

“Right to Refusal”: Practices of Consent in the Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community

by

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In 2015, professional swing dancer Steven Mitchell was outed online by several women as a serial sexual abuser and was ostracized from the swing dance community both within the United States and globally. The first woman to share her story was Sarah Sullivan and her blog post detailing her sexual assault has been translated into at least seven languages. Within a week, swing dance organizers began having conversations online, leading to changes in practices of consent and the promotion of safer spaces during dance events. While etiquette of the swing dance revival starting in the mid-1980s dictated that dancers should say “yes” to any dance, current practices have shifted to encourage dancers to feel empowered to say “no” for any reason.

This thesis joins a small but growing body of literature on social dance in the field of ethnomusicology and other fields including dance and performance studies. There are a number of scholarly works regarding swing dancing but their approach is typically historical while texts employing ethnography all focus on large cities. By investigating a small dance community in Pittsburgh, this thesis offers a perspective that may be applicable to other small swing dance communities in the United States.

Based on interviews and participant observation in the Pittsburgh swing dance community, I will examine the ways that requesting consent for dances, accepting or declining dances, and expressing discomfort during movement has changed between the swing dance revival to the time of my research in 2019-2020. By recasting “no” as an anticipated and acceptable response, the Pittsburgh swing dance community creates more opportunities for participants to set healthy boundaries and normalizes rejection. Dancers learn both how to request consent and how

to handle refusal, essential to discourses and practices surrounding bodily autonomy. Social dancing is unique as it demands physical contact, offering a place to rehearse respecting the bodily autonomy of others and asserting one's own bodily autonomy. This thesis will conclude by looking at potential advantages of social dancing as a site of cultivating new rhetoric and practice around consent and safer spaces.

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1.0 Introduction

“Swing dance” is a broad term which applies to several styles of couple dances that developed contemporaneously with a style of jazz also known as swing in the 1930s and 1940s. After a decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a swing dance revival began in the mid-1980s characterized by a renewed interest in both the music and the dance. Pittsburgh was a part of this revival and several of the events that began in this era continue today.

My involvement with swing dancing began in October 2018, when dance instructor and musician Adam Lee invited me to sing with his swing band, the Pitt Vipers, for events in the Pittsburgh area. This served as my introduction to the Pittsburgh swing dance community and I began attending lessons and social dances outside of performances with the Pitt Vipers.¹ I noticed that at every lesson I attended there was some discussion of best practices for requesting, as well as consenting to and refusing a dance. I became curious as to whether this was specific to the instructors I was learning from, or particular to Pittsburgh or to swing dancing more broadly. I began conducting research in February of 2019 and I have continued throughout most of the process of writing this thesis through April 2020.

I discovered that 2015 was a pivotal year in the swing dance community, marking the beginning of new discourses and practices surrounding consent and safer spaces in social dancing. Many dancers believe the catalyst of these conversations to be the allegations of sexual assault brought forward in a blog post by Sarah Sullivan against professional swing dancer Steven

¹ My role as a singer was productive in terms of access during this project, as many dancers recognized me from performances.

Mitchell.² The events that Sullivan described happened at a weeklong swing dance event in Beverly, Massachusetts. Dance organizers were shocked, as Mitchell was a beloved figure in swing dancing, and they began exchanging ideas online for new ways to protect dancers at their events. Developing codes of conduct that addressed etiquette for consent on the dance floor and creating policies to promote safer spaces at events were popular responses to the events surrounding Mitchell's removal. Alyssa Milano's Twitter post in October 2017, using a phrase coined by activist Tarana Burke, marked the formal emergence of the #MeToo movement. Although Mitchell's ostracization was two years prior, many dancers I interviewed find it to be part of the same social currents as they are both characterized by women pushing to create consequences for sexual predators where courts and formal litigation have often failed. Changing practices of consent in the swing dance community are both informed by and advance the grassroots pushback against sexual assault and harassment of the #MeToo movement. While these new codes of conduct and safer spaces policies are present in swing dance events globally, not every event has followed suit.

The Pittsburgh swing dance community reflects the aforementioned changes, as demonstrated by several events with well-developed codes of conduct and safer spaces policies. At the same time, there are several events in Pittsburgh that have not adapted to these shifts in etiquette. This thesis focuses on the swing dance community in this modestly-sized city, imagining the potential for the trends witnessed here to be reflected in cities of a similar scale. Moreover, this work suggests the potential advantages of swing dancing, and social dancing more broadly, as a site of cultivating safer spaces and new practices regarding consent.

² Sullivan, Sarah. *Wordpress.com* (blog), January 22, 2015. Accessed April 7, 2020. <https://ssullivan410.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/3/>.

I discovered that 2015 was a pivotal year in the swing dance community, marking the beginning of new discourses and practices surrounding consent and safer spaces in social dancing. Many dancers believe the catalyst of these conversations to be the allegations of sexual assault brought forward in a blog post by Sarah Sullivan against professional swing dancer Steven Mitchell.³ The events that Sullivan described happened at a weeklong swing dance event in Beverly, Massachusetts. Dance organizers were shocked, as Mitchell was a beloved figure in swing dancing, and they began exchanging ideas online for new ways to protect dancers at their events. Developing codes of conduct that addressed etiquette for consent on the dance floor and creating policies to promote safer spaces at events were popular responses to the events surrounding Mitchell's removal.

1.1 Scope and Methodology

In this thesis, I use the word “community” to refer to a group of people with diverse socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds who share a common interest and engagement with an activity, similar to Thomas Turino’s concept of “cultural cohorts” which is “a social group that forms around the activity itself” and “provides an alternative, temporary ‘place to be’” (2008, 187). The Pittsburgh swing dance community comprises people from a variety of geographic locations not exclusive to Pittsburgh, who gather at several events throughout the city and share an interest in swing dancing whether as amateurs or professionals. This extends Kay Shelemay’s definition of musical community:

³ Sullivan, Sarah. *Wordpress.com* (blog), January 22, 2015. Accessed April 7, 2020. <https://ssullivan410.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/3/>.

A musical community is, whatever its location in time or space, a collectivity constructed through and sustained by musical processes and/or performances. A musical community can be socially and/or symbolically constituted; music making may give rise to real-time social relationships or may exist most fully in the realm of a virtual setting or in the imagination. A musical community does not require the presence of conventional structural elements nor must it be anchored in a single place, although both structural and local elements may assume importance at points in the process of community formation as well as in its ongoing existence. Rather, a musical community is a social entity, an outcome of a combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves (2011, 364).

As in Shelemay's definition, the Pittsburgh swing community is not fixed to a single location and there is continuity in the community even as new event spaces appear and others disappear. However, in the Pittsburgh swing dance community dancers create a collectivity not by making or listening to music, but through movement to that music, through a framework of steps to which they add their own improvisations. Most of the social swing dancers that I have interviewed in use "community," intermittently using the word "scene," to refer to themselves. I use the term "community" both because I find it aligns with the goals, activities and organization of the groups I am studying and reflects the general practice of the dancers I interviewed.

As of early 2020, Pittsburgh hosts two weekly swing dance events, five biweekly events, and three large annual events, surprisingly robust for a city with a population of only around 300,000. The fact that this city hosts swing events nearly every night makes it strategic for studying practices of consent, particularly in the opportunities it affords to observe variation across respective dance events.

The city once had a thriving steel industry which declined in the 1980s (Hoerr 1988). This industry was gradually replaced by advanced manufacturing, particularly in robotics, and the city has more recently become a technology center for companies like Google and Apple.⁴ Pittsburgh also hosts a number of institutions for higher learning including the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, and Duquesne University. Many of the dancers in this study are not originally from the city and were drawn by the opportunities for higher education or employment in the technology industry available in Pittsburgh. In this way, the swing dance community in Pittsburgh reflects the predominantly middle class demographics of swing in the United States more broadly

Most of Pittsburgh's population, 66.85%, are white while 23.21% are Black or African American and 5.71% are Asian.⁵ The Pittsburgh swing dance community is mostly white, more than 66.85%, with some Asian representation and very little Black representation. While this does not reflect the demographics of the city as a whole, it does reflect the racial demographics typical to the swing dance community in the United States, showing a smaller sample size of what is a larger racial phenomenon in swing dancing. Through this research, I came to understand the racial

⁴ "Innovate or Die? Pittsburgh Chose to Innovate." U.S. Chamber of Commerce, August 5, 2015. <https://www.uschamber.com/above-the-fold/innovate-or-die-pittsburgh-chose-innovate>.

⁵ "Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Population 2020." Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Population 2020 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs). Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/pittsburgh-population/>.

and class demographics of the Pittsburgh swing dance community, including my own as a middle class white woman, to be incongruous with the working class, African American origins of this dance form. The swing events featured in this thesis are easily accessible to me because, as a graduate student, I live relatively close to Oakland where several universities are located and I have free access to public transportation. Although many of the events featured in this thesis are free of charge, I came to wonder how accessible they might be to working class people living far from convenient public transportation routes or working evening hours in the service industry. Besides these issues of access, the predominantly white racial demographics of swing after the revival may make it unwelcoming to some BIPOC. Whiteness has long operated as an invisible norm in the United States, and I realized that the overwhelming whiteness of swing dancing initially went unmarked for me, prompting a deeper inquiry into the origins of this dance form. The history of swing dancing will be unfolded more fully later sections.

For some dancers, swing was a pastime they carried with them when they moved to Pittsburgh, and for others it was a skill they cultivated in order to make friends in a new city. Either way, swing dance became a means of recognizing place, a means of connecting not only with a new group of people but also with the physical space of the city. All of the events featured in this thesis are held in spaces with several other functions; none of the spaces are used strictly for swing or even strictly for dancing. In this way, dancers are carving out a place for themselves in Pittsburgh, transforming spaces typically used for banquets and meetings into spaces of participatory movement.

My ethnography is focused on three events: Tartan Swing, which is held weekly at Carnegie Mellon University; an annual event called Pittsburgh Shakedown, held at several locations since its establishment and most recently at the Ace Hotel; and a biweekly event called

Swingin' at the Ace, also held at the Ace Hotel. A number of the participants at these three events are students or alumni of Pittsburgh universities, suggesting the lasting impact of participation in campus swing dance events and the contemporary appeal of this dance form to the middle class. I focus on the three events above as they have responded to shifts in etiquette after Steven Mitchell's ostracization, creating codes of conduct and making efforts to create safer spaces during social dances and lessons.

To provide contrast, I will also examine the weekly swing events at the Allegheny Elks Lodge and an event called Swing City held at the Wightman Center. These events do not have codes of conduct and do not appear to be making efforts in promoting safer spaces. All five of these events hold a lesson before social dancing begins. The lesson is often where, if the event uses a code of conduct, some of the expectations set forth in writing are expressed verbally or embodied by the instructors. Individual instructors working at events with a code of conduct have a certain level of flexibility as to *how* they address consent and those at events without a code of conduct can choose *if* they address consent. Participant observation in lessons was a part of this research as lessons are often the site where the values set forth in a code of conduct are articulated to dancers.

Social media, as a central form of communication for this community, has also served as a rich site of information for this thesis. By focusing on Pittsburgh, this thesis suggests the way that national conversations in swing dancing like those around Steven Mitchell trickle down into smaller dance communities around the United States. I consulted several Facebook groups including the Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community, Tartan Swing, and Pittsburgh's Swing City. Events that have codes of conduct usually post them on their Facebook page to make them easily accessible. The social media presence of larger regional events, such as Pittsburgh Shakedown, is

more sporadic than those listed above, advertising heavily through Facebook a month or two before the event occurs.

Through these case studies, I aim to reveal how broader movements like #MeToo are expressed in social dancing. In discourses surrounding the #MeToo movement, the obtainment of consent is conceived of as an essential component of sexual or romantic interactions. Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace also bring conversations of consent into more quotidian interactions, encompassing exchanges both on and off the dance floor. The initiatives of organizers in the Pittsburgh swing dance community may be able to inform other movements towards safer spaces, as social dancing offers unique opportunities to practice honoring bodily autonomy.

1.2 Project Significance

This thesis joins a growing body of literature on social dance in the field of ethnomusicology. Sociologist and swing dance researcher Black Hawk Hancock writes that, “[s]ocial dance, as a subcategory of dance, is done by and for dancers rather than for an audience; it is usually informal in nature and emphasizes sociability and socializing, since it can be danced with so many different partners” (2013, 38). A number of ethnomusicologists have written about social dance, particularly over the last 30 years, including, but not limited to, Joanna Bosse, Thomas Turino, David Kaminsky, Mercedes Liska, and Andrew Snyder. Bosse writes about the unmarked whiteness of American ballroom dance, and the simultaneous exoticization through classifications such as “modern” and “Latin,” based on ethnographic fieldwork (2007). Turino’s book *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* includes a chapter about old-time music

and contradance, tracing a distinction between geographically fixed communities with long-standing traditions with this art forms and revivalist participants who are often more itinerant and came into these traditions later in life (2008). Kaminsky details practices of flirtation in Swedish polska dancing, noting the way that new movements towards gender neutrality have challenged long-held gender roles in the dance (2011). Liska's book, *Argentine Queer Tango: Dance and Sexuality Politics in Buenos Aires*, opens with the revival of tango in Buenos Aires in the 1990s and focuses on the evolution of queer tango between 2000 and 2012, tying it to other social movements in Argentina and drawing on ethnography (2016). Snyder describes increases in the popularity of gender-neutral terms and practices in contradance based on a year of fieldwork with Circle Left contradance in Oakland and a regional dance camp (2019). Scholars from other fields including dance studies, performance studies, and anthropology have also written about social dance. Hazzard-Donald details the evolution of the jook, a general term for clandestine social houses and gatherings created by working class blacks (1990). Daniel writes about the historical heritage of Cuban rumba while also observing contemporary practices between 1985 and 1990 and providing detailed analysis of the choreography of the dance (1995). In *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, Savigliano writes about the entrance of tango into the global market in the beginning of the 20th century and the construction of the dance form as an exoticized commodity (1995). Drawing on ethnography and historical methods, Karatsu explores the way middle class Japanese dancers have adapted English ballroom dancing in a process the author calls "Japanization" (2003). Based on ethnographic work, Kapchan writes about the salsa culture of Austin, Texas, describing the use of "trash talk" to build intimacy and a sense of belonging across class and ethnic lines (2006). Borland and Bock explore the ways and reasons dancers choose to embody cultural Others through ethnographic studies of both belly dance as practiced by white

women in Central Ohio and salsa dance as practiced in a culturally diverse scene in Northern New Jersey (2011).

There are a number of scholarly works and trade books that focus on swing dancing. Two essential autobiographies were written by swing dancers Frankie Manning (2007) and Norma Miller (1996) detailing their experiences during the initial rise of swing dancing at the Savoy Ballroom. Michigan State University professor David W. Stowe looks at swing music and dance as “a microcosm of American society” (2), noting the way that the same tensions of race, gender, and politics found within swing culture were also found within American society more broadly (1994). In a 1997 article for *American Music*, University of Guelph professor Howard Spring outlines the origins of swing as both a musical genre and a dance, drawing on newspapers, films, recordings, and novel. Freelance author V. Vale wrote a timely book in 1998 providing extensive interviews with musicians and fanzine publishers participating what some regard as the peak of the swing dance revival. A year later, freelance journalist Degen Pener wrote a book detailing this same reemergence of swing into popular culture, providing an extensive list of swing dance classes and events across the United States and offering tips for etiquette and fashion. In a book called *I See America Dancing*, McMains and Robinson offer an ethnographic account of the swing dance revival in Southern California (2002). Randal Doane provides an ethnography which reveals the way that punk subculture members engaged with the swing dance revival in New York City, analyzing his data with a cultural framework from Bourdieu (2006). In a sociological study, Scott Renshaw describes the way that swing dancers in a “large Southwestern metropolis” (86) use retro fashions and dance itself to present “unique” identities (2006). Sociologist Black Hawk Hancock wrote an article (2008) and a book (2013) based on six years of ethnography on the Lindy hop revival in Chicago, focusing on the white appropriation of what is a Black dance form. Professor

of American studies Sherrie Tucker describes the practice of swing at the Hollywood Canteen, a Los Angeles club providing entertainment to WWII servicemen between 1942 and 1945, in a 2013 article and a 2014 book. In a dissertation from Arizona State University professor from Christopher “Christi Jay” Wells, the dialogic relationship between swing dancers and musicians is explored through the career of drummer and bandleader William Henry “Chick” Webb (2014). The most recent work on swing dancing during the writing of this thesis is from Richland College professor Kendra Unruh, who uses film and print media to critically examine, like Hancock, the white appropriation of Lindy hop from working class, Black culture (2020). The approach of these works is typically historical and texts offering ethnographies of swing dancing all focus on large cities: New York City, Chicago, and a “large Southwestern metropolis,” perhaps because some of these larger cities, particularly New York City, have been considered centers of swing dancing both in the original swing era and during the swing revival. None of the ethnographic work I have seen regarding swing dancing focuses on small or medium-sized cities. By focusing on a small dance community in Pittsburgh, I address this lacuna and offer a perspective that may be applicable to other small swing dance communities in the United States. This case study suggests the way that conversations happening in the national swing dance community online and through regional events might shape discourses and practices in modestly-sized cities like Pittsburgh.

Although this work focuses on dance, dance practices are inseparable from music and manifest a form of physical participation with music. Swing music and dance in particular developed in a deep mutual exchange wherein “musicians and dancing audiences [were] co-creators of dynamic soundscapes where participating bodies negotiated social dynamics to forge spaces for communication, collaboration, and catharsis” (Wells 2013, 115). The social dynamics practiced in dance and music shape and play into everyday interactions and in this way, the

sociality we practice on the dance floor is in constant conversation with small everyday interactions and broader social movements like #MeToo.

1.3 Swing Dance

“Swing dance” is considered a comprehensive term which includes a variety of dances that were popular between the late 1920s and 1950s (Conyers, Swing dances; Hancock 2013, 9). Some of the dance styles included within swing are east coast swing, west coast swing, and Lindy hop. The “breakaway,” an open dance position where partners still hold hands, is considered by many scholars to be a distinctive, identifying element of swing dancing (Tucker 2013, 86). In a “breakaway” both partners are able to improvise dance steps as opposed to a closed position, where the dancers’ torsos are touching or nearly touching, demanding identical footwork. Dancers are able to add a host of twists, turns, pauses, dips, and other movements to the basic dance step (Hancock 2013, 41). The juxtaposition of individual improvisation and rhythmic collaboration and the balance between “constant practical self and group awareness”(Hancock 2013, 60), has been described as the danced expression of the “democratic principle of jazz” (Tucker 2013, 86). This “democratic principle” may apply to the balance between rhythmic form and improvisation for swing music and dance, but it did not extend to gendered relations in swing dancing which will be explored further in the next section.

As the term “swing dance” is so broad, the Swing Dance Council of America created a more specific definition in 1985:

Swing is an all-American couples rhythm dance consisting primarily of 6-beat and 8-beat patterns that cover either a circular or

slotted area on the dance floor. Swing incorporates the use of underarm turns, side passes, push breaks, and whips—plus “4-beat” rhythm breaks, syncopations, and extensions of the same (Conyers, Swing dances).

The discussion of “6-beat and 8-beat patterns” refers to the number of beats covered by the basic step in the dance while circular and slotted, or columnal, refers to what an aerial view of the dancers might look like. The last sentence of the definition refers to specific dance moves that are characteristic of swing dancing.

Swing dancing evolved concurrently with a style of music also called swing, characterized by driving arrangements, four-four rhythms, and spirited drumming. Swing bands were larger than preceding jazz ensembles, typically consisting of fifteen to seventeen members by the early 1940s (Spring). Many scholars believed that swing music developed in conversation with dance, in particular, the Lindy hop (Spring 1997, 184).

Lindy hop is considered to be the first form of swing dancing (Conyers, Swing dances ; Hancock 2013, 9). This dance evolved from four earlier popular dances, namely the Charleston, the collegiate, the breakaway, and the Texas tommy (Conyers, Swing dances). Lindy hop, initially developed at the Savoy Ballroom in New York City, was part of a flourishing of Black artistic identity beginning in the 1920s which included the Harlem Renaissance and early jazz contributions (Hancock 2013, 11-12). Influential African American dancers and choreographers like Frankie Manning, Norma Miller, and Shorty George Snowden dazzled integrated attendees at the Savoy Ballroom, further shaping the dance form.⁶ When white dancers began practicing the

⁶ Sociologist Black Hawk Hancock offers two possibilities for the origin of the term Lindy hop. He suggests that either dancer Shorty George Snowden named the dance in 1928 or that it was named after the famous transatlantic flight of Charles Lindbergh (2013, 11). Jayna Brown quotes Shorty George Snowden saying “We used to call the basic step

Lindy hop in the 1930s and 1940s it became known as the jitterbug, consisting of movements that were simplified but fairly similar (Hancock 2013, 13). Some scholars trace the lineage of the jitterbug to East Coast swing which consists of a simpler 6-beat pattern, developed by instructors at Arthur Murray dance studios in the 1940s (Conyers, Swing dances). Arthur Murray was a ballroom dance instructor who opened several hundred franchised schools through the United States (Ibid.). A California-based instructor from this same franchise developed West Coast swing in the 1950s (Ibid) and some of the primary dance moves are the push, the whip, and the pass (Pener 1999, 90). West Coast swing involves couples dancing in a line or slot which some historians believe is an adaptation to the particularly crowded dance floors in California (Ibid).

Swing dancing began to decline in the 1950s and scholars offer differing opinions as to exactly when and why this happened. WWII may have marked the beginning of an erosion in swing dancing, as so many swing musicians and dancers, including Frankie Manning, were drafted (Manning 2005, 186). Changes in music may have also had an effect, and Manning notes that, “[b]y the time I came out of the Army, the music scene had changed” (Ibid.). He described the “jerky kind of dance” that resulted from Lindy hoppers attempting to adapt to bebop and he found this musical form to more appropriate for listening than dancing (Ibid.). Other scholars mark the decline of swing dancing with Manning’s retirement from dancing when he began to work in a post office in the early 1950s or when the Savoy Ballroom closed in 1958 (Hancock 2013, 13).

the Hop long before Lindbergh did his hop across the Atlantic” (2008, 170). Brown marks the metaphorical resonance of Lindbergh’s flight as a stark contrast to the difficult, often fatal journey that many Africans made in the hulls of ships coming to the Americas. Lindbergh’s “hop” across the Atlantic represents an exciting moment in technological advancement. African Americans naming this new dance after this new step in modernity marks a dialectic which is furthered by the fact that Lindbergh was a Nazi sympathizer. Brown writes that, “Lindbergh publicly stated his horror that Negroes may have been dancing in his name” (2008, 172)..

Lindy hop may have declined but it never entirely disappeared, maintained in small circles by the New York Swing Dance Society and older dancers like Norma Miller who continued to dance and teach (Unruh 2020, 49). Overall, partner dancing was less popular throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Ibid.). Scholars note several transmutations of Lindy hop and swing, one of the earliest being the jump blues. Louis Jordan, formerly a saxophone player with swing drummer Chick Webb, is credited for pioneering smaller bands, “finding a big new sound with his new seven-piece combo” (Pener 1999, 33). Some scholars mark jump blues as a point of departure for several largely white music genres, namely “rockabilly in the 1950s and 1960s, punk rock in the 1970s, and postpunk in the 1980s” (Doane 2006, 92). Others cite jumps blues as a “catalyst in the creation of both rock ‘n’ roll and R&B” (Pener 1999, 33) and a source of “essential elements” for R&B (Rabaka 2013, 45). Among Black communities, R&B and hip hop emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and dance styles evolved in tandem with these newer musical forms (Hancock 2013, 15).

Swing is a social dance, meaning that “it is done for and by dancers rather than an audience; it is usually informal in nature and emphasizes sociability and socializing, since it can be danced with many different partners” (Hancock 2013, 38). As such, swing dance is and has always been a site of negotiation over cultural values, norms, and gendered expressions. This negotiation continued when a dedicated group of dancers and teachers began what can be considered the earliest iteration of the swing dance revival (Hancock 2013, 10).

1.4 Swing Dance Revival

In the mid-1980s, dancers like Frankie Manning and Steven Mitchell led a swing revival, frequently teaching and offering workshops. A parallel mainstream jazz revival culminated at

around the same time, culminating in a concert series called Jazz at Lincoln Center in 1987.⁷ Swing dancing entered the public imagination more broadly in the 1990s with films like *Malcolm X* (1992), *Swing Kids* (1993), *The Mask* (1994), and *Swingers* (1996) and perhaps most importantly, in a Gap clothing commercial (Hancock 2013, 10). This commercial, released in 1998, featured young, white swing dancers sporting a line called Khakis Swing and moving to Louis Prima's "Jump Jive an' Wail." The visual effect is striking as the dancers execute aerial moves with a filming technique called "bullet-time," made famous by *The Matrix* (1999) wherein time stops but our view continues to rotate around the subject. The Gap commercial, along with most but not all of the films listed above, presented white swing dancers, in turn perpetuating a racial erasure which started in the 1930s and continued throughout the swing dance revival (Unruh 2020; Hancock 2008; Hancock 2013). The effect of the commercial was so significant that Lee estimates his class at that time swelled from around 15 to 20 participants to around 150 participants in the week following the release of this Gap advertisement.⁸ Blogger rikomatic on Yeehodi.com, a popular swing community website, writes that swing dancers used to ask each other, "Are you pre-Gap ad or post-Gap ad?" or, in other words, "Did you dance swing before it was cool?"

There was also a flood of neo-swing bands during this era. Neo-swing refers to the music and aesthetics that accompanied renewed interest in swing dancing in the 90s. The Royal Crown Revue is considered to be one of the leading bands in the neo-swing movement (Feber, 1998; Vale, 1998). This group formed in Los Angeles in 1989 and after they appeared playing their song "Hey Pachuco" in *The Mask* (1994) they began a residency at a landmark Los Angeles club, The Derby (Vale, 1998). Other neo-swing groups that emerged during this era include Big Bad Voodoo

⁷ "Riff on the World; Jazz at Lincoln Center." *The Economist* 411, no. 8884 (2014): 84.

⁸ Adam Lee, personal communication, December 2, 2019.

Daddy, the Squirrel Nut Zippers, Cherry Poppin' Daddies, and the Brian Setzer Orchestra. Many of these groups wore zoot suits, a high-waisted and wide-legged suit that was popular in the 1930s and 1940s among minority communities, or otherwise evoked the styles of the swing era and set the sonic scene for the reemerging dance community.

Some scholars mark the swing revival, particularly during its peak in the late 1990s, as part of a broader "Retro Revival" among white Americans, characterized by an attraction to the style and extravagance associated the Rat Pack, the "cigar and martini atmosphere of indulgence," (Hancock 2008, 78) and traditional gender roles of the 1940s and 1950s (See Pender 1999; Unruh 2020). For instance, PBS ran a City Arts special in 1998 about the surging popularity of swing dancing, particularly in New York City.⁹ In this special, dancers of both genders praise swing dancing as a great way for men to pick up women. The segment opens with a local female instructor saying, "Guys, if you're shy, if you don't know how to talk to a girl, just take a few swing dance lessons, at least, just to be able to get on the dance floor and make that girl spin."

Some dancers during the revival saw themselves as reconnecting with a simpler time, returning to an elegant demeanor associated with the swing dance era in the 1940s and 1950s (McMains and Robinson 2002, 89). These decades marked a surge of optimism and hope for future among Americans (Vale 1998, 4) and the swing dance revival borrowed heavily from them both in terms of aesthetic and social inspiration. Regarding the spirit of the swing dance revival, author and historian Vale notes, "With the swing movement a bit of ritual has been restored: dancing is the way to meet girls and guys, and with the emphasis on manners and grace borrowed from earlier decades, radically improved social relations now seem accessible and near at hand" (Vale 1998, 5). In the aforementioned PBS special, dance partners Janice Wilson and Paolo Lanna comment

⁹ "Swing City." PBS "City Arts" Special, 1998. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFDOnUuVUPs>.

on these “improved social relations.” Wilson opines, “I think when gentlemen dress up in a suit, I think that makes them act a little bit better,” and Lanna, wearing a flat cap and a purple tie, responds saying, “We put on the clothing and all of the sudden, we have manners.”¹⁰

Yet not all dancers considered these social dynamics to be improved, with some feeling that their agency was diminished by the common mantra to “never say no to a dance” (Gordon 2016). Although this etiquette was intended to be inclusive and welcoming, it often put dancers in a position where they felt uncomfortable saying “no.” This was the social environment, an environment which favored traditional gender roles and discouraged dancers from refusing, in which Steven Mitchell was teaching and dancing in the early years of the swing revival.

Steven Mitchell

Mitchell enjoyed several years of prominence within the swing dance community, working with Frankie Manning and frequently teaching workshops and lessons. Mitchell followed Manning’s path, teaching a variety of swing dance styles while specializing in Lindy hop. This changed when, in 2015, dancer Sarah Sullivan wrote a blog post detailing Mitchell’s sexual assault on her when she was still a teenager.¹¹ She started attending swing dances with her father and first met Mitchell at a workshop he was teaching in San Diego. They became friends and Mitchell began sending her inappropriate instant messages, joking about the two of them having sex and urging Sullivan to keep their relationship a secret. When Sullivan was 18, Mitchell served her alcohol at a swing dance event called Beantown in Beverly, Massachusetts, and led her to a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sullivan, Sarah. *Wordpress.com* (blog), January 22, 2015. Accessed April 7, 2020. <https://ssullivan410.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/3/>.

secluded spot where he made physical advances on her. Sullivan managed to remove herself, but she said the most traumatic part happened when they were walking back to the dormitory.

As we were walking back to the dorms, he grabbed my crotch. He held on to it and told me that he didn't know what had happened to me that "fucked me up" so badly. He said there must be something wrong with me.¹²

Sullivan describes how this message, that something was wrong with her for refusing sexual advances, affected her for years to follow. She internalized his words, believing that her boundaries and what she wanted were wrong.

Sullivan was the first of several women to come forward with allegations against Mitchell and her blog post inspired other women, including Alison Corder and Ramona Staffeld, to speak out via social media about the times that they were also assaulted by Mitchell.

Corder released a video about her rape in the same month of 2015¹³ and Ramona Staffeld released her story on a podcast in October of that year.¹⁴ Allison Corder was 18 at the time of her rape and Ramona Staffeld was only 15 or 16. Mitchell set up an email account for Staffeld, and for three years following they would arrange for him to fly to her hometown and take her to a motel after he picked her up from school. They both describe the way Mitchell used his position as a highly influential figure in the swing dance community to manipulate young women or, in Staffeld's words, "He got in our heads."¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMtgK2TtFOA>

¹⁴ Swift, Ryan and Ramona Staffeld. "007- Ramona Staffeld." *The Track* (audio blog), October 20, 2015. Accessed May 28, 2020. <http://www.thetrackpodcast.com/episodes/007>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Sullivan's hometown dance space, Mobtown Ballroom, was one of the first spaces to respond and create a code of conduct. After these women came forward, many instructors and organizers worldwide decided not to work with Mitchell and many of his teaching engagements were cancelled. What followed Mitchell's removal from the global swing community was a series of conversations about consent.¹⁶ The "improved social relations" of the 1940s and 1950s that the swing revival sought to recover and the common mantra to "never say no to a dance" were being called into question. In the following section, I will draw on the lyrics of two 1942 songs and several anecdotes from the same era to offer a deeper analysis of the era that largely inspired the swing revival.

1.5 A History of Refusal

You can't say no to a soldier

A sailor or a handsome marine

No, you can't say no if he wants to dance

If he's gonna fight, he's got a right to romance

So, get out your lipstick and powder

Be beautiful and dutiful too

If he's not your type, then it's still okay

¹⁶ See White, Bobby. *Wordpress.com* (blog), May 30, 2017. Accessed June 10, 2020. <https://swungover.wordpress.com/2017/05/30/the-swing-scene-vs-max-his-friends-and-the-swing-scene/and-Yehoodi-Swings>. *Youtube.com*, January 27, 2015. Accessed June 10, 2020. <https://youtu.be/nRbK4uvAtLI>.

*You can always kiss him in a sisterly way
Oh, you can't say no, no you gotta give in
If you want him to win for you*

-Harry Warren and Mack Gordon "You Can't Say No to a Soldier" (1942)

Although this thesis focuses on events occurring after the peak of the swing revival in the late 1990s, a discussion of etiquette surrounding consent traces the importance of this issue back to original practices of swing dancing and the way these practices translated off the dance floor. I focus on events in the 1940s as this decade was one of the main inspirations for the styles and gendered relations of the swing dance revival. In World War II, women were expected to do their part during the war effort, not only filling job positions left vacant by soldiers, but also entertaining and providing comfort to lonely servicemen. Although women were urged to make these changes only for the duration of the war, concerns were raised about disruptions in gendered relations that might continue long after (Hegarty 2007, 1). Public and private fears surrounded the interruption of women's normative position in the home and the loosening of sexual mores. Women were at the intersection of a public debate, with official wartime discourse planning to employ women's sexuality to support the war effort and federal agencies seeing women's sexuality as a threat that needed to be controlled (Ibid., 2). The loosening of sociosexual constraints made women "a suspect category, subject to surveillance for the duration of the war" (Ibid., 6).

Despite many increases in autonomy, women during the original swing era were expected never to say "no" to dances and their "no" often went unheard in instances of unwanted close contact or unwanted sexual activity. The following song lyrics and anecdotes will contextualize the importance of consent surrounding social swing dancing, both on and off the dance floor.

“You Can’t Say No to a Soldier”

Song lyrics reflect the principles of a group of people in a particular time, revealing values and sometimes offering models for behavior. The song “You Can’t Say No to a Soldier” captures the latter sentiment, detailing the ways women can be “beautiful and dutiful too.” This song appeared in the 1942 film *Iceland* and was sung by Joan Merrill. The lyrics suggest that soldiers who fight for their country have not only earned, but “have a right” to access women’s bodies.

In her 2014 book *Dance Floor Democracy*, Sherrie Tucker describes an incident wherein a woman attempted to say “no” to a GI and was physically assaulted. On October 31, 1942, professional dancer and actress Florida Edwards suffered an injury that ended her career (Tucker 2014, 146). The injury took place at the Hollywood Canteen, a club in Los Angeles which offered food and entertainment to servicemen between 1942 and 1945. The canteen was staffed by volunteers from the entertainment industry including stars, dancers, directors, agents, technicians, writers, and allied professionals.

Edwards explained to judges and attorneys that she firmly and repeatedly said “no” to the “jive-Maddened Marine” (ibid) as he gripped her arm and spun her around the dance floor of the Hollywood Canteen. Edwards began calling for help and was then thrown into a breakaway, ultimately crashing into the bandstand, dislocating her coccyx, and wrenching a vertebra into her lower back. What’s perhaps most tragic about this incident is that, had it happened on the job, she would have been eligible for workers compensation. Ironically, her weekly volunteerism at the Hollywood Canteen was, in fact, at the request of her union but was not considered work. This gave her no other option but to sue the Hollywood Canteen itself, for an amount of \$17,250 (ibid, 148).

Florida Edwards's story illuminates how consent plays a role in physical safety during social swing dancing. Had she been dancing at a time and place when her repeated "no" was heard and respected, she may have been able to continue in her acting career. The second chapter will return to intersections between consent and physical safety, examining the way it is sometimes reflected in codes of conduct.

In *Dance Floor Democracy*, Sherrie Tucker also interviews Dorothy Morris and Caren Marsh-Doll, two sisters who also danced at the Hollywood Canteen. They described feeling "protected" while they were volunteering there because if a soldier got too close or too rough, there were always sergeants ready to pull the GIs off the dance floor. Considering that "you can't say no to a soldier," the only option for these women was to hope that a nearby sergeant would say "no" for them, not empowering them but protecting the ideals of femininity and chastity. Yet what happens in cases like that of Florida Edwards, where a sergeant was not available to intervene?

"I'm Doing It for Defense"

Another song expressing these problematic sentiments is "I'm Doing It for Defense" from the movie *Star-Spangled Rhythm*.

Mister Bones, get this right, I'm your date tonight

But when I hold you tight, I'm doin' it for defense.

Months and months you've been drilled, now it's time you were thrilled;

Start from here, then we build, I'm doin' it for defense.

If you kiss my lips and you feel me respond,

It's because I just can't afford a bond.

If you think you're Cary Grant, brother, relax
You're just a rebate on my income tax.
Don't be hurt, don't get sore, I'm a pal, nothing more;
This ain't love, this is war, I'm doin' it for defense

-Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer "I'm Doing It for Defense" (1942)

In this song, the female singer directly tells her date that she's only out with him to fulfill her national duties. The line "If you kiss my lips and you feel me respond/ It's because I can't afford a bond" nods to national initiatives for civilians to support the war by purchasing war bonds. But for women who couldn't afford bonds, the next best thing, according to these lyrics, was offering their own bodies. The presumption was that women's ability to make appreciable contributions to the war effort were limited but that they could still demonstrate patriotism through sexual relationships with men who could serve the war more directly in their military service (Smith 2013). In a dissertation on sexual violence in the United States during WWII, Michaela Katherine Smith writes that, "While rape was common before the war, wartime conditions, popular culture, and definitions of masculinity led to an elevated rate of sexual assault for this period" (ibid, 1). The Uniform Crime Reports for the United States show that the number of rape offenses known to the police increased approximately 45% from 1939 to 1946.¹⁷ This is chilling, especially when one takes into consideration how much more difficult, both legally and in terms of social climate, it would have been for women to report rape in the 40s.

¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington DC, Volume VII number 1 annual bulletin for 1936, Volume XVI number 2 annual bulletin for 1945, and Volume XVII number 2, annual bulletin for 1946.

The comments from Morris and Marsh-Doll along with the wartime rape statistics trace a history of etiquette wherein women “couldn’t say no,” showing a connection between cultural expectations on and off the dance floor. Women were not encouraged or expected to say “no” to dances, unwanted physical contact, or unwanted sexual activity. These were the gendered relations of refusal in swing dancing that was brought forward into the swing revival.

1.6 Changes in Consent and “No” in the Swing Dance Community

The use and reception of “no” has changed over time within the swing dance community in the United States, particularly since the allegations towards Steven Mitchell in 2015. Swing dance events have created codes of conduct in order to address the physical, emotional, and sexual safety of participants. These codes of conduct serve not only to help event organizers manage themselves internally, but also to provide a statement to the public expressing their values. Swing dance codes of conduct are available to the public in hard copy or online, reflecting changing practices within the community.

Christopher “Christi Jay” Wells, professor at Arizona State University and a long-time swing dancer, noted the subsequent changes in etiquette and practice after allegations were made against Steven Mitchell.¹⁸ When Wells began dancing in 2010, proper etiquette dictated that one would need to sit out the whole song if declining a dance. Dancers were encouraged to say “yes” to every dance unless they were tired and wanted to sit out entirely (See Peneer 1999, 92). However, practices since 2015 have shifted towards inviting dancers to decline for any reason, whether they

¹⁸ Christopher “Christi Jay” Wells, personal communication, December 2, 2019.

feel uncomfortable with a particular person, are tired, thirsty, or just not in the mood. Wells states, “Ideologically I’m very on board with [the concept that] ‘no’ is a complete sentence; you should say ‘no’ to a dance as directly and with whatever affect you want to and people should just normalize hearing ‘no.’”¹⁹ In practice, Wells typically does offer a reason, saying something along the lines of “No, I’m sitting this one out,” or “No, I’m tired.”

It is important to note the roles of leads and follows in this section as it tends to affect who is in a position to say “no.” In swing dance, as in other forms of social dancing, the lead role is responsible for guiding the couple and cuing transitions in the dance. The follow role interprets subtle physical cues from the lead and generally does not initiate movement. In the Pittsburgh swing community, one can often see same sex couples dancing or women leading while men follow. However, the typical gender assignments of men as leads and women as follows represents the majority of dancers. Following these heteronormative roles, men are more likely to ask women to dance, making it more likely that women will be in a position to consent or refuse. Many dancers I interviewed who typically dance the follow role state that they rarely ask someone to dance.²⁰

My interviews indicate that etiquette in the swing community since 2015 changed the way “no” might be heard in the context of social swing dancing. Newer practices demanded a normalization of rejection, or thicker skin, for those requesting dances. Yet even progressive dancers like Wells find more traditional dance etiquettes hard to shake. A Pittsburgh swing dancer and organizer, John Dzikiy, advocates for dancers to be able to refuse dances for any reason, but still feels the effect of the etiquette he learned early in his experiences of swing dancing:

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kathryn Kessler, personal communication, February 1, 2020.; Claire Chu, personal communication, April 15, 2019.

I've been dancing since 2009 and things have changed a lot in that time frame. So, I'm still relearning habits. When I started I was told to "never say "no" to a dance," which moved to you could say "no" but you had to give a good reason, and now you say "no" for whatever reason you want.²¹

While practicing consent enhances the physical, emotional, and sexual safety of all dancers, it is most important for follows, who are overwhelmingly women. Practices of consent, with hearing and respecting "no" as an essential element, offer women more autonomy in social swing dancing. The following section explores the meaning of consent and the utterance "no" more deeply, framing an application for these terms in social swing dancing.

1.7 Theoretical Frameworks

This inquiry into changing practices of consent within the Pittsburgh swing dance community draws from ethnomusicological work on partner dance and attraction, as social dancing is often a site of flirtation and courtship. The utterance "no" will be considered from the perspective of linguistic anthropology as it relates to consent and refusal. Consent, as an essential component of conversations surrounding #MeToo, will be examined through the perspectives of philosophy as well as legal, Black feminist, and sexual justice theories.

²¹ John Dzikiy, personal communication, June 14, 2020.

Partner Dance and Attraction

Attraction and flirtation are tenets of many kinds of social dancing, as David Kaminsky reveals within the context of polska dancing in Sweden. Kaminsky notes that partner dancing in general serves as a rich site for studying human sexuality, writing that, “[t]he three-way tension between individual, couple and society that marks the social process of establishing sexual partnerships is mirrored and formalised on the social dance floor” (2011, 125).

Although Kaminsky writes about polska dancing as opposed to swing dancing, many of the same notions of etiquette apply. For instance, in both swing dancing and polska, it is considered inappropriate to ask someone on a date in the middle of a dance. Kaminsky describes this by including a statement from one of his interlocutors, Elin Monie-Landero, who remarks that, “You just don’t hit on someone who’s stuck 30 centimetres from your face” (Kaminsky 2011, 137). Monie-Landero suggests that, although the dance might be sensual and intense, it is simply inappropriate to make advances on someone who is something of a captive audience for that three and a half minute song.

Kaminsky’s work shows that many of the issues in this thesis are generalizable to certain other forms of partner dancing and not necessarily particular to swing dancing. His work also gestures towards the complex relationship between attraction and dance: “Couple dancing is not love, nor is it sex, but neither is it simply an abstract representation of those things”(2011, 127). Instead, couple dancing is both part of and reflective of social processes that shape behaviors in sex and attraction. In the same way, practices of consent and etiquette in social swing dancing both shape and mirror these processes in society more broadly.

The Utterance “No”

In an article simply entitled “No,” linguistic anthropologist Don Kulick explores the meaning of the word in three different scenarios: sexual harassment and rape, instances where the so-called “Homosexual Panic Defense” is invoked, and in sadomasochism. For the purposes of this section, I will focus on the first scenario. Framing “no” as uttered by women in refusal of sexual advances from men within Butler’s concept of performativity,²² Kulick writes that this utterance is part of what produces a female subject. In encounters of sexual harassment and rape, the subject position of “woman” is normatively produced by the utterance “no” whereas the subject position of “man” normatively never says “no” to sexual advances. In a culture that sexualizes and objectifies women, a woman’s “no” is twisted into “try again” or even “yes” and women who are raped are often blamed for not fighting back or being clear enough in their refusal. Catherine MacKinnon writes that a woman’s refusal of sex is simply inaudible in patriarchal culture (1993). Men are marked as pursuers and women are marked as the pursued.

A 2018 study invited 773 male and female college students describe how they convey consent in heterosexual scenarios (Marcantonio et al.).²³ The study found that both genders were most likely to use “direct nonverbal signals” such as rolling away or distancing themselves from a sexual partner as opposed to using “direct verbal signals” such as the utterance “no” (ibid). This study points out an important challenge in using direct verbal signals, suggesting that it is simply difficult or nonnormative to ask a direct question or give a direct verbal answer.

²² Judith Butler’s concept of performativity was influenced by the work of language philosopher John L. Austin. Austin focuses on the acts that words perform, the way that words themselves can create an act (Austin, 1962). Butler extends this notion of performing acts with language to show the way that people define their identities through both speech and nonverbal acts. “This term [performativity] relates to how speech and language, as well as nonverbal expressive actions, perform a person” and is used by feminist theorists use the term in relation to social norms, gender, and political acts (Myers, 2013, 293).

²³ See also Hall (1998) and Hickman (1999).

The #MeToo Movement and Consent

The #MeToo movement has brought up many controversies surrounding consent.²⁴ This movement is characterized by a considerable increase in allegations of sexual assault against powerful public figures, including comedian Bill Cosby, film producer Harvey Weinstein, and USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar. These allegations opened up conversations about what is considered acceptable in both working and romantic relationships. For example, freelance author and historian Laurie Collier Hillstrom marks the allegations against comedian Aziz Ansari, among others, as an “impetus for a public debate about coercion and consent in dating relationships” (2019, 101).

Dancers in Pittsburgh believe that the #MeToo movement created a social climate which enabled rapid action to address consent in the swing dance community. Dzikiy posits that, in regards to changes in consent, “The #MeToo movement contributed to it and it was spurred on by the #MeToo movement. We realized there was a problem, and now it’s kind of like we’re in the next part: “Alright, we have these problems, now what?” Pittsburgh dancer Vanessa Ceceil notes, “It was an influencing factor. People are encouraged to respect consent and because the Pittsburgh swing dance community has had issues, we had to kind of buckle down and respond to it.”²⁵

The grounding of this community’s changing consent policies in the #MeToo movement fits with the racial demographics described earlier. Regarding the specific context of ethnomusicology, Catherine Appert writes that these, “applications of #MeToo’s testimonial impetus center whiteness even as they invisibilize it through appeals to gender identity, thereby reproducing the ways in which white feminism has historically elided racial and class difference

²⁴ See Appert 2020 for a discussion of #MeToo in the field of ethnomusicology.

²⁵ Vanessa Ceceil, personal communication, June 14, 2020.

by foregrounding gender identity” (2020). Appert notes that this movement’s focus on personal testimony serves to further marginalize those for whom it is not yet safe to speak out, often people of color.

While the discussions around the #MeToo movement regarding consent typically focus with sexual consent, consent is an issue that affects many facets of our lives including medical, legal, and proprietary decisions. Ethics scholars Andreas Müller and Peter Schaber write that, “consent often makes acts morally permissible that would be impermissible without consent” (2018, 1). Medical procedures and clinical research, for instance, are permissible only with the consent of the patient or subject. Within political philosophy, many scholars trace the beginning of the modern liberal tradition back to Hobbes’ insistence on the “*individual* consent” of “naturally free and equal, rights-bearing men” as essential in creating a sovereign state (Müller et al. 2018, 16). Consent, however, was broadly construed as Hobbes wrote that consent could be given by "words spoken," "by inference," or as "the consequence of Silence"(ibid). The idea of consent is rooted in 17th century Western philosophy, colonization, and ideas of freedom and individuality accessible to a select few.

Legal theorists, philosophers, and ethics scholars have conflicting perspectives on what needs to be in place or order for consent to be “morally transformative” (Kleinig 2010, 4). Most scholars consider the core of consent to be either a mental construct, physical action, or a combination of the two (Müller et al., 2018). The mental conception of consent does not necessarily deny that consent is usually verbally or physically communicated in some way, but it does dictate that consent should be interpreted independently from its execution. Those arguing for a mental construct include legal theorist Peter Westen who writes that the “core conception” of consent is “a felt willingness to agree with—or to choose—what another person seeks or

proposes” (Westen 2003, 4). Philosophy professor John Kleinig contests this, stating that “there is always an expressive dimension to consent—that consent must be signified” in order for it to be morally transformative (2010, 10). Body language such as nodding or an act such as handing the keys to someone who asked to borrow your car are often considered expressions of consent. However, it is important to note that these physical actions are all based on a shared notion of meaning. Philosopher Hubert Schnüriger writes, “Crucially, both verbal as well as non-verbal forms of consent presuppose implicit or explicit rules that determine what public behavior counts as a token of consent. They presuppose conventions (Müller et al. 2018, 25).”

“[C]onsent is very much a contested and evolving concept” (Popova 2019, 15) and this not only applies to law and philosophy but also to human sexuality. The women’s movement that emerged in the 1960s was part of an important intervention in the practices of consent revealed in WWII era dancing in the first chapter. This radical tradition of feminism was interested in the way systems of oppression worked on women, and problematized consent as it took place in these same systems (Ibid). Multiple conceptions of appropriate consent practices often coexist, as exhibited by the so-called sex wars of 1980s which divided feminists into roughly two factions over a range of issues. One polarizing issue was pornography and one group of feminists, sometimes known as anti-pornography, was opposed pornography regardless of whether women consented to it. The opposing feminist group, which was described as pro-sex or anti-censorship, aimed to protect sex workers and criticize what they saw as a threat to free speech (Dicker 2008, 107).

Although swing dancing waned dramatically between the 1950s and the mid 1980s, when it reemerged it certainly was affected by and responded to evolving conceptions of consent in the United States. Interestingly, the “no means no” feminist campaign emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s (Popova 2019, 16), roughly contemporary to the reemergence of swing dancing. This

movement was characterized by the idea that men were responsible for listening to a woman's "no" and for not pressuring her or trying to convince her to consent (Ibid). This was reflected to an extent in pre-2015 swing dance revival practices in the way that, though a woman's "no" may have been respected, she was nevertheless beholden to sitting out the rest of the song after this utterance. Although sitting out was an option, women were generally encouraged to say "yes" to a dance, suggesting that swing dance events were a venue in which fragile men did not need to fear rejection. Rejection was not normalized in pre-2015 swing dance events. The "no means no" campaign was pushed aside by "yes means yes" which has its origins in the affirmative consent policy passed at Antioch College in 1991 (Nash 2019, 197). Later written into California state law in 2014, affirmative sexual consent refers to an enthusiastic, continuously given "yes" by all parties involved (Mettler 2018).

Some scholars are less interested in who said "yes" or "no" and more interested in power as a shaping force in sexuality, asking "what the conditions are that we need to create for consent to be truly free, and truly meaningful" (Popova 2019, 12). Black feminist scholar Jennifer Nash notes the imbrications of sex and eroticism with "inequality, violence, and hierarchy" (2019, 211) and the way that racialized longings often become a means of racial domination, drawing on scholars who suggest that in these instances "sex does its work not because it is excised from violence, but because hierarchy is put to work for fleshy electricity, for sensual pleasures" (2019, 212). Sexual justice theorist Joseph Fischel advocates for shifting the focus from consent to the way that men, particularly celebrity men, "leverage their superordination to exploit women's subordination: men barricading against the risk of live women's judgment and rejection in order to unduly limit women's sexual choices and to diminish access to the sex they want (Fischel 2019, 174).

If sex is inherently a terrain of hierarchy and inequality, how does this affect our ability to give consent in a free and meaningful way? Sex critical feminists note the way that sexual scripts²⁶ shape notions of linear and contractual consent, along with “the way we think about what sex is (penile-vaginal intercourse), who has sex (exactly one non-disabled cisgender man and one non-disabled cisgender woman)” (Popova 2019, 21-22). Sexual scripts shape hierarchies of sexual power, what “counts” as rape, and what narratives are found to be acceptable and believable in a court of law. Yet many scholars find law to be a blunt and ineffective tool for dealing with human sexuality. Fischel writes that sexual inequality is better addressed through political debate, public health initiatives, and creative collaboration than through law (Fischel 2019, 16).

Chapter 2 will explore the way consent is requested and received in the Pittsburgh swing dance community. If power imbalances make free and meaningful consent difficult to give, are codes of conduct and etiquette able to mitigate this issue? Later sections will also examine the way that the Pittsburgh swing dance community enacts Fischel’s proposal to address sexual inequality in creative collaboration, instead of necessarily turning to litigation.

²⁶ See Gagnon, John H. and William Simon. *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co, 1973.

2.0 Practices of Consent and Safer Spaces in the Pittsburgh Swing Community: On the Dance Floor

This chapter will address several codes of conduct that are used at Pittsburgh swing dance events including those for Tartan Swing, Pittsburgh Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace, and the ways they provide both internal and external value for the community. Each section will examine the formation of an event and the respective practices of consent and safer spaces. There is a considerable amount of overlap at these events both in terms of the individuals involved (instructors, dancers, organizers, musicians) as well as the language in their codes of conduct. I analyze them here as individual case studies in order to compare the way subtle differences in codes of conduct manifest at each respective event. After addressing the codes of conduct, practices of consent and safer spaces at Tartan Swing, Pittsburgh Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace, this chapter will close by examining Swing City and the weekly dances at the Allegheny Elks Lodge.

2.1 Tartan Swing

January 30, 2020 Tartan Swing Tonight a Lindy Hop 1 series, Lindy Hop 2 series, and a drop-in lesson were offered in three different rooms on the Carnegie Mellon University campus. I attended Lindy Hop 2 with Arielle and Doug who taught eight count and promenades to roughly nine couples, although the leads outnumbered the follows. Several follows were male and one of the leads was female, depicting the fluid gender norms around leading and following typical in the

Pittsburgh swing community. I rotated in several times to be led by Rosa, wearing a plaid dress and sneakers. Rosa is a strong lead and uses a clarity in her cues that put me at ease and allowed me to operate on a level of physical reaction instead of mental guesswork.

The couples stood in a circle around the two instructors who would model each step several times and then invite everyone to try it while they counted aloud. After each couple tried the step a few times, Arielle and Doug would invite everyone to high-five their partner and rotate to the next dancer, leaving two leads to dance with imaginary follows each time. My practice is usually to introduce myself to each new lead as I rotate, but some dancers waited quietly for instructions. Pittsburgh instructors generally do not urge dancers to ask for verbal consent each time they change partners during lessons although this is typical of practices taught on the West Coast.²⁷ The instruction regarding consent usually takes place at the very end of lessons, right before social dancing, an unstructured portion of the evening where dancers can try out the moves they just learned and experienced dancers from the community can show off their prowess. Tonight at Tartan Swing, the instructors from each lesson brought everyone into the main space for social dancing. Once everyone had gathered, Arielle explained a few basic points of etiquette, emphasized the importance of “using your words” to ask for a dance, invited dancers to say “no” for any reason, and ended by saying, “If anything feels weird or uncomfortable talk to one of us!” and gestured towards the instructors who raised their hands to indicate themselves.

²⁷ Claire Chu, personal communication, April 15, 2019.



Figure 1: Lisa Tamres requesting a dance. Photo by author.



Figure 2: Tamres's partner consents and they move towards the dance floor. Photo by author.

Tartan Swing: Background

Tartan Swing traces its history at Carnegie Mellon University, despite some breaks in continuity and many changes in management, back to 1998. Swing dancers Lisa Tamres and Lynn Baumeister were graduate students there at that time and started a weekly swing dance night, arguably the earliest iteration of Tartan Swing.²⁸ The swing event they founded went on hiatus several times and changed names but has become fixed and regular over the past several years. The events are free, drawing people ranging from around 20 to 60 years of age and organizers use prerecorded music except for special occasions where they might hire a live band. Carnegie Mellon University is in an area called Oakland, where the University of Pittsburgh is also located, and Tartan Swing draws mostly students or alumni from these colleges. Many of these dancers work in technology, are white, and middle class.

Organizers at Tartan Swing offer weekly lessons for an hour before social dancing begins. Every instructor teaches differently, but there is a basic format consisting of demonstrating movement, allowing time for couples to try the movement themselves, and then rotating to repeat this with other dancers in the lesson. Consent and etiquette policies are stated at the end or occasionally mentioned throughout the lesson. Typically there are several lesson options for dancers to choose from and there is always a “drop-in” lesson for beginner dancers. The drop-in lesson is the same every week, focusing on the basic east coast swing step and usually one or two turns. Tartan Swing also offers lesson series that build over the course of several weeks, usually in Lindy hop, Charleston, or Balboa. This demonstrates an expansive use of the word “swing dance” at Tartan Swing which is also reflected in other events in Pittsburgh. Daniel Johnson, an organizer at Tartan Swing, considers Balboa a swing dance because it is often danced to swing

²⁸ Lisa Tamres, personal communication, April 10, 2019

music and that it, “has a similar social/community-focused/relaxed atmosphere which allows it to fit in with other swing dances effortlessly.”²⁹

Tartan Swing was one of the first dance events in Pittsburgh to create a code of conduct. Before 2015, none of the swing dance events held at Carnegie Mellon University had a code of conduct and consent was not addressed during lessons. The Tartan Swing Code of Conduct (see Appendix) was written in 2015 by two organizers, one male and one female, who prefer to remain anonymous. In an interview they stated that the creation of this code of conduct was largely in response to the allegations against Steven Mitchell and that they had both been reading online discussions while drafting their Code of Conduct.

The Tartan Swing Code of Conduct is broken into three subsections: Safety, Etiquette, and Code of Conduct (see Appendix). The “Safety” section deals mainly with physical well-being, “Etiquette” with “social dance cultural norms,”³⁰ and “Code of Conduct” with protecting against sexual harassment and violence. The organizers took playful style cues from the code of conduct for Mobtown Ballroom, the aforementioned swing dance space in Baltimore:

I liked their code of conduct for making safety funny and light – it’s a serious subject that many people don’t want to think about (it’s either boring/routine or disconcerting/serious, but never pleasant). By making it funny, I thought it was a little bit easier to discuss, and to get newbies to pay attention.³¹

²⁹ Daniel Johnson, personal communication, April 13, 2020.

³⁰ Anonymous Author of Tartan Swing Code of Conduct, personal communication, April 9, 2019.

³¹ Ibid.

For example, #4 in the Etiquette section demonstrates this lightness: “Sweat happens. If it happens a lot, bring a sweat towel and/or a change of clothes.” Tartan Swing’s Code of Conduct is designed to make dancers feel more comfortable, using playful language to create a safer space.

Tartan Swing: Unsolicited Advice

In order to gain another perspective on the code of conduct for Tartan Swing, I talked to local swing dancer, Micah Parker.³² Parker learned how to dance at Swing City but has come to prefer the social atmosphere of Tartan Swing and the way the leadership facilitates community among the dancers. We discussed the Safety section, dealing mainly with physical safety, and we started with point #3 in this section: “Avoid leading aerials/air steps on the social dance floor.” Parker explained that this was referring to the leaps and flips that professional dancers perform. I asked why these movements were discouraged and Parker replied that they are not considered safe or courteous on a crowded dance floor.

We also discussed point #3 in the Etiquette section, dealing with consent and polite protocol: “Don’t offer unsolicited criticism/advice on someone else’s dancing.”³³ Parker expressed that he has offered unsolicited advice once or twice, and after someone explained the rule him he realized that “... it’s really rude because it will make [the other dancer] feel like they suck”³⁴ and does not take into account that everyone has different dancing styles. Johnson notes an exception to this point, wherein dancers are encouraged to offer feedback during some lessons, but never during social dancing. He explains:

³² Micah Parker, personal communication, April 18, 2019.

³³ As a novice swing dancer, I have personally had issues with this. I am always happy for tips and pointers, but I greatly appreciate it if someone asks if I would like advice before just giving it freely.

³⁴ Micah Parker, personal communication, April 18, 2019.

In a social dance the purpose is not to improve as a dancer but to enjoy the dance and music. Some people might think “My advice will make them dance better and enjoy the dance better,” but that is an uncertain opinion. Unsolicited advice can also have negative aspects that might ruin a dance: making a dancer less certain about their dance capabilities, disagreement on the advice, changing the focus from enjoyment to improvement, etc. To avoid the negative possibilities, there is a time and place for getting better (lessons), and you can always ask to give advice before or after a dance.³⁵

This brings up a distinction between the implied consent towards aims of enjoyment for social dancing and improvement for lessons respectively. In a lesson, dancers imply consent to feedback and comments just by showing up to the lesson in the same way that someone implies consent to a haircut by sitting down in the hairstylist’s chair. It is assumed that dancers are attending the lesson to improve their skills and are therefore open to advice. This does not extend to social dancing where, as Johnson noted, the focus is on enjoyment. The Tartan Swing Code of Conduct underscores this distinction by discouraging dancers from offering unsolicited criticism as it is believed that attending a social dance does not imply consent to feedback.

Each point in this code of conduct builds toward a physically, emotionally, and sexually safer space at Tartan Swing. Point #3 in the Safety section directly addresses physical safety, protecting both dancers who may execute unskillful aerials themselves as well as other dancers

³⁵ Daniel Johnson, personal communication, April 13, 2020.

who may be injured as innocent bystanders. The point about unsolicited criticism addresses the creation of an emotionally safer space. The last section, in addressing sexual safety, includes points like, “Don’t be a creep.” Dancers at Tartan Swing can expect to enter an environment where, regardless of their dance experience, they can practice and experiment without feeling criticized or sexually threatened. This atmosphere is part of what was appealing Parker and the dozens of other dancers who come to Tartan Swing on a weekly basis.

Tartan Swing: Refusal

The opening tableau above offers a glimpse into a typical swing dance lesson at Tartan Swing. Etiquette for consent is usually addressed verbally once all of the lesson groups have convened in the main space for social dancing. During these announcements, instructors will demonstrate and embody consent, asking their partner instructor for a dance and physically illustrating a reaction of acceptance or refusal. When the partner instructor accepts the dance, the couple will usually grab hands and dance a few bars. When the partner instructor refuses, the other instructor will say “okay” and walk away, usually explaining that this is normal, encouraging dancers to simply ask another person. The instructor thereby creates an expectation for refusal, and offers another option namely, to request a dance from someone else. The way the instructors model refusal simultaneously normalizes this reaction for both parties. Someone requesting a dance can anticipate rejection as a conventional response and someone who has been asked knows they are invited to refuse and can anticipate a simple “okay” in response to their refusal.

The Tartan Swing Code of Conduct underscores this concept in writing, “Embrace the fact that you are neither entitled nor obligated to dance with anyone in particular.” This serves toward breaking a normative “script” in swing dancing, in breaking a notion that a (man) lead will ask and

always be met with a (woman) follow's "yes." In addition to interrupting a sense of obligation to dances, instructors at Tartan Swing encourage follows to request dances. This breaks the swing dancing script again by empowering follows to choose dance partners and sometimes putting leads in a position to consent or refuse. The embodiment of consent etiquette by instructors, supported by this code of conduct, interrupts a linear and contractual model of consent and therefore offers more options for dancers. Dancers are not obligated to accept dance requests and are not obligated to occupy their normative role in either requesting or receiving solicitations for dances.

2.2 Pittsburgh Shakedown

January 25, 2020 Pittsburgh Shakedown I am standing by the edge of the "jam circle" at Shakedown as couples take turns entering the circle to show off their moves. The Hot Metal Swing Band is playing and for a few minutes I feel the connection between the musicians and the dancers become more palpable, the musicians drawing from the sudden, intense focus of energy on a single couple.

For the past several years, the Pittsburgh Shakedown has taken place at the Ace Hotel, a charming space in what was once a YMCA building. Everyone is dressed to the nines tonight because, I'm told, "this is the expensive dance." Admission for the social dance on Friday night is usually only \$15 but tonight is \$25, mostly to subsidize the sixteen-piece big band, and lots of people are wearing suits and sparkly dresses.

Couples continue to pulse in and out of the jam circle, spinning with a range and torque that wouldn't otherwise be safe on the dance floor. This is the one instance when aerials are permitted at social dances since the crowd has allowed for ample space around the couple in the

center of the circle. Sure enough, a couple enters and attempts an aerial. The crowd winces as the follow hits the floor, first on the lower part of her back with her head following. The couple got up laughing and shook it off as I realized I had been holding my breath.



Figure 3: Social dance floor at Shakedown, photo by Ralf Brown, used with permission.

Pittsburgh Shakedown: Background

Five years ago Paul Cosentino, a jazz big band leader, started an event called Pittsburgh Shakedown which had its most recent meeting in January of 2020 at the Ace Hotel. Pittsburgh Shakedown (hereafter Shakedown) is weekend-long event which consists of lessons throughout the day, culminating in social dances and competitions every night. Lessons focus specifically on Lindy hop and Balboa and are taught by professional instructors from throughout the United States. Dancers can buy a full weekend pass for \$150 or purchase tickets for specific lessons and dances for as low as \$15. Most of the dancers appeared to be between 20 and 60 years old, but there were

several tables in the back with adults in their 70s and 80s listening to the music and watching the dancers. As this is a larger, regional event, some dancers drive for several hours or even fly in to attend.

In addition to running the event itself, Cosentino puts together big bands and smaller ensembles every year for Shakedown and plays a lead role both on stage and in selecting the repertoire. He notes that the other musicians are not particularly aware of the interpersonal dynamics on the dance floor. Certainly there is an exchange between the musicians and the dancers, but Cosentino feels that most musicians usually do not notice whether appropriate or inappropriate things are happening on the dance floor. However, as an organizer, Cosentino submits that he needs to be especially aware of etiquette and consent in order to create a safe and welcoming environment for dancers.

Cosentino cited the accusations against Steven Mitchell and his subsequent ostracization as a catalyst for writing a code of conduct for his event (see Appendix).³⁶ He posited that swing communities began creating codes of conduct after these incidents, mostly following in the footsteps of the Mobtown Ballroom. Like Tartan Swing, Shakedown is one of many events that models its code of conduct after that of the Baltimore event.

Pittsburgh Shakedown 2018 marked the first edition of the event with a code of conduct. Cosentino stated that, “These sort of things didn't become ubiquitous for a while after Sarah [Sullivan]'s initial accusations came to light.”³⁷ As with Tartan Swing, this code of conduct is available online and instructors highlight certain points both during and after dance lessons. Revisions continue to be made and after a conversation with several other swing dance and blues

³⁶ Paul Cosentino, personal communication, February 21, 2020.

³⁷ Paul Cosentino, personal communication, April 13, 2020.

dance organizers in Pittsburgh in September 2019, the Code of Conduct for Shakedown 2020 was written, reflecting ongoing negotiations over consent.



Figure 4: Dance partners on social dance floor at Shakedown, photo by Ralf Brown, used with permission.

Pittsburgh Shakedown: Physical Safety

Generally aerials are not allowed during swing dancing events in Pittsburgh. Shakedown is something of an exception, stating in the Code of Conduct: “Aerials are not permitted on the social dance floor. Please refrain unless you are in a jam circle.” At Shakedown, jam circles are more common as it is an annual event and more of an occasion in that sense. If dancers have aerial moves in their repertoire, this is a rare opportunity to show them off as most other spaces do not permit them. Aerial moves still involve some risk, both for the dancers executing them and those watching on the edge of the jam circle.

Allowing aerials does not indicate a lack of concern for physical safety. Cosentino considers the cultivation of a physically safer space to be essential to his events. One of the points in the Shakedown Code of Conduct reads, “Aggressive Moves: Please be aware that aggressive moves on the dance floor can cause pain or injury. Yanking of limbs, wild gesturing, weight bearing moves such as deep dips, are discouraged. If your partner says you are hurting them, stop immediately.” Cosentino described the origins and rationale for this section, and its importance:

[T]he reason it is important is that I have heard from people—mostly women—who have been injured—by mostly men—who are too aggressive and/or don't respect or understand that they can injure someone if they force a person to move a certain way, or are too aggressive in leading a certain move. I wanted to make sure that was in the Code so that it is understood that even if a person doesn't realize that their style of dancing is hurting someone, if it is then they can be asked to stop that behavior or be asked to leave. And so that people will learn what type of moves and

behaviors can lead to injuries so that we can prevent that from happening in the first place.³⁸

By including this point in the Code of Conduct, Cosentino aims to create an expectation that aggressive movements will not be tolerated and that physical consent is not a one-time transaction. A dancer may initially consent to a dance but is invited to refuse during the song as needed. This point in the Code of Conduct encourages dancers, particularly follows, to revoke their physical consent to being led in a dance at any time that they feel they are being injured.

Dancer Crystal Daughtry feels comfortable giving verbal feedback if a dance is too rough or aggressive: “I am very vocal dancer and I’ll usually just say verbally, ‘Ow, that hurt!’”³⁹ A follow’s consent to a dance does not indicate that they will mutely accept any and all cues from the lead for the duration of the dance. Consent is continuously negotiated within each dance. Yet other follows protect themselves not by giving verbal feedback but by breaking physical contact with rough leads. Swing dancer and instructor Claire Chu says she lets go of the lead’s hand if they are causing her discomfort and then typically refuses any future dances with them.

I had this image of the "perfect follow" that meant I'd do whatever was led. The only times I'd really break things off were if my arms were getting twisted uncomfortably. So there were several incidences of things I didn't like happening. I'd usually just refuse dances with that person afterwards. Even though my ideas about

³⁸ Paul Cosentino, personal communication, March 24, 2020.

³⁹ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

following have now changed, I don't actively ignore cues for my comfort.⁴⁰

If the lead is cuing a turn, Chu will complete the turn but will release the lead to protect her arm from being twisted uncomfortably. Although Chu still completes the movement, she negotiates her own physical safety by refusing to maintain contact with a rough lead or later refusing to dance with them. The Shakedown Code of Conduct creates alternatives for dancers like Chu and Daughtry, challenging the notion of the “perfect follow” who will dutifully execute any cue that they are given. Dancers are given more options and are invited to express discomfort or physically remove themselves from potential injury.

Pittsburgh Shakedown: A Physical Gesture to Request Consent

As a larger, regional event, Shakedown draws dancers from a wider radius than weekly swing dance events. This may account for a more frequent use of an interesting loophole in the general practice of audibly requesting consent. At Shakedown I was approached several times by dancers using a gesture from American Sign Language, sweeping two fingers back and forth over the open palm of the opposing hand, to request a dance. The asker will use the gesture, accompanied by raised eyebrows and a questioning expression, and in these instances the askee will often consent with a nod and by taking the arm or the hand of the person who requested the dance. Some instructors teach this gesture as an alternative to requesting consent audibly if the dance floor is loud or if there is some distance between the dancers and the asker would like to avoid yelling.⁴¹ The majority of dancers choose to request dances verbally, but using this sign

⁴⁰ Claire Chu, personal communication, June 25, 2020.

⁴¹ I have also experienced being asked to dance with this gesture in close and quiet proximity, which makes me wonder if this option is simply more comfortable for some people.

language is considered a viable option and is more common at regional events. Daughtry notes that dancers who travel frequently to swing events throughout the country are more likely to use this gesture.⁴²

This gesture is a “presupposed convention” of the social swing dance community in Pittsburgh and nationally, based on a shared notion of meaning that may not translate to other kinds of dance events. This falls under what Schnüriger describes in *The Routledge Handbook of the Ethics of Consent* as a non-verbal token of consent (2018). In practice, this physical action is considered an acceptable behavior to solicit consent, but it does not appear formally in the code of conduct for Shakedown. Dancer Nathan Phillips said he rarely uses this gesture: “I feel somewhat silly doing it. And if there’s some distance between you and the person, there’s a risk of someone nearby mistakenly thinking you’re asking *them*.”⁴³ Phillips understands and accepts the gesture when it is extended towards him, but it has not been formalized or even extensively used in weekly events in the Pittsburgh swing community. In the greater regional swing dance community surrounding Pittsburgh and perhaps more widely, there is an implicitly shared notion of meaning surrounding this gesture.

The use of this gesture from American Sign Language is significant because it illustrates the way that communities negotiate their own context-specific conventions and suggests the way these conventions may be shared through travel and exchange. This hand signal may be unintelligible to those who are not fluent in ASL, but within this regional swing dance community it is an accepted token of consent. As Daughtry mentioned, dancers who travel are more likely to use this gesture, suggesting that these shared meanings continued to be negotiated as dancers travel

⁴² Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

⁴³ Nathan Phillips, personal communication, February 19, 2020.

to conferences and larger, regional dance events. Although conventionally dancers make requests audibly, this gesture has developed a legible, shared notion of context within this community.

2.3 Swingin' at the Ace

November 13, 2019 PITTSBURGH Swingin' at the Ace Typically this event is held in a space on the second floor of the beautifully renovated Ace Hotel with a stage and floor to ceiling windows. Tonight we're in a simpler space: a gym with peeling paint and 'YMCA 1971' emblazoned across the floor. The effect is charming and I appreciate that some spaces in the hotel let its history as a century-old YMCA building show through.

Adam Lee runs a small jazz ensemble for these events usually consisting of baritone saxophone, clarinet, bass, drums, and guitar. In the second set he usually invites any willing dancers up for a guest appearance and I volunteer. I join the group to sing "Sunny Side of the Street" and "All of Me" and the dancers respond warmly at the end of each tune.

The longer I'm here the more I realize how much people know each other already and how that informs who they ask. There are a few dancers who I see every week but have yet to dance with. But if there are dancers present whom I've already danced with, I've noticed that I end up dancing with them every time I see them.

I feel guilty. Earlier a friend asked me to dance and I said "In a minute" because I was tired and genuinely wanted to rest! But then another friend, Rudy, asked me a few moments later and my "no" muscle was worn out. I didn't notice if the first friend saw me dancing with Rudy, but if he did I can only hope he didn't take it personally.

Swingin' at the Ace: Background

Swingin' at the Ace was first held in October of 2019 and as of April 2020 is the most newly formed event in the Pittsburgh swing dance community. Swingin' at the Ace hosts a live, five-piece swing ensemble, Adam's Aces, led by Adam Lee. This event is held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of every month at the Ace Hotel with an entrance fee of \$5. During the 1940s and



Figure 5: Adam's Aces, the resident band of Swingin' at the Ace, every other Wednesday at Ace Hotel.

50s when the Ace Hotel in East Liberty was still operating as a YMCA, it offered one of the few integrated pools in Pittsburgh (Harrell 2016). At that time, East Liberty was predominantly Black but there were also large Polish, Irish, and Italian populations, and even a range of classes, who came together at the YMCA (Ibid.). The 1960s marked the “white flight” from surrounding areas

to the suburbs. Areas like East Liberty declined with businesses and housing demolished and then a process of gentrification began in the following decades, with more affluent, educated, and white populations moving into the area. The narrative of this area and this particular building trace a similar trajectory to that of swing dance, beginning as a Black working class dance form that was later appropriated by white dancers during the swing revival.

Swingin' at the Ace draws a similar crowd to the other aforementioned events, usually consisting of dancers between 20 and 60 years old, with most dancers being white and in their 20s and 30s and a small representation of Asian and Black dancers. This event is organized by the Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community (PSDC) and the Safer Spaces Committee, a working body which focuses on sexual and emotional safety at Swingin' at the Ace events.⁴⁴ Throughout the rest of this thesis I will use the acronym PSDC, as the group does, to indicate the organizers of Swingin' at the Ace, distinct from the Pittsburgh swing dance community more broadly.

The Safer Spaces Committee associated with Swingin' at the Ace formed slightly after the event began and this committee is distinct, yet overlapping, from PSDC which runs the event itself. PSDC and the Safer Spaces Committee collaborated on a code of conduct for Swingin' at the Ace which they refer to as the Safer Spaces Document (see Appendix). One of the members of the PSDC, John Dzikiy, was initially assigned the role of handling safer space issues for the event. This group made an announcement that they wanted to form an anonymous committee to handle safer spaces. Dzikiy noted, "We had some issues come up and I didn't want to handle them by

⁴⁴ The term "safe spaces" emerged in the 1960s and was used by a number of LGBT organizations (Hanhardt 2013). Some groups have exchanged "safer" for "safe" in acknowledgement that, despite best efforts and intentions, no space can be made entirely safe for everyone (Adkins 2013). We Have Voice notes that the term "safe(r)" espouses an intersectional approach to the term "safe," acknowledging that what is "safe" shifts depending on one's various identities and positionalities (<https://too-many.org/code-of-conduct/>).

myself.”⁴⁵ Dzikiy called on some of the members from the PSDC to serve as a temporary committee while they looked for other personnel.

Dzikiy shared that other local dance events, such as Hot Metal Blues, make the identity of the members of their safer spaces committee public. Dzikiy finds that this is positive in the sense that people know who they are talking to when they file a complaint which may make people feel more comfortable. However, this may involve risk for the members of the respective safer spaces committee. The concern is that members of the community who do not agree with a decision made by the committee may retaliate. At present, the Safer Spaces Committee for Swingin’ at the Ace operates with Dzikiy as the point of contact.

Swingin’ at the Ace: “Right to Refusal”

Despite the encouragements from instructors and points in codes of conducts, saying “no” can still be difficult in the moment. The code of conduct for Swingin’ at the Ace begins with this point:

Right to Refusal - Everyone has the right to decline or leave a dance, with or without explanation. Please do not take it personally if someone says no to a dance with you, if they dance with someone else during that song, or if they leave a dance mid-song. Keep in mind that there are many possible reasons for someone not dancing with you, and respect that nobody owes anybody else a dance.

⁴⁵ John Dzikiy, personal communication, February 21, 2020.

Daughtry confesses that there have been many instances where she said “yes” to a dance and meant “no.” Here she exhibits outward consent without an accompanying mental state of consent as described by Westen. Daughtry verbally responded “yes” even though she did not want to dance with that particular person at that particular moment. She notes that there is a difference in the way she participates in these dances, saying, “I think definitely there’s a change in my connection. I think usually when I don’t want to [dance] I’m not as engaged.”⁴⁶ However, she also claimed there are far more instances where she says “yes” to a dance and means “yes,” exhibiting a combination of a consenting mental state and the execution of a public action. Daughtry notes that for many of these dances it feels as though, “We just clicked. We were in sync with each other.”⁴⁷ The “click” happens most often in hybrid instances of consent, often instances of enthusiastically and continuously given “yes.”

Chu notes that when she says “no” she typically adds “I’m sitting this one out” or “I’m tired.”⁴⁸ Chu is aware of her “right to refusal” but feels compelled to soften her response, noting that a flat “no” feels too harsh in practice. Daughtry also tempers her refusals with a reason, and both dancers usually sit out the whole song if they have declined a dance (conforming to earlier forms of etiquette as described earlier by Wells).⁴⁹ Both dancers claimed that they rarely use a flat “no.” While their intention might be to soften their decline, does communicating in this way actually enhance their gendered subjectivity? Does “no” become twisted into “maybe” or “try again?”

⁴⁶ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Claire Chu, personal communication, April 15, 2019.

⁴⁹ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

Chu expressed that no one had ever questioned her “no” or tried to pressure her into saying “yes” within the Pittsburgh dance community and Daughtry has only had this experience a few times. However, Daughtry is also an avid salsa dancer in Pittsburgh and has had markedly more issues at salsa events with dancers not hearing her “no” and continuing to try to persuade her to dance.⁵⁰ In these instances, “no” may increase Daughtry’s normative subject position as the “pursued,” inviting a normatively male lead dancer to continue to “pursue” her and persuade her to dance. There might be several reasons for this distinction between the Pittsburgh swing and salsa communities, but what is apparent is that “no” is audible and respected within the context of the Pittsburgh swing dance community. Even a “no” softened with an excuse is rarely misconstrued as “maybe.”

As described earlier, Tartan Swing promotes a similar principle, also inviting dancers to decline for any reason. The Right to Refusal in the code of conduct at Swingin’ at the Ace is conveyed to dancers in the same way: verbally during lessons and in writing, both in hard copy and electronically. Ceceil finds that the Right to Refusal offers a number of protections for dancers, positing that,

It protects individuals that might feel obligated to comply if somebody asks them for a dance, they might feel obligated to say “yes.” So I think it’s really important to have it written and to state it at the beginning of dances, to reiterate that you don’t owe people a dance. But I also think it’s important to educate people asking for a dance that it’s probably nothing against you. I think that having an

⁵⁰ My experience has been similar in that no one in the Pittsburgh swing dance community has ever questioned my “no.” However, there have been several instances when, while salsa dancing in Pittsburgh, someone has tried to convince me to dance or tried to pull me onto the dance floor.

open policy stating that people are allowed to refuse dances kind of normalizes it and creates a healthy and safe kind of rejection, you know, even though rejection isn't fun.⁵¹

This normalization of rejection is a crucial point as it alters the terrain of socially viable options for dancers. Extending Kleinig's suggestion that consent needs to be outwardly expressed in order to be morally transformative, I posit that the imbrications of social structures and subtle operations of power need to be considered as well (Fischel 2019, Nash 2019, Popova 2019). Social structures shape the options we have. If I outwardly express consent to a dance but I do not truly have any other socially acceptable options, is that morally transformative? If my "yes" was not given freely and then is it meaningful?

Social swing dancing takes place in a context of patriarchy, social norms, and cultural formations which arguably preclude against freely given consent. These social norms have evolved over the many decades since the inception of swing dancing, and of course vary by geographic location and even within dance events. The modelling of refusal in swing dance lessons and inclusion of a "Right to Refusal" in codes of conduct, both in Pittsburgh and elsewhere, certainly cannot ensure positive results or guarantee unfettered consent. Yet it moves toward, however incrementally, conditions where "no" is a socially acceptable option, thereby rendering "yes" more meaningful.

⁵¹ Vanessa Ceceil, personal communication, June 15, 2020.

Swingin' at the Ace: Safer Spaces

The Safer Spaces Document builds toward the creation of a more comfortable, inclusive environment for dancers, often by encouraging better communication and practices of consent. The word “consent” is very much a part of the conversations which started in the swing dance community in 2015.⁵² “Consent” is an aspect of what local organizations and instructors are using to make the swing community a safer space. Etiquette insists that dancers “use their words” to request a dance and, because groups like the Safer Spaces Committee will ban individuals in instances of sexual misconduct outside of dance events, clear consent is also necessary off the dance floor.

The Safer Spaces Document makes the process for filing a complaint clear and available online to the public. When a complaint is filed, Dzikiy then redacts names of both the accuser and the accused in an email to the rest of the committee. This way, the identities of both the committee and the parties involved are kept anonymous. Once a decision is made, it is often the case that the Safer Spaces Committee must know the names of the accuser and the accused in order to carry out an appropriate action or response. Depending on the severity of the case, the accused may be monitored, spoken to directly, removed from the event, banned from future events, or reported to venue security.

Daughtry comments that the Safer Spaces Document for Swingin’ at the Ace makes her feel more comfortable, particularly in that it is clear that organizers are available for dancers should any problems arise during a social dance. Daughtry notes, “I think that it’s important for anyone to know that if [they] feel uncomfortable to just let someone know.”⁵³

⁵² I occasionally hear the word “consent” as part of a dance lesson, but more often it is used during conversations around issues on and off the dance floor surrounding the swing community.

⁵³ Ibid.

The Safer Spaces Document addresses issues of basic etiquette and physical safety. However, the influence of the Safer Spaces Committee has shaped it towards a heavier focus on issues of consent and sexual harassment. These policies regarding consent and sexual harassment serve to create safer spaces on and off the dance floor which will be explored further in the following chapter.

2.4 Swing City and Allegheny Elks Lodge

Swing City

Not every swing dance event in Pittsburgh uses codes of conduct to set expectations around consent and other aspects of etiquette. Swing City, held weekly at the Wightman Center, is an example of this. The Wightman Center is a community center which hosts dance events in the gym on the upper floor of the building, complete with a beautiful stage and rounded ceilings. This event draws dancers between 20 and 60 years of age and people occasionally bring their children with them to participate. Swing City may be the most costly weekly event with a \$15 adult entrance fee, some of which goes to a rotating cast of live swing bands. Cost was a discouraging factor for Ceceil, particularly between 2017 and 2018 when she was working for AmeriCorps: “I wasn’t going as often because it wasn’t feasible for my budget at the time.”⁵⁴

Ceceil also wanted to start focusing on Lindy hop which is not available at Swing City. Whereas Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin’ at the Ace offer a variety of dances during their lessons, Swing City consistently only offers drop-in lessons teaching the basic east coast swing

⁵⁴ Vanessa Ceceil, personal communication, June 14, 2020.

step. There is no discussion during lessons about ways to cultivate safer spaces. Addressing consent does still occasionally happen, but this is contingent on the individual instructor.

Jared Clemens, an instructor at Swing City, has a unique way of addressing etiquette as he offers advice for what *not* to do during a social dance, illustrating an inappropriate way to request consent for a dance. He will often ask two dancers to perform an impromptu skit during lessons. He asks for two volunteers and invites them to have a quiet conversation together. Meanwhile, he circles both of the dancers, staring at them intensely until they become uncomfortable and start giggling. Clemens says, “Creepy right?” and then urges dancers not to linger around someone they would like to dance with, instead simply asking them right away or waiting to come back to them when they are no longer in a conversation.

However, not every instructor at Swing City offers advice regarding consent. Bobby D, an instructor and founder of Swing City, chooses not to address consent, ways to ask for a dance, or etiquette for refusal during lessons. As Clemens does choose to discuss etiquette surrounding consent during lessons, this demonstrates that practices of addressing consent and refusal are particular to the instructor and not the event.

Allegheny Elks Lodge

The Allegheny Elks Lodge is another Pittsburgh swing dance event that does not use a code of conduct. The Allegheny Elks Lodge is north of Downtown Pittsburgh and of the Allegheny River and operates as a community space for a fraternal order called the Elks which was founded in 1868.⁵⁵ For swing dance events at the Allegheny Elks Lodge, a live big band called the Jazz

⁵⁵ <https://www.elks.org/who/ourHistory.cfm>.

Conspiracy plays and the area in front of the stage is cleared for dancers. This event only hosts one instructor, Mark Peters, for weekly lessons and social swing dancing, typically drawing people who are above 50 years of age. Racial demographics at the Allegheny Elks Lodge are even less varied than those of the other dance events described, with almost all of the dancers presenting as white.

Lessons at the Allegheny Elks Lodge are always drop-in, focusing on the basics of east coast swing. Peters chooses not to address consent during lessons and this has become as the de facto practice for the event since he is the only instructor. He feels that addressing consent at the Allegheny Elks Lodge is not important because the dancers all know each other and participants are relatively the same people each time.⁵⁶ Peters said he generally focuses more on encouraging women to ask men to dance. The dancers at the Elks Lodge are usually retirement age, and he says that the women of this generation are hesitant to ask for dances even though it is considered normal and encouraged within the Pittsburgh swing dance community more broadly.

When I asked Mark Peters what he thinks of Tartan Swing's Code of Conduct he said, "It scares people away."⁵⁷ This leads me to wonder who is being scared away? Are they retirement-aged dancers? Are they sexual predators? In the case of retirement-aged dancers, some of whom may have been socialized in and through dance around the WWII era, adjusting to changing practices of consent could be a challenge. There also may be very little incentive since they have opportunities to socialize in a way that is already familiar and comfortable. From my observation, this event may have the least amount of overlap with other Pittsburgh events in terms of dancers. This may be in part because this event is the farthest away from the city center, but is likely related

⁵⁶ Mark Peters, personal communication, March 21, 2019.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

to a generational divide among these dancers and those who attend other Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace. If events with codes of conduct and progressive etiquette are alienating, dancers can simply continue to only attend events at the Allegheny Elks Lodge and Swing City.



Figure 6: Allegheny Elks Lodge decorated for a St. Patrick's Day social dance. Photo by author.

2.5 Summary

Issues with Codes of Conduct

Organizers who commit to creating safer spaces take on the possibility of discouraging certain dancers in making a more comfortable and inclusive space for the rest of their community. The codes of conducts for Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace represent a shift in

priorities, at times upsetting traditional swing dance etiquette in favor of cultivating an inviting space for people who may have otherwise felt marginalized or uncomfortable.

Inevitably problems arise and sometimes dancers need to be monitored, spoken to, or removed from the event. This expresses what Cosentino refers to as “remedial levels” wherein consequences are adjusted according the severity of the infraction.⁵⁸ For instance, a sexual predator will be permanently banned from events. Yet someone who is using too much pressure or being too rough in their movements will be spoken to by an organizer before any other actions are taken. This is important because it means that dancers who do not yet have experience with the changes in consent and safer spaces that have occurred since 2015 have an opportunity to make mistakes, learn, and try again if they would like to dance at events like Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin’ at the Ace. However, given how rarely organizers need to remove people from events, it may be true that codes of conduct truly “scare people away.”

For dancers like Parker, the *lack* of a code of conduct at events like Swing City are alienating and led him to seek out events that are actively cultivating a safer space. Some dancers have expressed concerns that if a beginner dancer has a bad experience at one event, they may not wish try dancing at another event. In other words, there are concerns that if all of the swing dance events in Pittsburgh are not addressing consent and safer spaces, it could negatively affect the overall health of the swing dance community. Despite this, none of the dancers I interviewed are making efforts to persuade organizers of events like Swing City and Allegheny Elks Lodge to create codes of conduct; they simply are not supporting or attending their events.

⁵⁸ Paul Cosentino, personal communication, March 24, 2020.

New Directions

The organizers of Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace have carefully constructed codes of conduct, detailing expectations for dancers to follow in order to maximize physical safety, create expectations around “social dance cultural norms,”⁵⁹ and protect dancers from sexual harassment and violence. At their individual discretion, instructors also express some of these points verbally during lessons and create expectations for respecting the bodily autonomy of other dancers. Clear expectations regarding practices of consent are created and as a result the utterance “no” is audible between dancers. This is particularly important for follows as they are generally women and in other contexts their “no” might go unheard. Interestingly, having “no” honored does not seem to have as much to do with how it is said as how it is heard and received. Several dancers expressed that whether they used a flat “no” or softened their refusal did not change the degree to which their “no” was respected.

Despite a certain level of cohesion and overlap between codes of conduct, each event has a few unique features. Pittsburgh Shakedown for instance, as it is a regional annual event, is distinct from the other events described in this thesis. The fact that this event draws dancers from a much wider radius than weekly events contributes to different accepted practices of consent and allowances on the dance floor. Permission for the use of aials in jam circles is unique in that the codes of conduct for Tartan Swing and Swingin' at the Ace disallow aerial dance moves outright. Also, as Daughtry noted, the generally accepted use of a gesture from American Sign Language is more common with dancers who travel to larger events like Shakedown.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Anonymous Author of Tartan Swing Code of Conduct, personal communication, April 9, 2019.

⁶⁰ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

This suggests that, even within the relatively small boundaries of the Pittsburgh swing dance community, accepted practices of consent vary according to time and place. An implicitly agreed upon gesture for soliciting consent in the context of Shakedown may not be effective or understood in other swing events in Pittsburgh where dancers do not travel as much. A dance move that is considered dangerous, too dangerous to even ask consent for in one time and space, is considered reasonably safe within a consensual interaction in another time and space. Consent is a continuous negotiation, changing reflexively according to each context.

Dzikiy cites three weekly or bi-weekly social dances and three annual events that are working together in Pittsburgh to create more cohesion and clarity in the community.⁶¹ The three social dances are Tartan Swing, Swingin' at the Ace, and Hot Metal Blues, and the three annual events are Steel City Blues, Shakedown, and PittStop Lindy Hop. Organizers from these events are communicating with each other online and meeting periodically to discuss new directions in creating safer spaces. Dzikiy mentioned that the inclusion of Tartan Swing as an ally was somewhat recent and is the result of forthcoming changes they will make in their code of conduct. The new code of conduct will be very similar to those of Shakedown and Swingin' at the Ace, taking a more direct aim at creating safer spaces. Even if events like Allegheny Elks Lodge and Swing City continue to choose not to change their standards of consent, having a group of events working together to create more cohesion could help build a more robust community by creating a standard of quality. Dzikiy anticipates a greater level of internal organization among different events in Pittsburgh, with codes of conduct playing a central role in communicating shared values.

⁶¹ John Dzikiy, personal communication, February 20, 2020.

3.0 Practices of Consent and Safer Spaces in the Pittsburgh Swing Community Off the Dance Floor

April 4, 2019 Tartan Swing Drew and Jeremy are teaching the Lindy hop class at Tartan Swing tonight. They alternate giving verbal instruction and Jeremy dances follow while Drew dances lead during the demonstrations. As I walk in, Drew is emphasizing the importance of leads using their wrist, not their hand, to cue a particular move so that they won't dig painfully into the follow's back.

I notice a blonde guy with glasses standing on the side and ask, "Hey, would you like to jump into the lesson with me or would you prefer to watch?" He answers, "Sure, I'll jump in if you want to." We join the other dancers as the instructors finish demonstrating a turn and give everyone a moment to try the move on their own. Jeremy circles the group, snapping his fingers to the music playing lightly from a pair of speakers and observing everyone as they dance. If a couple appears to be struggling, he jumps in to offer suggestions. The follow next to me is a girl with short blue hair, a polka dot skirt, heeled shoes with laces and thick glasses. She's dancing with a man in his 60s, a regular at many of the dances in the swing community, who is sporting his typical swing uniform: a purple shirt and suspenders hugging a round belly. They smile at one another and offer encouragement as they try out the turn. Most of the other dancers appear to be in their 30s with a few in their 40s or 50s. Just as I think I've got the hang of the move, the instructors call, "Okay, change partners!"

I high-five my partner, a typical gesture after dances in the context of Tartan Swing lessons, and move to the next lead. He's in his 20s, wearing a striped shirt and green pants with a high waist and high ankles to show off a pair of colorful socks. We introduce ourselves and shake hands.

Jeremy breaks in to say, “If your partner says ‘I need a break,’ respect that always. Whether it’s here on the dance floor or elsewhere.”

In this instruction, Jeremy gestures to a notion held by many members of the swing dance community: respecting another person’s limits on the dance floor translates off of the dance floor as well. Hearing and honoring someone’s boundaries during a dance is seen as something that can be learned, practiced, and broadly applied.

Not everyone in the Pittsburgh swing dance community shares these ideals. A middle-aged, male participant at a dance once commented to me, “I just don’t see the connection between what people do on the dance floor and what people do in the bedroom,” suggesting a desire to separate public and private spaces and take advantage of the silence often surrounding sexual encounters. Yet people bring their values and habits with them in both private and public spaces; there is a connection. In practice, many dancers meet dates, significant others, and spouses through social swing dancing. This chapter investigates the ways that the practice of safer spaces and consent in the Pittsburgh swing community translate, or not, off the dance floor.

3.1 Romantic Advances: Consent Off the Dance Floor

The organizers of Swingin’ at the Ace considered it important to emphasize that consent to a dance absolutely does not equate to romantic or sexual consent. Yet attraction and flirtation have long been a part of swing dancing, and many dancers find dates and long-term partners through their mutual interest.

The second point in the Safer Spaces Document for Swingin’ at the Ace reads: “Romantic Advances: Do not interpret dance connection as attraction. It is not appropriate to ask your partner

out while dancing.” Dzikiy submits that, “[W]e regard dancing as a social activity but many non-dancers think of dancing as a mostly romantic activity.”⁶² Including this point in the Safer Spaces Document helps make it clear that the aim of Swingin’ at the Ace events is not to facilitate dating. Many dancers agree with this point of conduct but feel that it is acceptable to ask someone on a date once they have returned to the edge of the dance floor or, better yet, have left the space altogether.

Daughtry mirrors this opinion, finding it more appropriate to wait until the end of the song until asking someone on a date. Daughtry notes, “I like to be able to go out and dance and have it be about dance.”⁶³ On the same subject, Lee says:

When you ask someone to dance, the contract that you’re negotiating with them is for the dance, not for more than the dance. They’re not agreeing to anything more than a dance at that point. If you want to renegotiate whatever the terms of your relationship are, that’s not the time to do it.⁶⁴

Once that “contract” is up and the couple has moved to the side of the dance floor, Lee feels that both partners are welcome to redefine their relationship. From there, Lee feels that it is easier for one person to say, “no thanks” or “yeah that sounds great!” without feeling cornered or coerced.

Daughtry finds that the setup of the space at the Ace Hotel is particularly conducive to this kind of off the dance floor flirtation. Swingin’ at the Ace is one of the few swing dance events in Pittsburgh that serves alcohol. Limited selections are available at a staffed mini-bar to the side of

⁶² John Dzikiy, personal communication, March 30, 2020.

⁶³ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

⁶⁴ Adam Lee, personal communication, December 2, 2019.

the dance floor while a full bar is located downstairs in the lobby of the hotel. Social dancing at 'Swingin' at the Ace runs from 8 to 10pm and afterwards many of the dancers go drink together. Daughtry considers this to be ideal in instances when a dancer might be interested in asking another out on a date. Once they have moved to the side of the dance floor, Daughtry finds it entirely appropriate for one dancer to ask another if they want to get a drink after the event, leaving the other person free to agree or say, "No, I'm going to go home!"⁶⁵ This setup at the Ace Hotel is particularly comfortable because it allows dancers to get to know each other better while there are likely still friends and even event organizers present at the bar.

Dzikiy notes that members of the PSDC consider swing dance to be "social activity" although he also acknowledges that many dancers find dates and long-term relationships at swing dance events. Social swing dancing does not equate to romance but it also does not operate independently from sex and love. The Safer Spaces Document creates an expectation that dancers can enjoy sociality through dancing without having to worry about sexual or romantic advances. A healthy boundary is created between general socializing and flirting or acting upon attractions.

The benefit of this practice with the social swing dance community is that, if we consider it to be part of a social process that shapes behaviors in sex and attraction, this practice can become a habit and be extended into other areas of public life. For instance, many of the women who spoke out in the #MeToo movement brought forward allegations of sexual harassment against their employers. This reflects a boundary issue regarding when and where sexual or romantic advances are considered appropriate. The way that the PSDC creates boundaries surrounding flirtation can serve as a model for other areas of social life. It shows that there are times and places for flirtation,

⁶⁵ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

but not *all* times and places are appropriate. Not every interaction is ripe for sexual and romantic advances.

As the Safer Spaces Document was created in 2019, I argue that it also reflects changing social processes regarding sex and attraction. The #MeToo movement created unparalleled pushback and consequences for sexual predators, creating stronger romantic and sexual boundaries in the workplace and other areas of public life. These boundaries are mirrored in the social expectations at Swingin' at the Ace and other events in Pittsburgh. In this way, the expectations set forth in the Safer Spaces Document both play a part in and mirror evolving practices of flirtation, romance, and sexuality.

The Safer Spaces Document does much to outline etiquette for consent between dancers, but it cannot guarantee as to whether it will be carried out. Unfortunately, this is particularly the case in instances of instructor and student dynamics, as so many instructors have misused their power. The next section details an instance of consent violation within the Pittsburgh swing dance community.

3.2 Digital Activism and #MeToo

In an article for *The New Yorker*, Jeannie Suk Gersen writes that one of the tenets of the #MeToo movement is “the power of numbers across time”(2018). One woman might not be believed, but several women with corroborating claims makes each woman’s account more believable. Gersen writes, “When it comes down to it, #MeToo itself constitutes an evidentiary claim of sorts: what you say happened to you happened to me, too, and so it is more likely that we are both telling the truth” (2018).

Freelance writer Laurie Collier Hillstrom also marks the use of social media as a key component of the #MeToo movement. Some activists use digital tools to plan protests, share political information, and debate feminist issues. Social media was the means that enabled over three million people spread across 400 locations in the United States to gather for the Women’s March after Trump’s inauguration (Hillstrom, 2018, 4). People often use social media in order to out a serial sexual abuser, in the same way that Sullivan, Corder, and Staffeld did.

These digital confessions are rarely the impetus to bring perpetrators to court, but they are part of a growing climate of intolerance towards sexual misconduct. Not only do the confessions of many increase the believability of one, but there is also a notion that, “if he did it to me, he’ll do it to her.”

Since their formation in October of 2019, the Pittsburgh Safer Spaces Committee has decided to ban three dancers based on reports of “inappropriate and/or criminal behavior.”⁶⁶ Kathryn Kessler, a dancer based in Youngstown, Ohio who now frequents the Pittsburgh community described her experience of reporting a sexual assailant to the Pittsburgh Safer Spaces Committee. Kessler started swing dancing in Youngstown five years ago and described the community as small but consistent. She noted that a number of dancers in the Youngstown community frequent both weekly and larger, more regional, swing dance events in Pittsburgh.

Over the summer of 2019, Kessler started dating an instructor in the Youngstown swing community. During an intimate moment this instructor “stealthed” (see Brodsky, 2017 and Fischel, 2018) her or removed a previously consented upon condom while she was not looking. Devastated by the disrespect, Kessler announced via social media that she was going to withdraw from the Youngstown swing community citing “personal reasons.” The organizers of the community

⁶⁶ John Dzikoy, personal communication, February 20, 2020.

reached out to her to check in and Kessler said, “There was a non-consensual situation. I don’t want to talk about it. I just want to step away.”⁶⁷

Friends came forward on Kessler’s behalf and requested that this instructor be banned from the Youngstown community, only to be met with resistance from the organizers who claimed that it was not their place to intervene as this happened outside of a swing dance event. The organizers asked Kessler not to say anything about the assault, fearing that it would hurt their relatively small dance community. Youngstown has a “Safe Space Policy,” which deals mainly with protections against hate speech, but offers nothing resembling protocol for situations like Kessler’s. The first lines read, “Please participate at your own risk! Y-town Swing and venues are NOT responsible for the risks assumed while participating in the physical activity of dancing,” suggesting that dancers are responsible for their own physical (and therefore sexual) safety.

This illuminates an important distinction between the Pittsburgh swing dance community and the Youngstown swing community. Groups like PSDC consider their community to extend beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of dance events while the Youngstown swing dance community does not. Certainly there is an amount of porousness in both communities in terms of social bonds, as dance “may give rise to real-time social relationships” (Shelemay 2011, 364), but in terms of responsibility to the bodily autonomy of dancers within its community, Youngstown draws lines around its dance events; if they are not responsible for the risks assumed during dance events then they certainly are not responsible for risks assumed outside of dance events. The Pittsburgh swing dance community exhibits a more expansive notion of musical community, one that continues and extends off the dance floor.

⁶⁷ Kathryn Kessler, personal communication, February 1, 2020.

Kessler did start going back to swing events in Youngstown, reasserting herself in the space with the support of her friend group. However, she also started making the hour and a half drive to Pittsburgh to attend Swingin' at the Ace as she could usually assume that the perpetrator would not be in attendance. After hearing about Kessler's experience, a friend in the Pittsburgh swing community told her about the Safer Spaces committee, specifically that they have a practice of banning "any person who has been previously reported for inappropriate and/or criminal behavior by a member of the social dance community." Kessler filed an anonymous complaint and the committee decided to ban her assailant from Swingin' at the Ace events. This was timely, as before they could even inform the perpetrator, he indicated intentions via social media that he would come to a Swingin' at the Ace event that week. The Safer Spaces committee sent an email informing him that he had been banned from this event, he received it, and did not attend.

Dzikiy marks a rough distinction between two kinds of infractions and the way that the PSDC handles these violations. More minor issues such as inappropriate comments or dancing too roughly, towards different dancers over time, may be handled with remedial action. On the other hand are more serious violations like sexual assault, which have been dealt with by banning the perpetrator from events.⁶⁸

So far, the PSDC has only dealt with serious infractions resulting in removal from events. However, Dzikiy notes that, in theory, reporting more minor issues will work much like the #MeToo movement with many women coming forward to share their stories, in this case the way that a particular dancer said something inappropriate to them. Daughtry notes that in some dance communities, "a lot of things do go swept under the rug and a lot of people remain in scenes who

⁶⁸ John Dzikiy, personal communication, February 20, 2020.

make a lot of people feel uncomfortable.”⁶⁹ She find that groups like the Safer Spaces Committee offer an opportunity to, “start talking to each other about the person, then start to put the pieces together like, “Oh, you had issues with that guy too? So did I!”⁷⁰

Kessler describes the practice of consent, asking for dances, and inviting refusal during lessons to be important, but she feels that these things operate in isolation from the experiences she had outside of a swing event. “I think just talking about consent during a lesson and how to ask for consent should be a standard in every community. But I think at the end of the day a predator doesn’t really care about rhetoric. If you are someone who prioritizes your own pleasure ahead of someone else’s feelings or consent, going through the motions [of consent during a lesson] isn’t really going to change your course of action.”⁷¹ Kessler finds the Safer Spaces committee to be of much greater impact, saying that she feels much safer in the Pittsburgh community than in the Youngstown community because of it.

PSDC is able handle sexual consent violations without turning to litigation, manifesting Fischel’s call for dealing with sexual injustice through creative collaboration. PSDC is not able to remove the perpetrator from society or even prevent future assaults, but they are able to remove social and financial opportunities. Many assailants in the swing dance community are instructors whose income at least partially depends on teaching opportunities. By banning them from swing dance events, groups like PSDC are able to create consequences for perpetrators by compromising their social status and interfering with a source of income. The more swing dance organizers in Pittsburgh are able to collaborate and create consistency among their policies, the more these events will be able to works towards sexual justice and equality.

⁶⁹ Crystal Daughtry, personal communication, March 25, 2020.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kathryn Kessler, personal communication, February 1, 2020.

On November 19, 2019, Kessler shared a piece of artwork on Facebook that she had created to help her work through the aftermath of her sexual assault (Figure 1). In the piece, we can see a figure of a woman, Kessler herself, wearing a camisole and underwear against a black background. Her expression appears numb and we can see five disembodied hands, groping out of the darkness and pulling on her body. There are six different breaking points on her body, sometimes where a limb is being pulled off, where pieces crumble as though from a concrete structure.



Figure 7: Artwork by Kathryn Kessler in response to her experience. Used with permission.

In her post, she details her experience of sexual assault and writes about the “pieces that break away” in situations like hers. Her trust was one of the first pieces that broke away, as she

“felt so betrayed and so violated by someone [she] once trusted.”⁷² Her sense of self-worth was the next piece to break away and that she blamed herself for the assault for a long time. She writes, “One thing they don’t tell you about victim blaming is that sometimes no one does it more than the victim.” Kessler also expressed all the little unexpected pieces, some of her friendships and, for a while, her interest in dancing, that eroded away.

Dozens of people reached out to express support, either commenting on her post or sending private messages. Kessler finds that talking about her experience and her pain have been one of the most helpful things for her mental health. Reaching out over social media has helped her find allies and support as she built her way back into swing dancing.

What distinguishes Kessler’s post from those of Sullivan, Cordner, and Staffeld is that she never explicitly names the perpetrator. This precludes the potential coalition online of multiple women that might ostracize a perpetrator from the community. Kessler’s post wields a different power, opening a conversation about sexual violence and challenging notions about the boundaries of what “fits” into the paradigm of assault. Criminologist Rachel Loney-Howes describes the way that rape is often deemed “unspeakable” and points out the ways that a victim is impelled to speak “within the parameters of permissible speech within the given discursive setting, if her experience is to be rendered authentic and comprehensible” (2018, 27). Loney-Howes finds a double bind in the way that women are expected to produce a clear, linear account in order to be believed, yet the notion that rape is “unspeakable” leads some to question rape victims who speak with too much clarity or coherency. A story like Kessler’s might be contested by some because the encounter

⁷² Kathryn Kessler’s Facebook Page, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/kathryn.kessler>.

began consensually. In her Facebook post, Kessler writes, “A consensual situation can quickly become a non-consensual situation if someone does not respect your boundaries.”⁷³

Although Kessler’s post differs somewhat from those of Sullivan, Corder, and Staffeld, I contend that all of these posts articulate with the #MeToo movement more broadly. Kessler’s account enacts what Loney-Howes calls “peer-to-peer witnessing” which boldly brings the private into the public sphere, creating an opportunity for others, some victim-survivors themselves, to bear witness to the trauma. The blog posts and videos shared by all the women mentioned above enact this same process, building power in numbers. Social media platforms can facilitate more horizontal conversations wherein the victim-survivors are agentic and enabled to become “both witnesses and theorists of their own experiences” (2018, 33). Although it was not apparent as to whether victim/survivors were in dialogue with Kessler’s public post, she disclosed that several people had reached out to her in private messages, expressing solidarity and saying that they, too, had had similar experiences. When we consider her post as part of a social media movement, Kessler joins what Loney-Howes calls a “collective enunciation of violence” (2018, 45).

⁷³ Kathryn Kessler’s Facebook Page, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/kathryn.kessler.79>.

4.0 Conclusion

The swing dance community in Pittsburgh tells a small part of several much larger stories. It is part of a story of evolving practices of consent and safer spaces in social swing dancing, and part of a story of unprecedented pushback and consequences for sexual predators brought about by women sharing their experiences and bringing the private into the public. Further research would be necessary to gain a more holistic picture of the way consent and safer spaces are handled in other swing dance communities throughout the United States. It would also be interesting to compare practices within swing dancing to those of other social dances such as contradance, salsa, or ballroom or music movements working towards safer spaces such as We Have Voice.⁷⁴ The following sections propose partner dance as an advantageous site for building new practice and rhetoric around consent, offer suggestions for possible applications of this work outside of social swing dancing, and conclude the examinations of the Pittsburgh swing dance community from earlier chapters.

4.1 Partner Dance as a Site of New Practice and Rhetoric

Partner dancing is unique in that it is one of the few activities we may engage in wherein it is permissible to make physical contact with strangers. This contact is not only socially

⁷⁴ “Code of Conduct.” We Have Voice, May 5, 2018. <https://too-many.org/code-of-conduct/>.

acceptable, but anticipated. Generally, in public or in the workplace it would not be considered appropriate or tolerable. In this way, social dancing is unusual in that it offers a chance to *practice* respecting the bodily autonomy of others and asserting one's own bodily autonomy within a framework that also allows for physical touch. The beauty of partner dance is that, as Kaminsky notes, it "is not love, nor is it sex" but it is still a place where we rehearse aspects of both of these things. Dancers practice verbal communication and compromise which are essential to loving relationships and we practice physical responsiveness and reflexivity, essential to healthy sex.

Social dancing offers a site where dancers can practice aspects of love and sexuality without *actually* engaging in them. The stakes are lower and there is an expectation that most people are there to continue learning to dance and are therefore continuing to learn how to better communicate and respond to subtle cues. This communication is both ways; dancers learn how to listen to feedback regarding the bodily autonomy of others and they also have a chance to practice voicing their own physical needs. For women in particular, social dance is an important chance to rehearse the assertion of physical space and comfort, especially if this can be done in a "safer space."

This highlights the importance of changing rhetoric and practice within the social swing dance community. Social dancing has always been a chance to practice aspects of love and sex but the way it is practiced is contingent on notions of appropriate relationships in a given place and time. Notions of gendered relations in the 1940s were revived along with swing dancing in the 1980s and 1990s, but could not maintain alongside influences from feminist movements, the "no means no" campaign, and #MeToo. In this way, social dancing is in dialogue with these broader movements.

Introducing practices of consent into social swing dancing means changing the way dancers rehearse these interactions. When event organizers create codes of conduct and give dancers a “right to refusal,” women are able to practice saying “no.” In turn, other dancers are given an opportunity to practice hearing “no.” The following section will describe how this practice can be applied more broadly.

4.2 Potential Applications

One of the values of the way consent is taught in the Pittsburgh swing dance community is that it offers a means of normalizing rejection, of hearing “no” as a complete sentence.⁷⁵ Just by inviting dancers to say “no” for any reason, instructors and codes of conduct set up an expectation of “no” as a normal and acceptable answer. Handling refusal of consent is just as important as teaching people to ask for it. How effective is it to teach people to ask for consent without teaching them how to handle refusal? If someone asks for a dance, what happens if they are not prepared to take “no” for an answer?

Consent is gradually becoming an aspect of sex education in high schools and part of broader conversations about healthy relationships.⁷⁶ In an article for *The Washington Post*, Samantha Schmidt writes that the state of Maryland passed a bill in 2018 mandating that sex

⁷⁵ Christopher “Christi Jay” Wells, personal communication, December 2, 2019.

⁷⁶ Hoover, Beth. “Teaching Consent Doesn't Have to Be Hard .” *Teaching Tolerance*, February 14, 2018. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-consent-doesnt-have-to-be-hard>, “Sex Education That Goes Beyond Sex.” Harvard Graduate School of Education. Accessed March 31, 2020. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/11/sex-education-goes-beyond-sex>., Schmidt, Samantha. “Middle Schools Enter a New Era in Sex Ed - Teaching 13-Year-Olds about Consent.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company, January 14, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/middle-schools-enter-a-new-era-in-sex-ed--teaching-13-year-olds-about-consent/2020/01/14/27c17c80-35ad-11ea-bf30-ad313e4ec754_story.html.

education classes include discussions of consent, months after the allegations against Harvey Weinstein (2020). Until recently, most of the discussions about consent, particularly in regards to preventing sexual assault, were focused on college-aged students (ibid). Yet handling refusal, or rejection as it might be called in this context, is not often emphasized even in these more forward-thinking high school sex education programs. I contend that the normalization of refusal, and offering basic tools for dealing with it, should be considered as essential part of conversations about consent. Learning how to request consent is a great place to start with teaching teenagers about sexuality and healthy relationships, but students also need skills in order to hear and honor the utterance “no.”

4.3 Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community

In the decades between Florida Edwards’s unheard “no” and the invitation to say “no” for any reason around swing dance events around Pittsburgh, the promotion of consent and safer spaces has evolved drastically. Between the allegations brought forward by Sarah Sullivan against Steven Mitchell and the emergence of the #MeToo movement, a social current has moved through the Pittsburgh swing dance community and prompted a cultivation of physically, emotionally, and sexually safer spaces. These developing practices are reflected both during lesson instruction and in the codes of conduct for Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin’ at the Ace.

Dancers like Crystal Daughtry have noted that the codes of conduct make her feel safer and more comfortable at swing dance events and she likes knowing that organizers are available should any problems arise. Kathryn Kessler, although she considers the practice of asking for consent to be important, believes that requesting consent on the dance floor does not translate to

requesting consent off the dance floor. For Kessler, the formation of a Safer Spaces Committee who take responsibility for the sexual safety of dancers has a far greater impact than the contents of a code of conduct. Based on her response, it seems that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between respecting bodily autonomy during social dancing and respecting bodily autonomy in romantic or sexual partnerships.

Yet this should not render codes of conduct in social swing dancing valueless as there are several ways that they serve to protect dancers. To begin with, promoting practices of consent on the dance floor has the potential to prevent harm from aeriels, deep dips, or even more quotidian injuries like strained wrists. Encouraging dancers to ask for consent before attempting aeriels or deep dips promotes communication and creates expectations for these movements, making them far safer for both parties. Furthermore, asking consent before giving feedback to a dancer can create an emotionally safer environment, giving new dancers space to experiment and hone their skills without feeling criticized. Codes of conduct cannot prevent sexual assault, but they can cultivate safer spaces and build, if only in a small way, towards a culture of consent.

Dancers who regularly attend events like Tartan Swing, Shakedown, and Swingin' at the Ace appreciate dancing in a community of shared values, rarely attending events like Swing City or the Allegheny Elks Lodge. These events still run and have consistent participation, but I wonder if they will slowly be pushed out as more dancers discover events that are actively cultivating safer spaces. Since Tartan Swing, Shakedown, Swingin' at the Ace, and a few other events are working towards a coalition and more cohesion among their codes of conduct, events like Allegheny Elks Lodge and Swing City would either be left behind or forced to adopt more progressive policies.

Pittsburgh swing dance events create spaces where the utterance “no” can be heard and accepted, moving towards a normalization of rejection. Although in practice many dancers soften

their responses by saying “maybe next time” or “I’m going to sit this one out,” they know that they can simply say “no” and that this is an acceptable, complete answer. Dancers have more options and this means that they are able incrementally move closer towards free and meaningful consent. Women no longer need to wait for someone else to say “no” for them and dancers are invited to voice their own physical, emotional, and sexual needs. By offering dancers a “Right to Refusal,” the Pittsburgh swing dance community empowers individuals to assert their bodily autonomy and cultivates a safer space.

Tartan and Panther Swing Code of Conduct

SAFETY:

How to Avoid Stepping on People's Toes, Literally

1. Pay attention to your health. It's okay to sit some out. No one else knows when you're dehydrated or in pain.
2. Everyone should practice good floorcraft. (That means avoiding crashing into people on the dance floor.)
3. Avoid leading aerials/air steps on the social dance floor. Especially avoid them with strangers.
4. Don't surprise your partner by throwing yourself into a dip. You may be (accidentally) dropped.
5. Be gentle. Anyone can push or pull too hard in a dance (including follows).
6. Get smooth-soled shoes; too much traction is bad for the joints. Cheap rubber, suede or leather are best.
7. Respect each other's boundaries.

ETIQUETTE:

How to Avoid Stepping on People's Toes, Figuratively

1. Use your words to ask people to dance. Particularly, nobody likes getting a hand in the face.
2. Embrace the fact that you are neither obligated nor entitled to dance with anyone in particular.
 - a. If you turn someone down for a dance, be polite about it.
 - b. If you feel excluded/left out, ask one of the Points of Contact, below, for help.
 - c. Don't say yes to a dance if you don't want to dance with that person or at that time.
3. Don't offer unsolicited criticism/advice on someone else's dancing, even during lessons.
Exception: If a type of movement hurts or makes you uncomfortable, say something.
4. Sweat happens. If it happens a lot, bring a sweat towel and/or a change of clothes.

CODE OF CONDUCT:

How to Avoid Stepping on People's Toes, Seriously.

1. Tartan and Panther Swing is open to everyone, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, physical appearance, religion, disability status, etc. Hateful language, harassment, or intimidation will not be tolerated.
2. Don't be a creep. Best practices are:
 - a. Don't stare into your partner's eyes/feet/chest. Do look around the dance floor (i.e., practice good floorcraft), and look wherever you would in normal conversation.
 - b. Ask before moving into a closer connection (particularly chest-to-chest, or tandem).
 - c. Beware the ABCs (accidental breast/butt contact). It happens, and it's awkward, but it's better to acknowledge when it happens than to try to hide it. Just apologize and adjust.
 - d. Don't constantly try to pick up dates at the dance. You can date whomever you want to (consensually), but don't make advances on someone just because you had a nice dance.
 - e. Dance with a variety of people. Dancing only with people of a narrow age range is a red flag.
 - f. If someone makes you uncomfortable, they might make others feel the same. Speak to a Point of Contact
3. Respect the volunteers. Don't disrupt lessons or the dances. Don't damage or vandalize our facilities. Please follow all applicable rules at the colleges. Don't get us in trouble. Don't get yourself in trouble.

Bottom Line...

Please follow the above rules and guidelines. Flagrant, criminal, or repeated violations may result in permanent expulsion from our events at our discretion. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the above, or if you just need to talk to someone, please talk to **Jen Frenchek, Josh Moore, or Bobby Fisco** or any DJ, instructor, or an organizer.

Appendix B Code of Conduct/ Safe Space Policies

Pittsburgh Shakedown 2020

All people attending any portion of the Pittsburgh Shakedown are expected to read and abide by the following policies or be asked to leave without refund.

Code of Conduct

The Pittsburgh Shakedown is intended to be a welcoming event where all people can enjoy dance workshops, social dancing, and swing music in a safe and comfortable setting. We welcome dancers of all levels, and all people regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, or physical appearance.

Anyone who does or says something inappropriate, disrespectful, overtly sexual, illegal, dangerous, or otherwise violates any of the rules set forth here will face consequences including immediate removal from the event, possible banning from future events, and legal action.

There will be social dancing and workshops at the Shakedown. In either setting we encourage you to dance with different people. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Right of Refusal:** Everyone has the right to decline or end a dance for any reason, with or without explanation. Please do not take it personally or react negatively if someone says “no” to a dance with you, or if they end a dance mid- song. There are many reasons for someone not wanting to dance with a particular person, and no one owes anyone a dance.
- **Romantic Advances:** Do not interpret dance connection as attraction. It is inappropriate to ask your partner out during dance. We also ask that you refrain for public displays of affection on the dance floor including grinding, making out, and roaming hands- even if it’s with someone you know, and especially if it’s with someone you don’t.
- **Forced Connections:** Some dances involve being in closed position or close embrace. Please do not force your body against your partner.
- **Aggressive Moves:** Please be aware that aggressive moves on the dance floor can cause pain or injury. Yanking of limbs, wild gesturing, weight bearing moves such as deep dips, are discouraged. If your partner says you are hurting them, stop immediately.

- **Unsolicited Feedback:** There will be dancers of all levels, ages, and backgrounds at the event. Do not criticize anyone's dancing or attempt to teach on the dance floor. We have professional instructors for that! Compliments are fine, but please refrain from overtly sexual language about someone's body or clothing.
- **Aerials:** Aerials are not permitted on the social dance floor. Please refrain unless you are in a jam circle.

Safe Space Violations

Everyone attending the Pittsburgh Shakedown is expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, and to respect the personal boundaries of others on and off the dance floor. If you are hurt, threatened, or made to feel unsafe or uncomfortable by a fellow attendee, please notify a Safe Space Volunteer.

If you are not directly involved, but notice someone behaving or speaking inappropriately, and you believe this is causing a fellow attendee to be hurt, threatened, or uncomfortable, we ask that you bring this to the attention of a Safe Space volunteer.

If someone tells you that something you are doing is painful, hurting them, or making them feel threatened, unsafe or uncomfortable, we ask that you stop immediately. We understand that this can be challenging, but please do not take this type of feedback personally and respect your fellow attendee's wishes.

The Pittsburgh Shakedown reserves the right to ban or remove anyone from the event for violating the Code of Conduct, or if a person is known to be:

- A convicted sexual offender
- Is currently being tried for a sexual offense
- Has a Protection From Abuse (PFA) order against them
- Has a restraining order against them

If this person attempts to enter one of the venues, and the staff has not previously been aware of this person's situation, please notify someone on staff and that person will be removed immediately.

If any person who is not under legal action but has been publicly accused of inappropriate and/ or criminal behavior by members of the general swing dance community attempts to register or attend the event, that person may be banned and/

or removed at the discretion of the staff. Please make specific accusations known to a staff member before or during the event. If the resolution of any of these issues is not satisfactory to the attendee making the accusation, then they may be entitled to a refund at the discretion of the staff.

Safe Space Policies and Procedures

What you can expect when you bring an issue to a member of the Staff:

- An initial conversation away from other attendees.
- Complete confidentiality (unless we feel someone is in immediate danger).
- You will be asked how you would like the situation to be handled.

The staff member, with the approval of the complainant, will then determine how the reported person will be dealt with, including one or more of the following courses of action:

- Person will be watched by a staff member for the rest of the event, but not approached. Keep an eye on them for further bad behavior.

- Person will be spoken to directly about their behavior by a staff member and asked to stop.
- Person will be removed from the event by a staff member, and possibly banned from future events.
- Person will be reported to hotel security and/ or police.

We sincerely hope that any offensive behavior can be dealt with by staff to the attendees' satisfaction. If not, the offended individual may be entitled to a refund at the discretion of the staff member.

Our Limitations

While we want everyone to have a great time in a safe environment, we also realize that there are limitations to our policies and jurisdiction.

We will do our best to keep order and safety paramount in the rooms where the workshops and dances are taking place. However, the event is being held in a hotel which is open to the public, and we also expect that attendees will want to explore the surrounding neighborhood. If you experience a problem with one of our

attendees or a member of the public outside of our main rooms, please let someone on staff know- but be aware that we cannot police all areas surrounding the event.

We cannot be responsible for personality issues, feuds, or previous relationship situations that do not specifically violate our Code of Conduct.

Safe Space Staff

During the workshops, Paul Cosentino will be checking people in and available. Your instructors Naomi Uyama, Peter Strom and Valerie Salstrom will be your staff and should be notified immediately of any issues.

During the dances, Valerie Salstrom will be at all events. Staff volunteer Lisa Tamres will also be available. You can also speak to someone at the registration desk who will help you.

Appendix C Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community Safer Spaces Document

Everyone attending a Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community event must read this document and abide by its principles. People who do not follow these policies may be asked to leave the event without refund. Verbal or written complaints brought to us will be taken seriously and handled with confidentiality and care among the Safer Spaces Staff members.

Code of Conduct

Our goal at Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community is to create an inclusive and welcoming event where all people can enjoy social dancing and swing music in a safe and comfortable environment. We welcome dancers of all experience levels, and all people regardless of race, religion, nationality, physical ability, mental ability, gender, sexual orientation, physical appearance, or age. We expect all attendees to treat everyone with respect regardless of the factors mentioned above.

Swing is a social dance and our mission is to dance with different people.
That said:

- **Right to Refusal** - Everyone has the right to decline or leave a dance, with or without explanation. Please do not take it personally if someone says no to a dance with you, if they dance with someone else during that song, or if they leave a dance mid-song. Keep in mind that there are many possible reasons for someone not dancing with you, and respect that nobody owes anybody else a dance.
- **Romantic Advances** - Do not interpret dance connection as attraction. It is not appropriate to ask your partner out while dancing.
- **Forced Connections** - Yes, Swing dancing can involve close chest-to-chest connections; this does not mean you force your body against your partner. Please be considerate of the needs of your partner in terms of closeness, energy level, and connection type. If you notice non-verbal signals like body stiffening, hesitation, etc., and/or are unsure about what connection is appropriate for your partner, ask. Dances are a conversation — listen to each other!
- **Unsolicited Feedback** - Speak up if you are uncomfortable, in pain, or at risk of being hurt. Do NOT critique, criticize, or teach on the dance floor unless specifically asked.
- **Public Displays of Affection** - Please refrain from overtly sexualized activities on the dance floor (e.g., grinding, making out, roaming hands). Dancing can be close; this does not mean it is sexual.

- **Aerials and Dips** - **Aerials are not allowed** on our social dance floors.
Please do NOT do weight-bearing moves, such as deep dips, without verbal consent.

Safer Spaces Violations

Everyone attending a Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community event is expected to respect the boundaries of others on and off the dance floor. If you are hurt or made to feel unsafe or uncomfortable in any way by a fellow attendee, please immediately bring this to the attention of any Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community Committee member who can bring it to a Safer Spaces Staff member (listed at the end of the document).

If someone tells you that something you are doing is hurting anyone, or making anyone feel unsafe or uncomfortable, immediately stop the behavior. We understand that it can be challenging not to take this feedback personally, and we hope that you can see it as a learning opportunity.

Even if you are not directly involved — if you notice someone is hurting a fellow attendee or causing them to feel unsafe or uncomfortable, we still ask that you bring this to the attention of a Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community Committee member.

Anyone who does or says something inappropriate, disrespectful, overtly sexual, illegal, dangerous, or otherwise violates any of the policies set forth here

will face consequences up to and including immediate removal from the event, banning from future events, and legal action.

We reserve the right to ban individuals from attending any Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community event.

For example, if anyone is:

- A convicted sexual offender
- Currently being tried for a sexual offense
- Has a Protection from Abuse (PFA) against them
- Has a restraining order against them

This person may be refused entrance and/or removed from all Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community events. Please notify the Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community Committee if you know of any such individual who may plan to attend any Pittsburgh Swing Dance Community event.

Safer Spaces Procedures

When you bring an issue to a member of the Safer Spaces Staff, you can expect:

- An initial conversation away from other attendees

- Confidentiality within the Safer Spaces Staff (unless we feel someone is in immediate danger)
- You will be asked how you would like the situation to be handled
- The staff member will share the situation with additional Safer Spaces Staff members
- The Safer Spaces Staff will then determine next steps in consultation with you

Some next steps may include the reported person being:

- **Monitored**, but not approached, to keep an eye on them for further issues
- **Spoken to** directly about their behavior and asked to stop
- **Removed** from the event, and/or banned from future events
- **Reported** to venue security and/or police

If the resolution of any of these issues is not satisfactory, then you may be entitled to a refund (if applicable) at the discretion of the Safer Spaces Staff.

Safer Spaces Staff Members

John Dzikiy

Please reach out to us at: psdcsaferspaces@gmail.com



Safe Space Policy

ALL DANCERS

Please participate at your own risk! Y-town Swing and venues are NOT responsible for the risks assumed while participating in the physical activity of dancing.

The Y-town Swing Community seeks to create an inclusive and welcoming dancing environment that is open and accepting to everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical appearance, religion, dance ability, or anything else. With this goal in mind, we expect our staff, guests, and volunteers to adhere to appropriate and inclusive language and behavior. This means avoiding racist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, rude, malicious, harassing, or otherwise inappropriate language and behaviors. These kinds of actions will not be tolerated by our swing dance community and we reserve the right to ask anyone to leave who displays these behaviors. If you experience any of these actions, we hope that you will come to a staff member with your concerns. Our staff is on your side, we will keep things private and anonymous, and we are more than happy to handle the situation while you enjoy the rest of your dance.

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