

# Gender Moves

## Report of LOVA Study Day 2019

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In celebration of our 40-year anniversary, LOVA's annual study day took place at Leiden University on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Themed *Gender Moves*, the study day brought together scholars, students and others who were interested to discuss various topics regarding sports and dance, and how these themes relate to gender. The central topic weaving together the various presentations was the question of how our ideas about gender and the way we move interact with and influence each other. The day commenced with a welcome by Jasmijn Rana and Marina de Regt, introducing everyone to LOVA and its activities, and outlining the subjects that were going to be discussed. They also remarked that the topics of the day were lighter than usual, which could be sensed in the light-hearted and joyful atmosphere throughout the day.

After the introduction, Alex Channon delivered the first keynote lecture of the day, titled *Martial Arts, Embodiment, and the Subversion of Gender*. His talk was filled with personal anecdotes from his own research, as well as more general sports- and gender-related theories. One important point he made is that politics and empirical research go hand-in-hand, since the real world is not separated from politics. His research exemplifies this: within martial arts, women in a male-dominated space 'shatter' patriarchal conceptions of women, for example by showing that they are not fragile. In addition, he explained that his male participants did not



Key note by Alex Channon.  
 Photo by Filipa Oitavén

always treat women equally during a session, either by fighting harder in fear of losing to a 'girl' – which was thought of as emasculating – or by holding back. Both hinder women's development within the sport.

After a short break Caroline Zieringer kicked off the first panel session titled *Sport*. She presented her Master's research *En-gendering Space: Female Recreational Boxing in South-East London, Embodied Knowledge and Space*, dealing with embodied knowledge in boxing. She explained that the boxing gym is understood as a male space where dominant social norms – including expectations of masculinity and femininity – are reproduced. Therefore, women participating in boxing is a performative act, as it challenges these dominant social norms. An especially interesting remark Zieringer made was that

boxing is ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’, after which she posed the question “can we think of gender in the same way?”

The next speaker was Amisah Zenabu Bakuri with her presentation titled “*Staying Healthy and Looking sexy*”: *Physical Activities, Sexuality and Well-being in the Ghanaian and Somali Diaspora in The Netherlands.* She discussed the various physical activities her research participants partook in as well as their reasonings for doing so through vignettes and quotes from interviews. She found that people partook in various types of exercise not only because it was beneficial to their health, physical appearance or confidence; for some it was also a way of helping them integrate in Dutch society. In addition, Bakuri found that beauty standards can differ depending on the beholder, and that these beauty standards influenced the nutrition and exercise habits of her research participants. Some adjusted their nutrition and exercise more than others to their needs regarding health.

Mara Lin Visser’s visual ethnography titled *Roller Girls: Performance of Gender in the Roller Derby Community of Barcelona* was the last part of the Sports panel session. The film portrayed the roller derby scene in Barcelona, and consisted of various interviews and visuals of women partaking in roller derby. An important point that was made in the film was that within roller derby, women have the freedom to explore sides of themselves that they have been taught to keep to themselves or try to push to the side. During the discussion at the end it was also mentioned that it gives women more confidence to take up space in their own daily lives.

After the lunch break and LOVA General Members Assembly, Marion Quesne started off the second panel session ‘Dance’ by discussing gendered movement through Lindy Hop in her presentation *Lindy Hop: Transgression or Conformity*. She explained that Lindy Hop is traditionally transgressive when it comes to gender, since it breaks away from the standard male lead and female



Books and LOVA journals to look through.  
Photo by Filipa Oitavén

follower. Instead, it is a dance of freedom where power dynamics are constantly negotiated. Through video clips she showed that within Lindy Hop gender roles can be inverted, change throughout the dance or can be ‘non-binary’, and is therefore a dance of equal partnership.

Following was Anita Datta with her presentation titled *Dancing Trans Women, Smoking Lesbians, and the Diasporic Femme: Reflections on Explicit versus Everyday Performances of Queer Feminine Bodies in Kolkata*. She discussed the role that dance plays in the lives of trans women in Kolkata and presented ethnographic descriptions from her fieldwork. Furthermore, she explained that within this context dancing is not just a performance but elevates “the gendered being”, since the body is not just about carrying out or showing gender, but also about experiencing it.

Continuing the panel, Krizia Nardini joined in through Skype with her presentation titled *Twerking Classes and Feminism in Barcelona: A Critical Auto-ethnographic Account*. She commenced by explaining the roots of twerking; it came to Europe through African diaspora and African-American culture and was considered ‘dirty’. Now twerking has become a skill to learn, while before it was a spontaneous activity. Through this process it has been commercialised, commodified and simplified to appeal to a larger audience. During her research she noticed that this audience consisted largely of white women. In addition, she argued that the way twerking and similar dance styles have been taken up by white artists can be seen as cultural appropriation.

Finally, after the last break, Kathy Davis delivered the second keynote lecture titled *Dancing Tango: Hyper-heterosexuality, Queering, and Other Subversive Moves*. She described the ways in which gender is performed in tango dancing, explaining that tango is a “highly gendered dance” that consists of carrying out traditional gender norms which underlie certain power inequalities. Queer tango gets rid of these assumed gender roles, transforming the culture of the tango salon; it encourages gender complexity and exploration. The

lecture ended with a discussion about why queer people would choose such a heteronormative dance in the first place, and the question if queer tango is too concerned with transgressing heterosexual norms instead of exploring queer sexuality.

Closing off with the LOVA Marjan Rens Master’s Thesis Award ceremony, Willy Jansen handed out the awards. Isadora Cardoso Vasconcelos was awarded the fourth prize, Nika Looman won the third prize, Melody Jap the second and Loes Oudenhuijsen the first. All in all, it was a very educational and inspiring day that brought together a good number of people to learn and have fruitful discussions about sports, dance and gender.