied up with the extent to which it is safely removed from the everyday world and is all about ideal, supernatural, and exotic imagery. Indeed, there is an interesting historical circuitry to be explored here in that romantic ballet flourished in France as the newly emerging middle class sought refuge from "the rapidly growing, grimy, industrial world."<sup>28</sup> Here, almost two centuries later, we find members of the middle class once again seeking refuge in ballet. Two things have shifted: the gender of those seeking refuge (the patrons of the Paris Opera were overwhelmingly male); and the nature of the escape (these women are active participants, not passive observers).

Also interesting is how these women's comments about transcendence relate to those of Radway's romance readers. Like the women in Radway's ethnography, my interviewees have clearly chosen a hobby that offers escape not just as act, but also as identification. In other words, they don't just do something that constitutes an escape from the everyday, the something that they do involves identification with a certain kind of female heroine who represents a certain kind of freedom. However, my interviewees' identification process is arguably more intense in that it is not merely a matter of psychologically identifying (as Radway's women do) with women whose lives are less weighed down; it is also a matter of physically experiencing that

sense of weightlessness. By actively participating in ballet classes, they reach for freedom and escape at a very embodied level.

*ii)* Comments about bodily alienation in the workplace were accompanied by a variety of other complaints about work stress. For some of the women in this study, work stress came in the form of a tyrannical boss who impeded their ability to work well while simultaneously setting unrealistic targets. Jody, for example, talked about the pressure her superiors put on her to “produce the stats” (figures indicating successful crime solving), and how this quantitative drive undermines the ability of her and her fellow officers to devote time to preventative policing:

Captain wants you bring in higher stats. Although there is no quota there is still pressure to produce. And if you don't produce then obviously you're not doing anything, and if you don't have enough manpower on the streets then you can't do any proactivity; all you're doing is answering calls. And so there's a lot of pressure from people who haven't been on the street in 25 years.

Joanna, who works in corporate finance, had a similar complaint about her boss' unfair demands:

[my boss is] super-obsessed with work and doesn't mind staying until ten o'clock every night and doesn't have a lot going on outside of work and expects the same of everyone else. And so a lot of times she'll spend half of the day deciding what I should do and then expect me to stay until ten to get it done. And I don't work that way. I'm very efficient and just want to get it done and get out of there, or whatever. Work is not my life and won't ever be my life I hope. But she makes it stressful because she just has very high expectations.

Other women described work stress in less specific terms. Elizabeth characterized the stress of work as stemming not from any one individual but rather from the fact that there is an excessive emphasis on speed and a concomitant loss of civility in modern life: “During the day or when you're driving around in Atlanta traffic people are just very sort of erratic and rude to each other and abrasive and I think my job was very much like that; everything had to be done now, now, now! Very fast paced.” Kristy, meanwhile, did not give many details about her job, but her statement, “I get through Mondays because I look forward to going to ballet class,” suggests all too clearly that she, too, is less than content with her work environment.

Crucially, no matter the precise nature/origin of their work grievances, all of these women described ballet as an effective escape from work stress. Jody stated that dance is her “saving grace,” that life without it is “really bad,” and that it sets her free from work days filled with “disgruntled employees and overworked employees and reluctant employees.” “I think dance has always been my answer,” she says, adding, “Ballet just makes me feel great!”

Joanna was similarly enthusiastic about ballet as antidote to the unpredictable rhythm of her work life:

It brings me lots of stress relief. It brings me separation from work and I can leave the workday behind and, you know, the “ballet Joanna” comes out. It makes me feel better that I have something scheduled...just something else to do.

Something to focus on week-to-week. Something steady. I always know on Wednesday nights that's what I'm doing.

Elizabeth, meanwhile, described ballet as “therapeutic” and “healing.” Her previously quoted description of the harassing nature of modern commuting and working ended with this stark contrast: “going to ballet you hear this wonderful classical music and it's very soothing and very structured.” Once again, we see women talking about ballet in ways that are fully in keeping with wider cultural understandings about ballet aesthetics. For example, Elizabeth's positioning of ballet as the perfect antidote to the brutishness of Atlanta gridlock and workday freneticism echoes the sentiments of early twentieth century paeans to ballet such as these: “ballet is human bodies behaving in an unusually lovely manner, seeming to tend toward an ideal pattern, the Platonic Idea of movement. The condition of all such lovely behavior is perfect obedience to certain rhythmic and harmonic laws;”<sup>29</sup> “One feels enthusiastically that every child in a civilised community should go through such a course of training...”<sup>30</sup> For Elizabeth and her fellow dancers, the idealized world of the ballet class offers an escape from the less-than-lovely realities of contemporary working life.

*iii)* While most of the quotes above externalize work stress (i.e. work stress is blamed on specific actors or on a generalized speeding up of life), it is important to point out that many of the women in this study, including some of those quoted above, were very forthcoming about how their internal drive to succeed contributes to the stress of their jobs. Several even described how they turned to ballet in part to escape their own perfectionist tendencies, especially in the face of career disappointments. Jody, for example, spoke of the role dance played in her finally deciding to step back from what she perceived as a damaging cycle of success/set back at work:

That [being driven] has changed in the last few years and it had to because I wouldn't have been able to continue to go to work. I was very driven and every time I got promoted I would go through a series of, I would go through these cycles were I would work every minute I was at work and then probably a couple more hours at least at home. And finally it just... We had a massive pay increase it's been over a year now and for some reason they decided to pick and choose who they were going to give this raise to--which couldn't be legal but that's neither here nor there. Well I was one of the people who didn't get it. And it was based on if you had been in one position a really long time you got all this money and if you got promoted like you should all along you didn't get any. And that in combination with all this other stuff. You know, I thought, “Maybe you really need to just go in and do your job, and divert your energy into the dance.” Which of course I did.

Donna told a similar story about coming to a point in her life where she no longer feels she needs to keep proving herself: “People used to be amazed that I had two kids I was a medical student. It seemed to be some mark of that I was someone who really good, [could] do it all! But the fact is I really can't do it all, and I've been coming to terms more with my own limitations in recent years.” For Donna, returning to ballet is clearly characterized as an escape from expectations: “In some ways [I'm] less encumbered by the need to assert how much I can accomplish, how much I can do, and it doesn't really matter to me how good or not I am.”

It is crucial to note that this trope--ballet as escape from being driven at work--emerged not only in the narratives of older women further along in their careers. Though many years younger than Jody and Donna, both Amanda and Joanna described how starting adult ballet classes was linked to shifting gears in their careers. The comparisons Amanda makes between “relaxing” ballet and “frustrating” work closely echo those in Jody’s narrative:

What I love so much about it [ballet] is that it’s relaxing and I’m able to leave behind all the worries in my life... I’m not very happy at work so that can create stress even if your job itself isn’t stressful. ... I have not been given the opportunities that I deserve based on the experience that I have and the degree that I have. I feel like I haven’t been promoted at the rate I think I should have been, so I feel underutilized and underappreciated.

Joanna, meanwhile, sounds like a younger version of Donna. She recalls being extremely driven when she left college and explains how now, only two years later, she has already reevaluated what matters most to her:

I’ve kind of pushed it back ... Because I feel like the job isn’t challenging me to do well. It’s just stressing me out. And no matter what I do, I’m still not going to be really good at it because of the circumstances right now. And so it’s just kind of like, “Okay. I don’t care any more. I’m going to leave at six o’clock and I don’t care what anyone thinks... I feel like now I’m kind of getting my, I guess my priorities more in line. And so it used to be I was focused on doing really well at everything and over the years it’s kind of backed off. And now it’s like, you know, I just want to be happy and have a good time. And if I don’t, you know, make a million dollars by the time I’m thirty or whatever, you know, I’m not concerned with that anymore. You know, it’s kind of like things have been reshuffled and it’s like, you know, instead of being at work at eight o’clock, I’m going to go take this ballet class. And, actually, that was one of the things...like work was one of the things that pushed me to do this. Because I knew if I signed up for that six fifteen class, I would have to leave every day by five forty-five. And so I was like, “Hmmm, this will get me out of work early. Lets do this!” And so ballet just became a good outlet for not being at work late one night a week.

On a final and related note, two of the younger women in the group talked of how taking up ballet was bound up with redefining their sense of self after the specific trauma of losing a job. Elizabeth spoke of how she used to be very driven to please others, especially her father, who took great pride in her academic and dancing successes when she was a child. Her first job loss as a young adult changed all that, “I kinda learned this when I got laid off – I really defined myself in terms of what I did as a job and so it’s definitely eye-opening to see that when you lose your job.” For her, adult ballet classes provide, among other things, a safe space to fail: “I can usually look at it and say, “Well, this is just for fun, so if I don’t get it right it’s no big deal.”

Cara, who had likewise suffered a major career setback, was even more explicit in her characterization of ballet as a therapeutic experiment in letting go of the burden of success:

I lost my job in '95 because the federal government cut funding and that was my first experience with huge failure, and I actually had a breakdown as a result of it and I had to take a year off of working, period. That year I went into therapy and realized that I had this problem with perfection and success and all these things, and I've been working on it since then for the past 5-6 years and the ballet has sort of been an experiment. I'm still in therapy and my therapist has encouraged me to try to do things that I know I'm not good at, that I know I won't be the best at, and that I won't become a professional at. Because it will help me deal with the idea that I am gonna have more failures in my life and they don't have to devastate me, I don't have to be the best at everything, to get over some self-consciousness issues. So I guess I was hoping that I would get more graceful but I was also hoping that if I didn't I could still forgive myself for it and let myself have fun with the class.

*iv)* One of the general observations I made at the start of this paper about the women in the study is that that a significantly high number of them work in traditionally male dominated fields. Many of the complaints quoted above about work stress and, in particular, about being passed over for promotion, come from women in fields such as law enforcement and finance. Some women, like Jody, explicitly tied these problems to sexism in the workplace, while others, like Amanda, merely hinted at this. We do not have sufficient data to say with any certainty that these women's careers have been held back by gender discrimination in the workplace, though it would hardly be a wild speculation to suggest that they have. What we can, however, talk about with greater confidence is the way in which these women have chosen ballet as a specifically "feminine" antidote to specifically "masculine" work environments.

At the most basic level, the draw of ballet is that it promises female companionship to women who spend their days surrounded by men. Note the almost unison chorus in the following three quotes:

Paula: I went to school at Georgia Tech, it's like 1 in 7, which is better than it was years ago. But it was not unlikely for me to be the only female on a project, or the only 1 of like 2 people maybe in the group that I worked in. So it's not like you get a lot of female companionship when you're doing the job that I did.

Amanda: To me it's a nice little escape to be only with women because in all stages of my life I've always been overwhelmed with men because I studied engineering, went to MBA school, I'm in banking. Every step of my life has been mostly men so it's kind of a nice escape.

Joanna: You know, since I moved to Atlanta I don't have that many girlfriends because at work I meet men. And guys are fine to hang out with, but sometimes you just need to be around girls. And so that probably was in the back of my mind. You know, I haven't thought about it until now, but yeah it probably was like, "I need girls! Where can I find girls?"

Joanna went on to suggest the second level at which ballet provides an escape in terms of gender; ballet classes offer not only a break from having to be *with* men at work, they also

provide a break from having to be *like* men at work. In this sense too, ballet appears to be a compensatory activity:

[At ballet] I feel cute and girly. You know, when at work all day, I'm working with men all the time and you have to fit into that and then I can come here and just dance around and it's fun.... "Work Joanna" is pretty composed and always focused on trying to get things right and, you know, always stressed out because of the situation. But "Ballet Joanna" like, "Ballet Joanna" doesn't come out as much in class as right after class. Because I go home and I just kind of prance around the apartment and just pretend like I'm cute and frou-frou and whatever. But, you know, it's just a complete separation. Like I feel like I can just let everything go and not care and it's just much more relaxed.

Like Joanna, Maya sees her work self and her ballet self as very separate and again, there is a strong sense in her narrative that ballet allows her to free up a femininity that has to be covered up at work: "I tend to be attracted to more feminine things. I can be a wee bit overly feminine, I've kind of hardened up over the years being an attorney but growing up I was very, very feminine or prissy. Very finicky, very prissy type girl." She then adds to this confession: "Pink is my favorite color and that may be one of the reasons I'm drawn to ballet in a way. But I don't wear pink as an adult but ballet class is the one time I can put on the pink leotard and the pink skirt and the pink ballet shoes and its no big deal." Clearly, Maya is all too well aware that her love of all things pink and feminine is something that she needs to keep hidden at work if she is to be taken seriously:

I didn't [tell] the people I work with. Just because I didn't think someone that's an attorney comports with someone that does ballet. I didn't want to appear weak or flaky or too feminine or too something. Ballet has a lot of connotations in people's minds and whatever those images are I didn't really want people to perceive me as that.

Finally, Jody tells a similar story about having to be tough at work and about ballet providing a break from this:

I realized very early on because I was in a male dominated field, that if I hadn't had [dance] to balance the other I don't know what would have happened to me mentally, mental health wise. Because a lot of the women that go into my field deliberately take on male characteristics in the way that they live their lives – and it's not particularly healthy for them.

Asked to define what she means by "male" characteristics, Jody responds: "Oh you deal with stress by, you don't talk about it, you work more hours, you drink more, you cuss more. The male traditional accepted things." She then goes on to explain how her colleagues find her dancing very odd-- "The people at work find it very strange that anybody would be involved in ballet. That's not something that police officers do; they'd be involved in karate or shooting"-- but how for her it is all about finding balance.<sup>31</sup> Her work demands that she perform in what she perceives as traditionally male ways, but in her private life she embraces her femaleness:

I'm a combination... because I have to carry myself at work very authoritarian but I have tried to do it without losing me, without losing the fact that I am a female. And that's okay – there's a way to do my job, and still be female... if you throw some crisis at me I'm gonna handle it, I'm probably gonna be the one to lead the people out of the fire kind of thing. But that doesn't mean that two hours after it happens I'm not gonna be crying because that kid's dead.... Through my dance, I hope that I allow women to see their own beauty and their own power that they have that's uniquely theirs to their gender through dance and to be proud of that fact.

While one recurring definition of “maleness” in these narratives is toughness, masculinity was also critiqued in terms of its being synonymous with competitiveness. Commenting on her career in a male-dominated field, Paula observed that the work style of men is very distinct: “Guys seem to have more an ‘I've got to be better than you are’ attitude, and I don't think I'm necessarily that way. Because women tend to have more of a ‘Let's work together on things’ kind of attitude, and men don't seem to have that as much.” Significantly, she and many of the other women I interviewed were extremely enthusiastic about how ballet classes are, by contrast, supportive and cooperative spaces:

Kate: We're all very encouraging for each other.

Amy: One thing I really like about it [is that] everybody's very nice and helps, not helps each other but is encouraging or talks about it.

Elizabeth: [it's] laid back and it's just for fun and there's more of a sense of camaraderie.

Jessica: It has such a communal feeling: like these women who have come together, it's a small community – people working towards the same goal.

Sarah: I think people are very supportive, and people are, like, happy when you're doing well... Like I know when I watch someone else, and they do a really good job I'm like, “Wow! That was great!” Not “Wow,” or, you know, “Why can she do that and I can't? I don't feel that way, like, I would feel more like “Wow, that looks so good, that was great!”

Several of the women stressed that the teacher, Maria, plays a pivotal role in making the class so collegial, indeed the single most consistent claim running through all their narratives is that the teacher is wonderful. Jessica talked of how Maria “brings the class together;” Amy of how “she never singles just one person out which I think is really nice. She always tries to make everybody feel good about something and show them as an example for something.” Shirley praised the way Maria “tries to pay individual attention to everyone in the class, you don't have to compete for attention.” Kelly raved about Maria's humor and personality, and how she is “always supportive – will work with you until you get it right – is never condescending.”

It is worth adding here a couple of details about how Maria runs the classes. First, she is extremely lavish in her praise, and accolades such as “lovely ladies” “nice” “beautiful” and “well done!” fall frequently from her lips. Secondly, when she does find reason to criticize, she uses humor and is always careful to combine a compliment with a correction (so not “you’re doing it wrong” but “you have such a beautiful turn out that when you don’t plie correctly it really shows”). Finally, every class ends with a collective round of applause and Maria always closes with a comment along the lines of “great class ladies, well done.” In other words, no matter what goes wrong in the course of a class, (and plenty does), everyone gets praise at the end.

It is hardly surprising then, that the women in the group are so uniform in their praise of Maria’s positive reinforcement style. Unlike tyrannical bosses, macho or competitive workmates, or un-nurturing ballet teachers from days gone by (Amanda shared a particularly disturbing story of being repeatedly smacked by the man who taught her ballet as a child), Maria is credited with providing a warm, encouraging, and safe environment. The interesting observation to make here is that Maria emerges, in these women’s narratives, as the perfect mother: all-attentive, all-supportive, all-nurturing. This is a crucial point: What these women are saying, in effect, is that one of the things that draws them to ballet classes is that inside them they get mothered, and mothered well. This finding fits with Chodorow’s observations about the reproduction of mothering and the way in which modern nuclear families nurture everyone but the women at their core:

What is often hidden, in generalizations about the family as an emotional refuge, is that in the family as it is currently constituted, no one supports or reconstitutes women affectively and emotionally—either women working in the home or women working in the paid labor force.<sup>32</sup>

Again, I am indebted to Radway here, who writes of the compensatory activities whereby women seek out “desperately needed affective support.” She uses Chodorow’s theories to support her claim that “lack of emotional nurturance combined with the high costs of lavishing constant attention on others is the primary motivation behind the desire to lose the self in a book.”<sup>33</sup> Similar arguments can be made about my interviewees’ participation in ballet, although once again these adult ballerinas provide an even stronger example of the psychodynamics Radway observes. Where her readers find solace in a virtual community and in symbolic mothering, the women I am looking at experience actual community and hands-on mothering. The ballet class may well be an “invented community” (i.e. postmodern rather than traditional, chosen rather than ascriptive), but it is, crucially, an actual assemblage of real women in real time. For these women, Maria represents the nurturing center of this community.

## **CONTRADICTIONS**

In turning to consider some of the paradoxes that emerge around the issue of ballet as escape from work I am going to limit myself here to looking at just two main lines of contradiction. First, I interrogate the claim that ballet provides a space of release for the alienated and weighed-down work body. This leads directly into a reexamination of the claim that ballet class provides a relief from work pressure more generally.

The claim that ballet liberates the confined, encumbered, and alienated work body is complicated by at least two pieces of contradictory data. First, the search for a feeling of

lightness or transcendence in ballet is not always rewarded. As we noted in Part One, many women come out of adult ballet feeling heavier than when they went in because no matter how airy and ethereal the movements are, they experience their own bodies as clumsy, plodding and all too earthly and imperfect. There is then an all-important gulf, for many women, between the ideals of ballet and the realities of a ballet class. This clash is particularly vivid in the narrative of Kate, who had high hopes that ballet would be profoundly rejuvenating: “I was really trying to reach back and grasp the joy that I knew as a youth.” Instead, while she enjoyed the classes, she struggled with how it felt to dance with a less than ideal body: “Oh I got mad at it. It wouldn’t do what I told it. It just didn’t remember the stuff to do and it was a lot more difficult because I’m more stiff than I had been when I used to do ballet. Kinda aggravated me.” Her statements here are richly indicative of the way in which a ballet class, just like a work day, can produce both bodily alienation (note how she characterizes her body as a defective machine that won’t follow orders) and psychological stress.

Second, and very much related, all claims about ballet providing a free space for the body are qualified by the fact that ballet is extremely scripted and highly disciplined. As the women themselves noted, ballet class is far from being an “anything goes” environment. There is an exact way to do things and one is either doing them right or wrong. Jessica’s statement that she likes this kind of rigor should not prevent us from recognizing the discipline in action; ballet, as she describes it, is all about controlling and mastering the body:

It’s very structured in a way that there’s all these wrongs and rights about it and the technique is very precise and I like having that kind of, its weird its like I like having something to conform to or to train myself in. I was a pianist growing up – a serious pianist from about the age of 5 on and I ended up stopping in college but it sort of in some ways recreates that. I’ve been thinking about it and I think in a way I like that training of it – piano is this thing where there’s a really wrong and right thing and practice helped and there’s something very precise about it and linear too – you go and you get better and you move forward and you move up and you are able to do things that you weren’t able to do before.

The important point here is that ballet’s disciplinary regimes can be seen to complement, rather than counter, those of the typical workplace. In ballet class, as in work life, the body is subject to what Foucault calls “correct training.” Balletic discipline requires that the body move in ways that are neither organic nor natural. Turn-out, for example, (which is the lynch-pin of all balletic movement), has to be drilled from a young age, and even amateur dancers are familiar with the stories of ballet teachers standing on their student’s backs to force their hips to open out more. Indeed, several of the women in this study stated their conviction that early drilling makes all the difference. Sometimes this understanding came in the form of a lament. Anna, for example, felt she was unable to make up for her lack of prior training: “Sometimes I feel the old dog cannot learn new tricks.” Lisa also regretted having no early training and spoke of how frustrating this was for her in class:

I think all of the people in class who’ve had ballet before. I hate to be the one who has no background because like I said I’m a little bit of a perfectionist, or a lot, really... I expected to come in with people who were at a similar background level to myself and feeling like I’m reasonably fit and reasonably flexible but with

no background. I thought, “Well gosh! I’ll do real well at this!” But in reality here I am in a class with folks who have a lot more background so it’s a lot harder for me than I expected it to be. I hate to not know what I’m doing because I’m such a perfectionist in so many areas of my life. So that frustrates me.

For other women, the rigorous training associated with ballet emerged more as a point of pride. Kelly, for example, highlighted the difference between insiders’ and outsiders’ perceptions of ballet: “If you don’t know anything about ballet and you see it just looks like controlled smooth easy movements and people are just doing - but it’s very difficult to get your center, it’s very difficult to pull the moves off so that they’re doing what’s intended.” Susan, who had perhaps more training than any of the women in the group, was adamant about there being a hierarchy that distinguishes trained and untrained dancers, bodies that have been appropriately disciplined and bodies that have not:

When a new person comes in people sort of size up the skill of the person and where she fits in the order of things. And I know that I come in as a person who has some technique from the past... There’s a way in which your muscles - if you don’t start until you’re completely physically formed there are things that I don’t think you can ever get out of ballet. My observation has been that 18 is still young enough that your muscles can really change, or maybe it’s your bones even, I don’t know. But something about your muscular/skeletal system can adapt to the demands because the positions are not natural. And it looks to me like it’s much harder for someone who’s 30 + to get their body to do that in any way that it looks fun. It looks strained a lot of times when somebody has started older.

My use of Foucauldian vocabulary here is by no means idle or casual. Indeed, I would suggest that two more terms we associate with his name be considered here: “punishment” (built into the title of his seminal work on the history of the prison) and “panopticism” (referring, at the most literal level, to the highly effective surveillance practices built into the architecture of the modern prison).

On the issue of punishment, note how forthright the women in this study are about the pain and suffering that is part and parcel of the ballet class. Some, like Kate, complained about sore joints. Others, like Casey, talked of effort and sore muscles: “It looks so graceful when people do it. It looks as if it ought to be very ethereal and really it’s very muscular and there’s a lot of exertion and there’s muscle pain.” When it came to discussing pointe work, that part of ballet that most symbolizes ethereal transcendence, my interviewees were particularly concrete about the bodily sacrifice involved:

Amy: Oh my gosh have you ever done it? It’s *just* horrible!... You literally stand on your toes, you literally do! And I didn’t believe that. But you get this wood block in the shoe and you have to stand up on your toes and you have to go dance around. And it hurts really bad! And my feet just aren’t strong enough, they just – oh, it’s awful. So beautiful – I love to watch it I just, mm mm, no!

Brittany: It’s hard. I have a new appreciation for people who do it because they make it look so easy and it’s not. Just standing up on your toes you’re like

pouring down sweat. It takes a lot of energy that you don't even realize just to stand up on and sometimes its hard for me to get all the way up there. I don't wanna hurt myself.

Elizabeth: "It's very painful but fun."

Maya: It is painful but you get used to the pain... and I've learned to focus my attention elsewhere, away from the pain, like away from my feet and that helps.

Sarah: It's a love/hate thing, because it hurts like crazy, but I love it, I keep going back for more. And that's weird, I can't, you know... It just kills your toes, it kills your feet, like almost to the point where they're throbbing when you're done. [But] it's like exhilarating to, like, watch yourself move on point.

This last quote from Sarah brings us directly to the issue of surveillance. Her interesting wording here (watching, not doing, produces exhilaration) is fully in keeping with ballet's generalized emphasis on appearances. Inspection functions ceaselessly in the ballet setting, and my interviewees shared comments about this surveillance that dramatically complicate any simple understanding of ballet as an escape from a work environment in which they are under scrutiny. Jessica, for example spoke of her self-surveillance in class: "Watching myself in the mirror compared to the teacher its like "Oh my god!" They make it look so easy and it's really, really not." Marissa and Donna also spoke with great ambivalence about the presence of the mirror:

Marissa: I remember in high school talking with friends about how hard it is to stare at yourself and not think about your body and your weight and those type of things and I remembered that conversation immediately when I went back to it this year – just looking at myself in a mirror and doing all of that all over again. It does make you a little bit more concerned about it because you are in either leggings or tights and leotards and stuff...

Donna: The presence or absence of a mirror has been interesting to me. For example, doing yoga there's no mirror there and then going back to an environment where there is a mirror is an interesting change and one thing that I notice is I do, I am much more critical, I am much more aware of being critical of my body and of myself when I have to look at it in the mirror. Yesterday... that was mainly what I was doing was I was looking at it and I was scrutinizing what was wrong with various positions... ideally I would have been just scrutinizing the positions but instead I was also kind of scrutinizing my body and feeling that I was too fat here or not muscular enough there.

Kristy, meanwhile, described ballet classes as a place where she not only watches herself, but also watches herself being watched:

I don't feel that its that competitive although I make it competitive myself sometimes, just by wanting to be better than everyone else the class. I don't mean

to and I try not to because I know I'm just there for fun but still I like to be at the top. When I was growing up I was always the best in my class so I always stood on the front row in the middle. I was always the example. I'm used to my teachers saying "Oh that's very good Kristy" You know?

Cara, ironically one of the women in the group who had taken up ballet in an attempt to rid herself of her compulsive need to excel, had this to say about the unrelenting scrutiny of the classes:

Cara: I thought I was going to be able to pull it off more than I can but I can't because that mirror is totally unforgiving! Also the teacher points out little things I'm doing wrong. ... It sucks not to be good at it and that mirror is...! At least with the swimming I've never seen myself swim! With the ballet [laughs] I catch myself in the mirror and I'm like "Oh my god what was I thinking?!" So the class is like 50/50 for me. Every time there will be 50% of the time where I'm getting so much into the dancing that I'm not paying attention to the mirror at all, or if I am I'm only paying attention to the technique of what I'm doing, and I really enjoy myself. And the other 50% of the time I'm like, "Oh God! I hate how these pants fit me! I can't do that jump! I tripped over my foot! This doesn't fit me right!"

Finally, unquestionably the most vivid description of the discipline and surveillance of the ballet class came from Maya. Placing her comments about work side by side with those made about ballet, enables us to see, with remarkable clarity, just how problematic claims about ballet as break really are:

Also [ballet is] an outlet to get away from work to get away from my profession and who I am. When we come into the ballet class I don't know what a lot of the other people do. It's no big deal if someone just finished college, or hasn't finished college, or where they went to school, or did someone get that last promotion... I think in our American society people tend to assess people on what they've done and they draw conclusions from those things. And I think, you know, we tend to be competitive in our culture. We tend to have awe for people that are professionals who've done this or that and when I come to ballet class I have no idea of what the next person is, who she is or what she does. I can tell if she's married or not married just because most people have on rings and you know what? It doesn't matter. It absolutely does not matter. So for an hour a day no one cares if I'm an attorney or not and I don't care. And there's no pressures and expectations for me. No one asks me what I've done, no one asks me what I do. No one asks me where I went to school and every other place I go, every cocktail party, every dinner, everybody eventually gets around to: "Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? What do you do and who do you work for? All of those questions are people formulating images of you.

It's all based on performance. You have to do a certain level or certain jump. There's always a certain amount of people watching you and formulating

opinions on how high your leg kicked, or how high you jump, or how thick you are, or how muscular you are, or how well in shape you are, or where you danced, or how long you danced, or did you earn money from dancing? And you can always tell the people who have the ballet training versus mainly the jazz people ... and that's all part of it. And also it's women in the class so even with women we all have our own issues, you know: Who's prettier? Who's thinner? Who's this, that, and the other? You can feel all of that in a ballet class... ballet can be very intimidating. Because you know right then and there you're either getting a step or you're not. You're off or you're not off key. It's not like waiting for test results to come back, or for the end of the semester to know where you ranked within the class. You kinda know your ranking. There's the good dancers, the average dancers, and then there's the ones who don't have that much experience and it's all very visible.

What is remarkable about Maya's comments here is that key words, phrases and concepts appear both in her description of ballet as escape from work and in her description of the work of the ballet class. Unwittingly, she presents a convincing case both for ballet as escape from competition and surveillance and a powerful case that ballet is all about competition and surveillance. At best, ballet appears to substitute one form of pressure for another. According to the paradox embedded in Maya's narrative, ballet class allows you to get away from it all and escape nothing.

## **THINKING THROUGH THE PARADOXES**

When we take the time to look carefully at the contradictions and inconsistencies in these women's narratives, a clear finding emerges: While ballet classes may provide an escape from work, they do not provide an escape from working:

Jenny: You're competing with yourself, always trying to increase your flexibility, or your jumping height, or whatever detail happens to be what you want to be working on at the time. So there's a lot of different ways you can, I guess, focus on improvement.

The implications of this finding are fascinating. Most obviously, it raises an important question about motivation. If these women report that ballet offers relief from the stress of work, home, surveillance etc. but ballet, by their own testimony, turns out to be filled with pressure and scrutiny, then what does this do to their original claim? If claims about ballet are so rife with contradiction, how should we go about understanding the appeal these classes have for these women? How, in other words, can we account for their ongoing dancing?

Arguably the most obvious take on the paradox embedded in these women's narratives would be to conclude that they are suffering from a fairly bad case of collective false consciousness. They think they are getting away from it all, but in fact all these poor deluded dupes are doing is reproducing the very oppressive regimes that dominate elsewhere in their lives. Self-confessed "A-Types," they are incapable of recognizing that they are trapped in a never-ending cycle of pressured over-achieving.

I should perhaps use a less facetious tone here in that, as both an academic and a participant observer, I am only too willing to concede that my motivations in attending ballet classes are complicated, if not downright contradictory. Moreover, I do not want to shy away from the intellectually fascinating (albeit ideologically disconcerting) idea that we, as a group of adult ballerinas, are unconsciously reproducing stereotypes about female masochism. Along these lines, I believe there is a legitimate claim to explore here as to whether the choice of ballet as adult hobby undoes one stereotype (that ballet is just for kids) but reinvigorates another (that of the post-feminist wonder-woman: she who can cook, clean, get promoted, dote on her kids *and* stand en pointe). And though I lack the trained eye of a psychologist, it does appear that there is a connection to be explored here between these women's choice of ballet and their tendency to describe themselves as extremely driven.

That said, concluding that the women in this study are dancing in the dark strikes me as rather too patronizing and altogether too easy. Sure, they may be reproducing certain conditions of work in their leisure time, they may even be upholding self-defeating myths about women being able to do it all. But I believe that these perplexing patterns can also be approached in somewhat less pathologizing terms. Below I suggest three.

*i)* One explanation for why the women in this study willingly submit to the bodily discipline of the ballet class lies, ironically, precisely in that discipline. In other words, exactly what is attractive about these classes is how exacting they are. The point, reiterated across several narratives, is that it is only by being so incredibly taxing that these classes are able to provide effective relief from incredibly taxing jobs:

Elizabeth: I like that you have to think so hard about what you're doing, you can't think about the things - if I were to just go home I would be brooding about whatever happened that day; when you go to ballet, it makes you forget.

Casey: I really have to pay attention... When I go to class it's very hard to concentrate on anything else. Really good way for me to be centered... my work is very demanding, high intensity, high pressure... and so when I go to ballet class because it's very complicated and its hard for me... its all an act of concentration.... There's so much that's stressful in this job that you tend to kinda keep running in your head a little bit. You re-run the problems of the day and sit and think about things that happen. Did I handle this particular situation correctly? And when you're dealing with situations that are suicide attempts and sexual assault and termination of staff members.... There's a lot of internal processing... because it's people's lives you're messing with in this job - in very serious ways .... Ballet really helps me break that cycle because I can't do the activity and run that tape in my head at the same time. I have to switch that off in order to do the ballet.

Paula: I mean because it's so engrossing, it's something that it's such a good stress reliever for me.

Note that this "work hard, play hard" formula applies here regardless of whether the "work" being escaped is parenting labor or workforce labor:

Amy: When I'm there I don't think about anything – coz even when I go to the gym and I'm working out I'm still thinking “well I hope she's okay – like today she fell down and bumped her head and when I picked her up she had this big knot on her head and of course [with ballet] she's at home, she's in bed and I have to concentrate...The whole time I was there I didn't think about anything but ballet because you have to concentrate so hard...

Understanding the hard work of ballet in this way provides an explanation for these women's motivations that pushes beyond claims about false consciousness or innate masochism. Instead, we recognize the extent to which their choice of ballet as their break activity is psychologically healthy and adaptive. Faced with work/family lives that are demanding and stressful, these women turn to a “leisure” activity that, precisely in its lack of leisureliness, allows them to experience a sense of escape. However perverse the logic here may seem, it does appear that it is only by being hard work that ballet provides effective sanctuary from hard work.

Though beyond the scope of the current paper, this finding raises a series of questions about the status of leisure in contemporary American culture, an issue of concern to other Sloan scholars.<sup>34</sup> Hemmingway once said we should never mistake motion for action. This research reminds us to never mistake leisure for relaxation: at least not in any simple sense. For what makes ballet relaxing for these women is precisely that it isn't a walk in the woods: if it was, it wouldn't provide the necessary degree of relief. According to their testimonies, it is only by taking up a new challenge that these women are able to relieve the burden of another.

But what are the long-term implications here? If we are looking at a middle class world wherein high-pressured recreational activities are the only ones capable of relieving the stresses of high-pressured work/home lives, what does this bode for the future? Higher levels of physical and psychological well being? Or a ratcheting up of pressure and activity that can only end in collapse? If the latter, will that collapse be individual or collective? Destructive or constructive? The question that lurks here is whether a culture can sustain itself if leisure, as it has traditionally been conceived, disappears.

*ii)* A second explanation for why the hard work of ballet is not off-putting to these women is that failing does not carry, as it does in the rest of their lives, dire outcomes. This point was raised in a number of different interviews. We already saw, for example, how Elizabeth framed ballet as a safe space for failing. She was very clear that while adult ballet classes do involve pressure and performance anxiety, messing up is permissible because this isn't real life:

Sometimes, I think there are certain nights when I take myself too seriously, where I get frustrated if I can't do something easily or I think there are definitely times like that but I think for the most part I can usually look at it and say, “Well this is just for fun so if I don't get it right it's no big deal...” There's not, “Okay I'm not going to have a job if this doesn't get done,” kind of thing.

Sarah expressed a similar sentiment in her characterization of ballet as something that is purely voluntary and non-consequential in relation to the rest of her life:

It's definitely a stress reliever ... I think because I know like at any time if I'm not enjoying it I can leave it. It's like there's nothing tying me to it, or holding me it, or you know, it's just strictly because I like it. And I go and the music just kind of relaxes me, and I can just get in a zone, kind of forget everything else.

Maya added an additional twist to the whole question of how ballet stress is qualitatively different from work stress. Like the women above, she noted that there are no career consequences if she messes up in ballet. Additionally, however, she implied that it is also her position as independent consumer of ballet that inoculates her from experiencing too much pressure in ballet class:

If this is a dream of mine and I'm paying for this class then I feel like I'm gonna get what I'm paying for and at this point in my life who's to judge me? Because I'm not making a career out of it. I have another full time job that allows me to even be able to afford to take the classes.

According to her rather interesting consumer logic, Maya isn't overly burdened by ballet's stresses because her classes are purchased by money earned in her (truly stressful) day job. The distinction she is making here could be paraphrased thus: work consumes her (and is therefore stressful), but she consumes ballet (which is therefore relaxing).

Taken as a whole, the above quotes tell us that even as ballet often looks like work--and hard work at that--the women who go to these classes compartmentalize this work in such a way as to render it very distinct from the "work" of the rest of their lives.

*iii)* A third way of thinking about the contradictions that emerge in this study is to view ballet classes from a ritual perspective. Steps in this direction have already been taken by Lesley-Anne Sayers in a recent British anthology on dance. Sayers' "Unearthing the Ballet Class," explores the "unexplored territory" of the amateur children's ballet class. Though she does not apply ritual theory *per se*, her frequent use of "ritual" and "ritualized" to describe the "extraordinary" world of the ballet class encourages further probing along these lines. What is it about the ballet class that makes it, in her words, a "charmed, luminous, enchanted space" that "transform[s] very ordinary children into special beings"?<sup>35</sup> Another paper in this same anthology, while not focused on ballet, is also useful here. Barbara O'Conner's ethnography of set dancers draws heavily on Victor Turner's concept of "communitas" to explain the great appeal that set dancing has for women in Ireland.

The value of a ritual approach is that it allows us to better understand the powerful appeal of activities and behaviors that, on the surface, may not seem all that appealing. Ritual theory helps us to understand, for example, the tolerance of bodily pain. In ritual contexts, such "sacrifice" is commonplace and is understood by theorists such as Barbara Myerhoff as heightening the experience of an event.<sup>36</sup> What is crucial about rituals is that they involve certain features (magical locations, sacred scripts, special costumes, charismatic leaders, group solidarity etc.) that dramatically alter people's perceptions of such things as physical and emotional suffering. Ritual, in this sense, can be compared to the sugar that helps the medicine go down; its ingredients mask that which might otherwise be experienced as burdensome.

Peter Brown's recent work on adult cyclists provides an excellent example of the utility of using ritual theory to explain what he calls "positive deviance."<sup>37</sup> Looking over the recurring

themes in my interviewees' narratives, it is clear that their remarkable commitment to ballet can, like that of dedicated adult cyclists, be explained largely in terms of its status as ritual in their lives. Crucially, these women do not see ballet simply as "exercise." Rather, they describe it in quasi-spiritual and deeply ritualistic terms. They speak of time-out-of-time, and of a (welcome) loss of self, of the joy of community, and of the appeal of ballet's scripted nature. They describe the great appeal of listening to "magical" music and having a "charismatic" leader. Like Brown's cyclists, they also place great emphasis on the importance of having "special" costumes that make them look and therefore feel the part. Even the least confident of the dancers attested to power of costume to alter one's state of mind:

Cara: Last week I was looking in the mirror, which is a hard thing to do anyway, but it's there so you look. And as I was doing one of the turns which I don't do very well I had my hair back in a pony tail--almost looked like it was in a bun--and I was wearing a pink t-shirt which I don't normally wear. And I thought, "Okay, I could *look* like a ballerina." I'll never *be* a ballerina. [But] it was sort of nice. [emphasis added]

My point here, and it is one that will be explored in future collaborative work with Dr. Brown, is that these adult ballet dancers, like his adult cyclists, tell us that ritual theory is all important when seeking to understand what makes leisure that doesn't look like leisure so appealing.<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS/ DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Owing to constraints of space and time, certain issues did not make it into this paper. For example, under the heading of "contradictions" we did not get to the vexed question of how gender norms operate here. Recall that we saw how many of the women in this study described ballet as a refuge from masculinity. Indeed, it appeared that ballet offers a form of feminine compensation for women working in traditionally male fields. Several women cherished being able to "feel dancey and feminine and like a girl" (Amy), being able to "go somewhere you can dance and play, and be a girl for an hour" (Tracey).

An issue to be explored further is the way in which ballet's "frou frou-ness" is in fact an illusion, and the varying extents to which the women in this study are aware of this. Even Amy who loves how ballet makes her feel like a "girly girl" elsewhere talked of the "triangle of power" that she focuses on achieving in class. Jessica was explicit about the contradictions inherent here: "it's a very feminine thing and its also very, dancers are physically strong and powerful." And Lucy cited the gulf between what seems and what is as one of her favorite things about ballet:

I think it requires a lot of power, a lot of control, it's very meticulous... What I kind of like is the illusion that it's very light and airy, and I like the illusion of the femininity, but I've always known that it's not; that it's very powerful. Maybe I'm kind of like that. It's not all one-dimensional. You look feminine, it is feminine, it's not like that.

The reason I raise this issue here is that it strikes me that there is a parallel to be drawn between the illusion embedded in the role of ballerina, and the illusion embedded in the role of good mother/homemaker.<sup>39</sup> In both the balletic and the domestic domains, women are required to make it look easier than it is; to work extremely hard but to perfect the art of effortless. Sayers notes accurately that, “The ballerina has often been evoked with rather trivializing imagery that colludes with her artistry to disguise, or perhaps even deny, the skill and strength required to produce the image.”<sup>40</sup> The exact same observation could be made about mothers and homemakers. The question here is who stands to gain from the performance of ease?

A related question is what happens when women--on stage, at work, or at home--say no to the act? It is worth mentioning here the radical new choreography of “post-modern” ballerina Karen Armitage. Where mainstream ballet insists upon the elision of effort, Armitage brings it to the forefront of her dance. She is particularly renowned for choreography that makes evident to the audience just how strenuous and challenging pointe work is. What Armitage does, in the words of one critic, is to “underscore the heroism of the female dancer.”<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to consider what equivalent rebellions elsewhere in women’s lives might look like, and what shifts in consciousness they might produce. What would it take for the effort required for the “second shift” to be truly recognized? And what would happen if it were?

Still on the issue of recognition, a suggestion for further research: My study of adult ballerinas is, among other things, a study of mothers playing. As such, it challenges deeply seated beliefs about maternal selflessness. As Susan Suleiman writes, “To imagine the mother playing is to recognize her most fully as a creative subject, autonomous and free.” What I want to stress here is that one reason we remain incapable of imagining mothers playing is that scholars continue to neglect this as an area of research. Even Sloan researchers with their fairly overt mission to improve the lives of working mothers contribute to this neglect to the extent that their research invariably focuses on mothers as workers and mothers as caregivers, but not on mothers as autonomous individuals with needs of their own.

We should, in other words, be more cognizant of the fact that we as scholars internalize certain myths and, in choosing certain research questions over others, we sometimes unwittingly perpetuate the very stereotypes we seek to challenge. If we never look at mothers at play, is that because mothers never play? Or because we assume, with the culture at large, that mothers never play? And if we never produce reports about mothers at play, does that in turn discourage maternal play?

While it is laudable that much recent work/family scholarship has been used, at the policy/advocacy level, to persuade employers to free up more “personal time” (via flex schedules, family leave acts, on-site child care etc.), we should not fail to notice that all of that personal time is really imagined as family time. When it comes to women in particular, personal time is time for taking care of others. And while making it easier for working mothers to juggle their responsibilities is surely important, it is likewise important to recognize that what gets left out of the mix are their own needs, which they have neither the time nor the cultural permission to explore.

Along these lines, I would also urge that we conduct further studies that look at both male and female workers in terms of their access to, and uses of, “leisure” time.<sup>42</sup> For while I have suggested here that contemporary American culture is hostile to maternal play, one could argue that it is unsupportive of adult play generally.<sup>43</sup> We need to know more about who gets to do what leisure, where and when. And to avoid the ahistoricism that plagues too many of our laments about the difficulties of modern life, we need to investigate whether this picture has or

has not changed over time. Is the stereotype of the husband who works long hours then spends all Saturday on a golf course a valid one? Or are working men's leisure hours diminishing? Are they now expected to take the kids with them? Do women, generally, sacrifice leisure as they struggle to combine work and family obligations? Or do they, as independent earners, feel more entitled to claim time for themselves? How do men and women involved in pursuits other than ballet account for their particular choices?

Exploring these questions further should give us insight not only into what is (and isn't) going on in the lives of contemporary dual-income middle class couples, it might also explain some of what is happening to the children of such partnerships. My hypothesis here is that the overscheduled child reflects not just the migration of productivity values from the workplace to the home, nor simply the practical utility of having kids in after-school programs so that parents can work full time. It may be that the overscheduled child is also a symptom of our cultural intolerance for adult play. It might be useful, in other words, to understand the parents of overscheduled children not simply as pushy tyrants, but rather as grown ups responding to a cultural script that discourages adult play, a cultural script that always assumes that "ballet moms" sit in the audience.

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<sup>1</sup> In Reading the Romance, Radway recalls figuring out early on in her interview process that whenever she asked about pleasure in terms of text, the women kept answering in terms of act. She writes: “although I learned later than certain aspects of the romance’s story do help make this event especially meaningful, the early interviews were interesting because they focused so resolutely on the act of reading rather than on the meaning of the romance.” 87

<sup>2</sup> Comment made by Joanna. Personal Interview, Aug 29, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Lesley-Anne Sayers, “‘She might pirouette on a daisy and it would not bend’ Images of Femininity and Dance Appreciation.” P.166 In Helen Thomas, (ed) 1993

<sup>4</sup> Jowitt, 1998, 209

<sup>5</sup> LM Vincent: 1979, 100

<sup>6</sup> Adair, 1992, 107

<sup>7</sup> Jowitt, 1998, 213

<sup>8</sup> See Mal Lewis-Jones’ 1994 “Ghost at the Ballet School” London: Hodder Childrens Books, as quoted in Sayers, 1997 p146.

<sup>9</sup> Sayers, 1997 p146.

<sup>10</sup> During her pregnancy, Bussell’s on-line newsletters to her fans betrayed a certain defensiveness on the subject that was ill-disguised by her attempts to sound casual: “Oh and by the way,” she wrote in one, “ I AM planning to continue dancing after the baby is born!” When the birth turned out to be a problematic one, the media was only too happy to circulate details of how darling Darcy almost died preparing for her “greatest role yet.” See, for example, Peter Robinson’s gushing reports in Hello magazine, May, June, and Oct 2001.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Laurel Parker West, “Soccer Moms, Welfare Queens, Waitress Moms, and Super Moms: Myths of Motherhood in State Coverage of Child Care” (April 2002); Teresa Arendell, “Mothering and Motherhood: A Decade Review.” Center for Working Families Working Paper, (April 1999), and “Hegemonic Motherhood: Deviancy Discourses and Employed Mothers’ Accounts of Out-of-School Time Issues.” Center for Working Families Working Paper, (April 1999)

<sup>12</sup> See Arendell, “Hegemonic Motherhood: Deviancy Discourses and Employed Mothers’ Accounts of Out-of-School Time Issues.” Center for Working Families Working Paper, (April 1999), 5, and Sharon Hays, The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1996

<sup>13</sup> Arendell, “Hegemonic Motherhood: Deviancy Discourses and Employed Mothers’ Accounts of Out-of-School Time Issues.” Center for Working Families Working Paper, (April 1999), 5.

<sup>14</sup> See Hays 1996, Thurer 1994, Williams 2001

<sup>15</sup> Thurer notes how two trends in mid-twentieth century psychoanalytic thinking “colluded in the obliteration of mothers as persons.” First, “it was assumed that motherhood was the child’s drama, with mom in a supporting role. The plot was played out against, or with, a female parent whose job it was to service her child’s needs and then disappear into the scenery.” Second, the “norm” of maternal self-sacrifice was given greater credence as psychoanalysts like Melanie Klein argued that masochism is the natural, healthy and adaptive state for women. See Thurer pp. 267-8.

<sup>16</sup> There are in fact two linguistic patterns here worth noting. The first, as I suggest, concerns the relationship between mothering and play: when premodifiers refer to work (or, in the case of the highly negative premodifier “welfare” lack of work) the mother is in all cases the active referent; when the premodifiers refer to pastimes and play, they are automatically understood as referring, in fact, to the mother’s child/ren. The second interesting pattern concerns the use of mom versus mother. Societal disapproval appears to be registered in the use of the more formal, distanced “mother” over “mom.” Hence “welfare mother,” “working mother,” and “single mother,” but “stay-at-home mom” and “soccer mom.” The use of mother in the noun phrase “Stage Mother” can be explained thus: in this instance, the intensive behind-the-scenes mothering is considered a little too intense, the mother is accused to living too vicariously through her offspring. Note here the “Catch 22” for mothers. Good moms have no needs of their own and selflessly support those of others. But overzealous support of one’s offspring rapidly turns one into a bad mother.

<sup>17</sup> In all these senses ballet is **not** like the romance reading Radway describes that can be “accomplished without mounting a fundamental challenge ... it is a method of garnering attention for the self that creates a minimum amount of dissonance between accepted role expectations and actual behavior precisely because the assertion of self-interest is temporary and expressed through leisure pursuits that are relatively less significant than other areas of concern.” See Radway 103.

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<sup>18</sup> All of the participants' names, along with names of children and spouses, have been changed. In addition, where certain biographical details seemed certain to reveal someone's identity in a context that might prove embarrassing, I have omitted or altered such details.

<sup>19</sup> We don't know what Joanna's coworkers actually say and think, only what Joanna says they say and think.

<sup>20</sup> As a participant observer, I can concur with Casey's experiences. I am 5' 6" and 118 lbs: the only ballet tights that actually fit me are X/XL. The peculiar sizing system of ballet stores is not unlike that in The Gap, where women can now purchase the extraordinarily perplexing "Size 0" (from an existential/feminist standpoint, this size category raises troubling questions about whether or not women's bodies should in fact exist).

<sup>21</sup> In her interview, Donna referred to the struggle to "get her body back" after having two children. And in the first class she ever attended, she made a disparaging comment about how, during the sautee exercise, (mini jumps in quick succession) it would be evident that she was a mother. These comments speak to a more generalized disdain for the "natural" female body that is beyond the scope of this current paper.

<sup>22</sup> Lesley Anne Sayers uses this line in the title of her paper on gender and ballet criticism. It comes from a November 1911 review in the *Dancing Times*, London.

<sup>23</sup> Arendell, 1999 p.3

<sup>24</sup> Arendell, 1999 p.19

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Jenny was extremely adamant about her right to dance ("I make people aware that it is a high priority for me, so I leave work when I need to, to get there, and my husband's aware of it, and he's aware of the fact that after the baby's born, Tuesdays and Thursdays evenings are mine"), but has now stopped coming to class. According to Maria, our teacher, she is finding it impossible to combine being a new mother, returning to work, and making it to ballet classes.

<sup>26</sup> I return in my conclusion to the issue of gender and entitlement to leisure. See also, Stacey Merola and Phyllis Moen's "Time for Leisure: Do Gender, Occupation, and Lifestage Matter?" Cornell Working Paper #00-02

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, New York: Pantheon 1988; Barbara Kingslover, "Civil Disobedience at Breakfast" from *High Tide in Tuscon*, New York, Harper Collins 1995; Susan Suleiman, "Playing and Motherhood; or, How to Get the Most Out of the Avant-Garde." In Bassin et al (ed) 1994.

<sup>28</sup> See Christy Adair, 1992 p. 92

<sup>29</sup> From R Heppenstall's "Apology for Dancing Faber and Faber, 1936. As quoted in Lesley-Anne Sayers, "Madame Fudge, Some Fossils, and Other Missing Links: Unearthing the Ballet Class." P.143

<sup>30</sup> From a report in the *Manchester Guardian*, 1927. As quoted in Lesley-Anne Sayers, 1997, p.141

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Jody reports that when her male colleagues find out she dances they automatically assume it is a) for money and b) for male pleasure; "The males usually make a joke, you know? When you say you're involved in dancing they'll say 'Oooh! What kind?' meaning 'are you striptease?'" Both assumptions add weight to the claims made earlier in this paper about the extent to which women are rarely given cultural permission to pursue pleasure in purely self-serving ways. If Jody, a working mother of two, is dancing, it must be for the economic or sexual benefit of others. Jody challenges such assumptions not only by attending ballet classes, but also, and there is a quite delicious irony here given her colleagues' assumptions, by describing her ballet classes as self-stimulating: "The closest thing to wonderful, great, tremendous sex by yourself: You're in control!"

<sup>32</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. University of California Press, 1978. p. 36

<sup>33</sup> See Radway, p 95-6

<sup>34</sup> See Stacey Merola and Phyllis Moen, "Time for Leisure: Do Gender, Occupation, and Lifestage Matter?" Cornell Working Paper. They offer a brief overview of the way in which the meaning of "leisure" has shifted over the past century. For example, they quote economist Steffan Linder's claim that there is no leisure anymore in the sense Veblen and others imagined (unproductive use of time). Rather, all leisure is "for the sake of something else."

<sup>35</sup> See: Lesley-Anne Sayers, 1997

<sup>36</sup> See Barbara Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox." In *Celebration: Studies in Festival and Ritual*. Ed. Victor Turner. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982. 109-135.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Brown, "Ritual and Identity as Keys to Sustainable Physical Activity: Implications for Chronic Disease Prevention." SFAA/SMA Meeting, Atlanta, GA, March 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Brown stresses, and I concur, that understanding how ritual ingredients operate in the leisure pursuits of "positive deviants" will allow health educators and advocates to design exercise programs that have a higher degree of sustainability built into them. This could have a profoundly positive impact in terms of encouraging healthy living among a wider American population that is, by all reports, increasingly overstressed and sedentary.

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<sup>39</sup> Traditionally, “homemaker” is reserved for describing women who stay home full time. I use it here to refer, more generally, to all women who are invested (part or full time) in the creation and maintenance of home life. My liberal usage is, I would argue, justified given that multiple studies have pointed to the fact that, despite their large-scale involvement in the workplace, women still take responsibility for most domestic labor. See, for example, Arlie Hothschild, The Second Shift.

<sup>40</sup> Sayers, 1997 134.

<sup>41</sup> Greskovic 1985 as quoted in Adair, 1992 p.117.

<sup>42</sup> Stacey Merola and Phyllis Moen’s “Time for Leisure” marks an important first step here.

<sup>43</sup> As a culture, we spend a good deal of energy separating childhood and adulthood. In particular, we campaign loudly (albeit ineffectively) against kids becoming parents. The under acknowledged flip side of this is that we also (in much less overt ways) campaign against parents being kids.