STREET DANCE STORIES:

Finding health and identity through dancing

MA thesis
Journalism Connected
Supervisors: Joel Rasmussen and Fredrik Sturzenbecker
Author: Anette Bodén
Abstract

Dancing is for many considered something embarrassing in today’s society and male dancers often face prejudices. Street dance is one dance style that is often perceived as masculine and can thus be seen as a safe haven for male dancers. However, the popularity in street dance is also vast in female dancers. Health benefits of dancing have been well researched, though not in street dance. This study explores health and identity issues in street dance, portrayed and studied through personal stories of four street dancers. The purpose of the study is twofold, on a journalistic part it is to tell the stories of four people’s personal experiences of street dance, thus spreading the image of dancers and highlighting some of the health and gender issues that street dance can bring. On the theoretical part the purpose is to thematise and analyse the same stories. The interviewees were selected by convenience samples, two male and two female street dancers strategically chosen for their expertise in the culture, different experiences and backgrounds, making an interesting journalistic selection. Through thematic analysis, the in-depth interviews show that the interviewed men and women talk about street dance in similar ways. They all describe the style in terms as ‘hard-hitting’, ‘explosive’, and ‘expressive’, and as masculine or gender neutral. The men chose street dance because it was the only dance style considered accepted. The women chose street dance because of the freedom and expressivity in the contrast to the previous dance forms they had tried. Street dance is perceived as a more accepted dance style for men because of still-going prejudices on homosexuality in classical dance forms. The health effects of street dancing are similar to what research has shown for other dance styles, for example that it relieves physical and psychological tension and improves the ability to express oneself. What the interviewed women emphasise about street dance is that it allows acceptance of the female body, which is perceived as a health effect with great impact. The interviewed men put greater emphasise on self-confidence and that street dance may help finding identity. The study may have significance to communication professionals in dance, to help decrease prejudice and embarrassment in dancing, to change attitudes of the general population.
Table of contents

1 Introduction 5

1.1 What is street dance? 6

1.2 Research problem 7

1.3 Aim and research questions 8

1.4 Thesis outline 8

2 Theory and previous research 9

2.1 Gender and dance 9

2.1.1 The concept of identity 9

2.1.2 Gender roles 10

2.2 Health communication theory and global journalism 12

2.2.1 Health benefits of dance 13

2.2.2 Eating disorders 14

3 Material and Method 15

3.1 Choice of stories 15

3.1.1 First-person sources 16

3.2 Practical considerations 16

3.2.1 Interviewing and analysis 16

3.2.2 Multimedia writing 17

3.2.3 Photography 18

3.2.4 Video 18

3.2.5 Audio 19
3.2.6 Web publishing 19
3.2.7 Design 19

3.4 Limitations 20

4 Result and Analysis 20

4.1 Stories 20

4.1.1 "What is street dance?" 21
4.1.2 "Street dance saved my life" 21
4.1.3 "Dancing makes me feel safer on stage" 21
4.1.4 "A feminine touch to the masculine dance style" 21
4.1.5 "They told me only girls dance" 21
4.1.6 Health and identity, pdf magazine 22

4.2 Themes 22

4.2.1 Health 22
4.2.2 Identity 24

5 Conclusion 27

References 29

Appendices 31

1. "Dancing makes me feel safer on stage" 31
2. “They told me only girls dance” 32
3. “Street dance saved my life” 33
4. A feminine touch to the masculine style 35
5. Online PDF Magazine 36
1 Introduction

Dance is a universal language, a basic form of expression, whether it is for entertainment or communication. It is found in all corners of the world and as far back in history as can be seen. In the modern, western world though, it has become something embarrassing; most people (especially males\textsuperscript{1}) only dare enter the dance floor after a few drinks, if even then. Still, it is a built-in reflex, to move your body to the rhythm - just look at small children when they hear music!

The health benefits of dancing are well researched and besides from being an excellent physical exercise form, they include many psychological aspects such as increased self-esteem and creative thinking.\textsuperscript{2}

In dance schools around Sweden, the vast majority of dancers and dance students are female. However, in the last 10 years or so, a dance style that has expanded greatly in Sweden is street dance (with sub genres such as breakdance, popping, locking, hip hop and house). In these dance classes, the number of participating boys and men have increased dramatically compared to all other dance styles. Popularising dance with the male gender leads to interesting stories. Suddenly, the voices of male dancers can, and must, also be heard. It seems street dance is one of few dance styles that is generally accepted as a “cool” dance style, but what makes it so different from other dance styles? Is it considered a masculine dance style? Perhaps. But street dance is also very popular with girls, taking over the more controlled dances such as ballet and jazz dance. One reason might be that it allows more space for personal expression, it is freer in its form and allows big, explosive movements in contrary to the feminine ideals of classical dance with its strive for perfection in every detail.

This project will explore health benefits of street dance along with prejudices about dance and gender, through personal stories of street dancers in different forms. However, before further development, I will present some more background on street dance.


1.1 What is street dance?

Street dance started as an urban way of expression, in one way a rebellion against the classical dance forms, of the kids who could not afford to go to a dance school. The music scene was a great influence, hip hop music demanded its dance form companion, funk music likewise. The music scene was a great influence, hip hop music demanded its dance form companion, funk music likewise. Through different music styles, various dance styles popped up. Beginning in the 1970’s in the clubs and streets (i.e. anywhere outside of the ordinary dance schools) of South Bronx, New York City, youths of primarily minority groups as African Americans and Latinos started breakdancing, the first and perhaps most known street dance style. The street dance phenomenon spread world wide and came to Sweden in the 1980’s. But after a short boom of popularity after movies such as Flashdance (1983) and Breakdance: the Movie (1984), it soon faded again.

In the beginning of the 21th Century, street dance began it’s comeback and ever since, the urban expression of street dance has appeared in hundreds of commercials as a statement of youth and hipness. The Swedish dance group Bounce achieved great success and brought street dance to the big scenes. TV shows as Floorfiller, Let’s Dance and So you think you can dance contributed to making street dance once again widely popular, this time taking it into the dance schools, kids wanted to learn street dance in class. Even though it is commercialised and less connected to the original form of improvisation in the streets and clubs, it was, and still is, connected to youth culture hipness. As it looks today, street dance is still reaching it’s peak in popularity and new styles are continuously developing. The most popular forms of street dance in Sweden are: breakdancing, popping, locking, house and hip hop, all of which are generally considered masculine or gender neutral in style.

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1.2 Research problem

Continuously, research have shown proof of the good health effects dance can have on people, both physically and therapeutically. While many reports and studies are made on the topic, most research are focused on the health of young girls through dance therapy.\(^5\) Anyone interested can look at this research, but to make the information appealing to a wider audience, it seems important to emphasise personal stories on the topic, to see the different effects it may have. As a professional dancer and dance teacher, I have met many people who have told of how dancing has changed their lives, in different ways.

Spreading and emphasising the image of the male, as well as female dancer, along with information on the health aspects, will hopefully help diminish the walls of embarrassment of dancing in general.

I believe street dance in particular can be a good starting point for youths to take an interest in dancing. In this sense, the study may have practical significance for communication professionals in the dancing field.

The target audience for this project is a general one, but more specifically a young one and anyone interested but perhaps a bit scared of dancing. As my interviews and research will be conducted in Sweden, it is local in one sense. But since the language will be English and the topic itself is universal, it can be seen as a project interesting for a global audience, making it part of global journalism. It can be referred to as *glocalising news*, globalising a local topic.\(^6\) In this matter, the study may add to the theoretical body of knowledge of journalism in a global and local context.

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1.3 Aim and research questions

This thesis is a complementary, theoretical text to a journalistic, practical project which I have named *Street Dance Stories*. The project consists of a website with personal stories about street dance in written articles, video and audio. The purpose of this study is thus twofold. On the journalistic part, the purpose is to tell the stories of four people’s personal experiences of street dance, thus spreading the image of dancers and highlighting some of the health and gender issues that street dance can bring. On the theoretical part the purpose is to study the interviewed dancers experiences of health and identity issues in street dance, through thematising and analysing the same stories.

I am interviewing both men and women and in this sense, I will look at the results partly through a gender perspective: masculinity and femininity as socially constructed terms in relation to street dance, by comparing the interviewees answers. The aim of the project will be fulfilled by answering these research questions:

• How do the interviewed men and women perceive masculinity and femininity in street dance?

• Why did women/men choose street dance?

• Why is it perceived as a more accepted dance style for men?

• What are the perceived health effects of the interviewees? Do they vary between the interviewed men and women?

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis will serve as an evaluation of the journalistic work. In the following chapter, *Theory and literature*, I will discuss the projects connection to gender theory, health communication theory as well as global journalism. I will also discuss some previous research in the different aspects of dance that will be usable for my articles. Chapter 3, *Material and method*, deals with how the different stories will be conducted and material gathered. The fourth chapter, *Results and analysis*, will present the results of the interviews as well as compare and analyse them. Chapter 5, *Conclusion*, will summarise and evaluate the findings.
of the project as well as note what was gained through the project from a journalistic perspective.

2 Theory and previous research

There is a vast amount of literature and research on dance in hundreds of different angles and approaches, but street dance is a style that has not been as much looked at. Perhaps this is because street dance has not been seen as a performing art, not a part of the stage or the fine culture. Since this is now possibly changing due to the rising popularity, I am hoping to see more research involving street dance in a near future. There is on the other hand a lot of interesting research around dance in general regarding health, identity and gender, which will be useful to build on.7

Before starting the practical project, I have looked at how the topic relates to theories on identity and gender, health communication and global journalism along with relevant previous research.

2.1 Gender and dance

2.1.1 The concept of identity

In every-day life, the term ‘finding identity’ is often used, but in research, the concept of identity is a complex matter, discussed and perceived differently in various theories, e.g. in sociology, psychology and philosophy. It can be seen a something individual, mental and permanent, or something social, linguistic and unstable.8 Sociologist Kathryn Woodward argues that identity is connected to free will to some extent, that a person chooses what or whom to identify with, or from. Woodward also argues that identity is separate from personality, that personality traits can be similar between people, e.g. being shy or outgoing,

7 See e.g. Anna Halprin, Returning to health with dance, movement and imagery, LifeRythm, 2002.
but that identity requires some element of choice. The choice of identity is marked by similarities and differences when comparing oneself to other people. Although some identity traits are more passive, such as gender, age and ethnicity, identification as e.g. a dancer, a drummer or a journalist, are active choices we make to identify with a group of people or distinct from another group of people. This goes for all characteristics such as taste in music, fashion sense or political view. Some people also create their identity through differencing from everyone else.

Olausson discusses two identity theories and combine them; identity of a mental, socio-cognitive character that builds on how we communicate and reinforce our values of identification, or seeing identity from a linguistic, discursive perspective. Olausson argues that what combines the two theories is the social part of identity, that it must be based on comparison with something or someone else than the own self.

Identity can be seen as a complex weave of values, preconceptions and attitudes, not necessarily permanent, but rather flexible. Finding identity in dance does not necessarily mean that it is a permanent identity factor for the individual. In this study I will look at how the interviewees perceive their identities as street dancers.

### 2.1.2 Gender roles

What is masculinity and femininity? While most people surely identify with the words in some way, it seems that within them lie many assumptions. In the article "Personal Definitions of Masculinity and Femininity as an Aspect of Gender Self-Concept", Hoffman et al. describes it as:

> A tendency to assume that 'we all know what we mean' by these terms permeates much of popular and professional literature alike, despite the acknowledgement that different personal and cultural concepts of femininity and masculinity do indeed exist and contribute to one's identity as a woman or a man.¹¹

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¹⁰ Olausson, p. 142.

Hoffman et al. argue that the terms masculinity and femininity is best defined through personal determination, that "...each female individual must be allowed the latitude to determine what her femininity (femaleness) means to her and each male individual must be allowed the latitude to determine what his masculinity (maleness) means to him." I agree with this and when talking about masculinity and femininity in street dance, I take this concept with me through my interviews.

In most dance forms, both men and women participate but have different roles. Women are more often displayed and do tricks, while men carry, lift or lead them. As masculine as this might seem, male dancers are often faced with prejudices of homosexuality. In Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire by Judith Lynne Hanna (1988), the author discusses and analyses the gender roles in dance. One of the points she makes is that dance has been considered a non-profitable occupation and that straight men have been more inclined to aim for more prestigious careers. Women and homosexual men, 'the weaker sexes', have therefore had the majority of dance occupations. I would argue that today, this might change, looking at the new dance scene where the more male dominated street dance is continuously taking over. However, the prejudices on male dancers seem harder to break down.

Hanna suggests that the art world has been more open-minded and has given male homosexuals an arena where they are accepted. This, on the other hand might scare heterosexual men away from the same arena in fear of being accused of homosexuality.

The relationship between dance and gender is also discussed:

Dancing is an eye-catching, riveting way for humans to identify themselves and maintain or erase their boundaries. Feelings and ideas about sexuality and sex roles (also referred to as gender) take shape in dance.

\[\text{\ begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid. p. 67.
\item Judith Lynne Hanna, Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. xiv.
\item Ibid, p. 136.
\item Hanna, p.xiii.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}\]
Hanna analyses the gender roles of dance through a historical context. But she relates to dance as an extremely sexual art form, something which I would disagree on. I do believe many people, mostly non-dancers, have this view on dance, but my experience is that dancers themselves usually do not agree, although this might depend on the genre of dance. There is no discussion of street dance in this book but it is an interesting way of looking at dance and I will spin upon these ideas in my interviews with street dancers. How is sexuality, masculinity and femininity perceived in street dance? Do the interviewees think street dance is breaking or withholding the barriers of sex roles that are usually incorporated in dance? Why is street dance a safe haven for men in the world of dance? These are all questions that will be looked at in this study and implemented in the previously stated research questions.

2.2 Health communication theory and global journalism

In theories of health communication it is stated that spreading information to a wider public rather than one-on-one has many advantages. A relevant concept within health communication is health education, here defined by Dianne Berry:

Health education is any intentional activity which is designed to achieve health- or illness-related learning, that is, some relatively permanent change in an individual’s capability or disposition.

Health education performed in the right way can have great influence on an audience, change attitudes and thus make lifestyle changes - sometimes even saving lives. With such great power comes the responsibility to use the right channels of communication. Today one of the most effective ways of communication is via the internet, allowing interaction for a large audience and to whoever is interested in the topic. In this project I am using a web platform with some possibilities of interaction, which I will discuss more in chapter 3.

17 Ibid. p. 90.
18 Berry, pp. 105-106.
Internet makes the project accessible for global communication. "Like every other social practice, journalism cannot now be fully understood apart from globalization."\(^{(19)}\) Reese refers to the world as a single place where one needs to be aware of the connection between the local and the global. Reese also suggests that the growing global connections lead to new forms of journalism. He also argues that domestic news media need to become more global because of the new, global reality. I agree on this, and even though this project is based on soft news, I am convinced that seeing the world from a bigger perspective is the new form of journalism and that it can be implemented in all forms of news production.

This project is relevant not only to Swedes but has an aim to appeal an audience in other parts of the world as well. In my opinion, this itself makes it part of global journalism. Street dance is a global phenomenon so the topic itself contains an angle of interest to a global audience, even though the interviewees are all Swedish. Street dance originates from the US and in this project I will explain how the style travelled to Sweden. The idea of the website is that practitioners of street dance world wide could contribute with interesting stories.

Media and communication has an important role to spread messages, in this case to widen the acceptance of dancing in today’s society. With this practical project I am therefore hoping to provide information and interest people in the art of dancing, through health communication. While dancing itself is a nonverbal form of communication, the health benefits of dancing must be shared to others, encouraging a wider public not to be ashamed of moving their bodies. This is especially important for the male gender, since the prejudices are so hard on male dancers, as I have explained above.

2.2.1 Health benefits of dance

The benefits of dancing have been studied in many countries and through many angles with great health results. Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is a special health field focusing on the connection between dance movement and mental health. It is defined as "the

psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration of the individual” by the American Dance Therapy Association.20

In Sweden, Dance/movement therapy has been conducted since the early 1980’s. Forsberg Peljer lists some of the health benefits of dance therapy in her article ”Dans och rörelse som psykoterapeutisk behandling, friskvård och hälsovård”.21 Some of them are: it stimulates social connections, reduces the feeling of outsidersness, creates the feeling of purpose and meaning, triggers the creative process, relieves physical as well as psychological tension and improves the ability to express oneself. These list goes on but all research on dance therapy has shown positive results. From what I can find, most of these studies have worked with contemporary dance or free, improvisational dance. Still, I would claim that all dance styles, including street dance, would have a similar effect.

2.2.2 Eating disorders
Professional dancers have a tendency to be very aware of their bodies, not surprising considering it is their work tool all day, plus they are usually surrounded by mirror walls. Tough competition and high demands put dancers in a position where they often risk their health. They are pushed to being as thin as possible but at the same time have the strength to work really hard. It is a thin line, and many fall into the dark pit of eating disorders.

It is well documented that dancers, especially girls and women, have a greater risk of developing eating disorders although the results have a great variety range. It is stated that ballet dancers have a significantly higher disease risk than for example contemporary dancers.22 My hypothesis is that eating disorders are much lower in street dancers than other dance styles. Although this is nothing I can justify through this thesis, I will bring with me the topic and question to my interviews. As eating disorders and worries on physical appearance is more common in females, this health issue is also related to gender theory.

21 Forsberg Peljer.
To summarise this chapter, I will use ideas from gender theory when discussing masculinity and femininity in street dance, using the concept of each person's own identification with the terms. When discussing male and female sexuality in dance I will bring with me ideas on homophobia as a reason for the minority of male dancers. Ideas of health communication will be implemented in the project to create awareness to the audience. Questions on health and eating disorders will be included in the interviews and all of the above theoretical points will be used when analysing the interviewees answers. Global journalism theory will be used as an overall concept when executing the practical project, with the aim of making it understandable from a global perspective.

3 Material and Method

In this chapter I will present the methods used for gathering data, choice of stories and method for analysis. This chapter also covers the practical considerations on interviewing, multimedia writing, photography, audio, video shooting, building websites and design. The chapter ends with a listing of the projects limitations.

3.1 Choice of stories

As the twofold purpose of the study is to 1) tell the stories of four street dancers 2) thematise and analyse these stories, the main articles circle around personal stories. There is one introduction feature explaining the background and history of street dance, along with a short video of professional dancer explaining the word street dance. I chose to have the video because of the validity of the expert position he holds. Furthermore, I have four profile interviews where street dancers talk about their personal experiences from different angles, in written features and complementary video or audio. Finally, I will include a pdf magazine with a conclusion feature on health benefits of street dance and tips on the different dance styles. It will also include some extra discussion of the interviewees views on health and gender in dance.
3.1.1 First-person sources

For finding interviewees I posted a message on Facebook saying I was looking for people who wanted to share their stories about how street dance has affected them in any way. Using social media to find stories is a great tool for journalists according to Christian Möller.\(^\text{23}\) I definitely agree. As I have a large network with many dance connections: both dance teachers, students and colleagues all around Sweden, I got many responses. After some initial correspondence I chose two men and two women in different positions and experiences to make an interesting journalistic selection, suitable for the project and with my initial topics health and gender in mind. I ruled out stories that were to vague or similar to one another. I had to replace one of them after she cancelled in the last minute. However, I found an equally interesting interviewee the same day. The samples were thus chosen from convenience samples, the interviewees being willing and positive to participate.\(^\text{24}\) But it was also a strategic choice, as I wanted experts in the culture I am studying.

3.2 Practical considerations

To build the practical project I first considered how to execute the interviews and practically conduct my stories. In the following section I will discuss techniques used in interviewing, writing, photography, video shooting, web publishing and design.

3.2.1 Interviewing and analysis

Preparing for interviews includes learning as much as possible about the topic prior to the interview.\(^\text{25}\) As my interviews evolved around very personal stories, I sent some written questions by e-mail beforehand to have some more personal knowledge about the interviewees. This helped me to thematise the interview study in relation to its purpose, prepare by doing research on their respective topics and consider techniques of interviewing

\(^{23}\) Christian Möller, 2013, "Social media and social networks as tools for journalists", 2013 Social Media Guidebook, p. 89.


and analysing. As Tuggle et al. suggests, I wrote down some questions in my note book to feel more secure, but I did not depend on them entirely, because an in-depth interview is best conducted as a conversation.

As this project concerns personal in-depth stories, my choice was to conduct one-on-one interviews. Telephone or e-mail interviews would have been too non-personal. Focus group interviews could have been another option, to encourage a variety of viewpoints. However, since I wanted to have personal conversations and possibly also go into sensitive questions regarding health and sexuality, I chose to have them one-on-one. Focus group interviews are also an unusual method in journalism.

I prepared open questions that would offer long, conversational answers. I started with easy, open question to make the interviewee comfortable and continued with more complex, more sensitive questions.

After conducting the interviews I collected the material and made a thematic analysis by comparing the answers of all interviewees, placing findings in categories and/or themes. In categorising as method of interview analysis, one should preferably use coding. Coding means putting keywords to a text to define experiences or actions of the interviewees and thus making it easier to file them under themes or categories. In my four main interviews I sorted out codes, for example ‘masculinity’, ‘expressivity’ and ‘freedom’. I then found two main themes to divide them in: ‘identity’ and ‘health’. All four interviews discuss the same topics so they can all be analysed under the two themes. Through these two connecting themes, the stories will be compared and analysed in the next chapter.

3.2.2 Multimedia writing

When it comes to writing articles for online purposes there are a few things to take under consideration. First of all, readers tend to skim through much text, so sub-headings are a good idea to make the story clearer. When using an online platform, live linking is a great way of


27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, p. 150.

29 Kvale & Brinkmann, pp. 201-203.
making the text more reliable and provide more information to whom is interested.\textsuperscript{30} I am for example using direct links to the interviews on the front page. I am writing the articles with a majority of first-person accounts since that goes with the aim of the entire project: personal stories. I chose to do the in-depth interviews in written features combined with video/audio for two reasons. The reader has the choice to either read or watch, depending on mood and capabilities. Doing written features also provided an opportunity to deepen the interview, to get more said that did not appear as easily on video, complex explanations for example.

\subsection*{3.2.3 Photography}
Mark Briggs writes: “journalism without photographs is like writing without verbs.”\textsuperscript{31} I consider taking pictures one of my strongest qualities and I have added photos for each story. Especially for one interview, I had the opportunity to take a great amount of pictures. For feature articles online it is recommended to use close up photographies because of the small interface. For best light circumstances I took all pictures outside.\textsuperscript{32} I used camera RAW to be able to adjust values like exposure and contrast later on and all pictures were edited in Photoshop. All of the photos on the site are taken me by except one small picture in the pdf magazine of the fitness expert, since I did not have the opportunity to meet her in person.

\subsection*{3.2.4 Video}
Because my stories are based on personal experiences and opinions, video was a choice I made early since they provide an emotional appeal.\textsuperscript{33} A big part of this projects subject is dancing and therefor I wanted to show dancing through videos. A lot would go missing if I did all in written articles or audio only. When preparing the video shoot the same thing goes as for photography: checking exposure, background, providing good light. One problem I had was that one interviewee wore I white shirt, even though I had asked him beforehand not to wear white or black, for disturbing the camera’s white balance. It still worked out alright after

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Briggs, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{33} Thornburg, p. 42.
\end{flushright}
changing some exposure values in Final Cut. I tried to film a variety of close up shots, medium shots and wide angle shots to have enough material to work with while editing.\(^{34}\)

### 3.2.5 Audio

For one interview I did not have enough b-roll footage, so I decided to use the interview as an audio piece instead. Audio pieces have the advantage of being flexible, the listener can decide how much attention he will lend the piece.\(^{35}\) The written feature works well as it is, but allowing the audience to listen to the interviewee’s voice and intonation brings an intimate feeling that text alone can not accomplish.

### 3.2.6 Web publishing

For the project I created a CMS website on Wordpress to easily get a clean webpage running. Content management systems make it easy to publish news, one must not even have knowledge of FTP, HTML or CSS in order to succeed.\(^{36}\) Still, I am glad I have gotten an awareness of it all as I downloaded a free template and had the possibility to change the appearance because I understood HTML.

### 3.2.7 Design

In Illustrator I created a vector image to make a suitable header for the webpage. I chose to work with two colours, blue and pink, to match photo content and links. Other colours are white, black and grey for a clean design. Using InDesign I designed a pdf magazine where I worked with the same colours to match pictures.

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\(^{34}\) Briggs, p. 216.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, pp. 178-179.

\(^{36}\) Thornburg, p. 76.
3.4 Limitations

There are no reliable statistics on how many boys and girls that attend dance schools in Sweden, only estimations. Neither are there any statistics on eating disorders in dancers. Otherwise I would have used data journalism to complement my stories.

The camera I used for video recording broke before my last interview and therefor the videos of Jakob are shot with a much poorer quality. As they were shot outside of Örebro I did not have the chance to redo the interview.

Unfortunately I only had the chance to have a longer photo shoot with one of the interviewees, the website might therefor seem a bit overrepresented with pictures of Karin.

4 Result and Analysis

The project consists of written in-depth articles combined with complementary video and audio plus an online pdf magazine. When accessing the website (http://ace.oru.se/~anebov121/wordpress/), first a homepage appears explaining the purpose of the project in short. It also suggests that you first go through the introduction feature ”What is street dance?”. The menu offers the different tabs: Home, About this project, What is street dance?, A healthy dance style, Finding identity and About the journalist.

Listed below is first a brief review of the stories separately. Thereafter follow the results and analysis of the four in-depth interviews, divided into the themes ”Identity” and ”Health”.

4.1 Stories

Please note that the full interview articles are to be found as appendices. The four interviewees are named Karin, Emil, Jakob and Sepideh.
4.1.1 "What is street dance?"
This is an introduction feature explaining the history and meaning of street dance and how it spread to Sweden, same information that can be found in the first chapter of this thesis. For extra validity it is combined with a video with one of Sweden’s first street dancers talking about the dance genre.

4.1.2 "Street dance saved my life"
A combination of audio and written article, this feature is about Sepideh, a former ballet dancer who used to suffer from anorexia, a disease very usual in that field. After finding a love for street dance she quit ballet and recovered completely. She describes the free feeling of dancing street dance and the different view on the female body in the respective fields.

4.1.3 "Dancing makes me feel safer on stage"
Emil, a local Örebro pop artist and amateur dancer, uses street dance as a tool to build on his pop artist identity. He also talks about masculinity in dance and why he thinks street dance is considered a more acceptable dance style for men. He describes the perceived health benefits as physical exercise and increased confidence. This is a written feature article with video.

4.1.4 "A feminine touch to the masculine dance style"
This written feature with video is about professional dancer Karin, who adds a feminine style to street dance and thinks it is important for girls to be able to explore their sensuality and femininity in a safe environment - the dance class room. She also discusses importance of style when dancing, to build confidence and identity as a dancer.

4.1.5 "They told me only girls dance"
One of Sweden’s most celebrated street dancers, Jakob, talks about the difficulties for boys who want to dance and prejudices on male dancers outside the street dance field. This story consists of shorter video interview combined with a longer feature article on his background, struggle and success.
4.1.6 Health and identity, pdf magazine
This online pdf magazine consists of several parts, one page explaining health benefits specific to street dance, another explaining the different dance styles within street dance, along with comments from a fitness expert. It also contains extra interviews on gender and health with the four previous interviewees.

4.2 Themes
The two themes health and identity somewhat interrelate, as they are both connected to gender theory. However, the division in themes will make the answering of my research questions more clear. The interviewees views on health and identity in street dance will be presented, compared and analysed.

4.2.1 Health
When discussing health benefits of street dancing, the four interviewees had many similar opinions but differences also appear between the men and women’s point of view.

Emil mentions both mental and physical health benefits:

First of all, for me, it's the best way to work out and be physically healthy. I’ve never been the type of person who goes to the gym or play sports. I hate running. But dancing, it’s something I really enjoy. I do it for fun and all the good parts of working out just follows automatically, like flexibility and stamina. Actually, self-confidence is probably the best I’ve gained from street dancing.  

Emil put emphasise on self-confidence as a major health benefit, but he also indicated the negative effect of low self-esteem, if dance students choose a too high level in dance class and feel lost.

The other male interviewee, Jakob, said:

Whether it is social dancing like salsa, classical ballet, hip hop or just clubbing with your friends, dancing in general is great for a lot of things, both physically and mentally. What’s special in street dance is the attitude, the rawness. There is

37 See appendix 1 for full article, "Dancing makes me feel safer on stage".
no pressure for perfection, street dance is about finding your own style, or flavour, as we call it. I see this as an important health issue for kids today. They grow up with so much pressure to be and look a certain way, when what is most important is finding who you are, developing your own uniqueness. This is what we work on in street dance.  

Jakob emphasises the importance of finding an individual style when dancing and that this has a significant health relevance - building identity from the own personality traits rather than fitting into a pre-formatted frame, which other dance styles are more inclined to do.

Of the four interviewees, Sepideh is the one who emphasised health benefits most, both physical and mental health. As she experienced a constant pressure of being thin and perfect as a ballet dancer, she suffered from eating disorders and was very unhealthy. Finding another passion in street dance, Sepideh describes her recovery and way back to health:

The dynamics of street dance, the explosiveness, it kind of required you to have a big booty and thick thighs. It was another way of looking at the female body. It wasn’t skinny, classical beauty but more what you interpret as beauty. That made me feel more secure. It made me explore my womanhood. I truly believe that street dance saved my life.

The second female interviewee, Karin, also emphasised the way of looking at the female body as an important health factor of street dance:

There is no pressure to look a certain way, be thin or gracious. In street dance it’s quite the opposite, you dress in baggy clothes, your posture can be non-existing. Karin relates to street dance as an open-minded dance style and that all body forms are accepted. She says that it can even be harder to be a thin street dancer because of the explosiveness in the steps. As the others she also agreed that dancing is a great physical workout.

The perceived health effects of the four interviewees were: physical exercise, increased body awareness, self-confidence and less pressure on body ideals. The answers differ somewhat between the interviewed men and women. While the men both highlighted physical exercise, self-confidence and room for individuality as the most relevant health effects, the women put

38 See appendix 2 for full article: "They told me only girls dance".
39 See appendix 3 for full article: "Street dance saved my life".
40 See appendix 4 for full article: "A feminine touch to the masculine style".
great emphasise on the relaxed view of the female body and that there are no certain shape or form required to be a street dancer, as apposed to ballet, for example.

As discussed in the second chapter, *Theory and previous literature*, eating disorders and critical view on the own body, is a problem connected mostly to females. This study makes no exception. Only the women discuss health issues which concerns the view on physical appearance. The interviewees claim that street dance is a dance style that generally lacks these kind of problems and thus support my hypothesis.

### 4.2.2 Identity

When asking the interviewees why they chose street dance as a dance form, the answers differed. Karin said the reason she chose to pursue a career in street dance was the less focus on perfection compared to classical dance styles and because she liked the dynamics and musicality of the style. She also discussed her female dance students: “The girls who choose to dance hip hop usually like the style because they feel more accepted as they are, compared to other dance arts.”

Sepideh said:

> I realised that the persona that I had with my ballet background was a very controlled and strict way of living and dancing. I saw that that wasn’t really me. As a woman you should be more thick skinned, you can’t be so fragile as I was. With street dance I found a style and culture that allowed me to be my real, true self. I was free.

For Emil, street dance was a choice because of it’s ‘coolness’, and said he had the more or less ‘conventional’ view on other dance styles as gay, prejudices that derives from when dancing was a low-income career, as discussed by Hanna in chapter two.

Jakob was more or less forced to choose street dance of conventional reasons and prejudice from the outside world. Once he had been identified as a street dancer, it was more accepted for him to explore other dance styles without facing prejudice:

> As I grew up and practiced street dance, it was always considered a cool thing, there were no prejudices in my direction that I was aware of. But dancing other

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41 Appendix 4.
42 Appendix 3.
styles was not accepted as easily. When I started trying other dance styles at 16, I was already known as ‘the breakdancer’ so I guess people thought I was cool anyway. If I had started with jazz dance I think I would have faced greater difficulties. It’s a real shame. I wish all parents would let their kids do what they want and not reinforce these prejudices on their kids.43

Both women mention the freedom and less pressure of perfection as reasons for choosing street dance over other styles. The men chose/had to choose street dance because it was the only dance style considered accepted by their surroundings. The interviewed men and women differ here. The way they talk about and describe street dance is very similar though and also indicates why it is perceived as a more accepted dance style for men. Karin said:

I think the best thing about street dance is the freedom, the acceptance of all body types, the non-sexist view on both the male and female body. In other dance styles, salsa for example, the gender roles are very much conservative, girls dressing in sexy dresses and following the man’s lead. In street dance there is an equalness in women and men.44

Karin discusses equality in street dance, and as she previously described the style as masculine, she here indicates that masculinity means freedom for women. Emil has a similar point of view:

Girls are already more comfortable with dancing and no one will think it’s weird if a girl wants to try breakdance. I wouldn’t be as comfortable taking a ballet class for example, sorry to say. There is still so much prejudice on male dancers and homosexuality.45

Karin and Emil both agree on the different approaches on masculinity and femininity in dance, where masculinity is acceptable for women but femininity is less accepted for men.

Sepideh takes it a step longer than Karin when discussing the equality of the dance:

Some say the style is masculine but I’d rather call it gender neutral, because there is no focus on sexuality really, that’s for more commercial styles. In true street dance the focus is on musicality and expressivity. In styles like popping and locking, the emphasise is on corkiness, originality. There simply is nothing masculine or feminine about it, unless you yourself decide to bring those qualities into your style. You want to be unique, not try to look or move like someone else. This is the very opposite of other dance styles like ballet where all dancers are

43 Appendix 2.
44 Appendix 5.
45 Appendix 1.
shaped into the same form, or like ballroom dance where stereotype gender roles have been used forever.\textsuperscript{46}

Sepideh emphasises gender neutrality and uniqueness rather than masculinity and femininity and claims that the dance style contains no form of sexuality unless it is intentionally brought into the dancer’s style. Jakob also discussed the importance of uniqueness in the style and did not want to call it a masculine style per se.

The interviewees all found identifying with the role of a street dancer as something positive, bringing up an attitude and self-confidence that they might not have had outside of the dance culture. Emil found more confidence as an artist when he could also identify himself as a dancer. Jakob experienced that his street dance identity made him more secure to try other dance styles. Karin and Sepideh both felt more secure and confident when identifying themselves as street dancers instead of ballet or jazz dancers.

In summary, the interviewed men and women talk about street dance in similar ways. They all describe the style in terms as ‘hard-hitting’, ‘explosive’, and ‘expressive’. Emil and Karin describe the style as masculine while Sepideh and Jakob thinks of it more as gender neutral. The impression of the style is not differed between genders but rather between what they perceive as masculinity and femininity, which is up to every individual, as discussed by Hoffman et al.

The men chose street dance because it was the only dance style considered accepted by their surroundings, in Emil’s case also by himself. The women chose street dance because of the freedom and expressivity in the contrast to the previous dance forms they had tried: ballet, jazz and contemporary in both cases. Street dance is perceived as a more accepted dance style for men because of still-going prejudices on homosexuality in classical dance forms.

\textsuperscript{46} Appendix 3.
5 Conclusion

This project has been very interesting to conduct. Listening to the stories and experiences of Jakob, Sepideh, Emil and Karin made me realise that they all have the same view on what street dance stands for: expressiveness, freedom and attitude. By interviewing both men and women I found interesting results, both similar and contrasting to previous research.

As Hoffman et al. describe, letting the interviewees themselves define the terms masculinity and femininity was important in this study, not to force answers from pre-formulated meanings and values. The interviewees perceived masculinity and femininity in street dance differently: the style is considered gender neutral or masculine, masculinity here in the sense of power and explosiveness. Femininity is considered non-existing in street dance unless it is intentionally incorporated in the dance.

The interviewed men and women chose street dance for different reasons, the men because they perceived it as the only socially acceptable dance form. The women chose street dance because it allowed them more freedom and less stress on body ideals. This builds on previous research on unhealthy body ideals and eating disorders being common in dancers. However, the interviewees all thought street dance is a style free from these body ideals, thus making an interesting field for further research - how common is eating disorders in street dance compared to other dance styles?

The study also answered why the interviewees thought is was a more accepted dance style for men. As Hanna discusses, strong prejudices on male dancers and homosexuality still exists from long ago when dancing was a low-income career and the world of art was more liberal. As street dance began outside of dance schools and scenes, it was male dominated, raw and explosive in its form - conventional proof of masculinity which still seem to linger on.

Hanna argues that ideas about sexuality and sex roles take shape in dance. The interviewees had different opinions here, the three professional dancers saw street dance as a non-sexualised dance form, while the amateur dancer perceived the expressions in street dance as

47 Hoffman et al., pp. 66-67.
48 Koutedakis et al., pp. 93-105.
50 Hanna, p.xiii
the very essence of male sexuality. It supports my view that professional dancers do not themselves see dancing as a sexualised arena form, but that this is perhaps the spectators point of view. This is also an interesting topic for further research: does street dance break conventional perceptions of sex roles in dancing?

The health effects of street dancing are similar to what previous research has shown, for example that it relieves physical as well as psychological tension and improves the ability to express oneself as described by Forsberg Peljer. What the interviewed women emphasise about street dance is that it allows acceptance of the female body, which is perceived as a health effect with great impact. The interviewed men put greater emphasis on self-confidence and that street dance may help finding identity.

This study may be useful for communication professionals in the field of dance, enhancing the importance of sharing stories and experiences for inspirational purposes. Spreading the image of the male and female dancer, how street dance can have good health effects and break gender barriers, are all important issues. I believe that open and personal communication about these issues may lead to helping many aspiring dancers as well as people who are embarrassed by dancing, why it is also important to have journalists write about the topic. It is my belief that talking about prejudices of male dancers may help break them, especially with having successful male dancers, as role models, talk about it. This is where health communication plays an important role. As stated in the introduction, I suggest that street dance can be a good starting point, especially for boys who are interested in dancing. It may lead to an interest in also exploring other dance styles and break the walls of embarrassment.

This project might have been more interesting with more research and more stories from different angeles, to build a more complete project. Considering the limited amount of time and resources provided for this study, it is only a narrow field that has been studied and with a few samples ideas have been indicated. This type of project could be a starting point for a bigger site, where articles on street dance, or any type of dance, could be collected worldwide - an interesting idea looking from a global journalism perspective.

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51 Forsberg Peljer.
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1. "Dancing makes me feel safer on stage"

Local Örebro musician, producer and amateur street dancer Emil has many projects going on. A new album is released, gigs are booked and moves are being rehearsed. As a solo artist he performs under the name John, an act influenced by american pop. To build on this pop artist identity he has incorporated street dance as an important part of his artistry.

"I was, as so many others, initially inspired by Michael Jackson and Justin Timberlake. When I started the John project in 2006, I felt that Sweden didn’t have any visually interesting male pop artists, so I decided to try to use dance as a promoting factor for my music”, Emil says.

He intensely started taking street dance classes and quickly found himself hooked on the expressive dance style. For music videos and performances he hired a choreographer and background dancers. But it was also important that he would dance himself, although he emphasises that he is just an amateur dancer.

"Female artists so often use dance to express sensuality, sexuality, show off their curves. It is known to sell, you know”, Emil laughs.
"Why shouldn’t the same go for male artists?"

Street dance is often seen as a masculine dance because of its explosive, powerful movements. And in that sense, it becomes the very essence of stereotype male sexuality.

Emil thinks that in today’s society it is more acceptable for women to be masculine rather than for men to be feminine.

"That’s why I think street dance has become such a winning concept for both genders. Girls are already more comfortable with dancing and no one will think it’s weird if a girl wants to try breakdance. I wouldn’t be as comfortable taking a ballet class for example, sorry to say. There is still so much prejudice on male dancers and homosexuality.”

Today street dance has exploded in the Swedish music scene. Almost every act in this year’s Melodifestivalen had street dancers, for example. In that way the popularity of the dance style has spread to the Swedish homes, even though many might not know it is street dance they are watching. The majority of the dancers were male in this year’s contest and Emil thinks that is a positive thing.

"Increasing the image of the male dancer, I think will slowly make it more accepted for guys to dance, hopefully not only street dance.”
Emil does not think it is a bad thing to sexualise artists, whether male or female, but rather that it is the only acceptable outlet for that kind of expression.

"It's becoming more and more important for male artists to have dance skills as well, just look at artists like Danny or Anton Ewald from Melodifestivalen this year. They definitely use male sexuality in their performances and it really works commercially. It’s cool, sexy and cocky.”

2. “They told me only girls dance”

Jakob, 35, is one of Sweden's most distinguished street dancers. He participated in many international competitions, toured with dance shows in Europe, USA and Canada and appeared in several music videos. But the road to be a professional dancer was not easy for a young boy growing up in the northern parts of Sweden.

When Jakob was eight years old he saw a new Michael Jackson music video. Astounded he asked his older sister what the dance style was and where he could learn it. She told him it was jazz dance and that they taught it at the local dance school in Umeå. Then she turned to him and added "but only girls dance”.

Jakob was heart broken. Still determined that he wanted to dance, he also asked his parents, but they said the same thing. He asked his class mates and they said the same thing. To his great happiness, he found out that there was one dance style that they all thought was OK for boys: street dance.

"It had a tougher expression and the people that you could see dancing it on TV were mostly men”, Jakob explains.

But there was no dance school where they taught street dance at that time, so he had to learn it by himself.

"We were a couple of guys who started to dance together and collect material by watching videos and copying moves. More and more we started to learn the basics. It wasn’t until I was 16 that I had the courage to go to a dance school and try a different style.”

The first dance class he tried was jazz dance. Jakob remembers how he felt very awkward and intimidated around all the girls and the female teacher.

"It was difficult, but since I was 16 years old I had the maturity to handle the situation. If I would have gone there when I was eight, I think it would have been too much for me.”

Jakob continued dancing and exploring new styles. Intense practicing in the basement of his home made him one of the best breakdancers in Sweden in the 90’s. While most professional dancers concentrate on one dance style, Jakob never settled, he also mastered popping, locking and hip hop.

Jakob is the choreographer and leader of the group ”-----” and has also danced with groups such as the legendary Rock Steady Crew in the US and the Swedish dance phenomenon Bounce. His versatileness has also given him the opportunity to tour with a contemporary dance company, an experience he talks very fondly of.
"Mixing street dance with the more classical dance styles is a great way to cut the borders of what is cool and not, what is masculine and not, accepted and not. This way we can diminish the prejudices on dancing."

Today there is a wide range of street dance classes in the dance schools and Jakob says that more than ever, boys are interested and encouraged to attend dance classes.

"I think they start to realise that girls love guys who can dance", Jakob says and laughs. "Sadly, it is still a very strong opinion out there that only street dance is the accepted dance style for boys. To me, now, nothing is cooler than a ballet dancer. It is the most technical and advanced art form. I will always be a little sad that I didn’t get that chance when I was young."

3. “Street dance saved my life”

As an aspiring ballet dancer, Sepideh suffered from severe anorexia. She was on the verge of quitting dancing completely as the disease broke her down physically and mentally. But then she discovered hip hop, found her way back to health and worked as a street dancer for several years. Although now retired, she never lost the love for dancing.

Being a dancer is extreme in many ways, especially for ballet dancers. Long days of training in a classroom of mirror walls, wearing thin tights to show all the movements in absolute detail. There is a constant strive for perfection, there is nothing to hide but all to compare. It is estimated that one in every five dancers suffer from eating disorders at some point in their career, and studies show that for ballet dancers the number is significantly higher.

Sepideh was one of them. Today she is a healthy, happy, 29-year-old who works as an English teacher and only teaches dance classes occasionally. And when she does, it is not ballet but perhaps the greatest contrast to it, hip hop and dancehall, both styles of the street dance genre.

I meet Sepideh by the river Fyrisån in Uppsala, her hometown. Drizzling with energy, she comes running a few minutes late. There is a rare openness to her personality. She looks genuinely happy and healthy and she does not seem to have any trouble talking about her darker days.

Sepideh’s dancing career began at the age of 10 when her mother put her in ballet class. “My mother thought it was the only proper way to dance, beautiful, elegant and gracious, as girls should be. At first I didn’t like it, but it grew on me and I soon found my identity as a ballerina. I loved everything about it”, Sepideh says.

Through high school she danced for a minimum of 10 hours a week, but the ballerina identity was becoming harder to handle with the physical changes that come with puberty.

“When my body started changing, so did I. As I saw myself so much as a ballerina, I had no intention of having curves, although curvy is my natural body type. I was set on keeping the slender ballerina body I had basically always had. Suddenly, I was fighting my womanhood.”

Sepideh was 15 when she began developing a eating disorder. It would be years of war, fighting womanhood, fighting anorexia.
“As many with eating disorders, I became a master of disguise and lies. At some point even the ballet tights you wear to class, were too loose. I had to buy them in children sizes. I learned how to wear double layers of trousers to hide my skinniness from my parents.”

As she increased her training hours and minimised her eating, the love for dancing was no longer the focus in her life. Her appearance was. Sometimes on dance practice she just sat there, without strength or even will to dance. But she was still persistent on being a ballerina, as she saw it as her main identity.

Still facing anorexia while attending the three-year Swedish Ballet Academy in Stockholm, she was unhappy and even more unhealthy. During the first year of the education, Sepideh started considering quitting her dance career. She was then 19 years old.

“It was a constant competition who was the thinnest in class. We where all painfully aware that in order to get parts in dance companies, you had to stay thin, and even though it’s gotten a lot better in the last decade, it’s still the norm that you have to be really thin in the ballet scene. No one questioned your skinniness really, as long as you had the strength to dance. If they did, they were just jealous.”

The turning point came when she was invited to a hip hop class by friends outside of the ballet academy.

“Of course, I met these guys”, she laughs and says it sound like a classical dance movie, ballet girl meets hip hop guy.

“They were really cool and totally into street dance. I saw them dance and they were so explosive, aggressive and they were really trying to express themselves in a whole new way. I realised that this was something that I should try. “

Sepideh never became anything more than friends with those guys, but she found a new love: street dance. Slowly but surely she switched from ballet lessons to street lessons and she decided to drop out of ballet school. She started to listen to hip hop music and learn more about the hip hop lifestyle.

“I realised that the persona that I had with my ballet background was a very controlled and strict way of living and dancing. I saw that that wasn’t really me. As a woman you should be more thick skinned, you can’t be so fragile as I was. With street dance I found a style and culture that allowed me to be my real, true self. I was free.”

“The dynamics of street dance, the explosiveness, it kind of required you to have a big booty and thick thighs. It was another way of looking at the female body. It wasn’t skinny, classical beauty but more what you interpret as beauty. That made me feel more secure. It made me explore my womanhood. I truly believe that street dance saved my life.”

As Sepideh found the love for street dance she also found her way back to health. Eating disorders as anorexia and bulimia are diseases that often follow the patients more or less through their entire lives. Sepideh says she is completely healthy today even though she is always aware of calories in food because of her previous obsessions.

“I’m aware in a way that I sometimes wish I wasn’t. But I do eat whatever I want to and I love my curves today, I wouldn’t change them for skinny me ever again. I’m bootylicious!” Sepideh laughs.

As we finish the interview and she gets up to shake my hand, she does it with the grace of a
ballerina. But then she walks away like a warrior, proud of her conquered battle.

4. A feminine touch to the masculine style

“Girls need a place where they can express their sensuality and explore their womanhood in a safe environment – why not the dance class room?” says street dance teacher Karin. She thinks putting a feminine touch to the masculine dance style is important, not to restrict the dance to a male body language.

Karin, 34, has been teaching hip hop for more than 10 years. She is located in Uppsala but often travels to other cities and countries to hold dance workshops. Her popularity derives from her quite unique genre; being one of the only Scandinavians to teach feminine hip hop.

Hip hop, one of the styles under the umbrella term street dance, is usually considered a masculine dance style with its hard-hitting, explosive movements.

“The girls who chose to dance hip hop usually like the style because they feel more accepted as they are, compared to other dance arts. There is no pressure to look a certain way, be thin or gracious. In street dance it’s quite the opposite, you dress in baggy clothes, your posture can be non-existing. All you really need is love for dancing, love for the music”, Karin says.

So why is there a need for bringing femininity into the style?

“I believe there is a need for girls to experiment with body expressions. In a bad situation, young girls might feel pressure to dress and act sexy for boys. In a good situation, like in dance class, girls can experiment with their feminine side in a safe environment, doing it for themselves and in fun, natural way with their friends.”

The two feminine styles that she teaches are called ‘hip hop high heels’ and ‘feminine vibe’. Hip hop is then mixed with a more girly touch, flipping hair and accentuating hips.

Karin says that these feminine styles do not mean sexualizing the female body but rather keeping the dynamics of street dance and just adding a female flavor to it.

“It’s really fulfilling as a dance teacher to see your students find a way to live out their different sides. Shy, quiet girls can suddenly find a cocky, expressive attitude when dancing. I see them grow into confidence a little more every week.”

Dress to impress

A key to confidence might also lie in the outfit. The general clothing style of hip hop, as Karin explains it, it is not about dressing provocative, it is about expressing self-assurance.

Karin herself is the definition of this; she wears a bright pink jacket with golden details, black jeans and sneakers. She has a cool but still very feminine appearance, just as she describes her dance styles.

“It’s a play with confidence. Even though you can come to a dance class in any outfit you want, the clothes can still contribute to the way you express yourself in dance. If you look cool, you feel cool, you become cool.”
Dance steps to health and fitness

Within the street dance genre are several hip hop and funk styles, the most popular being breakdance, popping, locking, hip hop and house dance. The styles have many similarities but are also quite different in expression and complexity. Everyone can find a style that suits them, so grab your sneakers and find a beat that makes you want to move - one step closer to fitness.

Health benefits of street dancing:

- **Calorie burner.** Dancing is a great way to burn calories. And you might even forget that you are working out because you concentrate on hitting the moves. Also, don’t be surprised if you even have fun while doing it. Definitely a different type of workout than running the treadmill.

- **Stamina and cardio.** Street dancing is a dynamic work out form that makes you move in ways you never do in every-day life and in different tempos to get your heart pumping. Regular dance workouts will improve stamina and keep your heart healthy.

- **Endorphins.** After nailing the steps in the ending of a tough dance class, your body will be producing endorphins like mad, which will make you feel pure happiness.

- **Flexibility and strength.** As street dancing contains such a variety of moves, you’ll stretch and strengthen your entire body. A dance class usually ends with a stretch which will also enhance your flexibility.

- **Self-confidence.** When dancing for enjoyment, you gain self-confidence and become more aware of your body and body language. In street dance you have to put on a tougher attitude than you probably normally have, but being that ghetto girl or guy for just one hour can have impact on your entire week. Just remember it is important to choose the right level in dance class so you don’t feel lost.

Not sure which style to have a go at? Dance and fitness instructor Sandra gives her tips on each style.

**Breakdance,** i.e. breaking or b-boying, is the most dynamic street style and consists of four parts; top rocks, down rocks, freezes and power moves. Beginners start with the three first parts and gradually learns techniques and strength to perform power moves, the acrobatics such as head spins and windmills.

*Sandra: “Nothing for weak wrists, but this is for you who are looking for a challenge.”*

**Popping** and electric boogaloo are funk styles based on contracting and releasing your muscles to the beats of the music and isolating body parts in flowing waves or robot style movements. This is a great dance style for enhancing body awareness and allows a great freedom in choreography - the point is to have your own style!
Sandra: "This style does not include floor work so anyone can do it, and it’s amazing how fast you work up a sweat just by flexing your muscles! Great for better body control."

**Locking**, the funkiest style, is based on locking movements, but this style is very energetic and theatrical - each movement has a meaning and name.

Sandra: "Locking is a great style for street dance beginners because you get specific moves that you can practice on your own. And the style is great as a fitness workout, you never stop moving through the dance class."

**Hip hop** exists in two forms, old school and new style. In old school hip hop you see classic 80’s and 90’s dance moves as ‘the running man’ (think MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice), while new style hip hop is more r’n’b-related, lyrical dance; what you see in most music videos.

Sandra: "In old school hip hop it’s usually big movements, not as detailed as in new style. It depends on which music you like best, but both styles are very good fitness workouts as you are constantly on your toes"

**House dance**, as it sounds it is danced to house music and the dance style is influenced by tap dance, salsa and afro. Emphasis is on fast foot work and fluid upper body movements.

Sandra: "This is a dance style that almost gets you into trance. It gives you a club feeling and you’ll be dripping with sweat"

**Gender and health in street dance**

Dancers often face prejudices such as ‘men who dance are gay’ or ‘dancers have to be skinny’. But street dance seems to be a safe haven – one of few dance styles that is commonly considered suitable for guys and where the female body is not forced into a certain shape. Street dancers Karin, Emil, Sepideh and Jakob share their experiences.

**Karin, 34.** Professional street dancer and dance teacher.

*What do you think is most positive/negative about street dance compared to other styles?*

"I think the best thing about street dance is the freedom, the acceptance of all body types, the non-sexist view on both the male and female body. In other dance styles, salsa for example, the gender roles are very much conservative, girls dressing in sexy dresses and following the man’s lead. In street dance there is an equalness in women and men. This is as much health related as gender related.

Negative sides? All styles in street dance are very oriented on battles, competition, proving your worth on the dance floor. For some, like me, I don’t think it lies in our nature to compete like that. This makes it hard for me to get a higher status as a dancer and is a reason why I
teach more today. Girls are usually shyer when it comes to dance battles and this is a problem, guys often getting more credit as dancers.”

**Emil, 28.** Pop artist and amateur street dancer.

*Do you see any health effects specific to street dancing?*

"First of all, for me, it’s the best way to work out and be physically healthy. I’ve never been the type of person who goes to the gym or play sports. I hate running. But dancing, it’s something I really enjoy. I do it for fun and all the good parts of working out just follows automatically, like flexibility and stamina. Actually, self-confidence is probably the best I’ve gained from street dancing.

I guess the negative side would be that if you have a low self-esteem you might compare yourself too much to others in dance class, and feel worse than when you started. You have to find a style that suits you, the right level and probably a dance teacher that you click with.”

**Sepideh, 29.** Street dancer and former ballet dancer.

*What do you think about masculinity and femininity in street dance, compared to other dance styles?*

"One thing I’ve learned in the world of dance is that street dance is one of the only genres where you are allowed such great amount of individuality. Some say the style is masculine but I’d rather call it gender neutral, because there is no focus on sexuality really, that’s for more commercial styles. In true street dance the focus is on musicality and expressivity. In styles like popping and locking, the emphasise is on corkiness, originality. There simply is nothing masculine or feminine about it, unless you yourself decide to bring those qualities into your style. You want to be unique, not try to look or move like someone else. This is the very opposite of other dance styles like ballet where all dancers are shaped into the same form, or like ballroom dance where stereotype gender roles have been used forever.”

**Jakob, 35.** One of Sweden’s most skilled street dancers.

*What positive/negative health effects do you see in street dance?*

"Whether it is social dancing like salsa, classical ballet, hip hop or just clubbing with your friends, dancing in general is great for a lot of things, both physically and mentally. What’s special in street dance is the attitude, the rawness. There is no pressure for perfection, street dance is about finding your own style, or flavour, as we call it. I see this as an important health issue for kids today. They grow up with so much pressure to be and look a certain way, when what is most important is finding who you are, developing your own uniqueness. This is what we work on in street dance.”
Do you face prejudices from being a male dancer?

”As I grew up and practiced street dance, it was always considered a cool thing, there were no prejudiced in my direction that I was aware of. But dancing other styles was not accepted as easily. When I started trying other dance styles at 16, I was already known as 'the breakdancer’ so I guess people thought I was cool anyway. If I had started with jazz dance I think I would have faced greater difficulties. It’s a real shame. I wish all parents would let their kids do what they want and not reinforce these prejudices on their kids.”